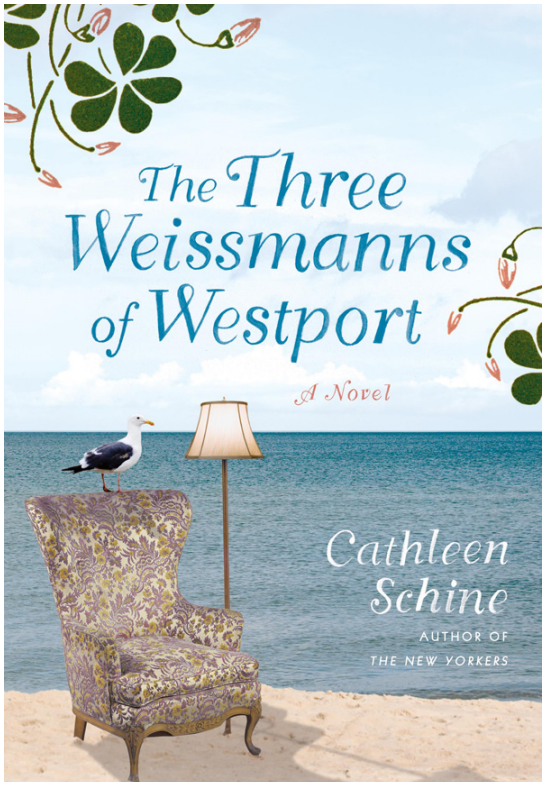
The Three Weissmanns of Westport

by

CATHLEEN SCHINE



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Raising timeless questions of the heart, *The Three Weissmanns of Westport* is an ideal selection for reading groups. The topics that follow are designed to enhance your experience as you discuss this captivating novel of reason versus romance.

Just as Jane Austen delighted readers with wise heroines and surprising turns of fate, Cathleen Schine delivers a world of wry insight in each of her novels. With *The Three Weissmanns of Westport,* she brings *Sense and Sensibility* to modern-day Connecticut, where Betty Weissmann and her two middle-aged daughters have begun living as exiles. At age seventy-five, Betty has been dumped by her husband of nearly fifty years. He and his mistress have set up housekeeping in the sumptuous Manhattan apartment that Betty had called home for most of her adult life. Her daughter Miranda—a tough-as-nails literary agent—is facing bankruptcy after a series of scandals. Her other daughter, Annie, is smitten with the brother of her stepfather's mistress. Banding together against a slew of looming crises, Betty, Miranda, and Annie find refuge in a run-down beach cottage owned by a generous cousin. While Betty discovers a wealth of personal strength, her daughters discover an intriguing, aristocratic community—whose population includes the handsome actor Kit Maybank.

Questions for Discussion

1. How do Betty and her daughters relate to men? Do the three women have the same expectations about love and relationships?

2. How do the Weissmann women define "home"? What does the Manhattan apartment mean to

them? What do their reactions to the Westport cottage say about their personalities? Would you have enjoyed living there?

3. In *Sense and Sensibility,* Mrs. Dashwood does her best to help her family thrive despite dwindling fortunes. What challenges do women still face in such situations, even with the cultural changes that have taken place since Jane Austen was writing?

4. Which cad is worse: Schine's Kit Maybank or Austen's John Willoughby? If Miranda could meet Marianne, what advice would the two characters give each other?

5. The fact that Miranda and Annie are not Joseph's biological children also mirrors Austen's plot. Would Joseph have handled the divorce differently if the girls had been his biological daughters?

6. Is Frederick a good father to Gwen and Evan? What stokes Annie's attraction to him throughout the novel?

7. Is Betty very much like her relatives? Which of your family members would you turn to if you were in her situation?

8. What accounts for the similarities and differences between Annie and Miranda? Are both women simply driven by their temperaments, or have they shaped each other's personalities throughout their lives? How does their relationship compare to yours with your own siblings?

9. Schine's work often blends humor with misfortune, such as Miranda's undoing by authors who turn out to be plagiarists and extreme fabricators. What other aspects of the novel capture the tragicomic way life unfolds?

10. Why is it so hard for Joseph to understand why his stepdaughters are mad at him? Why does he prefer Felicity to Betty? Discuss the revelations about Amber. In what way is her romantic situation similar to Felicity's?

11. Ultimately, how do the Weissmanns reconcile sense with sensibility? Who are the book's most rational characters? Who is the most emotional?

12. What makes Roberts remarkable (eventually)? Who are the overlooked "characters" in your life story?

13. What aspects of the ending surprised you the most? What had you predicted for Betty, and for Leanne? Do the novel's closing scenes reflect an Austen ending?

14. Does the storytelling style in *The Three Weissmanns of Westport* remind you of Schine's other portraits of love? What makes the Weissmanns' story unique?

Acclaim for Cathleen Schine:

"Schine has a gift for illuminating wholly believable yet somehow unexpected characters with a single line." —*Chicago Tribune*

"Schine is a modern-day Jewish Jane Austen." —*People* Magazine

About the Author

CATHLEEN SCHINE's previous novels include *The New Yorkers* as well as *The Love Letter* and *Rameau's Niece,* both of which were made into major motion pictures. She has contributed to *The New Yorker, The New York Review of Books, The New York Times Magazine,* and other publications. Raised in Westport, she now lives in New York City.

Reading Group Guide written by Amy Root / Amy Root's Wordshop, Inc.