

The Engagements (Vintage Contemporaries)

By 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.

This ebook edition includes a Reading Group Guide.

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Editorial Review

From Booklist
A pioneering, single career woman writes what becomes a legendary slogan for a product she will never use. A husband and wife teeter on the edge of bankruptcy after she is mugged and her most precious piece of jewelry is stolen. A mother despairs over the end of her son's marriage as she recalls the precarious circumstances of her own. A married French woman becomes engaged to an American musician only to discover him cheating on her with her best friend. An overly practical woman nearly ruins her gay cousin's wedding. Inspired by the real-life story of Frances Gerety, a 1940s copywriter who penned the "A Diamond Is Forever" tagline for DeBeers, Sullivan riffs on the fragile state of marriage through a clever series of loosely connected vignettes. At the heart of each episode lies that sparkly symbol of romantic commitments, and what could have been a distractingly disjointed narrative style is give a sharp and crystalline coherence by virtue of Sullivan's sometimes bold, sometimes nuanced improvisation on the resonance of the diamond engagement ring. --Carol Haggas

Review
Praise for *The Engagements:*

"*The Engagements* . . . opens in 1947 with ad-agency copywriter Frances Gerety . . . Struggling to find a last-minute tagline for De Beers, she scribbles down 'A Diamond Is Forever' and promptly falls asleep. For Frances, a lifelong bachelorette, it's just marketing — her boss points out that the phrase isn't even grammatically correct. But Engagements' other characters show how much her tossed-off idea came to define diamonds as the ultimate symbol of love and commitment . . . [Sullivan is] a born storyteller. Like its mineral muse, *Engagements* shines."
—Leah Greenblatt, *Entertainment Weekly*

"A perceptive portrait . . . In Sullivan's easy, unadorned style, *The Engagements* is a delightful marriage of cultural research and literary entertainment . . . Sullivan handles all the details elegantly, and the situations are surprisingly distinct . . . 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."
—Ron Charles, *The Washington Post*

"*The Engagements* is a rollicking, entertaining read and a thought-provoking one too. Several of the characters' voices have stayed in my head, and even days after putting it down I am left with a sturdy, hopeful sense of the fundamental goodwill of people and the abiding power of love . . . [I] am certain it will be one of this summer's big hits."
—Lindsey Mead, *Huffington Post*

"The best-selling author of *Commencement* and *Maine* has written her most ambitious novel yet."
—*Entertainment Weekly*

"Sullivan takes the cake when it comes to tying the knot . . . brilliantly captures how the vicissitudes of life—grief, infidelity, pressure—echo throughout a marriage." —Elizabeth Taylor, Editor's Choice, *Chicago Tribune*

"Winning . . . [A] decades-spanning tale of four very different couples and the determinedly single career

girl who dreamed up ‘a diamond is forever,’ the slogan that helped make engagement rings de rigueur. There's plenty of romance and sparkle, but . . . this is one smart summer read.” –Kim Hubbard, *People*

“Any one of the five stories of *The Engagements* could have been a novel in itself. Taken together, though, they rather brilliantly represent different facets of marriage — and not always the bright and shiny ones . . . Captivating . . . Clever . . . Sullivan’s writing is smooth as she takes the reader back and forth in time and in and out of relationships; by the end, you understand, as one character notes, that marriages can come and go, and it’s only the diamond that lasts.”
—Laurie Hertzel, *Minneapolis Star Tribune*

“*The Engagements*, J. Courtney Sullivan’s sprawling saga of a novel, all centered around the idea of love, marriage, and, yes, a particular diamond ring. In five interconnected stories, ranging from those of the fictionalized Frances to the contemporary Kate, couples work out their sense of what marriage means in terms of commitment and family . . . These alternating stories make for a more ambitious book than Sullivan’s two bestsellers, *Commencement* and *Maine* . . .This book has a momentum of its own . . . The protagonists are highly likable.”
—*Boston Globe*

“A seamless tapestry . . . Sullivan is a keen observer of people and how they morph over time, either being softened by the years or made more brittle by strife.”
—Bronwyn Miller, *BookReporter.com*

“[Sullivan] threads her story with the glitter of diamonds . . . a tale that sweeps across varied emotional landscapes.”
—*New York Daily News*

“This novel’s concept is as shiny as a diamond itself.”
—*Glamour*

“Sullivan has written an intricate, beautifully timed novel, so delicious in its gradual unfolding that readers will want to reread it immediately to enjoy the fully realized ties.”
—Beth Andersen, *Library Journal*

