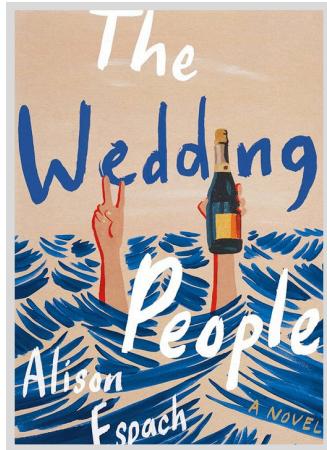




The Wedding People

by Alison Espach



Summary

It's a beautiful day in Newport, Rhode Island, when Phoebe Stone arrives at the grand Cornwall Inn wearing a green dress and gold heels, not a bag in sight, alone. She's immediately mistaken by everyone in the lobby for one of the wedding people, but she's actually the only guest at the Cornwall who isn't here for the big event. Phoebe is here because she's dreamed of coming for years—she hoped to shuck oysters and take sunset sails with her husband, only now she's here without him, at rock bottom, and determined to have one last decadent splurge on herself. Meanwhile, the bride has accounted for every detail and every possible disaster the weekend might yield except for, well, Phoebe and Phoebe's plan—which makes it that much more surprising when the two women can't stop confiding in each other.

In turns absurdly funny and devastatingly tender, Alison Espach's *The Wedding People* is ultimately an incredibly nuanced and resonant look at the winding paths we can take to places we never imagined—and the chance encounters it sometimes takes to reroute us.

Courtesy of MacMillan Publishers



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About the Author

Alison Espach is the author of the novels *The Adults*, a *New York Times* Editors' Choice and a Barnes & Noble Discover pick, and *Notes on Your Sudden Disappearance*, which was named a best book of 2022 by the *Chicago Tribune* and NPR. Her short stories and essays have appeared in *McSweeney's*, *Vogue*, *Outside*, *Joyland*, and other places. She is a professor of creative writing at Providence College in Rhode Island.

Author bio courtesy of MacMillan Publishers



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Discussion Questions

1. What is your favorite part of attending a wedding --- the ceremony, the food, the activities or the guests? Which wedding moments from the book stood out to you most?
2. Imagine if your wedding lasted a whole week! Where would you be, and what sort of activities would you plan?
3. What is the craziest thing you ever saw at a wedding? How do some of the scenes in *The Wedding People* relate to experiences that you have had attending a wedding of your close friends or family?
4. Have you ever had a chance encounter similar to the way Phoebe and Lila did? What was that like? Did it have any similarities to the start of Phoebe and Lila's relationship? Do you still have a relationship with that person?
5. Try naming all the literary icons scattered throughout *The Wedding People*. Which author do you think had the closest correlation to Phoebe?
6. How did you feel when Matt showed up at the hotel? Were you expecting it? Why or why not?
7. In what ways does *The Wedding People* reflect cultural or societal attitudes towards weddings and marriage? Does it challenge or reinforce traditional views? Do you think each of the character perspectives change over the course of the novel? If so, how?
8. Have you ever had to fill in for a wedding party spot like Phoebe does when she steps in for Lila's Maid of Honor? What was that experience like? Did you feel equipped for the job?
9. If you could be one of the wedding people, which person would you be and why?
10. Phoebe and Gary grow close throughout the novel. What do you think about this relationship, and do you think it will continue in the future? Why or why not?
11. Early in the novel, it's mentioned that literature tends to have circular endings, and the endings are always a reflection of the beginning. What's the biggest change for Phoebe, Lila, Gary and Matt by the end? Would you consider the book to have a circular ending? If so, how?

Courtesy of MacMillan Reading Group Guides



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Professional Review

Library Journal (03/01/24):

Starred Review Espach's latest brings Phoebe Stone to an exclusive small hotel in Newport, RI, where she quickly discovers that everyone else is there for a six-day, million-dollar wedding extravaganza. After several unsuccessful rounds of IVF, losing her husband to another woman, and the death of her cat, Phoebe figures the solution is to give up on life, but in style at this dream vacation spot. Phoebe has no qualms about telling the wedding's bride, Lila, why she is there, and Lila is as incensed—a suicide during her wedding week is not on the agenda. Lila recently lost her father, whose dying wish was for her to get married, and he left her the money to pay for the lavish ceremony. Lila harangues Phoebe into joining the wedding festivities, and they spend quite a bit of time together. Sometimes, it is easier to confide in a relative stranger than a loved one, and both women learn quite a bit about each other during the wedding week. VERDICT Witty dialogue is just a bonus in this engrossing read centering on complex women making life-changing decisions.

Publishers Weekly (05/28/24):

Espach offers a sparkling and slightly macabre novel of a 30-something woman finding a new lease on life. After adjunct English professor Phoebe Stone's husband leaves her for her colleague, she declines an invitation to return the next semester, unable to stomach seeing her husband's new lover. Unable to find another teaching job, she checks into a luxury hotel in Newport, R.I., where she's always wanted to stay, and plans to end her life with her cat's painkillers. She doesn't count on the hotel teeming with wedding guests, or meeting the 20-something bride, Lila, who, after hearing of Phoebe's plans, does everything she can to keep Phoebe alive, worried a suicide would mess up her perfect wedding. During an early morning soak in the hotel's hot tub, Phoebe is drawn to a handsome stranger and buoyed by their connection, even though he lets her know he's taken after she brazenly hits on him. The next day, Phoebe learns he's the groom. Over the course of her brief stay, Phoebe, having chosen to stay alive, musters the courage to break her old patterns and stop letting people walk over her, which leads to a triumphant finale. Readers are in for a treat.