



# The Wedding: A Novel

By Dorothy West

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**The Wedding: A Novel** By Dorothy West

**An Oprah Winfrey Presents Mini-Series on ABC Network Television  
Starring Halle Berry**

In her final novel, Dorothy West, the last surviving member of the Harlem Renaissance, offers an intimate glimpse into African American middle class. Set on bucolic Martha's Vineyard in the 1950s, *The Wedding* tells the story of life in the Oval, a proud, insular community made up of the best and brightest of the East Coast's black bourgeoisie. Within this inner circle of "blue-vein society," we witness the prominent Coles family gather for the wedding of the loveliest daughter, Shelby, who could have chosen from "a whole area of eligible men of the right colors and the right professions." Instead, she has fallen in love with and is about to be married to Meade Wyler, a white jazz musician from New York. A shock wave breaks over the Oval as its longtime members grapple with the changing face of its community.

With elegant, luminous prose, Dorothy West crowns her literary career by illustrating one family's struggle to break the shackles of race and class.

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## The Wedding: A Novel By Dorothy West Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

*The Wedding*, Dorothy West's first novel in almost 50 years, is ably brought to life in this finely nuanced audio version. Writer and actress Regina Taylor (*Courage Under Fire*, *Lean on Me*, and TV's *I'll Fly Away*) uses her considerable talent to show off West's sensual and elegant prose to full advantage. The Oval, an elite African American community in 1950s Martha's Vineyard, sets the stage for the story of the impending nuptials of Shelby Coles, the golden-haired, fair-skinned youngest daughter of the neighborhood's leading family. Shelby's intended groom is Meade Tyler, a white jazz man with a far less upscale pedigree than his bride. (Like many grooms, Meade plays little role in the pre-wedding drama; the snippets of jazz that frame the reading are about as close as listeners get to meeting him.) Sparks fly in the few dozen hours before the wedding, when one by one those close to Shelby come to her to make a case for or against the controversial match. As new characters are introduced, Taylor succeeds in giving each a distinct personality through her reading.

Shelby is dragged through a crisis of identity, while West skillfully steers listeners through an examination of the tangled and painful meanings of race and class in the United States, themes that still resonate today. Taylor's reading deftly renders the subtle distinctions between the characters and their backgrounds without ever descending into stereotype. (Running time: about 180 minutes, two cassettes) --*Naomi J. Cohn*

### From Publishers Weekly

The tranquility of a late summer weekend in 1953 is shattered by a tragic accident in this spare, affecting novel by one of the last surviving members of the Harlem Renaissance. The Oval, the exclusive black enclave on Martha's Vineyard, prepares for the marriage of Shelby Coles, daughter of one of the community's most admired couples. Shelby's choice of white jazz musician Meade Wyler awakens dormant but unresolved racial issues in her family, which includes her physician father, enduring a loveless but socially proper union; her mother, confronting a dwindling pool of partners for her discreet affairs, and her great-grandmother, who dreams of escaping her ambivalence by returning to her aristocratic Southern roots. The arrival of black artisan Lute McNeil upsets the precarious equilibrium of the Oval when his aggressive pursuit of Shelby leads to disaster. Through the ancestral histories of the Coles family, West (*The Living Is Easy*) subtly reveals the ways in which color can burden and codify behavior. The author makes her points with a delicate hand, maneuvering with confidence and ease through a sometimes incendiary subject. Populated by appealing characters who wrestle with the nuances of race at every stage of their lives, West's first novel in 45 years is a triumph. BOMC and QPB featured selection. Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

### From Library Journal

Actress Regina Taylor's (*I'll Fly Away*) richly intoned reading is a perfect match for this gem of a novel (LJ 12/94) by the last living writer of the Harlem Renaissance. On the surface, this tale recounts the 24-hour interval leading up to the social event of the season in the Oval, a haven for class-conscious blacks who summer in Martha's Vineyard in the 1950s. The imminent union of the youngest daughter of the affluent Coles family with a white musician is deftly used by West to probe the unresolved, underlying issues of racial preference and social prestige that have caused the affairs to be fraught with tension. Flashbacks amplify the complex characters and troubled family heritage as the plot progresses toward senseless tragedy. Highly recommended for public library collections. ?Linda Bredengerd, Univ. of Pittsburgh Lib., Bradford Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

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### **From reader reviews:**

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#### **Lena Robertson:**

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