



The Garden Party: A Novel

Grace Dane Mazur

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A rehearsal dinner brings together two disparate families in a sparkling social satire set over the course of a single day.

This enchanting novel takes place in Brookline, Massachusetts, where dinner in the garden is bringing together two families on the night before the wedding that should unite them. The families are not unfriendly but they are shy and leery of each other. The Barlows are a Wall Street Journal-reading family of lawyers steeped in trusts and copyrights, corporations and war crimes, golf and tennis. The Cohens are wildly impractical intellectuals, including a biologist who has studied why scorpions glow in the dark; a social activist who always needs rescuing; and a historian of the cooking of ancient Babylonian who is trying, while hosting the dinner party, to figure out whether Time is really shaped like baklava.

The novel begins with the Cohens brewing morning coffee and considering the work they will have to do to prepare their house and gardens for the dinner, and it ends, late that very night, after a complicated series of fiascoes and miracles. Over the course of the day, it becomes clear that neither family is more eccentric than the other.

Featuring an ensemble cast of exceptionally vivid characters ranging in age from three to the early nineties, Grace Dane Mazur's wonderfully lyrical novel is an irresistible portrayal of miscommunication, secrets, and the power of love.

The Garden Party: A Novel Details

Date : Published July 10th 2018 by Random House

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Author : Grace Dane Mazur

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From Reader Review The Garden Party: A Novel for online ebook

Cynthia says

I so wanted to like this book, but alas, it didn't work for me. Some of the writing is awkward, and the story jumps from underdeveloped character to character.

Francis Viscount says

A wonderful whimsical story that was utterly fascinating. Perhaps I had been reading too much non-fiction so from the first page to the last I found The Garden Party enjoyable at many levels. However it was the writing that captured me...it was magical. The garden, the families, the many stories, the past, current and possible future events of each of the four generations present were told with a lightness and uniqueness that let me observe but not know so much that I got bored. The eccentricities of the people were shared with an eccentricity of prose that, for me, was like endless semi-sweet topping on a dessert. Grateful to have discovered this author, and especially since there are other books she has already written that I will seek out and read in the near future.

Patty says

The Garden Party
By
Grace Dane Mazurka

What it's all about...

Two very different families come together on the night before their children wed. The dinner takes place at the home of the groom's parents. The groom is a poet. The bride is a veterinarian. His family is sort of unusual...in the eyes of the bride's family. The groom's family...in my head...anyway...is sort of boho...they like natural things and books and messy gardens and flowers...the odd glass of wine. The bride's family is more J. Crew...they like games and golf and proper books and papers...a Gin and Tonic is their drink of choice.

Why I wanted to read it...

The way these families came together was unique and interesting. I loved the writing behind the conversations.

What made me truly enjoy this book...

The characters were unique. Each character had his or her own story. There was a good amount of dysfunction as well as mystery behind these characters personalities. The groom's sister...the one who lived

at the airport for four days before calling to get picked up to come home. The groom's father...does he have a secret life when he is in Paris on business? Oh my!

Why you should read it, too...

This book surprised me because it was not at all what I thought it would be. I was taken in by the writing and the "behind the scenes" conversations...just wait until you read about the private ceremony going on at the dinner table!

So...readers who love leisurely lovely books like this...filled with quirky characters...should love this book.

I received an advance reader's copy of this book from the publisher through Edelweiss and Amazon. It was my choice to read it and review it.

Cory Lynn says

I could not finish this. I couldn't even get into it. Too many characters with first names only and none distinct enough (the actual characters, some names are too distinct) to make them easy to remember. A lot of extracurricular scenarios besides the garden party...couldn't even get to the party itself.

Thanks to NetGalley for the free ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Liz says

I'll admit I was totally drawn to this book because of the cover. It just seemed so inviting. The concept is that two families are gathering at a rehearsal dinner. The Cohens, Jewish and Bohemian by nature, are hosting the Barlows, stiff upper lip WASP lawyers. "At their first meeting, Stephen Barlow had asked Pindar if there was something wrong with Adam that he had become a poet, implying that poetry was not a calling but a failure of will or a malady of the soul."

I wasn't sure what to make of this. This is mostly a series of character studies. And there are some weird characters here. Each is initially given a few pages as back story. You're given a glimpse into their thoughts. Just like walking into a party where you barely know anyone, you are thrust into this group of unknown and diverse souls. And just like at some parties, I struggled to find someone I could relate to. Thank God for Leah, the only one I liked.

I can't say I really cared for the writing. It just seemed off, somehow. I wish I could explain it better. Well, part of it might be the number of incomplete sentences. Yes, there's a poetic feel to it. And in other hands, I might have found the descriptions charming. But it just felt busy, crowded. Too many descriptions, too many thoughts crowded one on top of the other. You not only hear the conversations but the thoughts behind the conversations.

