



The Engagements

J. Courtney Sullivan

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From the *New York Times* best-selling author of *Commencement* and *Maine* comes a gorgeous, sprawling novel about marriage—about those who marry in a white heat of passion, those who marry for partnership and comfort, and those who live together, love each other, and have absolutely no intention of ruining it all with a wedding.

Evelyn has been married to her husband for forty years—forty years since he slipped off her first wedding ring and put his own in its place. Delphine has seen both sides of love—the ecstatic, glorious highs of seduction, and the bitter, spiteful fury that descends when it's over. James, a paramedic who works the night shift, knows his wife's family thinks she could have done better; while Kate, partnered with Dan for a decade, has seen every kind of wedding—beach weddings, backyard weddings, castle weddings—and has vowed never, ever, to have one of her own.

As these lives and marriages unfold in surprising ways, we meet Frances Gerety, a young advertising copywriter in 1947. Frances is working on the De Beers campaign and she needs a signature line, so, one night before bed, she scribbles a phrase on a scrap of paper: "A Diamond Is Forever." And that line changes everything.

A rich, layered, exhilarating novel spanning nearly a hundred years, *The Engagements* captures four wholly unique marriages, while tracing the story of diamonds in America, and the way—for better or for worse—these glittering stones have come to symbolize our deepest hopes for everlasting love.

The Engagements Details

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From Reader Review The Engagements for online ebook

Lisa says

This is the type of novel that winds up getting unfairly characterized or dismissed as "women's fiction" or a "literary beach read."

Five characters, separated in time, and apparently without connection (they have one, and you should be able to guess it) narrate this novel. In 1972, Evelyn is a well-to-do grandmother, still in love with her husband, but devastated by her adult son's recent abandonment of his own wife and children. In 1987, James is a down-on-his-luck ambulance driver, working the night shift on Christmas Eve in hopes of shoveling his family out of their mounting debt. In 2003, Delphine is a Parisian who married for dull stability and has recently left her husband to take up with a young, wild violin virtuoso in New York City - only to find that he has cheated on her. In 2012, Kate is a liberal activist who doesn't believe in marriage, rails against blood diamonds and the wedding industrial complex, and is trying to raise her daughter in an egalitarian way; today, she must set her feelings aside to celebrate the gay wedding of her beloved cousin. These characters come alive, and if the connection between them is cheesy, the characters don't suffer for it.

But most interesting - for me, at least, was the character of Mary Frances Gerety. Unlike the other wholly fictional character, Gerety was a real person, and her sections in the book are fictionalized accounts of true events in her life. In 1947, Gerety came up with the slogan, "A Diamond Is Forever," for DeBeers, and basically invented, through advertising, the "tradition" of the diamond engagement ring. She, however, never married or had children. Gerety's chapters follow through the key events of her life, as she struggles to be a career woman in the 40s and 50s, as she eventually is marginalized as she ages, and when DeBeers honors her contributions in 1988.

I received an advance review copy of this book through a giveaway on Goodreads.

Elizabeth says

Some really excellent story telling happening here. *The Engagements* creates a fascinating intertwining of 5 different stories about marriage without being too complicated or cliché. This is not chick lit, nor is it light-hearted! One of my favourite reads of 2016!

Cher says

3 stars - It was good.

This book has a unique setup: 5 different plotlines that are loosely connected, each following the diverse characters for a few decades. It was interesting to peak inside such different marriages and see how each one's relationship evolved.

Delphine's character was the most controversial and could inspire lively discussion in a book club. Unlike most other readers, I didn't cheer her on with her revenge (and seriously, that was too far with Charlie). I'd call it a trope except you see it so often in real life, but I truly cannot fathom how anyone expects faithfulness from someone they begin a relationship with through an affair. It's naiveté meeting karma each and every

time.

Favorite Quote: People wanted you to validate their choices by doing the same thing they had done.

First Sentence: And what gives diamonds their hard and remorseless beauty, really?

