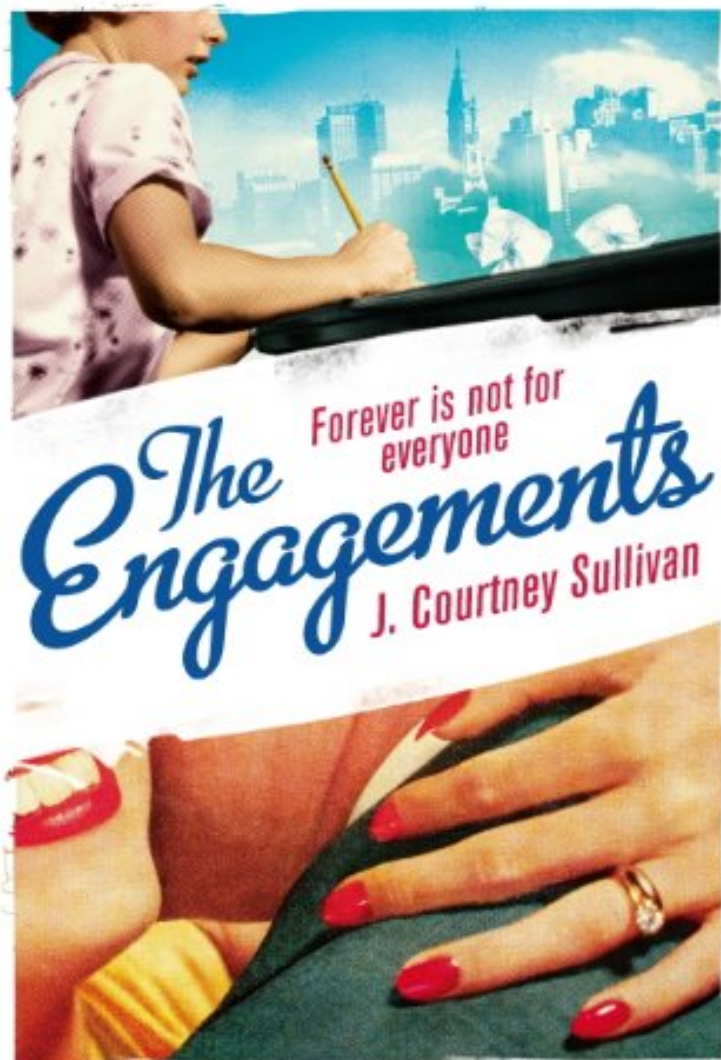


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# The Engagements (English Edition)



Par J. Courtney Sullivan

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The Engagements (English Edition):

'Sullivan is a born storyteller' *ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY*

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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteur1947: Mary Frances Gerety, a young copywriter in an eminent advertising agency, has to convince the world of two things - that marriage means a diamond ring on every woman's finger, and that she is as good at her job as any man. And then, in one moment of brilliant inspiration, Mary Frances writes down four words which will achieve both her aims . . . Moving from a Harvard swim-meet in 1927 to the three-martini lunches of 1940s advertising, from the back streets of 1980s Boston to an exquisite Parisian music shop in 2003, *The Engagements* is a novel about love, marriage, commitment and betrayal; it is as sharp, as fiery and as beautiful as the stone we have taken to represent our dreams.Extrait1947 Frances poured the last bitter remains of the coffeepot into her cup. The small kitchen table was covered in paper:

layouts, copies of confidential reports, lousy ideas she had scrapped hours ago, and good ones, already published in *Look*, *Vogue*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, and *Harpers Bazaar*, to remind her that she had done it before and could do it again. For once, the apartment building was silent. Usually, from off in some distant corner she could hear a baby crying, a couple arguing, a toilet flushing. But it was past three a.m. The revelers had long been asleep, and the milkmen weren't yet awake. Her roommate had gone to bed around ten

