



Wise Men

Stuart Nadler

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Hilly Wise is the son of one of the most powerful and wealthy lawyers in the United States. When Hilly meets Savannah, a young black girl on the beach at Cape Cod during the summer of 1952, his affection for her collides with his father's secrets. The result shatters his family, and hers.

Years later, Hilly sets out to find Savannah, and to right the wrongs he helped set in motion. But can his sense of guilt, and his good intentions, overcome the forces of history, family, and identity? A multi-generational story about love and regret, the evolving struggle for racial dignity, and the crushing weight of familial obligation, WISE MEN confirms that Stuart Nadler is one of the most exciting young writers at work today.

Wise Men Details

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Author : Stuart Nadler

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From Reader Review Wise Men for online ebook

Philippe Malzieu says

There are literary places. A geographical conjunction of human and social factors able to create the drama. It was for Proust Cabourg and the Grand Hôtel. Cap Code belongs to this places.

US aristocracy meet between here. This human society has its own codes and rituals. They live protected in magnificent house. The son of Wise, a great and powerful lawyer, is in love with the niece of Lem, his black domestic. That could be a mix of « Downton Abbey » and « Guess who's coming to dinner » (last Spencer Tracy movie).

This transgression will be involuntarily at the origin of the drama. The past of Wise re-appear. Lem will die. As said Balzac « At the origin of each fortune, there is a crime. »

Many years later, the son of Wise will leave in search of the niece of Lem. Undoubtedly a kind of redemption for him. But things are not also simple.

There is only in american litterature wher I find novel able to approach topics as difficults as religion, difference of class, family, social success without militancy or pathos. This nowel is particulary successfull. It would make a splendid film.

Vince says

2.5 stars. Nadler has assembled several elements of a good story in Wise Men but never seems to quite pull it together in a cohesive way. The characters are just shadows and never fully realized. The drama is not all that dramatic. Sorry, but at about the half-way point I was just reading so I could say I finished the book. I believe the author has potential so here's hoping that his next effort shows improvement.

Julie says

The book jacket screams, "... reminiscent of Harper Lee.." , "winsome and compelling narrator", "brilliantly plotted and carefully observed". I'd have to agree. If you lived in an alternate universe, that is, where any kind of falderal and gibberish passes for literature.

This book has as much in common with Harper Lee as Homer, the author of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, has in common with Homer Jay Simpson, erstwhile Safety Inspector at the Springfield Nuclear Plant. Harper Lee lived, and understood, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Nadler watched the made-for-tv movie, took notes, and rendered a feeble facsimile of inter-racial tensions and complexities. At the very best, this book is an annoyance. At its worst, it is a violation against the civil rights movement and the intricacies of human interaction, in that very difficult post-war period in America.

I am offended by the simple-minded narrative and dialogue that reads more like a pre-pubescent teen's novel-of-sexual-discovery than it does of any complicated social and racial issues. It's as if the author felt that if he threw in a Jew, a Black Man and a couple of homosexuals into the mix, stirred it up and threw some period-specific lingo, he'd have the perfect recipe for exploring the emotional ferment of that period from the 1950s to 1970s.

Better to have titled the novel *Idiot in America*, for the punning of the Wise family moniker with the wise men really grates like nails on chalkboard.

Carrie says

[I am over books with main characters who conveniently end up with piles of money at the end. Also the one sentence when the main character states that there is no point in writing about his life with his wife because they were happy just really rubbed me the wrong way. He may have been happy but I wonder how she fel

Mary Ronan Drew says

I love first novels. So much promise and such a thrill when a first-time author has written a really good book. Stuart Nadler has written a first novel and it's a really, really good book: *Wise Men*.

The story begins in a fictional Cape Cod town located between Wellfleet and Truro where Art Wise has bought a modest summer house. Art had been an ambulance chaser until he took on a class action suit against an airline, accusing the company of negligence. Before long he was working for airline companies, finding ways to protect them from such suits. He and his partner, Robert Ashley, became extremely rich.

