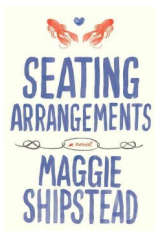


Wedding Complications



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In *Seating Arrangements*, Winn Van Meter and his family descend upon the family's summer retreat house on the New England island of Waskeke. His pregnant daughter Daphne is about to tie the knot. Biddy, her mother, is deeply involved in final wedding preparations, and Winn finds himself strongly drawn to one of the bridesmaids, Agatha. Meanwhile, Daphne's sister, Livia, who just terminated her own pregnancy, is trying hard to get over a big breakup with Teddy Finn. And to her father's horror, Livia plans to become a marine biologist rather than a lawyer. This lovely, slyly humorous novel is brimming with very believable and flawed characters; it captures the insanity, tension, and chaos of a modern wedding.

Winn, an upper-crust, stoic accountant likes things just so. Imagine his consternation when he arrives a day late for the weekend party to find his spiritual retreat taken over by women: his wife and two daughters, three other bridesmaids, and the alcoholic Aunt Celeste, who sees right through Winn's holier than thou exterior to his traitorous heart. During one pre-wedding party with the new in-laws, she follows him up to the widow's walk and warns him, not to ruin Biddy's weekend.

But lust is far stronger than familiar ties or advice. And speaking of advice, Livia receives it constantly from the bridesmaid, from her many times married aunt, and from her father. She's determined to forget Teddy by having a romance with someone new—no matter, that the only available men (so far) are the three brothers of the groom. Don't mess around with your future brother-in-law, the wise bridesmaid Dominique warns her.

Many flashback scenes focus primarily on Winn's life, his strange father who only talked to him in fancy clubs; visits to his mother, who was an invalid all her life; a vivid break-up scene with the woman he almost married after her father denigrated the uncle Winn was named after. The latter occurred during a bizarre billiards game where sinking the eight ball was never the game.

In another flashback, he interrupts his wife during her bath (she's an Aquarius and loves water) with a yellow legal pad—he hopes to write down the pros and cons, especially cons of having a second child.

Shipstead is an astute observer of human foibles. Her dialogue is amazingly fresh and on-target. This wonderful novel will make you forget all your chores and encourage you to find a patch of grass or a hammock, where you can pretend to hear the crashing Atlantic waves and watch renegade lobsters crawl across the sand.

For another island wedding novel, try Richard Russo's *That Old Cape Magic*.

Posted by Dory L. on August 6, 2013

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