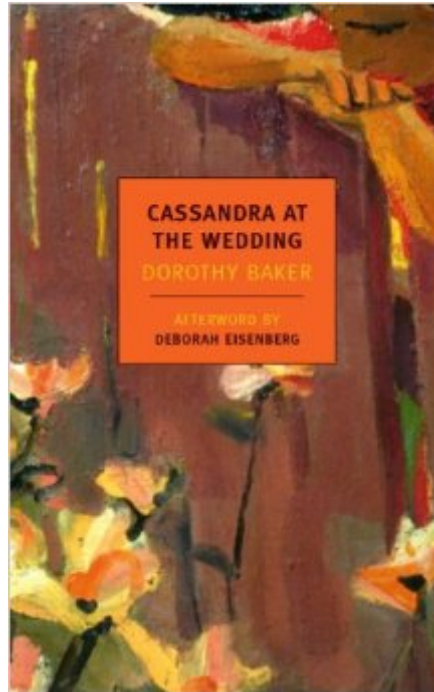


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Cassandra At The Wedding (New York Review Books Classics)



Synopsis

Cassandra Edwards is a graduate student at Berkeley: gay, brilliant, nerve-racked, miserable. At the beginning of this novel, she drives back to her family ranch in the foothills of the Sierras to attend the wedding of her identical twin, Judith, to a nice young doctor from Connecticut. Cassandra, however, is hell-bent on sabotaging the wedding. Dorothy Baker's entrancing tragicomic novella follows an unpredictable course of events in which her heroine appears variously as conniving, self-aware, pitiful, frenzied, absurd, and heartbroken "at once utterly impossible and tremendously sympathetic. As she struggles to come to terms with the only life she has, Cassandra reckons with her complicated feelings about the sister who she feels owes it to her to be her alter ego; with her father, a brandy-soaked retired professor of philosophy; and with the ghost of her dead mother. First published in 1962, *Cassandra at the Wedding* is a book of enduring freshness, insight, and verve. Like the fiction of Jeffrey Eugenides and Jhumpa Lahiri, it is the work of a master stylist with a profound understanding of the complexities of the heart and mind.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

You're a twin --- so close to your sister that she moved across the country. Now she's getting married to a man you've never met and cutting the cord for good. And you're her only bridesmaid. In the universe we now inhabit --- the urban chicscape of "Sex and the City" --- Cassandra Edwards would have a posse of smart-talking, Chardonnay-swilling pals to help her through this overwrought moment. They'd gab for hours about her choice of a bridesmaid's dress. They'd speculate about the

groom's endowment. And they'd tease Cassandra for her ambivalence about catching the bouquet. "Cassandra at the Wedding" is a stunning rebuke to that shallow-as-glass sensibility. More to the point, it's a smart, stylish, disturbing novel --- a book much too good to languish at an Amazon ranking of 1,000,000. But then, Dorothy Baker is not exactly a household name. *Young Man with a Horn* --- her fictionalized account of the doomed jazz great Bix Beiderbecke --- was published in 1938. It's pure pleasure; I've read it a dozen times since discovering it as a kid. I thought it was her only novel until a Butler reader tipped me to "Cassandra at the Wedding", the last of what turn out to be Baker's three novels. Like "Young Man with a Horn," this novel begins effortlessly: "I told them I could be free by the twenty-first, and that I'd come home the twenty-second." That makes Cassandra seem chatty and friendly. Well, it doesn't take long for her bitchy side to surface. Example: Her twin's beloved is John Thomas Finch. Cassandra's comment: "Where'd she meet him --- Birdland?" Soon we see that Cassandra is an inventory of neurosis.

The first and last sections of this magnificent book are narrated by the redoubtably ironic Cassandra. These describe her role in the marriage of her twin sister, Judith, who narrates the novel's center section. The great achievement of the novel is Cassandra's theatrical and mesmerizing voice, and her childish, inebriated, overdramatic attempts to prevent her sister from abandoning her. We come to love Cassandra so much that we are almost persuaded that Jude should not marry the kind, strong, prepossessing MD, Jack. Jude's voice, ironic but less theatrical, is also a convincing tour de force. But marriage, of course, is the traditional climax of the romantic marriage plot--and so it goes. But "Cassandra at the Wedding" is not so simple. Cassandra, the reader will remember, is the famous figure from Greek mythology whose prophetic warnings of the fall of Troy went unheeded. And Judith is the biblical heroine who liberated her tribe by beheading the drunken lecher Holofernes. Taken together these two stories, lurking in the background of the names, would actually support Cassie's position at the wedding that her fragile family should not be invaded by the outsider and cast her as the protector of the clan. And indeed the vision she spins for Judith of the unconventional life they could live together as two sisters is compelling. Whether or not we are twins, the forsaking of our families of origin can feel like a betrayal and a loss. As Deborah Eisenberg notes, in her wonderful afterword, the novel also draws upon Plato's fable that explains love as each individual's search for her lost double, who in primeval times had made one spherical whole.

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