Hilly Wise, Art's 17-year-old son, falls in love that first summer on the Cape, with Savannah, the niece of his father's hired hand, Lem Dawson, a black man. The adults come between them and Art accuses Lem of theft, prosecutes, and sees that he is given a stiff sentence in state prison. Three months later Lem is murdered by another inmate. Hilly feels guilty and suspects his father had something to do with the murder.

Art denies it but as time goes along Hilly can't forget his part in Lem's arrest. And he doesn't forget Savannah. He refuses to take any of his father's money and becomes a newspaper reporter whose specialty is the civil rights movement. Reading that a brick had been thrown through the window of Savannah's father's cafe in a small Iowa town, he visits in hopes of meeting Savannah again.

He does, but things don't work out the way he had hoped. Savannah is married, and Hilly goes back to Boston and he marries, too. Eventually his dad gives him the house on the cape, where he and his family live for many years.

The fraught relationship between the nouveau-rich Art and his judgemental son is well portrayed. In the scenes in the beginning of the book, Hilly's immaturity and the lack of judgement that makes him responsible for Lem's prosecution are tense and sad. Late in the book the mood is elegaic as Art and Bob, the old men, are becoming frail. Hilly still thinks of Savannah and arranges for her to visit him at the house on the Cape.

Nadler spins the plot into gold. Hilly's relationship with his father and his inability to forget Savannah are touching, and the ending, which has some surprises as all good plots do, is splendid.

Yasmin says

Based upon the book description, *Wise Men* was something different and not what I expected. For me, the storyline didn't match the description or maybe I just didn't want a story that was centered primarily around Hilly and his horrible father. Or one that only treated Savannah as a secondary character. Also, while I know that bigots/racists come in all colors, shapes, sizes, genders, religions, creeds...it still annoys the heck out of me that another group that was abused, mistreated, persecuted (ie Jews) can still so easily and without conscious abuse and disrespect another group of folks (ie blacks). Or at least that's how the author portrayed Arthur Wise in this storyline...perception can often be reality. Maybe I shouldn't think too hard about this book because the more I think about it...the more disgusted I become with Hilly who was a coward and a liar and the more I wish I had never met his father, Arthur. Oh, and the ending...are you kidding me? Seems like a case of an author running out of steam but realizing that they must end the story some sort of way so they come up with something out of left field and that they believe to be sensational. Fortunately, I had already figured out the big secret in the middle of the storyline so I wasn't surprised...just perturbed that the author took so long and waited until the last minute for the reveal. This isn't a book that I would necessarily recommend to others...primarily because it's one that will be easily forgettable after a day or so. So, in closing, read at your own risk.

Val says

This book, as told from the first person, reads like a memoir. It spans 7 decades and multiple socioeconomic levels. It covers race relations and interpersonal relations. It tells of the miscommunications between and father and a son. It is a microcosm of a life. I was sucked into its pages and didn't want to leave until the very end, when the world of the book was totally upended. It was very well written. I'm looking forward to the next novel by Stuart Nadler.

Dean Cummings says

In the spring of 1947 a passenger plane, owned by Boston Airways, crashed near Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island. Fifty-six people died in the crash, thirteen of them children.

Arthur Wise, a New Haven based "slip-and-fall-and-sue attorney" happened to be connected to one of the passengers on the fated flight, a brother of one of his old law school classmates. In the weeks and months following the disaster, Wise researched the circumstances of the crash, along with the safety and maintenance records of the airline, finally concluding that he had a legal case against the airline, he filed suit against Boston Airways.

Interestingly, in the late 1940's, class action lawsuits were unusual, considered almost radical to most people. The few that did come to light, attracted heavy media attention while at the same time grabbing the interest of the general public. Arthur Wise understood, and took advantage of these conditions, one of the most notable came when during an interview, he described the Boston Airlines crash as "the biggest threat to civilian safety since the Blitz." His theatrics and dramatic statements found a willing and attentive audience of post war Americans who no longer had Germans or Japanese to oppose. Even before the case went to trial, Arthur Wise was already becoming a celebrity in America.

