



## Marry Me: A Romance

*John Updike*

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## **Marry Me: A Romance** John Updike

A deftly satirical portrait of life and love in a suburban town as only Updike can paint it.

Updike's eighth novel, subtitled "A Romance" because, he says, "People don't act like that any more," centers on the love affair of a married couple in the Connecticut of 1962. Unfortunately, this is a couple whose members are married to other people. Suburban infidelity is familiar territory by now, but nobody knows it as well as Updike, and the book is written with the author's characteristic poetic sensibility and sly wit.

## **Marry Me: A Romance Details**

Date : Published August 27th 1996 by Random House Trade Paperbacks (first published 1976)

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Author : John Updike

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## From Reader Review Marry Me: A Romance for online ebook

### Mark Merenda says

John Updike was the Mozart of modern American literature. There was nothing that he could not do well. This book is fascinating, quite apart from his wonderful prose style. It apparently is closely based on an actual affair that almost blew Updike's first marriage apart. He alludes to it in his book "Self-Consciousness", saying something along the lines of "I tried to break out of my marriage and failed." He did not publish the book "for personal reasons" while married to his first wife, but brought it out in 1976 after their divorce. He said that "Sally" commented later, "We tried to do too much."

The controversial ending seems perfect to me. Jerry imagines the future if he had chosen Sally, then the real aftermath of his marriage to Ruth, then...a world in which Sally remains his ideal, always just out of reach, never real, and thus never spoiled, a world in which they will always be in love, and in which he is always just about to ask her to marry him.

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### Jennifer says

This reads more like a play than a novel. And felt like a riff on the "No Exit" theme- hell is living with other people or living in a love triangle for the rest of your life. The whole book had an overwrought, over-analyzed, Woody Allen kind of indecisiveness. He wants his mistress, he wants his wife, he wants his mistress, he wants his wife. I don't think I've ever read a book that seemed so real and unreal at the same time. I kept thinking: Is this what marriage was really like in America when you got married in your early 20's in the 50's/60's?

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### Yulia says

Could anyone explain to me what happened in the last two chapters? I just couldn't understand what Updike intended by them.

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### Maia says

Between 3 and 3.5 stars for this, but settled for 3 because, despite the obvious strength of talent, Updike as always leaves me with a bad taste in my mouth afterwards--and not an insightful 'wow!' kind of bad taste either.

I've long had issues with Updike, even before college, and now he's finally dead (and nifty male reviewers, esp of his own generation or near it, can stop the accolades except from a distance) I really do wonder for how long and just how profoundly his reputation will remain as A Great American Writer. It'd be interesting to see what a reader, say, 30 or 40 years from now will really think of his work. Put it this way: he's no Hemingway.

A detailed review will follow but for now, suffice it to say that the most grating aspect of Updike's writing is the obviously nerdy self-interested mysoginism, which page after page makes me want to jump back in time,

kick him in te groin, and shake his bony shoulders. Enough.

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### **Angelina Rotenhajzer says**

Well, wonderful. Despite the authors making a joke he called it a 'romance' because people didn't behave that way any more, the book is acutely correct in its understanding of the evolution of human desire and the description of the mental angst when facing the consequences. The characters' behaviour is nauseating, irritating, trying the readers' patience by being so understanding towards each other it leaves every one of them too many options. The multiple choice and indecision throughout the plot is the reason the last chapter works so well, or is even the only way the book could have ended, though not many readers appreciated it as far as I can gather from the comments.

I understand that the main point of the novel is that too much understanding between the divorcing parties does make the decision-making even more difficult and the divorce more painful, and it rang true to me.

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### **Cassandra says**

loved it. and wanted to die after I finished. bleak. raw. jerry conant is a motherfucker. put me on suicide watch for an hour and hide the liquor. jesus.

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### **Mark says**

More than thirty years ago I read *Marry me* and it made a big impression on me. Rereading it all these years later was a sheer pleasure. It is Updike's typical stomping ground: couples, marriages and adultery in a middleclass setting. I remember an interview in which Updike said of this subject matter: 'If I haven't exhausted it, then it certainly has exhausted me'.

In *Marry me* the story is about the married couples Jerry and Ruth and Richard and Sally. It is set in the early sixties in a small town in Connecticut. Jerry and Sally are having an affair and Jerry cannot decide whether or not to break up his marriage with Ruth and choose Sally. His indecisiveness is irritating, frustrating, almost debilitating. But this is just the point. At one stage in the story, Sally, waiting for Jerry to make up his mind and no longer much at ease in her own house with Richard, decides to go and stay with her brother in Florida for a while. Then follows this exchange between Ruth and Jerry:

[Ruth]: Why?

