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Take an instantly recognizable social dilemma—attending a wedding alone—add a good laugh (and maybe a cry), and meet *The Singles*, the warm and witty debut by *Boston Globe* “Love Letters” columnist Meredith Goldstein.

Beth “Bee” Evans’s first vow as a bride is that everyone on her list be invited to bring a guest to her lavish, Chesapeake Bay nuptials. When Hannah, Vicki, Rob, Joe, and Nancy one by one decline Bee’s generous offer, the frustrated bride dubs them the “Singles,” adrift on her seating chart as well as in life.

The Singles Details

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From Reader Review The Singles for online ebook

Naomi says

Full Review @ <http://bit.ly/MT0Wmr>

There were numerous things that drove me crazy about the book. First off, what could have been a pretty hilarious almost a Bridezilla story simply fell flat to me. I just thought that the book didn't have any bite whatsoever and was read and finished as part of a challenge. I will often read "chick lit" to break up heavier reading and that is why this book was sought out, but it didn't even accomplish that goal for me. Second, it was told in multiple person perspective which further drives me crazy. Often one has to keep notes to keep the story straight. When the book was somewhat enjoyable to begin with...multiple person perspective just makes it more difficult to follow. Third, I thought the book to be extremely predictable and that it is a dime a dozen book to other books out there.

Maya says

Won from Firstreads

Review first posted at www.apprentice-writer.blogspot.com

Premise: A wedding causes five single invitees to evaluate their lives.

Cover: Title - Simple, direct, effective. Art - Very pretty and reflective of content, with the gold metallic lettering cleverly calling to mind the rings (i.e., life partners) that the novel protagonists don't have. The theme of social pressure for people to couple up literally forms the centre of attention.

Overall, well done and attractive.

First Sentence Test: "Twenty-nine-year-old bride-to-be Beth Eleanor Evans, a slender, freckled, strawberry blonde whom people called Bee because of her initials, stood in front of the whiteboard she'd purchased that day at the Target off Route 103."

Did this make AW want to read on? No

What Works: Weddings seem like a hot topic right now, fascinating to far more people than just those intending to tie the knot in the near future if the multitude of wedding reality shows and are any indication. This novel, and the earlier "Girls in White Dresses", seems to ride the wave.

Why? Why are weddings intriguing for people not directly participating? As a person who was, yes, sucked into regular viewing of one or two of those shows, please allow Apprentice Writer to voice her theory: it's the expanding effect weddings have on the psychology of onlookers. No one (at least, not in this novel) remains within their regular emotional parameters prior and during the wedding. Their highs get higher and their lows lower, and it can be tremendously addictive entertainment to have a window on what happens under those circumstances. As such, AW was sold on the premise of this book.

She enjoyed the ensemble approach, with events looked at through the eyes of multiple characters rather than

just one point of view. AW also liked how each POV character had clear strengths and weaknesses; there were none who skewed heavily to the "good" or "evil" side. AW would like to think that this realistic and balanced approach has something to do with the author's background as a newspaper etiquette and advice giver, a perspective that would tend to encourage the view that a) we all have our personal issues to work through, and b) one need not ever given up on anyone completely. This is how the characters come across, and AW appreciated it.

What Doesn't: AW received an Advance Readers Copy, and therefore has no way of knowing how much of the manuscript that finally went to print may have changed and improved. That being said, the authorial style and voice didn't always entirely flow for her. Run-on sentences (as from first page, above) were not uncommon, as was a tendency to repetition: "She was blinded just a few seconds later by a vicious, almost blinding fluorescent light."

AW disliked the biological reality descriptions included in some scenes for two reasons; it seemed to her that the point could have been gotten across without going into as much detail, and also, it seemed to underline how the choices of some characters kept them at what seemed like a high school/college level rather than people moving on and establishing themselves in their professional lives. It is true that often, individuals may be moving forward in some parts of their lives while feeling as though they are stuck in others. This is a common and relatable phenomenon for many if not most readers. But characters such as the woman who accepts and swallows an unknown pill from a near stranger and then (against advice) drinks steadily without eating gets no sympathy when things start going wrong.

Overall: A slice-of-life novel about people trying to find their post-college groove and figure out the age old question of how or even whether to find a partner that manages to make the reader, whether single or partnered, feel their status is valid.