Alecia says

This was a tough one for me to rate with stars, and I would give this 3.5/5 stars. I think the parts were greater than the whole here. J. Courtney Sullivan is a very good writer, and this book is comprised of seemingly unrelated threads of stories that jump all over the timeline. The one story that ties the theme (in a way) all together is the story of Frances Gerety. She coined the phrase "A Diamond Is Forever" as a young copywriter in 1947. Her story thread follows her and her career and it appears Frances really existed and her story is based on fact. The other threads are individually very interesting, but I found the back and forth rather jarring, and it always took me a bit to reacclimate myself with the different characters each time the story shifted yet again. The thread that joins these different stories becomes apparent only at the end. I truly enjoyed each story thread, and applaud Sullivan's talent, but wished there was more cohesiveness in my reading experience of this book. The jumping around/different story threads device she used took away continuity for me.

Jenna says

First, a disclaimer: This is a far better book than I could write, or than most people could write. That being said -- yes, it fully deserves to be damned with such faint praise. This book is like the high school valedictorian who got all A's, but didn't take any AP courses or ever have any fun. It's like the Olympic figure skater who scored bronze after running a cautious, conservative routine and never, ever partying with the other Olympic Village athletes. The book is totally...circumspect, inoffensive, unobjectionable. It competently enough checks the boxes of plot, character, setting. It purports to have a Theme of Importance. It has a great cover and momentous title that will look nice on commuter train or in beach bag. The partaking of this book shall neither rot your brain nor induce intolerable guilt/shame. And yet...and yet... all this is precisely the problem. This is undoubtedly the most middlebrow and satisfactory (not to be confused with satisfying) book I can imagine, perfectly suited to the "People Magazine 10 Best of the Year" and other similar awards, or should I say, citations, it drew. This book would be far better if it didn't attempt to be such a goody two-shoes, if it tried to be worse.

And what prevents this book from being More? Primarily its intense superficiality/lack of depth. For example, the purported theme is engagement, commitment, marriage. And how is this theme realized? See, the various characters in the book's interconnected stories all have engagement rings, see? Sometimes they might LOSE them. Sometimes one person inherits ANOTHER person's ring. Sometimes their marriages/relationships WORK OUT and sometimes they DON'T. Deep, huh? So yeah, that is about the extent of the theme's execution. The moral of the story is: Sometimes relationships are successful, sometimes not, and these successful or unsuccessful relationships are equally likely to somehow involve a diamond ring, or not. I bet you needed to read a 500-plus page novel to wrap your head around all that.

However, the novel's shallow characterizations trouble even more than its thematic shortcomings. Each character is a stamped-out type: The Passionate, Impetuous Frenchwoman. The Working Gal Ahead of Her

Time. The Working-Class Guy Who Is A Disappointment To Himself and Others. As I said earlier, the author is a striving A-student, so she dresses up these mannequins with some dutiful research that admittedly probably took some time. Each character is nestled in some window dressing to evoke the setting (era, occupation) that character occupies. Most of this decoration consists of vocabulary and jargon -- for instance, of antiques dealing, or working as an EMT, or in the early days of the advertising industry -- that is supposed to flesh out and enliven these characters and their subplots. The overall effect is reminiscent of bedecking a display window with tissue paper flowers to transform it into a florid, but ultimately lightweight and ephemeral spectacle. I was reminded of playing with paper dolls when I was little. I may have been able to dress them up and put them through their paces and plotlines, but in the end it was all pretty flat and flimsy.

The most interesting character in the book -- at least the most potentially interesting -- is Frances, a fictionalized version of the pioneering woman in advertising who reportedly ran the campaigns that popularized the diamond engagement ring and authored the infamous slogan, "A Diamond is Forever." I could envision a more fascinating, detailed, and nuanced book that focused on her and dispensed of the extraneous characters who needlessly and redundantly illustrate the "theme" that relationships of all stripes may/may not involve a ring in some way...since, you know, the meaning of the diamonds is totally constructed and bears no connection to the actual lived reality of intimate relationships! if you can believe it! or in case that was at all unclear!