at the sight of her standing there in her nightgown and curlers, Frances was overcome with professional jealousy, even though Ann was only a secretary in a law office, who would spend tomorrow the same way she spent every day, fetching coffee and taking dictation. Frances had just finished writing the newest De Beers copy, a honeymoon series with pictures of pretty places newlyweds might go the rocky coast of Maine! Arizona! Paris! And something generic for people without much money, which she labeled *By the river*. In a way, that one was the most important of them all, since they were trying to appeal to the average Joe. A decade earlier, when De Beers first came on as a client, the agency had done a lot of surveying to find out the strength or really the weakness of the diamond engagement ring tradition. In those days, not many women had wanted one. It was considered just absolutely money down the drain. They'd take a washing machine or a new car, anything but an expensive diamond ring. She had helped to change all that. The honeymoon ads read, *May your happiness last as long as your diamond*. A pretty good line, she thought. Time for bed, Frank, she whispered to herself, the same words her mother had whispered to her every night when she was a child. She was just about to switch off the light when she saw the blank signature line that the art director had drawn on the layouts, which she was meant to fill in by morning. Rats. Frances sat back down, lit a cigarette, and picked up a pencil. A day earlier, Gerry Lauck, head of the New York office, had called her. I think we should have something that identifies this as diamond advertising, he said. A signature line. What do you think? When Gerry Lauck asked what you thought, it was wise to understand that he was not actually asking. In her opinion, the man was a genius. Unpredictable and a bit gloomy at times, but perhaps all geniuses were like that. Yes, perfect, she said. Gerry looked like Winston Churchill, he acted like Winston Churchill, and sometimes Frances believed he thought he was Winston Churchill. He even had fits of depression. The first time she had to go to New York to show him her ideas, she was scared to death. Gerry looked them over, his face giving no indication of what he thought. After several torturous minutes, he smiled and said, Frances, you write beautifully. More important, you know how to sell. They had liked each other ever since. Half the employees of N. W. Ayer were afraid of Gerry Lauck, or couldn't stand him. The other half thought he hung the moon, and Frances was one of them. The line shouldn't say anything about De Beers, of course, Gerry continued over the phone. Of course. For nine years, De Beers had spent millions on ads that barely mentioned the company itself. To even name it as a distributor would be breaking the law. So the advertisements were simply for diamonds, and they were beautiful. Ayer pulled out all the stops. They couldn't show pictures of diamond jewelry in the ads, which left the art department in a pickle. In theory, Gerry had nothing to do with creative. He was a straight-up businessman and just handed out the assignments. But as an art lover, he thought to commission a series of original paintings from Lucioni, Berman, Lamotte, and Dame Laura Knight. He purchased preexisting works from some of the finest galleries in Europe for the De Beers collection, by Dalí, Picasso, and Edvard Munch. The resulting four-color ads showed gorgeous landscapes, cities, cathedrals. Printed on the page, just below the artist's creation, would be a box displaying illustrations of stones, ranging from half a carat to three carats, along with approximate prices for each. Gerry was the first person to create an ad campaign featuring fine art. A year or two later, everyone in the business was doing it. I'll need the tagline by tomorrow, Gerry said. I'll be in to Philadelphia in the morning and then on to South Africa by late afternoon. Sure thing, Frances said, and then promptly forgot all about it until now, the middle of the night. She sighed. If she hadn't been bucking all her life for the title of *World's Biggest Procrastinator*, maybe she'd get some sleep one of these days. She knew she had to work tonight, but still she had stayed out with her pal Dorothy Dignam until Dorothy had to catch the nine o'clock train back to Penn Station. Dorothy started as an Ayer copywriter in the Philadelphia office in 1930, but soon after Frances came to the agency four years back, Dorothy moved to the New York office at 30 Rockefeller Center to head up the public relations department. Like Frances, De Beers was her main priority. They had publicists in Miami, Hollywood, and Paris, too, just for this one client. Dorothy had even arranged for the creation of a short film with Columbia Pictures, *The Magic Stone: Diamonds Through the Centuries*. It started playing in theaters in September 1945 and by the time the run was over, it had been seen by more than fifteen million people. Her friend would never tell her age, but Frances guessed that Dorothy was at least a decade and a half older than she was, probably about fifty. She had been in advertising in Chicago in