Emily says

I love Meredith Goldstein! I read Love Letters religiously and she gives some of the best advice around. Smart, rational, balanced advice - I wish we could be BFFs. But I think she's a better writer than this! I enjoyed the premise - single people at a wedding, story of my life - but her characters were selfish, hollow, and sort of boring. I got a little tired of the pop cultural references. A few are great - as I think they form a common bond with author and reader - but too many is oppressive. I felt like I was reading an OK Magazine after while, nevermind it will entirely date this book in years to come. Also, everyone felt like big cliches - hot uncle, pageant Southern friend who wears too much eyeliner and smokes, winy college girl who can't get over a bad boyfriend. And the one guy with the dog? I felt like that was way out of left field, it just didn't fit. I think if you enjoy chic lit you'll like this book, but this genre is just not for me, there's just not enough meat to them. I still love you Mere!

Clemence D says

Ce livre est à la fois une sympathique petite romance sans prétention et une rétrospective de la vie de chacun

des personnages. Sont-ils parvenus au bout de leur rêve ou ont -ils cédés aux dures réalités de la vie ?

Un groupe d'étudiants se retrouvent à l'occasion du mariage de l'une d'entre eux et les langues se délient ... Des chemins se sont séparés, d'autres se sont rapprochés... et quand en plus s'y mêlent des sentiments amoureux, le moins que l'on puisse dire, c'est que l'unité du groupe se retrouve quelque peu chamboulée !

Le rythme n'y est pas des plus étourdissants, il est même presque nonchalant. Alors oubliez les multiples rebondissements et autres péripéties habituelles, dans ce style de romance, vous ne les trouverez pas ici. Mais rassurez-vous l'ensemble est bien écrit et les personnages principaux sont la plus grande force de ce roman !

Parlons en justement de ces fameux célibataires. Nous les découvrons les uns après les autres, avec leurs passés parfois tumultueux.

J'ai été étonnée par la finesse de la psychologie des personnages qui est tellement soignée qu'elle nous empêche clairement de nous ennuyer. Je les ai trouvés tous très attachants, mais j'ai adorée en particulier le personnage d'Hannah.

J'ai eu peur pendant une nanoseconde lorsque leurs chemins se sont recroisés d'avoir une fin trop facile et naïve où tout le monde vivrait heureux dans le meilleur des mondes.

Mais je trouve que les relations au sein de cette bande d'amis sont restées parfaitement réalistes et que la conclusion s'est dénouée de la meilleure des façons.

Je conseille ce livre à tous ceux qui n'ont pas peur d'une romance un peu différente de celle qu'on a l'habitude de lire non pas par les personnages eux-mêmes mais par la façon dont ils ont été traités !

Chana Snyder says

I'm going to be hard on Meredith Goldstein, whose 'Love Letters' column is thoroughly enjoyable and for whom I had high hopes with this first novel. C'mon, Meredith, you're a better writer than this! Great concept, single folks caught up in the shallow couple-dom of an overly lavish wedding, but too many stereotypes get in the way of decent character development. I am reminded much too much of the world of Emily Giffin, and for that I am sorry. Better luck next time for Goldstein!

C says

quick read, pleasant distraction

Mary says

I noticed this book doesn't have the best ratings, which makes me sad. I enjoyed this book VERY much. If you like books like Bridget Jones I think you would really enjoy it. It is a fun and at times outrageous tale about group of college friends and a few new individuals that are going to a wedding. I love how chapters are from each characters prospective. The author really goes into each individuals life so you can understand who they really are and their backstory. Which made me wanna root for the characters and keep flipping

pages to see what would happen next. Quick read that kept my interest and kept me up way too late!

Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

As one of the perpetually single, I knew that I had to read this book. I've barely been in a relationship, and certainly not in a long-term, plus-one to events type one. Without a doubt, I am approaching the age where I will be grouped into the socially awkward, not paired off group known as the singles. Of course, I'm only 24, so most of my best friends are still unattached as well. But, I know the time is coming - we all do - when people will start dropping like flies into marriage and babies. Being one of the ones left behind can be awkward.

