



Maine

By: J. Courtney Sullivan

J. Courtney Sullivan takes composites of her own family, friends, and experiences to create a tale of three generations of a totally dysfunctional family. Each chapter gives a separate perspective and narrative by four women, ranging in age from 30 to 80. This gives a multi-faceted view of the same scenarios and issues as interpreted by the different family members. Each of these women truly are the center of their own universe.

The novel pivots around their summer beach house in Maine and the internal turmoil of these women. The beach house serves as an escape, a sanctuary, a womb, a burden and a chance for eternal life. Just like relationships with loved ones, the summer home is often underappreciated by the family and taken for granted. It has always been there; the symbol of unconditional love that they expect to continue to be there for them their entire lives. It is a monument to their patriarch, Daniel, who died ten years prior to the time period of the story. Interestingly, he is the most likable character in the book!

All of the female characters have their struggles and issues. They play off of each others' weaknesses and vulnerabilities while churning in a sea of dysfunction. They are all trapped in their own individual hells of their own creation. Guilt, avoidance, and fantasy guide their lives and distort the realities that seem so obvious from the outside looking in. They rationalize their decisions, for good or for bad, and they all have to deal with the consequences.

The secrets, guilt and alcoholism of Alice, the mother/grandmother, lead her to scheme her way to eternal forgiveness and immortality -- so she thinks. In reality, what she leaves her family is a legacy of betrayal and bitterness.

The New York Times calls this book "wickedly funny" but it is more like pathetically sad. It is not a feel-good read. However, it will make you thank your lucky stars that your family can't possibly be as messed up as this fictional one. Thank goodness for that!

Recommendations: Visit the author's website at jcourtneysullivan.com to read the Q&A about the novel. Compare our review with guest reviewer Laura Dave on amazon.com. She apparently loved the women in this novel and has a completely different take. Then go to goodreads.com to see some unsolicited reviews. Read the book and decide which truth holds for you; page turner or drudgery. We give it an average of 3 stars -- we were a bit torn, too.

Our wine sampling for this novel was a California pinot grigio "Middle Sister, Drama Queen". It was a little sweet for a typical pinot grigio but it somehow seemed to fit the book this month. Until next time ...

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