

Wedding Wipeout: A Rabbi Kappelmacher Mystery

Jacob M. Appel

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Sprinkled with a healthy dose of Yiddish humor, a cast of quirky characters enlivens this send-up of a whodunit.

A spinster bride is found dead the morning after her wedding. Was it natural or murder? Rabbi Kappelmacher is determined, using rabbinic reasoning, guile, and a dash of Yiddish humor, to discover the truth. The dialogue and physical descriptions keep the characters distinct, and the potential motives will have readers guessing until the very last page.

The setting of *Wedding Wipeout* is suburban New York City, in the recent past before cell phones, where two spinster sisters live quiet, routine lives supported by their deceased father's estate. Things are turned upside down when one of the sisters, Florence, decides to marry her new beau; according to their father's will, Florence will have to cede her share of the funds to the unwed Lorraine. A gathering of estranged relatives is invited to a wedding filled with emotional turbulence. Florence is found dead the morning after.

At the outset, the book provides a list of characters and their relationships, but the contents page lists chapter titles without page numbers for reference. The novel is divided into two parts; the first offers evidence given by the characters, and the second revisits the evidence, but with a series of feints, lies, and several personal indiscretions revealed.

Kibitzer (busybody) and widower Rabbi Kappelmacher is drawn into the mystery by former Rabbi Green, now an attorney. The voice of junior Rabbi Steinmetz narrates the tale and is the foil for Kappelmacher's rabbinic reasoning. Yiddish terms, such as *dumkopf* (stupid person), *meshugah* (crazy), and *noodnik* (a pest), are part of the dialogue, capturing nuances of the New York Jewish community of religious and assimilated Jews and gentiles of varied social standing. Physical descriptions and personal quirks are described throughout the story. For example, the raised arm of Rabbi Kappelmacher presses an imaginary button to emphasize a revelation; the lighting of a cigar creates dramatic tension and also gives the rabbi breathing space.

Writing intelligently with an ease of knowledge in medicine and law, author Jacob M. Appel has given the book an alliterative title, *Wedding Wipeout*, though the word "wipeout," in any of its meanings, doesn't quite fit the story.

Appel pokes fun at the detective genre during an exchange between Rabbi Kappelmacher and one of the suspects, who is a fan of murder mysteries; several famous mystery novels are spoofed during their conversation. The narrative also gives hints to readers attempting to solve the case. According to Steinmetz, "The murderer always arranges an alibi which needs to be cracked." Humorous bits—like an Episcopal neighbor being told that she is a candidate for the *Dumkopf* Prize, given to righteous gentiles, and her response that she knows of this prestigious award—form only a small part of the broad emotional spectrum offered in this book. The variety of characters will keep the reader guessing about who killed the bride.

The classic tying up of loose ends takes place in a large drawing room with all suspects present, where Rabbi

Kappelmacher, using his rabbinic reasoning, presents the motives and explains each suspect's actions. The case is solved in a very satisfactory manner.

Fans of detective novels and Yiddish humor will pore over the evidence, with several surprises and a laugh or two along the way.

MARK LAIOSA (November 22, 2013)

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