

Winds of Change

Mary Metcalfe

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In present-day Boston, social worker Jennifer Barrett and her best friend, nurse Lana Fitzpatrick, struggle to cope with grief. While her dad deteriorates at Brentwood, the nursing home where Lana works, Jennifer grieves the deaths of her husband and daughter. Lana, too, is widowed, raising her young son, Danny, alone. Into their lives come Ben and Mark Powell, a father and son, respectively, each man struggling with his own demons. As the pair of men and the pair of women connect, circumstances shift for all of the characters. Such is the plot of *Winds of Change*, Mary Metcalfe's sparkling debut about the travails and triumphs of life and love.

Although she is a member of the Romance Writers of America, the author's book delves into more than the affairs of the heart. Those who appreciate substantive characters will easily be wrapped up in the nuanced characterizations of Jennifer, Lana, Mark, and Ben. While romantic love makes up part of the story, Metcalfe deftly explores Jennifer and Lana's friendship and Mark and Ben's father-son bond as she creates real wounds and, ultimately, genuine healing for each of them. Jennifer's attempts to relate to her father, Art, as his dementia worsens, provides a poignant look at a dilemma many middle-aged people face today: how to hang on while simultaneously letting go as one's parent slips away. The book has a leisurely pace in the beginning, but never falters, as Metcalfe establishes each sympathetic character while readers bear witness to their traumas and joys. When romance at last blooms, it blossoms gently and realistically, but thrills the heart nonetheless. The sex scenes are passionate but tastefully done. Indeed, there is even some suspense involved because the audience isn't sure which woman will end up with which man. Refreshingly, one couple has quite an age difference between them, but the affection is treated as genuine, turning the trope of the gold digger and the silver fox squarely on its head. The author portrays Alzheimer's disease, PTSD, depression, and grief without letting the mental trials define her characters.

The dialogue rings true, and one can imagine the characters bantering in real life. Oddly, however, Metcalfe peppers her text with Briticisms, and the characters alternate between British and American slang, although the story is set in Massachusetts and none of the characters has English ancestry. Nonetheless, readers will love being swept along with *Winds of Change*.

JILL ALLEN (September 14, 2012)

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