Oh, and if you're waiting for something exciting to happen, you've got a long wait. And even then, it's so

subdued you almost miss it.

My thanks to netgalley and Random House for an advance copy of this novel.

Sherry says

Lovely, lush, poetic, magical. How I would have loved to be at this party! Grace Dane Mazur has treated us to a night of intellectual conversations and ruminations on love, food, lust, and the nature of time. I felt sorry that it had to end.

Sheila Quach says

I really wanted to love this book....for me it just had way too many characters, their issues and story lines going on all at the same time. Couples at different stages of their relationships and life just made this tired Mom even more tired trying to remember it all. The book puts you smack dab in the middle of a very important day.... the night before a wedding. The story is set mainly at the rehearsal dinner where the two families that have their differences with one another vow to come together at peace for the lovely couple. I was charmed by the over all story, it's a lovely setting. And I did connect with a few of the characters and their situation like the wedding couple longing to just skip the wedding all together and elope right there at the rehearsal dinner. I felt like this was a book I would like to stash away and pull back out in another season of life.

I was given an ARC from NetGalley for my honest opinion.

Diane S ? says

3.5 Gorgeous cover, beautiful prose. My reactions to the novel though, decidedly mixed. When the Cohen son, decides to marry the daughter of the Barlow's, both sides try to understand the attraction. The Cohens are poets, travelers, academics, the Barlows are lawyers, rather stuffy, circumspect. Strangely, the family's will meet for the first time at the rehearsal dinner,can dinner given by the Cohens.

A brilliant setting, a setup for some humorous conversations, circumstances, of which there was plenty. From trying to plan a dinner, taking into account the various food allergies, to the young couple trying to sneak a private ceremony, before the official one. An aging matriarch on one side, a elderly grandfather on the other. Can someone actually be allergic to a color. Believe me, these are some colorful people, and I enjoyed some of this very much.

The problem though was the large cast of characters, floating in and out of scenes, like acts of a play. Never really felt I knew any of them, well a few more than others. The book is relatively short in pages, so in a way it felt like it was ending, just as it was beginning. So, basically a humorous story, a comedy of errors if you will, with some wonderful prose, but the situation drives the characters instead of the characters driving the story. Definitely worth reading though, this is an author I think we will see good things from in the future.

Tucker says

The cover of “The Garden Party is one of the most beautiful and inviting covers I’ve seen this year. It looks like the setting for a perfect summer dinner party under the stars, but that turns out to be more anticipation than reality. When two very different families meet in an intimate social situation, a wedding rehearsal dinner, navigating those differences proves to be tense, challenging, and surprising. The story focuses primarily on the large and varied group of people at the wedding, with most of the characters providing their own point of view. This allows the reader a glimpse into the past experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the characters, but with so many characters some of them weren’t fully brought to life or explored as deeply as I would have liked. While Mazur helpfully provides a seating chart with brief descriptions of each character, the fact that so many of the characters are heard from in a relatively short book detracted from the overall experience. But that is a relatively minor quibble with this witty, stylish, and vividly written novel.

Thank you to Random House and NetGalley for providing an advance copy of this book in exchange for my honest review.

Kasa Cotugno says

I would categorize this as a refreshing sorbet, a well written story that doesn't appear to have a message and is gentle in its approach to its characters. There are many books around using funerals and weddings as excuses to bring disparate people together, and here we have the more conservative Barrows, parents of the bride and all their brood in their Brooks Bros. celebrating the rehearsal dinner at the home of the groom, a shall we say more bohemian group.

But the house in Brookline, Mass is lovely, has been in the family for two generations, and features a lovingly tended garden. (Odd, the rehearsal never seems to take place or it did off stage so quietly I didn't notice.) Some of the situations seem contrived, and some of the motivations are unclear. Also there are far too many characters, rendering many of them shallow and unfinished. The most unexamined is the betrothed couple, as if they know their wedding is only a contrivance to explore other characters in their families brought together for this wedding. Still, I found this to be a quick, enjoyable read with some beautiful writing throughout ("She was like the patch of zinc on the hull of a motor yacht, attracting the charged particles of seawater onto itself and keeping them away from the brass propeller...".)

Ann says

I liked the idea of this story. Two families getting together at the rehearsal dinner for tomorrow's wedding. The groom's family are teacher's, poets and philanthropic minded folks with three generations living in their home with lovely gardens. The bride's family has all lawyers and are a little stiff and snobby. The story is a little complicated with so many characters attending the dinner. The entire book takes place in one day with many of the characters reminiscing and telling others what they have done in the past. I received this ARC in exchange for a fair and honest review.

