



The Wedding of the Two-Headed Woman

By Alice Mattison
ISBN: 9780060937881

Introduction

I am in my mid-fifties, and I have long, blond hair, possibly too long or too blond for my age. I bear the last name, Andalusia, of a man I no longer know and scarcely remember, with whom I moved to New Haven, Connecticut, thirty years ago so he could go to Yale Medical School while I supported him. When Dr. Andalusia left, I stayed. The story I'm going to write down had to happen in a small city. Here, you're never quite sure you're done with a person; you never know how many ways the two of you will touch.

Alice Mattison's last novel, *New York Times* Notable Book **The Book Borrower**, was called "extraordinary" (*Washington Post* Book World) and "ambitious and original" (*Wall Street Journal*), and was lauded for capturing in "deceptively quiet prose ... the fraught, complex relations of men and women" (*New York Times* Book Review). Now Mattison revisits Daisy Andalusia, a character from her

critically-acclaimed collection of stories, **Men Giving Money, Women Yelling**, in a simmering, intelligent novel of love, marriage, and friendship set in a New England city that's sometimes charming, sometimes dangerous.

Following an early first marriage, Daisy Andalusia remained single and enjoyed the company of men on her own terms, making the most of her independent life -- especially her sexual freedom. But now, in her fifties, she is no longer unattached; after a long on-again and off-again love affair, she has married inner-city landlord Pekko Roberts. A resident of New Haven, Connecticut, Daisy earns her living organizing clutter, a calling that affords her an intimate peek at the disorder of the lives of others. Her business soon leads her to a Yale project studying small cities, where she partners with the ebullient director, Gordon Skeetling.

Over her husband's fierce objections -- and working with Gordon, with whom life becomes ever more complicated, Daisy organizes a conference about murder in small cities, including New Haven. For a community theater group seeking a subject for a play, Daisy appropriates a tabloid headline that Gordon has kept for years among the dusty piles in his office: "Two-Headed Woman Weds Two Men: Doc Says She's Twins." These words will take on increasing significance over eight transformative months, March through October, 2001, as Daisy questions whether she can truly be a part of anything -- a two-headed woman, a friendship, a marriage -- while discovering more about herself than she wants to know.

Profoundly moving and psychologically penetrating, **The Wedding of the Two-Headed Woman** is the intimate, endearing, and finally triumphant story of how Daisy at last learns to live the life she has so lovingly crafted for herself.

Questions for Discussion

1. "A two-headed person would not have told Pekko's secret, I thought. People are supposed to have two heads. I said, 'I gave away a secret. I hurt someone.'" (page 269) Daisy tells Gordon Skeetling the secret of Edmund killing his girlfriend, which Pekko specifically asked her not to tell anyone. Why do you believe that she confides in Gordon? Would you have made the same choice? Why or why not?
2. When Daisy's friend Ellen confronts her over her affair, Daisy lies to Ellen. Do you feel that she was justified? Or do you feel that she should have told her the truth? Why do you think we conceal things from those whom we consider close? Can you achieve closeness, but maintain boundaries in relationships?
3. Daisy thinks that Pekko wants to bury New Haven's history of crime, poverty, and prostitution while she wants to uncover the city's secrets. Do their opposing desires reflect aspects of their personalities, their backgrounds, or both?
4. How did you feel about Pekko's relationships with his tenants? How would you categorize him as a landlord: did you see him as an overwhelmed business owner or a New Haven slumlord? Did your perception of him as a landlord influence your judgment of his guilt or innocence in regard to Daphne's accusations?
5. On page 139, Daisy says, "I wanted to know about New Haven murders, but I also wanted to know about murder: how it feels to do it, why people do it, and how they sometimes get away with it." What does this statement say about who she is? Does it shed light on some of her behavior and choices?
6. Daisy's fascination with prostitution might have caused you to suspect that she too, had once accepted money for sex, and eventually it is revealed that she had. What did you find more surprising: that she accepted money for sex or that she paid for sex with her young lover Denny?
7. "I loved being with him -- I loved going to bed with him -- and we were going to do that only once more -- but I didn't love him, I wasn't going to love him, and therefore I was free and in charge. What I like is power." What is the connection between sex and power that Daisy makes? Does this statement reflect Daisy's essential difficulty with intimacy -- that intimacy without power is unacceptable? What are some of the ways she tries to maintain control in her affair with Gordon?
8. When Gordon has to suddenly leave their romantic weekend in New York because of another woman, Daisy writes, "I wanted to

be a triumphant woman visiting her brother, not someone who'd been left alone in a hotel by a man with more urgent plans involving worthier people. I wanted to be the one with urgent business." In addition to a fear of losing control in love, this statement seems to suggest a need to look like the powerful figure in a relationship or a certain demand her ego makes on her. What are some other instances where Daisy is concerned with appearances? Do you think that she recognizes this characteristic of her personality? If so, do you think she considers it a flaw?

9. Is organizing clutter therapeutic for Daisy? Is it therapeutic for her clients? What do you think drew Daisy to this profession? What aspects of her work do you find alluring? On the other hand, what wouldn't you enjoy about having such intimate access to the lives of others?

About the author

Alice Mattison is the author of four novels, four collections of short stories, and a volume of poetry. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Glimmer Train*, *Ploughshares*, *The Threepenny Review*, and *The Pushcart Prize*. Her short story "In Case We're Separated" was included in **The Best American Short Stories 2002**. She lives in New Haven, Connecticut.