[Jerry]: The bind was getting to be too much for her.

[Ruth]: What bind? What *is* bind, exactly?

[Jerry]: A bind is when all the alternatives are impossible. Life is a bind. It's impossible to live forever, it's impossible to die. It's impossible for me to marry Sally, it's impossible for me to live without her. You don't know what a bind is because what's impossible doesn't interest you. Your eyes just don't see it.

Jerry's eyes see the bind all too acutely. He longs to be free of the bind, he feels the constriction in his lungs (he has asthma) when the bind presses too much. But in the end, his conclusion that life is a bind, is inescapable. In the short but beautiful last chapter (called 'Wyoming', since that is where Jerry and Sally dreamed of building a new life together), Jerry alternately imagines how eloping to Wyoming might have been, in reality goes to the South of France with Ruth and his children and finally, goes on his own to the tropical beauty of St Croix. Here he muses: 'The existence of this place satisfied him that there was a

dimension in which he did go, as was right, at that party, or the next, and stand, timid and exultant, above the downcast eyes of her gracious, sorrowing face, and say to Sally, *Marry me.*' A dimension outside of the bind, so to say, which is impossible to find in real life.

Updike's writing is sensitive, precise and insightful, and his dialogue as the couples woo, bicker and fight is impressive. I think I would normally rate this book with four stars, but in this particular instance I am adding one for sentimental value.

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### **Caitlin says**

I read all the reviews of this book before picking it at the book store. Now that I'm finished with it, I have to say I'm a little disappointed in a lot of you.

The reason I actually read it despite the reviews was that like most of John Updike's books, once I started I couldn't put it down. I was literally standing in the book store aisle, 20 pages in and realized I didn't want to stop reading.

John Updike has such a beautiful way of describing things. I love the settings he establishes, the characters he creates, and the language he uses. The places are always relatable. The people are vulnerable. The words are simple and elegant. His writing makes you feel.

As for the subject, just because the story is tragic and you don't agree with the decisions a character makes, doesn't make the book bad. For me, the point of reading is to experience something I wouldn't or couldn't experience in my real life. I read to escape and gain insight to the emotions of other people.

Isn't it interesting to think about what someone else is thinking? Especially in a situation different than your own?

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### **Jen says**

This book is depressing. The worst perspective on marriage I've ever read. Honestly, it is so far from what my relationships with men have been like that it didn't come across as real. But then, I've been faithful to my husband for 17 years.

A great book to read if you are considering an adulterous affair, because you'll run away from that lover faster than I got this book out of the way (2 days). I would have never finished it if it weren't the book up for discussion this month. I'm interested to hear the other participants' opinions; it could tell a lot about their life history.

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### **D says**

Rather boring exhaustive description of an affair between two married people that may or may not end with a divorce and, possibly, a wedding. Of the four characters involved, the adulterers stand out as being influenced by religion and rather stupid.

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I found one memorable quote, though:

[He was seven.] He was the most logical of their children and without a theory of 'jokes' grown-ups would not have fitted into his universe at all.

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### **Rebecca F. says**

Overall a decent representation of what Updike can do -- but certainly not his best. Much of the content in this book will be familiar to regular Updike readers -- marital problems, infidelity, inner conflict, obsession with questions of death and God. Bright spots are the many majestic metaphors done with classic Updike panache. He has such an incredible eye for connecting the physical world to the psychological/emotional in a unique and moving way. Main characters here resemble the major players in his other books: Jerry is derivative of Harry Angstrom (Rabbit, Run) and Piet Hanema (Couples), especially in his obsession with extra-marital affairs; Ruth, the wife who's lost her lustre, is quite like Janice (Rabbit); Sally, the other woman, is a mix of other "other women" Ruth (Rabbit, Run) and Mrs. Harrison, I can't remember her first name (Rabbit is Rich); Richard, the other woman's husband, resembles Freddy Thorne (Couples) and Ronnie Harrison (Rabbit at Rest) in his bitterness and virile machismo that's hiding a softer sense of warmth and integrity underneath. A really quick read, it didn't really move me, and was a lot of rehashing the same old themes. But Updike is still a literary pleasure.

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### **Tatevik Najaryan says**

I am in trouble, I am in big trouble. I can't do anything but read today. This is my second finished book for today and I fear of starting a new one, because I may accidentally finish it too. I need a prison bar over my bookshelves for a night.

