

A Syncopated Life – Synopsis

The night before a wedding, six friends meet for dinner and pretend that theirs are happy lives. But Rose knows her oldest friend Helena is cheating on the devoted John, the man she secretly loves. And as dinner progresses, Helena inadvertently triggers a confrontation with Rose, who in turn demands she end the affair or leave John. Her stability under threat, Helena realises she loves John, not least because she needs John to support in chasing her dream of music college. But is love needing someone?

John hides a dark past near-ruined by alcohol and depression only Rose knows about; and so, the morning of her sister's wedding, she hatches a plan to ensure John survives Helena's betrayal. But are her motives so selfless? When Helena and accepts John's shock wedding proposal, Rose arranges for Helena's string quartet – with which Helena's lover Nick is a part – to play at the reception, forcing the truth to the surface. But the plan backfires, and when John catches Helena alone with Nick he flees a broken man, turns again to alcohol, and falls to the mercy of the depression he'd fought so hard to defeat. Rose and Helena face their demons by facing each other, but John, humiliated by Nick's disregard for their happiness, turns to violence, hospitalising him.

The following day, Helena waits by an unconscious Nick's hospital bed, wrestling with her guilt and her father's disappointment in her. But who is the father of her unborn child – Nick or John? Rose too faces the sister whose wedding everyone assumes John ruined, but Rose alone knows he is the victim. Lost in grief, John turns to his estranged father, a man whose own life was ruined by the loss of his beloved wife. Yet he finds few answers, faced only with the inevitability of self-destruction.

As the police come for Helena's statement, she can't betray John any further, refusing to give them anything and losing the last respect of her father in the process. Rose faces her own insecurities, questioning her love for John, but craves a father-figure

for her son Ozzie. Confronted by Rose's sister Antonia, John suffers a shattering panic attack and falls to the darkness within him. And when the police come to the home he'd built with Helena, he loses all control, torching his bloodied clothes to save himself from incrimination and purge her from his life. But it escalates into an inferno, nearly taking John with it. At the last moment, he is dragged to safety, but with nothing left, how can he rebuild his life?

Eight months later, Helena and Nick have a house of their own, and she is heavily pregnant. But her need to offer her unborn baby stability and the estrangement from her father made her give up her dream of studying violin, and the cost has been too high. Rose and John now live together, not from love but for comfort. Seizing upon the chance to offer Ozzie the childhood John's father's depression robbed him of, he pretends to be a perfect step-father and partner. But Rose can't hide her guilt at forcing his breakdown, and John can't shake his memories of it, and what it cost him. Yet it is the impending trial for Nick's attack and the house burning that forces the ghosts of the past back to haunt them.

Helena realises she can't love Nick and tries to make amends with John, but he too has faced his demons, and realises that to lay the past to rest he has to put his fate in the hands of justice. But as he finds the strength to make Helena stand on her own for the first time, it is Rose who is least able to protect her happiness. The Judge sentences John to fifteen years, stripping Ozzie of his father-figure, Rose of the man she's always loved, and Helena of the true father of her child. Yet John finds nobility: the strength to admit his faults and sacrifice the future he'd wanted for the only future that will lead him to salvation, his life entwined with Helena and Rose's, though syncopated against them.