A fine read, so long as you don't require all your books to be saddled like diamonds with the pretense of a "Forever" level of significance. This is a perfectly okay 50-cent candy ring pop of a book for anyone who finds that payoff worth a 500-page investment.

Nancy says

****Warning! Review contains spoilers!****

My book club is reading this book, so even though I realized very early on that it wasn't really for me, I did finish it. I agree with many other reviewers: the writing itself was compelling and I will admit that the book is a bit of a page-turner. Although in the end, the bad far outweighed the good and I ended up NOT liking the book.

I found many of the characters loathsome and completely detestable. Kate: did not like her AT ALL. I actually found myself siding with her sister May (you know, the one you weren't supposed to like, the married one who evidently watches FOX News). Kate was so self-righteous and smug with her political-correctness that I grew to dislike her more and more as the story progressed.

Delphine was just as offensive, if not more so. Leaving poor Henri for that punk PJ? I was hoping Henri wouldn't take her back, but it seems he did. Boo, Henri! You deserved better--even if it meant being alone!

Also, if I want to hear about how idiotic and mindless people like Kate and Delphine (read: J. Courtney Sullivan) think conservatives/Republicans are, I can do that elsewhere. I don't read novels for the purpose of being hit over the head with the author's political opinions. This book had tremendous potential, but IMO fell far short. So disappointing!

Patty says

The Engagements
by
J.Courtney Sullivan

My "in a nutshell" summary...

Sort of the history of De Beers diamonds and the way they were used in advertisements years and years ago. Add to that the stories of couples...and their diamond rings...that sums up this book!

My thoughts after reading this book...

This is a story that began with Frances...who was a woman working in advertising when women were only given "women" things to work on and made half the salary of men in advertising. France's came up with the slogan "a diamond is forever". This was also at a time when diamonds were not that popular and only the really wealthy had them and they usually were in the family for years and years.

So...that's the beginning of this lovely book. The rest of the book meanders among couples that are married, about to be married, shouldn't be married and those who question marriage. The book touches different years...sort of in a back and forth manner...and quite honestly...I had no clue how anything was connected until I was almost at the end of the book. The lives of the couples in each section were interesting and varied. Some were wealthy, some not so wealthy, some were happy, some not so happy. Some sections were more interesting than others but that didn't detract from the simple loveliness of this book.

What I loved about this book...

I loved some couples and some years more than others. I loved Evelyn and Gerald. Old fashioned, polite, and sweet with a nasty spoiled son. I didn't love James and Sheila. I didn't love Daphne, either, but her story was engaging and fun to read. There were tons of characters within the essential stories but it was easy to keep all of the characters in order. I also loved the way the story continued to go back to Frances.

What I did not love...

It's essential to the book but there was a ton of sort of wordy stuff to read. Some of the events were not that interesting and seem to go on...and on...but I managed and still loved the book.

Final thoughts...

Readers who love a great story that begins in the forties and goes on until the present will delight in this book.

Christin says

The premise of this book is totally predictable, but getting there is truly a pleasure and quite inventive. Sullivan has a smooth, readable style that I admire more and more with each successive novel. She writes tight prose and credible characters that are fun to meet, even if some may come across as slightly insufferable or preachy. I haven't read Maine yet, but I feel like as a Smithie, she feels honor-bound to have at least one token strident feminist in every novel. The fact that I just used the phrase "strident feminist" as a devout feminist makes me loathe myself a little, but critique is part of the work; I still believe such

politically-conscious characters could be achieved without making them ring (pun intended) as obnoxious. I think Sullivan needs to work on that. The true center and delight of *The Engagements* was Sullivan's portrayal of real-life Peggy-Olsenesque diamond advertiser, Frances Gerety. She was a true maverick, and I think Sullivan's depiction offers fitting tribute.

Angela Risner says

I have to admit that when I started this book, I was afraid I wouldn't be able to get through it. It starts off somewhat slow, but the story it weaves throughout time and characters is well worth continuing on.