“For her third novel, best-selling author J. Courtney Sullivan (*Commencement* and *Maine*) places the indelible diamond slogan and its creator at the heart of a generously populated, multi-generational tale . . . *The Engagements* moves at a brisk pace; it's a fun story. I grew especially fond of Kate and her cousins Jeff and Toby; her married sister, Meg; her divorced mother; her abiding partner; her daughter who (as it turns out) likes fancy dresses and perhaps even dolls. There's dark and light to Kate, despair and tenderness, a sense of a character still unfolding, complexity. Kate says what she thinks, and then she thinks some more. I love that she gets the last word.”
—Beth Kephart, *Chicago Tribune*

“Satisfying . . . At each stage of the game, the engagement ring has a different meaning.”
—Janet Maslin, *The New York Times*

“Delving into the allure of ‘for better or worse,’ Sullivan’s novel starts with Frances, an unmarried copywriter who coins the ‘A Diamond Is Forever’ slogan, then follows four couples to the altar. Frank, but fun.”
—*Good Housekeeping* Summer Beach Roundup

“This novel is a fun look at diamond advertising and the people who do—and do not—buy into the hype . . . I was captivated by the narratives and thrilled with the way the pieces came together in the end.”
—Angela Livengood, *Real Simple*

“The author of *Maine* and *Commencement* returns with a sprawling tale about marriage, its meaning, its importance and whether or not a diamond really is forever.”
—Ashley Ross, *Marie Claire*

“The author of *Commencement* and *Maine* threads her story with the glitter of diamonds . . . It’s a tale that sweeps across varied emotional landscapes.”
—Sherryl Connelly, *New York Daily News*

“The bestselling author of *Maine* and *Commencement* opens her third novel with the tale of Frances Gerety, the real-life ad copywriter who coined ‘A diamond is forever’ for De Beers. It’s the perfect springboard for Sullivan’s story, which follows four couples as they navigate the shifting terrain of love and marriage.”
—*People Magazine*

“This sprawling novel about marriage spans nearly 100 years and focuses on four couples, as well as a young single copywriter who coins the ad slogan ‘Diamonds Are Forever,’ which resonates through the decades.”
—Cathleen Schine, *Los Angeles Times*

“Is a diamond really forever? So Sullivan (*Maine*, 2011, etc.) asks in her third novel . . . Frances Gerety, a real person whom Sullivan enlists at the outset of her tale, had a daunting task way back in 1947: She had to cook up an advertising tagline for De Beers that would convince Americans to purchase diamond engagement rings, hitherto ‘considered just absolutely money down the drain.’ Sullivan’s story takes off from there, diamonds forming a leitmotif in ingeniously connected stories that span generations. As B. Traven advised in his grand tale of gold, precious objects can cause people to do very bad things; so they do here . . . Does money ever buy any of them happiness? Not really, but it does score a few carats. A modern update of *The Spoils of Poynton*; elegant, assured, often moving and with a gentle moral lesson to boot.”
—*Kirkus* (starred review)

“Inspired by the real-life story of Frances Gerety, a 1940s copywriter who penned the ‘A Diamond is Forever’ tagline for DeBeers, Sullivan riffs on the fragile state of marriage through a clever series of loosely connected vignettes. At the heart of each episode lies that sparkly symbol of romantic commitments . . . given a sharp and crystalline coherence by virtue of Sullivan’s sometimes bold, sometimes nuanced improvisation on the resonance of the diamond engagement ring.”
—Carol Haggas, *Booklist*

In praise of *Maine*:

"You don’t want the novel to end in July. You want to stay with the Kellehers straight through to the end of August, until the sand cools, the sailboats disappear from their moorings, and every last secret has been pried up." —Lily King, *The New York Times Book Review*

"I have never stayed at this cottage in Maine, or any cottage in Maine, but no matter: I now feel I know what it's like being in a family that comes to the same place summer after summer, unpacking their familiar longings, slights, shorthand conversation, and ways of being together. J. Courtney Sullivan's *Maine* is evocative, funny, close-quartered, and highly appealing." –Meg Wolitzer, author of *The Uncoupling*

“An ideal summer read. . . . Gives us . . . characters we can care about, despite their sometimes too-familiar flaws.” —*USA Today*

“Attentive to class distinctions and hierarchies, as well as historic pressures and family dynamics, Sullivan presents women who may be stubborn and difficult, but she does so with such compassion and humor that we, too, end up rooting for them. Even if *Maine* weren't set on a beach, it would be a perfect beach book.” —*Chicago Tribune*

"Sullivan’s smarts shed light on topics all families deal with, but her tasteful approach on the tough ones (particularly modern-day religious issues) shine through. The cast of quirky characters will have you laughing out loud and aching for their regrets in the same chapter, pining for more pages when it comes to an end." —MarieClaire.com

