FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

General

Difficult Women
Alfred Duhrssen
Wallaroo Books
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When narrator Frederick Quist phones his recently deceased father's home, Quist, "half expecting him to answer the phone" gets

Isabel instead, "his fourth and last wife, by whom he had had four girls in a vain attempt to replace his only and disappointing son, namely myself."

That negative and self-reproaching tone permeates this tale of a wealthy, dysfunctional family through nearly two generations, focusing on the many women with whom the narrator has relationships.

Beginning with a brief introduction to his childhood, Quist, in first person, relates the story of his parents' break-up and his sister Mimi's first marriage.

Like his fictional counterpart, Duhrssen—this is his second book—is also a veteran of World War II and although American-born, resides in Spain.

Prior to the war, Quist strikes up a romance with Isabel, a friend of Mimi's. It's that same Isabel that later marries Quist's father, thereby becoming his stepmother.

Following the war and a brief affair with Molly, a nurse he meets while convalescing, Quist returns to the states, attends Yale and meets Ruth, another of his sister's friends. Despite being already married and the mother of three, Quist proposes to her. "Father was notably outraged when he heard about my intention of running off with a married woman older than myself. To make matters worse, Ruth kissed him in the kitchen during a cocktail party, perhaps with the design of winning him over with her charm, of which she had an exaggerated opinion when she drank."

Moving to Paris for further schooling, Quist tells briefly of his time there with his wife and their children. David is his first-born.

His mother read to him constantly when he got older and he grew

up fast, too fast. God knows where he is now.

Quist describes in detail his “sexploits” and continuous mind games with five different women in the next several chapters, each bearing their name: Ellenore, the ever enceinte professor’s wife; Berthe, the French actress; Cat, the Canadian who dislikes Quist’s excessive drinking; and Petra, the Nordic beauty carrying a secret.

What the author lacks in a sympathetic main character, he makes up for with such lines as: “I headed down the road, the setting sun behind me, crawling up my back like a spider.”

Quist is searching for something—but no one discovers for certain what it is.

Robin Farrell Edmunds