The story follows several individuals as well as couples throughout time. We begin with Mary Frances Gerety, who came up with the de Beers slogan of "A Diamond is Forever." In 1947. Yes, a woman came up with that slogan in 1947. I love that. We follow her story throughout the book as she is a pioneer of women who don't marry a man because they're already married to their jobs.

We also meet Evelyn, who in 1972 is married to her second husband. She is troubled by their son's crumbling marriage.

In 1987, we meet James, who is one of the first paramedics in Boston. He is trying to make ends meet for his family and it's Christmas.

In 2003, we meet Delphine, a Frenchwoman who followed a much younger lover back to New York.

And finally, in 2012, we meet Kate, who is perfectly happy being in a committed relationship with her man. She worries that allowing her daughter to be the flower girl in her gay cousin's wedding will give her the wrong message about the role of a woman.

And eventually, we learn about the connections between all of them.

What struck me the most was when I learned, at the end of the book, that Mary Frances Gerety was a real woman and she really did come up with the slogan for de Beers. The subject of advertising is examined throughout the book, which I found to be fascinating. It made me realize how much advertising really does affect us. Diamond engagement rings were not popular when Gerety coined that phrase. However, because of that advertising, people now feel as though they can't become engaged without a diamond ring.

Well-written. Highly recommend.

Michael says

If you were curious about when and how the diamond engagement ring came into fashion, J. Courtney Sullivan's latest novel *The Engagements* will give you an idea. Life long bachelorette Frances Getty dreamed up the famous marketing line "Diamonds on Forever" in 1947, never knowing the impact it could and would have on romance, marriage and sales of diamonds.

Woven into the story of Getty are five relationships and the impact that a single diamond ring can have on them. At first, the connection between these five relationships isn't clear, but Sullivan deftly weaves together her various plot threads until the final tapestry is revealed in the novel's last fifty pages.

Each of the relationships is at a different point, with various parties having a differing view on the diamond ring and what it symbolizes. For some it represents a feeling of being trapped, for others its a potential road to freedom and for others it's something that isn't wanted or need and is viewed with a bit of contempt.

What makes *The Engagements* works so well is the rich characters. There are some you will like more than others, but Sullivan gives the reader ample insight into their motivations and thoughts to help us understand where they are and their feelings on marriage. From the mother who is horrified at her son's impending divorce and its implication to the woman who sees marriage as outdated and unnecessary, much to the horror and chagrin of various family members, all of these characters feel authentic.

The one downfall of the novel is a plot thread involving a lost wedding ring that seems to have been lifted out of a variety of sitcoms. In a novel where so much else rings true, this one doesn't work as well as it was intended.

But it's a minor quibble in what is, otherwise, a stellar novel.

Jess says

I had mixed feelings about this one. It was quite engaging at times, but two of the main characters - Kate, especially, and Delphine - really got on my nerves.

Kate was so unbelievably smug and self-satisfied. I found her insufferable. One chapter in to her story, and I wanted to scream, "You don't want to get married? Don't get married. Nobody cares." It went on and on with how wonderfully she was raising her daughter, birthed at home by doula, natch. She raises her angel with organic foods and gender-neutral toys, and her sister is supposed to be awful in contrast (really her sister seemed like just a fairly normal parent). Go ahead and do these things. Organic foods are great. Just please don't pontificate about the righteousness of your choices.

As the mom of only boys, this line from Kate in reference to her nephews particularly irked me: "Boys were trouble. She'd been lucky with what she got." So much for being an enlightened person. Another character ends up with a baby girl, just what her husband had always wanted, while another couple has five boys, just trying for that elusive girl. Evidently female progeny are far more desirable and worthy creatures.

Similarly, I got tired of Delphine's unending comparisons of Parisian women and American women, French women and society superior in every way.

Irritations aside, I thought the plot was clever, and Sullivan undeniably is a very good writer. I thought "Maine" was better, but no doubt many will enjoy this.