"*Maine*’s brisk storytelling, and the unfurling of its central mystery . . . sweep readers along with gratifying sink-into-your-deck-chair ease." —*Entertainment Weekly*

"Curl up with this wry, absorbing novel and eavesdrop on a summer’s worth of secrets, feuds, and misunderstandings." —*Parade* magazine

"Ms. Sullivan’s follow-up to her best-selling novel, *Commencement* . . . follows adult children who gather at their beach cottage in Maine to sip that familial cocktail of misery and love. . . . Once the women are together, the fuse is lighted. Ms. Sullivan locks the doors and waits for the explosion." —*The New York Times*

"[Sullivan] validates the old adage that you can pick your friends, but you are stuck with your relatives. This is a powerful, evocative story, beautifully written to reveal raw human emotions. . . . Fresh and lively. . . . This is a well-crafted story about destructive family relationships and shameful behavior, loaded with tension, secrets, booze, marital conflict, stinging arguments, and some very funny scenes." —*The New Maine Times*

"*Maine* by J. Courtney Sullivan is a powerful novel about the ties that bind families tight, no matter how dysfunctional. Sullivan has created in the Kelleher women a cast of flawed but lovable characters so real, with their shared history of guilt and heartache and secret resentments, that I’m sure I’ll be thinking about them for a long time to come." –Amy Greene, author of *Bloodroot*

"Everyone has dark secrets. It’s why God invented confession and booze, two balms frequently employed in Sullivan’s well-wrought sophomore effort. Alice Brennan is Irish American through and through, the daughter of a cop, a good Catholic girl so outwardly pure that she’s a candidate for the papacy. . . . As Sullivan’s tale unfolds, there are plenty of reasons that Alice might wish to avoid taking too close a look at her life: There’s tragedy and heartbreak around every corner, as there is in every life. . . . Sullivan spins a leisurely yarn that looks into why people do the things they do—particularly when it comes to drinking and churchgoing—and why the best-laid plans are always the ones the devil monkeys with the most thoroughly. The story will be particularly meaningful to Catholic women, though there are no barriers to entry for those who are not of that faith. Mature, thoughtful, even meditative at times—but also quite entertaining." –*Kirkus*

"At the heart of this compelling novel of three generations of women emotionally stunted by fate and willful stubbornness is the family vacation property in Cape Neddick, ME, where the Kellehers have convened for six decades. . . . In her second novel (after *Commencement*), Sullivan brilliantly lays out the case for the nearly futile task of these three generations of badly damaged Irish Catholic women seeking acceptance from

one another." *–Library Journal*

"Sullivan creates deeply observed and believable [characters]. . . . Moody matriarch Alice, her uninvolved hippie daughter Kathleen, brown-nosing daughter-in-law Mary Ann, and newly-single, thirtysomething granddaughter Maggie each has a simmering-below-the surface inner-monologue that lights a spark, and Sullivan makes sure we can only anticipate an explosion. Sullivan gracefully meets the challenge of crafting a cast clearly pulled from the same DNA soup, without a clunk or hitch in the machinery." *–Booklist*

About the Author
J. COURTNEY SULLIVAN is the author of the New York Times best-selling novels Commencement and Maine.Maine was named a Best Book of the Year by Time magazine and a Washington Post Notable Book for 2011. Her writing has also appeared in The New York Times Book Review, The Chicago Tribune, The Wall Street Journal, Glamour, Allure, Real Simple, and New York magazine, among others.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Joseph Herbst:

Do you have something that you want such as book? The book lovers usually prefer to pick book like comic, brief story and the biggest some may be novel. Now, why not seeking The Engagements (Vintage Contemporaries) that give your enjoyment preference will be satisfied by simply reading this book. Reading behavior all over the world can be said as the way for people to know world far better then how they react in the direction of the world. It can't be stated constantly that reading routine only for the geeky particular person but for all of you who wants to always be success person. So , for all of you who want to start examining as your good habit, it is possible to pick The Engagements (Vintage Contemporaries) become your current starter.

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Rebecca Beal:

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Michael Blossom:

As a college student exactly feel bored to reading. If their teacher inquired them to go to the library or even make summary for some reserve, they are complained. Just minor students that has reading's spirit or real their passion. They just do what the instructor want, like asked to the library. They go to at this time there but nothing reading very seriously. Any students feel that reading is not important, boring as well as can't see colorful pictures on there. Yeah, it is to be complicated. Book is very important to suit your needs. As we know that on this period, many ways to get whatever we wish. Likewise word says, ways to reach Chinese's country. So , this The Engagements (Vintage Contemporaries) can make you sense more interested to read.

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