My usual book fare (teen books) actually prompts thoughts about this too. So many fictional works, especially 'girl' books, but a lot of 'boy' books too, focus on relationships, on romance, on true love. Even in high school, there's this conception of the couples and the people stuck going solo, and an idea that the single people are lesser, are messed up in some way. Unsurprisingly, as a single person, I do not approve of this, which is not to say that I think that couples are bad either. I just think relationship status should not be such a big deal.

What drove me crazy is that there are two single ladies at the wedding, all of whom are absurd in different ways. Why do they have to be weird to be single? One is still obsessed with a former boyfriend, even though they broke up freaking ages ago. The other suffers depression, which she treats with a special lamp. Gah! The single men at the wedding are clearly not married by choice, rather than because their significant other left them or because of being crazy.

As I read on, I did get a bit more swept up into the story, and I was certainly alarmed/disappointed to find that it just ended. Although the opening scenes were somewhat as expected, the story definitely developed some depth as it went along, focusing less on who fell in love with whom at the wedding, which is what would happen if this were just chick lit, and on the group's development as people.

All told, this was a pretty fun read, but it wasn't precisely my cup of tea either. The only character I really bonded with was Rob, since all of the others were going crazy over the weekend. Not sure who exactly I recommend this too, but I guess if you find the premise interesting, go for it!

Adam says

I liked and identified with this story. I've always gone stag at weddings -- even the Maryland-wedding-after-graduation scenario (twice)! And the Syracuse flashbacks took me right there: house parties with earnestly bad college rock bands, takeout from Alto Cinco and huddling up with your dorm friends for days on end, never seeing the sunlight.

Things that stuck out:

- The way buffalo wing sauce smell clings to clothing, as a device that really gave you a feel for that character, resurfacing at just the right times
- The description of a character's nails chipping the paint from a windowsill, and the character's wish for the lead in the paint to kill her. One of my favorite paragraphs. Moves from vivid description to over-dramatic

self pity that makes you laugh. Really fine writing.

- The mindset only a pet owner can experience, when they're doing what they can to ease their friend through the home stretch, and the questions and feelings that follow
- What an Old Bay-seasoned Crab tastes like when a sea breeze is blowing through a tent
- The saddest Springsteen reference I've ever read

Goldstein goes pretty easy on her characters, quickly forgiving or conveniently preventing some of their bad behavior. Even if you've never been in their shoes, she does a good job helping you understand what brought them there.

This book had excellent flow, and was a lot of fun to read.

Kathy says

This is the story of the Annapolis wedding of Bee Evans and Matt Fee (yes she will become Bee Fee) and the five guests who despite receiving a plus one invite come solo to the wedding. Hannah, a college classmate of Beth's is a bridesmaid. She dreads the wedding as she will need to confront ex boyfriend Tom who dumped her. She is hoping that Rob a college friend and old boyfriend will attend the wedding with her, but Rob the flakiest of the five solo wedding guests stays in Texas to support his dog Liz a rescue mutt with epilepsy. Rob stays current with the wedding events through texts sent by Hannah. Hannah's roommate at the wedding is Vickie another college friend. Vicki, a romance novel addict, works at an unexciting but well paying job; she is constantly depressed and travels with a social affective disorder sun lamp in a guitar case. These three college friends are supplemented by two additional solo guests. The bride's uncle Joe, a divorced father is attending even though the bride's mother would prefer he not be in attendance. Joe is attracted to Vicki and has big plans for their relationship, plans that are not shared by Vickie. The final character in this farce is Phil. Phil is only attending the wedding as a favor to his mom who is ill and unable to attend. Phil is perhaps the saddest of these characters, unable to grow up he continues to linger in a prolonged adolescence that includes sports and failed commitments and not much else.

The adventures of these five characters through the wedding weekend are enjoyable to follow. The story is told from alternating perspectives. Some of the scenes are quite funny. Hannah, on the advice of a controlling maid of honor, takes some pills to settle her nerves. Followed by a couple of drinks Hannah's confrontation with her ex is painfully funny. All five of the solo guests experience character growth through this wedding weekend. The back and forth between Hannah and Rob is very well done. Rob, still in love with Hannah, but unable to act decisively on it, shows the most growth of all of the characters. All of these solo guests are changed by their attendance at this wedding. I loved the ending; it provided hope but was not an unrealistic take on life.