the last year of the First World War. She was the Chicago Herald's society reporter at seventeen years old and stayed until the day Mr. Hearst moved in and moved her out. She went from there to the offices of the Contented Cow milk company as a copywriter, and later to Ayer. Dorothy was a real hot ticket. She was something of a model for Frances. She had traveled the world for Ayer in the thirties, working in London, Paris, and Geneva for Ford, sailing to Norway and Sweden to study household electrical progress. She even made frequent visits to Hollywood, where she went to the Trocadero for dinner and saw all the stars. She once ran into Joan Crawford in Bullocks Wilshire. Dorothy bought size 16 of the dress that Joan had purchased in size 14. Just an inexpensive black daytime frock and very useful to both of us, I'm sure was how she had described it in a postcard she sent. Their dinner tonight had started off as a business meeting, but after two martinis each they were laughing uproariously at a table at Bookbinders, eating oysters and telling jokes about the fellas at work. They were endlessly amused by the things they were expected to know as women in the office. A few years ago, Dorothy started keeping a sheet of paper in the vacant drawer under her typewriter, and every question that was asked of her, she typed down. Tonight, she had read Frances a few of the latest: How should a woman look when her son is seventeen? Could a winter hat have a bird's nest on it? Is Macys singular or plural? Do women ever warble in the bathtub? What's the difference between suede and buck? Does Queen Mary have a nice complexion? How many times a day do you feed a baby? Is this thing an inverted pleat? They had had a ball, but now Frances would have to pay the price. She glanced at a sheet of paper, a recent strategy plan, and read, We are dealing primarily with a problem in mass psychology. We seek to maintain and strengthen the tradition of the diamond engagement ring to make it a psychological necessity. Target audience: some seventy million people fifteen years and over whose opinion we hope to influence in support of our objectives. Well, that narrowed it down nicely. In 1938, a representative of Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, president of De Beers Consolidated Mines, wrote to Ayer to inquire whether, as he put it, the use of propaganda in various forms might boost the sales of diamonds in America. The Depression had caused diamond prices to plummet around the world. Consumer interest had all but vanished. There were only half as many diamonds sold in America as there had been before the war, and the few diamond engagement rings still being purchased were inexpensive and small. De Beers had reserve stocks they couldn't possibly sell. Oppenheimer was eager to bring the diamond engagement ring to prominence in the United States, and he had it on good authority that Ayer was the best in the business, the only agency for the job. He proposed a campaign at \$500,000 annually for the first three years. What Ayer had done for De Beers was a true testament to the power of advertising. By 1941, diamond sales had increased by 55 percent. After the Second World War, the number of weddings in America soared, and diamonds went right along with them. The price of diamonds went up, too: Today, a two-carat diamond could range in price from \$1,500 to \$3,300. In 1939, it would have been \$900 to \$1,750. They had created a whole new sort of advertising for this campaign, and other agencies had been copying it ever since. In the absence of a direct sale to be made, or a brand name to be introduced, there was only an idea: the emotional currency attached to a diamond. De Beers produced less than they could, to keep supply low and price high. Not only did their advertising approach boost sales, it also ensured that, once sold, a diamond would never return to the marketplace. After Frances got finished pulling their heartstrings, widows or even divorces would not want to part with their rings. On occasion over the years, she had imagined what the Oppenheimers must look like. The peculiar particulars of their relationship stoked her imagination, making her wonder what their faces did when they saw her newest ideas. Were there raised eyebrows? Slight smiles? Exclamations? It was unusual for her not to have met a client, but De Beers was prohibited from coming to the United States because of the cartel. The company controlled the world supply of rough diamonds, a monopoly so strong that the mere presence of its representatives in America violated the law. They operated out of Johannesburg and London. Once a year, Gerry Lauck took the ads she wrote to South Africa in a thick leatherbound book for their approval. He kept a set of golf clubs there, since it was easier than lugging them back and forth from New York. The first time Gerry went to Johannesburg to present market research to the Oppenheimers, the small seaplane he was traveling on made a crash landing off the Island of Mozambique. He used the large mounted maps and charts he had brought along as flotation devices to get to shore. Two others on board died, and The New York Times ran the headline airliner is wrecked in southeast Africa: American escapes injury. Gerry felt that the presentation quite literally saved his life, and perhaps for that reason, he was willing to do whatever it took for De Beers. Her roommate let out a great snore in the next room, interrupting Frances's thoughts. Ann was waiting on a marriage proposal from a dull accountant she had been dating for a while now. After that, Frances would be back on the hunt for a new roommate, as had

tended to happen every few months or so since the war ended. Rose, Myrtle, Hildy: one by one, she had lost them all to matrimony. But she was up for a promotion at the office, so perhaps when Ann left she could finally afford to live alone. When Frances started working at Ayer four years ago, at the age of twenty-eight, she had convinced her parents that it was time for her to move away from home and into the city. But her paycheck demanded that she get a roommate to help with the rent. She wanted a house of her own on the Main Line. Then she'd never have to worry about getting enough hot water in the shower on winter mornings, or tolerating Ann's nasally soprano as she accompanied Dinah Shore on the radio at night. She relished and reamed about the prospect of living alone, the same way most single girls probably dreamed about married life. Frances ran a finger over one of her new honeymoon ads. Other women never seemed to think about what came next. They were so eager to be paired up, as if marriage was known to be full of splendor. Frances was the opposite: she could never stop thinking about it. She might go to dinner or out dancing with someone new, and have a fine time. But when she got home and climbed into bed afterward, her heart would race with fear. If she went out with him again, then they might go out again after that. Eventually, she would have to take him home to be evaluated by her parents, and vice versa. Then he would propose. And she, like all the other working girls who had married before her, would simply disappear into a life of motherhood and isolation.

Revue de presse 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 Hertzler, *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 . . . Its 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. Its 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 De Beers, 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 "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." Marie Claire.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