Carol says

Engagements was the perfect diversion to my usual fare of murder and mayhem. This enjoyable blend of historical fiction culled several stories told in bits and pieces over a span of one hundred years.. The Diamond (Ring) is the thing that glues all these stories together. Marriage in all its splendor, or not, is a secondary but important theme. Together, the stories revealed of these men and women living their lives, their hopes, their dreams, their triumphs and tragedies, kept me fascinated.

The book opens in 1947 with the real life story of Mary "Frances" Gerety, an employee of N. W Ayer & Son who is primarily responsible for the De Beers Diamonds account. Frances, as she is known, is a self-proclaimed procrastinator, one who does her best work under pressure. Needing to come up with "a signature line" for the Ayer client Frances racks her brain and in a burst of inspiration coins the greatest advertising slogan of our times, "*A Diamond Is Forever*". Though not meant to be a history of the diamond market there's just enough here to whet your appetite about the subject. Several good books are mentioned for further study.

Forward and back, back and forward each of these promises of love are unwound. It's hard not to tell you about all the characters I loved and cared about but that's the job of the author. Read the book. I was curious to see what fate would provide for each. The way one of the stories intertwined with another surprised and delighted me. I didn't see it coming, unusual for me.

The acknowledgments give credit to some excellent resources that I plan to check out, including reference to an interview with Frances Gerety available at The Smithsonian, and full color copies of every De Beers ads residing there too.

A thought provoking read, *Engagements* nudged me once again to examine my concept of what marriage is.

Ronya says

I didn't love this. While Sullivan is a good writer, this book was not as entertaining or engaging as her two previous novels. People call this novel "ambitious." I'd agree. Sullivan takes five separate stories, flips them all over the last 75 years or so, and then, in the last 40 pages, brings it all together. I knew the hodgepodge had to come together in some way and spent a good amount of time (read: too much) trying to figure out how all the characters fit together--if they even did!

She managed to get all the relationship stereotypes in, each one slightly more annoying than the other. You have the woman who never wants to get married for all kinds of reasons, the spinster who chose career over love (though, it's hard to say if it was choice or circumstance), the marriage to avert going to war, the young widow who falls for her deceased husband's best friend, the cheater, another cheater, another cheater...not very uplifting. Where was the run of the mill, fall in love and get married for that reason couple?

I wasn't a fan of the style, wasn't a fan of any of the characters, and found the history (while I appreciate her research and ability to incorporate it into the story) to be boring. I should give her a little bit of credit--how the stories came together was interesting and unexpected, though I wonder if I would've figured it out had I paid a little bit more attention instead of trying to get through it.

switterbug (Betsey) says

Despite the whimsical cover, THE ENGAGEMENTS is not a lighthearted (or light-headed!) novel. Now that I've read it, I see the irony in the cover art. Moreover, the novel contains a substantial chunk of dark moments and cultivated topics. It is an ensemble piece of five separate stories (four of them about marriage), with a trajectory of over 60 years, that connect by the subject of diamonds in general and one in particular. Eventually, four of the stories are wedded together. One of them, the story of true life Frances Gerety, is the historical thread that illuminates the height of advertising--creating a market for diamond engagement rings out of thin air. Eventually, diamonds become a symbol of wedded bliss, thanks to the psychology of N.W.

Ayer and Son, the advertising giants of the 20th century.

Each story has its own year (1947, 1972, 1987, 2003, and 2011). However, the 1947 story, which belongs to Frances Gerety, jumps forward in time as she gets older. Gerety is the copywriter that worked for Ayer (and handled the DeBeers account) that came up with the signature line, "Diamonds are Forever." She is an icon in advertising history, and her story as a progressive woman in the world of men is fascinating. As a female, she was subjugated to men, and was paid half as much. She was indispensable, but was treated more like a secretary than a brilliant creator. She accepted it with grace and panache, despite her secret desire to rise to the top. She never married or had children; she was married to her career.