Wise ultimately won the case, along with a handsome settlement. From a historical standpoint, Wise's success came at just the right time. Commercial aviation was becoming very popular, and every year there were more and more flights taking off from airports all over the world. But safety standards were not yet formalized in the airline industry, and as a result, between 1948 and 1952 there were hundreds of airplane crashes around the world.

Wise was one of the few attorneys who'd taken on and beaten a corporate airline, because of this, he was often courted by the lead plaintiff's lawyers to settle. This happened in dozens of class-action lawsuits that were similar in size and scope to his case against Boston Airlines. These conditions came together fantastically for Arthur Wise. The big corporate defense firms hired to represent the affected airlines, offered settlements as fast as Wise could file suit. He'd found his niche in the legal profession, no one wanted to challenge him, he was famous and was becoming fantastically wealthy.

That's when everything changed for the Wise Family.

Hilton "Hilly" Wise, Arthur's son was twelve years old when the Boston Airlines crash occurred, he was seventeen when his father moved he and his mother Ruth from New Haven to Wren's Bridge, a bedroom community half hour north of Manhattan in order to be closer to the Court of Appeals in New York during the Boston Airlines case. Hilly was unhappy with the move, he missed his school friends, the neighborhood he lived and most of all, he missed playing baseball, their new home didn't have a league. Hilly ran away from home, back to New Haven, but his father was there to pick him up to take him back to Wren's Bridge almost immediately after his teenage son set foot back in his old neighborhood.

Shortly after Arthur won the Boston Airlines case, he found himself in the financial position to purchase a beach home with an ocean view, something he'd always wanted and a symbol of his new found success. The new home was located near a place called Blue point, a small town on the far edge of the "flexed arm" of Cape Cod, between two other towns, Wellfleet and Truro. Hilly and his mom Ruth were taken to see their new home, and also saw that the place, about a mile down the shoreline, that Robert Ashley, Arthur's partner in the firm was also to live. Hilly soon meets the "caretaker" of the property, a middle-aged Negro man named Lem Dawson who simply chose to remain after the previous owners sold the property to Arthur Wise. Both Arthur and to a slightly lesser extent, Hilly's mom Ruth treat Lem dismissively as the hired man. Their initially vague prejudices also begin to show through where Lem is concerned. First, when Arthur begins referring to Dawson as "boy" and later when Arthur notices Hilly befriendng Lem and discourages it in no uncertain terms. Lem is an important character, partly because of his own contribution to the story, and partly because he is the uncle of a young lady named Savannah Ewing. Lem's sister, Savannah's mom, has passed away and Savannah was since raised by her father Charles, a gambler with a spotty employment record who also happened to be a talented baseball player who through a series of unfortunate circumstances, was only given a tiny taste of major league action as a player. Mostly, Charles and Savannah live in near poverty.

It is Savannah and Lem that change the course of the remainder of Hilly's life.

After reading “Wise Men” it comes as no surprise that Stuart Nadler has already won a number of awards as a writer. There are a number of aspects to his writing style that captured, and held my attention:

Firstly, it’s the atmosphere. In a number of scenes, Nadler shows his penchant for slowing the pace of the story, just enough to allow us to consider and appreciate the importance of setting the characters find themselves in. One example that stood out in my memory was the way Nadler describes the Wise’s new house in Bluepoint, Massachusetts.

“The house itself was spare, white, the floorboards bleached, the back windows open to the water. Salt air in the kitchen. Twin wicker settees in the living room, a shipman’s lanterns on a side table, a tide chart, two years old, folded on the lip of a broken radiator like a road map.”

As I read scenes like these, I often pause to reflect on what a place like this would look like in my mind’s eye, knowing it’s a location that is sure to be visited over and over again over the course of the story.

In another scene, Nadler describes the landscape of rural Iowa.