I don't remember lately reading a book with such deep feelings showed. One word to describe the book - deep, this book was deep. It was so real. It seemed I was seating in a living room with these 4 people, and they were living their lives, talking, eating, thinking, being cheated - having me as a ghost in their houses, in their lives.

I love the way Updike created the people for this book. Two women - definitely the exact opposite of each other and two men letting these women decide how they should live.

*"Men don't like to make decisions, they want God or women to make them."*

The whole book is around this sentence. Well, they don't just say, decide instead of me, they just wait for the circumstances to decide how to act. And they want these circumstances to be created by their women.

I loved Ruth. Her way of making decisions, her perspectiveness of future life, her mature thinking, her way of building her family. The others were so weak - Jerry without a hint what to do, changing his mind every two minutes (I am sure he would change his mind again if the book had two-three more pages.); Sally without any idea what she wanted or if she knew what she wanted, was it what she needed?; and Richard too much into himself.

I have never read Updike before, but now I'm intrigued. The man creates a mood - the writing is so honest and straight, the story is so realistically true.

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### **Bruce Beckham says**

I've realised that John Updike is not everyone's cup of tea. However, for me, he's like Earl Grey, which I spend far too much of each day drinking. To date, I'm neither tea'd out, nor Updiked out.

*Marry Me* is set in the mid-seventies, in a small coastal town somewhere outside of New York City. In a nutshell it is about two couples, Jerry & Ruth, and Richard & Sally. Jerry & Sally are having a heavy-duty affair; Ruth & Richard once had a lite version (unbeknown to their partners).

Most of the novel (pp69-239) is given over to two chapters, in which first Ruth and then Richard 'react' to the revelation of Jerry & Sally's relationship. Nothing much happens. But such is the skill of Updike that - if he's your cup of tea - you just want to keep reading.

When I struggle to analyse a book I fall back on my triple criteria of subject-story-style. As I say, there isn't much of a story - but Updike's style - elegantly crafted prosaic poetry - makes what there is seem quite fascinating. I don't know how he does it.

The subject, of course - the affairs - makes for voyeuristic reading, an experience perhaps vicarious, perhaps relived. He writes so convincingly, it makes me think he knows something about it.

Contrastingly, if there is a weakness, it is in relation to the couples' children, and the impact their existence ought to have upon parental actions and agonies. In fact they are treated as chattels, and perhaps this reflects a gap in Updike's know-how. (If I could get moving on his autobiography, I might find the answer to this.)

But an excellent read washed down with a few gallons of Earl Grey.

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### **Malaya says**

Marriage, if it is lived honestly, holds a mirror to our faces. It shows us who we really are. Romance shows us who we'd like to be.

Sometimes the pain of facing ourselves in marriage is so great that we seek an outside romance through which to lie to ourselves, or obtain a reprieve from our true selves - a place to hide in a candlelit glow. We run from our "Ruth," the truth, to a safer view.

Although many times the book offended me - it was ugly, the language could sometimes bite - Updike showed love as viewed through the lens of idealism, and love viewed through the lens of reality. He juxtaposed the two so that we could see the stark contrast between Jerry in romance and Jerry in reality - and the difference was a shock.

Jerry fights between the affair in which he feels his best, and the marriage in which he has to accept who he is. He doesn't want to leave Ruth and his children because he wants to retain the illusion of being a perfect husband and father - but neither does he want to give Sally up, who believes him so.

How many of us do this, in small ways? How many of us hide from facing ourselves, by criticising the other, by seeking something outside to dull the pain? How many of us are still seeking the idealized version of ourselves as the real view, or the best view, and refusing to face something that might force us to make a change?

I disliked Jerry so much by the end, but mostly because I recognized something of his struggle in myself. His pursuit to see himself and be seen as a great man can be tempting. And the way he handled it, by falling in love with Sally, was his way of going out to buy a more forgiving mirror than the truth.

I kept wondering what Jerry should have done - Marry Me shows the problem of his way of thinking, but what is the solution? I can only guess that it would be learning to accept the truth of himself as a warmer, truer friend than the idealistic illusions - and this would have to be done from inside. No matter who Sally was, had Jerry married her instead of Ruth, she would have shown him the truth of himself once the romance wore off. No matter who Ruth was, he would have felt dissatisfied in his marriage, because he wanted to be married to his ideal self. The only way for him to stop running would be to accept and receive the truth of himself.

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### **alice brightman says**

good, very good. but a fluffy last chapter that made me end the book being incapable of either remembering the good parts, or liking any of the characters

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