What you learn about the propaganda campaign of diamond hawking? Well, don't read this book if you are near to the altar. The cultural history of the engagement ring is reason enough to call the whole thing off. The 4 C's should add a 5th--cartel, for the manufactured consumerism. Perhaps a 6th--campaign, for all the work that Ayer did to engineer the mindset that the size of the diamond equaled the commitment to marriage, as well as the groom demonstrating his worth and ambition.

The individual stories were absorbing, each a strong example of the times for which they were written, topped with a gay wedding planned by the cousin of one of the grooms, a woman emphatically against the institution of marriage. As the stories go back and forth, you will be equally touched, entertained, and immersed.

4.5 carats, rounded up to 5.

Ron Charles says

Thirty years ago, I spent all the money I had on two purchases: The first was a top-of-the-line Brother typewriter for \$800. The second was an engagement ring for \$425. When my future mother-in-law saw the diamond, she said, "Wait a minute, I need my glasses." But my fiancée wasn't troubled by the size of the stone or even by the cost of my typewriter. And in any case, she got the last laugh: My Brother is long gone; my wife is still here.

As you probably know, "A diamond is forever."

What you may not know is that a young woman came up with that phrase in 1947 while working on an ad campaign for De Beers. Frances Gerety was a copywriter for N.W. Ayer & Son, the late, great Philadelphia advertising firm that taught us to "Reach out and touch someone" and "Walk a mile for a Camel." Gerety's diamond tag line was the firm's masterpiece; Advertising Age crowned it the best slogan of the 20th century. (Take that, Don Draper!) Ironically, Gerety herself never married (neither did De Beers's founder, Cecil Rhodes), but she and her ads crystallized an engagement expectation made from the hardest substance known to man: tradition.

Gerety's life is the historical spine that runs through several fictional stories in J. Courtney Sullivan's third novel, "The Engagements." This is "Mad Men" before the men moved to Madison Avenue, and Sullivan captures the postwar workplace in all its crisp formalities and crude prejudices. Frances is a rare woman in a chauvinistic industry dedicated to promoting consumer roles for breadwinner and homemaker. She leans in with everything she's got, but the old boys still treat her like a super secretary. It's a perceptive portrait of a talented woman too wise to grow bitter, but too smart to ignore the truth.

While Frances hawks diamonds to a country that doesn't yet know how much it wants them, "The

Engagements” constantly shifts to other, less mercantile facets of romance. Like a wedding planner managing five demanding clients, Sullivan rotates, chapter by chapter, over 80 years of love, American style. From the 1930s to 2012, from chaperoned dances to Match.com, we see attitudes about relationships solidify, dissolve and reform. Some of these couples polish their devotion to a blinding sheen, some trample on their vows, and still others dare to construct something new from something old. But through it all rolls the ring adorned with a diamond — a cartel’s best friend. In Sullivan’s easy, unadorned style, “The Engagements” is a delightful marriage of cultural research and literary entertainment — the perfect book to ruin your wedding plans.

It’s hard to describe “The Engagements” without making it sound like a lot of clunky exposition and domestic construction: five settings, dozens of characters, and all the attendant social and political contexts that need to be built for these separate plots. Don’t worry: Even jumping from story to story every few pages, Sullivan handles all the details elegantly, and the situations are surprisingly distinct, adorned with the unique elements of the times and even the disparate ways people spoke:

- A paramedic in Boston struggles to provide for his wife on Christmas.
- A wealthy, older woman can’t imagine why her ne’er-do-well son wants to abandon his wife.
- An antiques dealer from Paris destroys her cheating fiancé’s apartment.
- A woman who disdains marriage must plan her gay cousin’s wedding.

Each of these stories explores the way lovers express their affections — how they worship fidelity or rationalize infidelity as Time’s winged chariot hurries near. And as we follow them, the sparkle of that diamond ring keeps catching our eye until finally, subtly, all these characters are wedded together.

Despite Sullivan’s portrayal of what motivates lovers, her stories remain, to a striking degree, as prim as a De Beers ad. In a series of otherwise psychologically astute character studies, she gives us intimacy almost completely devoid of sexual desire, fulfillment or frustration. Instead, 45 years after John Updike’s “Couples,” this new novel about coupling titillates us with just the explicit mechanics of advertising. And, I have to admit, the stories never grow flaccid. Perhaps in a market-obsessed culture, nothing is sexier than marketing. Not tonight, dear, I have a spreadsheet.