L says

This book needs a sense of humor. Even just a tiny bit would help cut through the heavy sense of existential angst. Sure there are "whimsical" metaphors and quaint, curious details, but even these are delivered far too seriously. I ended up speed reading through the last 40 or so pages and wishing I had given up sooner.

Jennifer says

A quiet, thoughtful book that really helps you get inside the minds of its characters (the majority of which are quirky and complex.)

The book itself is structured very much like the party at the story's center. Often you arrive to conversations already in progress (which can be a bit disorienting). Those too are frequently interrupted by random internal dialogues running through a character's head while they're listening (or even talking) to others. This all felt very true to life. You have a front row seat to the awkwardness and intimacies of two families of strangers joining together to get to know each other and the celebrate a marriage.

There is a sense of dreaminess to this book, particularly as the story draws to a close. There is a random young girl from a nearby party who wanders by, there is an ancient fish in a pond which refuses to be caught, there is a mute boy who has a reckoning. If, like me, you find yourself intrigued by how all of these loose ends will all play out, this dreaminess will feels appropriate.

My big problem was that, for me, these loose ends--even the central narrative itself--DIDN'T really play out. After spending the vast majority of the book getting to know a rather large cast of characters--who each person loves, who they're cheating on, what they want, what's standing in their way of getting that thing they want--the story take a left turn to not only focus the remainder of the book on only one character, but only on a memory from her past (while, at the same time, something perhaps critical to the plot--but never clearly described--happens in her present) For me, it felt like I was suddenly reading an entirely different book. That was a shame since I rather liked the book I had already been reading.

In the end, again like a party, things just kind of peter out. We're not sure how much of anything (large decisions people have to make or small internal issues they are struggling with) is resolved. Nor are we entirely clear what the repercussions of this evening will be. I suppose that's a bit like life--people cross our paths and we have interesting evenings with them, never to see them again or learn how our encounter impacted their life. Problem is, from an entertainment perspective, that's not always very satisfying.

Thanks to the author and NetGalley for granting me the opportunity to read this book in exchange for an honest review.

Jill Meyer says

I think that Grace Dane Mazur's new novel, "The Garden Party", will garner a range of ratings and reviews. The very reasons I liked it may cause another reader to dislike it. Set in 1991 in a Boston suburb, "The

"Garden Party" follows an age-old plot line - the gathering of two families for an occasion of joy. In this case, it's the wedding of Adam Cohen - a poet - to Eliza Barlow - a young woman who seems to be searching for a vocation. Already there are the differences in families - Jews and Wasps - with all the inherent characteristics that provide an author with the beginnings of a plot. But at this point - the starting point - author Mazur can go one of two ways. She can make the members of the families into caricatures or write them as fleshed-out, individualists. (Even though making them "individualists" can carry its own problems.)

The "garden party" of the title is really a wedding rehearsal dinner, though the participants refer to it as a "garden party". It IS held in a garden at the Cohen's largish house, but the dinner is to celebrate the bringing together of two families, due to be formally joined at a church service the following day.

Mazur does a pretty good job at dispensing with the stereotypes of Jew vs Gentile. It's still present in the plot, what with the Barlows being a family of rock-ribbed lawyers (including the bride's mother, Philippa) and the Cohens being relatively free-spirited searchers and learners. But appearances aside, a few members of the Barlows do show cracks in their veneer of respectability. The marriages of a couple of the Barlow sons appear to be at the end of the line. The Cohens, whose most interesting family member is the 91 year old matriarch Leah, are similarly at sixes-and-sevens in terms of relationships.

I'll be interested to read more reviews of "The Garden Party", as mine is the first on Amazon. While I enjoyed the book and can recommend it, I'd also recommend another new novel, "We Are Gathered", by Jamie Weisman, which is also about a wedding and its participants.

Jenny says

Wikipedia says that "the purpose of the rehearsal dinner is for the relatives and friends of the bride and groom to meet and have a good time. The couple generally take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped with the wedding preparations."

Grace Dane Mazur's book, "The Garden Party", uses this plot device to bring together the Cohen and Barlow families for a rehearsal dinner to celebrate the upcoming nuptials of Adam Barlow, a Wasp, to Eliza Cohen, who is Jewish.

Besides the religious differences between the two families, the Waspish Barlows are mostly highly educated uptight lawyers who are worried how they will connect with the free spirit, artsy Cohens.

Mazur's wonderful, almost ethereal use of words is trancelike. I felt as if I was floating above the party all evening turning my head from side to side to hear all the conversations and stories.

Grace Dane Mazur has written a sometimes humorous, intelligent, smart and witty book that I recommend reading.

Thank you to Netgalley for an advance copy and in no way influenced my review of the book.

Check out my blog on Wordpress at thejwordpress.wordpress.com

#netgalley #thegardenparty #gracedanemazur