“We’d taken the country road out of Ebbington, passing for ten miles through empty, flat country so stark, it seemed like land that hadn’t been discovered by man, just the dark space between towns. Towns in Iowa crop up unexpectedly, sometimes in the crook of an elbow, sometimes on what passes for high ground. Everything here is postglacial, steamrolled by ice, carved by wind.”

While I enjoyed “Wise Men” I moved through it more slowly than I might with other titles. This is partly because of scenes like this one. I’ll read them, then set the book down, close my eyes and try to see the rural Iowa that Nadler is telling me about.

Secondly, I like how Nadler injects authentic history into his story. I’ve always enjoyed reading the work of authors who do this well. In Nadler’s case these really stood out, including a reference to the connection between Arthur Wise and John F. Kennedy.

“Jack Kennedy, at the time the congressman from Massachusetts’s Eleventh District. Kennedy, in 1952 was a few months away from running against Henry Cabot Lodge for the commonwealth’s Senate seat and had sent an emissary to curry favor with my father – a needless trip, for my father was a conservative in the most stringent sense: aggressive in his stance toward Communism, aggressive in his stance toward regulations of the market, and aggressive toward what he considered the cowardice of liberalism.”

I appreciated how Nadler caused his fictional timelines to dovetail neatly with the actual history of John F. Kennedy’s political rise, a phenomenon that would’ve certainly played into almost any story taking place in Cape Cod during the early 1950’s.

Lastly, and without giving too much away, I was amazed at the sense of nostalgia I felt as I passed the halfway mark of this novel. It’s a testament to the power that an exceptionally well crafted story has to suspend our sense of reality. Time in a fictional story and the “real time” passage of time are wildly out of sync when twenty years pass in just a number of chapters. Much reflection comes with these experiences, even though the “rational” part of our mind knows that this is a story of fiction and only a few hours or days have actually passed as we read. I experienced a strong sensation of this kind of reality suspension as I read this book. As a work of fiction where the sense of the passing of twenty years was so powerfully felt, I felt as though I had to shake it off. What a wonderful feeling!

“Wise Men” really stood out from this aspect. A truly fantastic book.

Jeri Collins says

This book was such a disappointment. It was selected based on the interesting description but sadly the story itself did not live up to the book jacket. I don't think this is a story about fathers and sons at all, nor is it about racial violence. There is a father and a son in the story; and racial violence occurs but what either of those things have to do with the story line is tenuous at best.

I think it is about the narrator who is a guy that never grows up. Hilly is a Peter Pan type of guy. He has ideas about what his life might be like but he never actually puts anything together. He says he doesn't want his father's money but of course he takes it and lives off it for the bulk of his life. He picks a job as a journalist but only so he can, for lack of a better word, stalk a woman he had a crush on when he's a teenager. He says Lem is his friend, but then he starts a series of events that ends in tragedy. And there is never any good reason given for why he betrays his friend Save me from friends like Hilly! I saw nothing that Hilly brought to anyone's life. Other people were building their lives around him but he had some vision of what might have been that he couldn't ever get over. Had it not been for Jenny, his wife, who gets completely dismissed in this story - I think Hilly would have ended up very badly. The end of the story is a complete disappointment - what a cliché throwaway of an ending. I guess the commonality of "forbidden" love was, in the end, the tie between Hilly and his father? Hilly's mother was present in the story but completely absent from his life.

The writing was good -- the story was terrible.

Larry H says

I'd rate this 4.5 stars.

Stuart Nadler's terrific book explores the complex relationship between father and son, and how spending one's life trying to be something other than what is expected can be emotionally crippling. It's also a book about the powerful hold unrequited love has over you, and like Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, it's also a story of how a snap decision made in the heat of the moment can have life-changing implications.

Hilly Wise is a teenager growing up in New Haven when his father, Arthur, an ambulance-chasing attorney, lands a major case following a tragic plane crash. The case makes Arthur one of the wealthiest and most famous attorneys, reviled by airlines and other businesses, and sought after by individuals whose lives have been affected by tragedy. In the summer of 1952, Arthur moves his family to a beach house in the small town of Bluepoint on Cape Cod, where his law partner, Robert, also moves to an adjacent house on the property. Arthur and his wife easily settle into the life of the newly rich and powerful, but Hilly struggles.