But for a novel that presumes to examine a swath of marriage experiences in the 20th and 21st century, the curious thing is who’s not invited. In these pages, the bride must not only wear white, she must be white. Without insisting on a Benetton spectrum of diversity, it would have been nice to consider how marriage rituals, wedding expectations and corporate advertising play out among African Americans, for instance, or Hispanics — anything to add a little hue to this monochromatic survey.

But I can feel relatives glaring at me, so let’s move on. This is a reception, after all. And Sullivan is at her best when cataloguing the obscene excesses of the modern wedding ceremony. One of her characters, Kate, a granola liberal whose self-righteousness could cut glass, fumes at the extravagance of her cousin’s nuptials. Don’t invite Kate to your bachelorette party: Amid the fittings and the tastings and other preparations, she lectures anyone who will listen about the evils of blood diamonds. She’s struggling to raise her daughter on organic yogurt and total gender equality, but that’s hard in a world where loved ones insist that the shape of your diamond “says a lot about you.”

As these blessed and disastrous relationships play out across the decades, Sullivan returns again and again to the clever work of Frances Gerety and her campaign to make everyone believe that men have always given their fiancées diamond engagement rings. Every time incomes rise or fall, or new mines are discovered, or courtship attitudes shift, the Ayer agency adjusts its tune to keep American brides walking down the aisle

with little chips of compressed carbon on their hands. Times change, but adiamondisforever.com.

Examining these characters through Sullivan's loupe, it's impossible not to consider your own attitudes about engagement rituals. Gerety's ads have infected us all with the tyrannical standard of the perfect will-you-marry-me moment. Who can resist feeling that the size of the gem reflects the depth of a man's adoration? Subjected to the right propaganda, how quickly traditions can be manufactured and given the patina of age. But here's a novel that could save you thousands of dollars. If you're in the market for a ring, don't worry about what the ads call the 4 C's: cut, clarity, color and carat. It turns out, that's all 1 C: crap. As Sullivan makes plain, whether or not your marriage gets off to a good start has nothing to do with your gemstone investment.

I'm not giving anything away by revealing that "The Engagements" ends with a wedding. An engagement ring, after all, is like Chekhov's gun: If we see it in the first act, it had better be used by the time the curtain falls. And for all her sharp wit and insight into the agony of failed relationships, Sullivan's no cynic. The novel's final wedding transcends the craziness and the extravagance and the bickering. Against all odds, it represents something genuinely eternal about the love between two people.

Do I believe in that?

I do.

Nicholas says

Having read Sullivan's previous two novels, and not being thrilled with either of them, I was slightly perplexed by my desire to buy and read this one. But then I realized that context was important: I was about to go on a transatlantic trip and I knew I would need something light and entertaining for the flights. And Sullivan really is entertaining.

The problem, however, is that her novels just aren't that smart. I appreciated all the archival research she did here into the diamond industry (and particularly the lives of Mary Frances Gerety and Dorothy Dignam, who are both characters in this novel, but also really did work at Ayer, the DeBeers advertising agency), and I love the feminist politics of this novel. But Sullivan is none too subtle. She kind of hits you over the head with her messages and this can grate (even when I tend to agree with them: see the 2012 exhibit of Kate and May and Jeffrey and Toby). At times I think she doesn't trust her readers to figure out the message on their own so even when she foreshadows and then has an event take place, she finds it necessary to have a character reflect on its meaning, even though if the reader has paid ANY attention, s/he KNOWS that meaning as soon as the event takes place. But it's also that Sullivan just isn't that deep and there is very little ambiguity here. Add to this that while some of the writing is artful, a lot of it (particularly some dialogue) also seemed clunky and contrived to me.

All that said, I will not be at all surprised when I buy her next one, especially if I have to be on a plane for ten hours.