This is a debut novel for Meredith Goldstein, the popular LoveLetters advice columnist from the Boston Globe and it is a good one. You'll love the characters and if you've ever gone single to a wedding you'll relate to the events in this story. The Singles, I think will be a popular beach read this summer. The book has been optioned for film so read it now before the movie is cast and you can compare your casting choices with the actual ones.

Helen Dunn says

Quick read about five single guests at a lavish wedding in Annapolis. I wanted to like the characters but found them all horrible. Their behavior was crude and ridiculous and got worse and worse as the wedding wore on.

The two male characters that were not completely awful were pathetic in that they ruined relationships with women in favor of their Mom and a dog. What was up with that??

All the women, except for the bride, were horrible.

I should have known this would be bad because one of the blurbs on this book is from the author of "Girls in White Dresses" the other book I gave one star to this year!

Amanda says

This seemed like it could be a light, fun summer read. But, overall, it was just meh.

It's not a bad book - the writing is fair, but the characters seemed a bit underdeveloped and the story wasn't something particularly new.

It's an OK book, not great but not awful. It just seems to lack something to set it apart from the crowd.

Colette says

Interesting concept, with each chapter focusing on a different character. However, I think it could have been executed better. Nothing super exciting or memorable.

Meg says

Meredith Goldstein's *The Singles*, a humorous and often dry look at love and its endless pursuit, is a quick read that anyone forced to attend a friend's nuptials alone will appreciate. When it seems our friends are all coupling up, settling down and leaving us behind, Bee's buddies band into an unlikely group to recall their college friendships, career misdirections and several other catastrophes along the way.

When I started the book, I was initially nervous that Goldstein's debut would suffer from the dreaded Too Many Characters-itis. I mean, on the surface, it seems like it *completely* would. We're talking a real motley crew of people here, folks, and that listing above doesn't include many other peripheral characters *or* Phil, Nancy's son, who actually winds up attending the wedding in her stead. That's a ton of people.

It's a testament to Goldstein, then, that I could actively recall every person in this book without referring to any notes. I can recall their colorful back stories, too, *and* the circumstances that brought them to Annapolis, Md., to see Bee marry Matt, her nondescript husband. Strangely, though, the couple exchanging vows are the ones I felt I knew the least. The groom is nothing more than a prop. And that's fine; I mean, I get it. The book is really about friendship and the links between the singles, not the happy couple. Still.

Casting director Hannah was probably my favorite character. If anyone out there watches the fabulously hilarious and underrated "Happy Endings" on ABC, she *completely* reminded me of Penny. She's that friend who just can't get her act together and has too many quirks to mention, yet you can't help but love her -- and want to protect her. She arrives at Bee's wedding frightened of seeing her ex-boyfriend, the one who just about broke her; he's coming with his new girlfriend, of course, leaving Hannah/Penny to stave off her anxiety in a way that makes her unintentionally crazy. While I really felt for her and hoped she would abandon the Crazy Train, I couldn't help but be amused. Who hasn't faced an ex with a sense of dread *and* excitement?

Being a Maryland girl myself, the Annapolis setting piqued my interest. References to the Naval Academy, local bed and breakfasts and Maryland's famous seafood made my local heart jump for joy. I definitely got a feel for the coastal, breezy wedding Bee was going for, and liked that Maryland featured so prominently in the book. It seems like much of what I read favors the bright lights of Manhattan or glitzy London, so reading about our capital was great for this crab lover.

Fast-paced and fun, *The Singles* takes place over the course of one weekend. Everyone arrives with a hefty amount of emotional baggage, and most carry a sense of uncertainty about where life will take them next. I like that the novel didn't offer easy answers, and things weren't sealed and clean by the end. Goldstein didn't pair off her bumbling characters, having each magically find love or redemption. What was messy did, for the most part, stay messy.

Still, there was a hopeful chord struck by the end that I really appreciated -- and I think fans of women's fiction and novels on friendship, love and starting over will appreciate *The Singles*. It's a light, quick read that resonated with me, and readers who enjoy short character studies and vignettes will appreciate Goldstein's storytelling and attention to detail.

Paula says

Relatable characters who (mostly) change for the better.