In Bluepoint, Hilly meets Lem Dawson, the black man whose job it is to care for the Wises' house, and although Arthur discourages it, Hilly strikes up a tentative friendship with Lem, borne partly out of sympathy for the way his father treats Lem, partly out of curiosity and loneliness. Hilly finds himself falling in love with Lem's troubled niece, Savannah, although he is unsure exactly how to express his affection. And in one moment, a decision that Hilly makes has shattering consequences for all of them.

Years later, an adult Hilly, working as a reporter, tries to track Savannah down, in an effort to satisfy his longing and his curiosity at how her life turned out, as well as to assuage his guilt. But picking up where you left off—especially in a situation like this—is more difficult than one would imagine, and his relationship with his father once again leaves everything awry. And all of these feelings, and all of the familial history, continues to follow him through the rest of his life.

This is a powerful, well-told story about love, guilt, resentment, and trying to escape your destiny. Nadler does a great job creating a compelling story that transcends these familiar themes, and while Hilly at times seems a little too spineless and sad-sack, and Arthur seems to be a bit of a caricature at times, the narrative packs a resounding, emotional punch. Some of the plot you'll see coming, some you may not, but it's a story that will fascinate you, frustrate you, and ultimately, move you.

Huda says

Something about it reminded me of *The Great Gatsby*-- the story is in the shadow of a rich, self-made man who, while not admirable, is very compelling. It kept me wanting to read even though I did not love any of the characters. At times, it felt melodramatic and I hesitated between 3 and 4 stars. But in the end, I feel it captured a remarkable transition in American history and it was beautifully rendered without the writing being overdone.

Stephen6400 says

It felt like a collection of red herrings poorly weaved together. Sporadic character development, limited sense of suspense, lacking strong visual descriptions ... and the last page 'reveal' was pretty weak. There were some good ideas around which to create a good novel, but this one did not work for me.

Melissa says

I won this through Goodreads First Reads & this book was absolutely amazing. It was beautifully written and after finishing it I was left staring at the words, mouth gaping trying to place my feelings about how it all turned out. It really is such a strong, emotional beautiful story and I can not wait to recommend it to everyone that I know. I do have to say that I really wish many things had happened differently but life isn't a fairytale, not everyone has a happy ending and in it's own way that is part of the beauty of the story.

I do have to agree with another person who recently reviewed this book as well. There was so much left unsaid and when I was trying to place my feelings at the end it was partly because I was left wanting something more. I was left wondering what it all meant in a sense or like there was some conclusion for many of the characters that I was missing out on. Even so, very well written and sometimes not knowing everything is part of what keeps the level of intrigue at it's fullest. Like a quick glimpse into someone else's life. You may see some of what's going on but without being that person or living that life you'll never really know everything. I would most definitely recommend it to anyone and everyone. Amazing read!

Jayarby says

The majority of the story is about Hilly Wise, the son of obnoxious nouveau riche Jewish attorney, Arthur Wise. Hilly has a near-stalking obsession with Savannah, a poor local black girl he knew briefly when they were teenagers. His odyssey of trying to contact her through the convening years is two-fold. He wants to rekindle what he perceives as a love interest between them, of which she seems to be indifferent, but also because he feels responsible for sending Savannah's Uncle Lem, Arthur Wise's handyman, to prison for stealing some papers from Arthur's briefcase. These papers play a part in a big family secret that is revealed on the last page of which, I might add, I just assumed during the course of reading the book. The stories I really enjoy are ones that leave me satisfied as I close the book for the last time. Satisfied in that, I'm glad I took the time to read it and also a feeling of sadness that the story is over. I never got that with this book.

Arwen56 says

[il padre del protagonista e il suo socio sono gay (hide spoiler)]