Denise says

This novel incorporates the factual history of the engagement ring and our fascination with size, clarity and price. The Engagements has more character development than plot. Sullivan relates the stories of four

different marriages and their relationships spanning thirty some years. Evelyn and Gerald, long term marriage of 40 some years was perhaps my favourite story. The other three were also different but interesting. All the stories are linked by the true story of France's Gerety, who wrote, in the 1940's the slogan of "A Diamond is Forever."

I enjoyed Sullivan's writing but kept wondering when these individual stories would be linked. It kept me wondering until the end! 3.5 stars (KUYH's August Who Runs the World.....Girls)

Leanne says

Backstory! Backstory! This is packed with backstory, and juicy, detailed storylines, and strong female characters, and bordering-on-cheesy-yet-still-surprising links.

We have 5 different plotlines: Frances, a single working girl at a large advertising firm, who is essentially engaged to her job. Her largest client is De Beers, and she is the brains behind the famous "A Diamond is Forever" slogan, which is very cleverly woven into the story. Then we have Evelyn, a very well-off retired teacher, who is the wife of Gerald and mother of Teddy - who is looking to divorce Evelyn's precious daughter-in-law. Next, James, an EMT struggling to make ends meet and provide for his high school sweetheart turned wife and two sons. Then Delphine, a sophisticated 40-something Parisian woman, who is enticed away from her safe and comfortable world by a whirlwind romance with a young American violinist. And finally, Kate - a woman who abhors marriage and anything to do with it, who is unfortunately stuck planning her cousin's very elaborate gay wedding and dealing with her much more traditional mother and sister. Essentially tying all of these stories together is a particular ring that appears first through a traditional proposal and is at some point stolen, inherited, lost, and then taken apart and put back together.

This book is my perfect guilty pleasure. I am a romantic at heart, and I *love* love stories. But I hate the clumsy, overwrought way they are often written, and I tend to similarly hate the silly, fluffy, more comedic versions. On the contrary, *The Engagements* certainly has love, but it also has independence, emotional maturity, and it is written in a more literary, nuanced way than 95% of "chick lit" (I'm not a huge fan of this phrase, but it is what it is).

Sentimental, far-reaching - it resonated with me for several days after (even as I was enjoying a week of sun-filled vacation), and to me that is the mark of a great book.

Patricia Williams says

Another book that I loved. Really good, historical story about the woman who started the phrase "A Diamond is forever" for DeBeers back in the 1940's and also a story about one special engagement ring that went through 4 generations and the people that owned it. Would definitely recommend this. I love historical fiction and also a good drama!

Vivian says

I have to say I'm surprised at all the high ratings for this novel. While the premise was interesting - following the career, at intervals, of the woman who wrote the famous DeBeers slogan, "A Diamond is Forever," as well as the relationships of fictional couples who did, or didn't, choose to marry - I found the execution

heavy-handed and much too verbose. I don't need EVERY SINGLE thought a character is having at the moment to be spelled out, and I also don't need the history and reasons behind every choice a character makes. For example: a former schoolteacher mentioning to an ex-colleague that teenagers today (early 1970s) seem to have a harder time than teenagers in the past does NOT require the author to describe the complete detailed list of "ways to tell if your child is becoming a hippie," as given to parents of that time. A small anecdote would do. Or another character explaining (or complaining) of all (and I do mean ALL) the ways New York can't possibly measure up to Paris, at least to a Parisian. One or two choice culture-shocks would have told the reader more than 10 pages of rants by the character, which do not in any way advance the story. The facts may be accurate, but that doesn't mean they add anything to the narrative.

I don't mind historical facts in a novel; I think, done well, they can add greatly to the ambiance of the story. But the facts have to pertain to the story in some way, not just serve as filler, which seems to be the case here. A good editor could have gotten this novel down to half of its 400 pages, and I think I would have enjoyed it so much more. As it is, I had to plow through the author's fact-dumping to get to the actual stories, which I did enjoy when I could find them.
