



Save the Date: The Occasional Mortifications of a Serial Wedding Guest

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Weddings. They're fun, festive, and joyful, and at a time when people marry later in life—and sometimes not at all—they offer endless opportunities to reexamine love and what we want for ourselves, regardless of whether or not our aim is a walk down the aisle. In *Save the Date*, Jen Doll charts the course of her own perennial wedding guesthood, from the ceremony of distant family members when she was eight to the recent nuptials of a new boyfriend's friends.

There's the first trip home for a childhood pal's big day, in which she learns that her first love has eloped to Hawaii. There's the destination wedding attended with little baggage beyond a suitcase of strappy sandals and summery party dresses. Regrettably, there is a series of celebrations that mean the end to a valued friendship. There's also the wedding that offers all the promise of new love.

Wedding experiences come in as varied an assortment as the gowns at any bridal shop, and Doll turns a keen eye to each, delivering a heartfelt exploration of contemporary relationships. Funny, honest, and affecting, *Save the Date* is a fresh and spirited look at the many ways in which we connect to one another.

Save the Date: The Occasional Mortifications of a Serial Wedding Guest Details

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Amy says

This is going to be a tricky one to write. So, let's put it off for a minute, shall we? This is where I'll tell you that I'm obligated to disclose the fact that I didn't purchase this book. Instead, I won it through a Goodreads giveaway.

Well, crap, that didn't last long, did it?

When I read the little blurb describing the contents of this book, I was under the false impression that what I would be getting was various wedding stories from hell, similar to what Concierge Confidential is to hotels, and Retail Hell is to, well, retail. That's not exactly the story here, though admittedly that was my own fault. I should have paid closer attention, and read the synopsis all the way through. While there were a few chapters about different destination weddings, drunk bridal parties, etc., for the most part, this read like a Jen Doll autobiography. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but it was somewhat disappointing, when I was anticipating getting a few cheap laughs. But, again, I'll take most of the blame for that. In my own defense, however, the title is somewhat misleading, don't ya think?

I mean no personal offense to Ms. Doll, but there's really nothing extraordinary about the experiences she writes of. Add to that the fact that her delivery lacks a certain spark. The book read more like a research paper, and less like an amusing memoir. In fact, as I was nearing its midpoint, I was downright bored, and eagerly anticipated the buzz of my clothes dryer so I could escape to folding clothes. (There's something wrong with that, I think.)

A more apt description of Save the Date would describe it as Ms. Doll's journey toward relationship contentment, interspersed throughout with various nuptials all over the world. Seriously - nice and dry, just like that. Instead, the word 'hilarious' is tossed around in the description, and I'm still looking for that particular passage. While I may have smiled occasionally, there was certainly no hilarity involved. Also, one of my major problems with the book is that every time I found myself rooting for a coupling to be successful, I would read on to the next chapter, only to discover that she had moved on to the next guy.

My overall impression is that she was aiming to cover this autobiographical nuptial ground in an amusing way, a la Jen Lancaster, but it just falls flat. While the girl can certainly write, she lacks that snarkiness that Ms. Lancaster wears so well. I don't think you can fake that - you either have it, or you don't. And, I'm sure you can guess which category I'm filing Ms. Doll in.

I'm still going to rate this 3 stars. As I stated previously, my disappointment probably stems more from my misplaced expectations than with any fault in the book. Although, I still think the word 'hilarious' should be stricken from the record. Just sayin'...

Kate says

Do you remember that episode of Seinfeld where J Peterman is supposed to be writing a book about his life, and for all the privilege and opportunities he has had in life, he just doesn't have any interesting stories or

anecdotes? Now imagine he wrote a book about the weddings to which he has gone.

I sort of still can't believe that this got published. One can surmise based on various things within the content of this book that this author has led a somewhat charmed life, and I think that scoring this book deal speaks to that.

First of all, I think that the subtitle should have been flip-flopped to say, "the serial mortifications of an occasional wedding guest." She honestly doesn't seem to have been to that many weddings, and she does seem to have made a fool of herself at all of them.

Secondly, the book jacket describes this book as hilarious. I honestly have no idea to what that is in reference. I have been known many a time to laugh out loud at a book, yet I only remember even smiling once while reading this one. And that was at this realization: at one point in the book, the author says that when she was a child and someone would ask her for a kiss, she would run from them and passionately kiss herself in a mirror. I smiled to myself, thinking how ironic it was that only two pages earlier, referring to something completely unrelated, the author had said, "a metaphor if ever there was one."

Indeed, the author does seem rather smitten with herself. Even when she is revealing some rather unpleasant truths about herself, she doesn't seem to really grasp how ugly they are. For example, her drinking seems truly problematic, and she references other people saying so, and she even makes a joke about how she may have had a drinking problem for a while. She also seems to sort of get, but not REALLY get what a double standard this is: that she has dragged dates to several weddings and then had a fit because they were not making a good enough attempt to have fun with a bunch of strangers, and then when she attends a wedding with a new boyfriend and he is paying attention to his friends more so than to her, she has what even she calls "a tantrum" about it. There are numerous references made to the weddings she attends in her late 20s and into her 30s where she gets drunk to the point of vomiting, or does things such as making out with strangers, throwing her shoes when she's mad, and other behavior that could be described as rather pathetic. Maybe these stories are intended to be funny, but they come across as just sad. On a number of occasions throughout the book, the author's friends are gravely counseling her as to who she owes apologies to, and things like that. They don't sound any more amused by her antics than I was. And there are a number of points throughout the book where it seems apparent to me as a reader, though not to her as the author, that men are eager to cut ties with her, whether they just met her and she is drunkenly sobbing to them, or whether they are trying to extricate themselves from an actual relationship with her.

The allegedly hilarious circumstances that she seems to find so unique to her are things such as the following: she's going to a wedding, and she finds out that some guy who years earlier beat her in a high school debate – unfairly, of course – will also be in attendance. BFD, right? To what I can only assume would be the exasperation of the bride, she obsesses over this and of course can't steer clear of him at the wedding, and they end up making out. This seems like barely an anecdote to relate to friends, much less an actual book chapter.

To fill the book out a little bit more, and give it a lighter tone, there are lots of unnecessary details about the great outfits and shoes the author wore to each of these weddings. She also interjects as a cutesy detail what she calls "Wedding tips." Like, "Wedding tip: eat the whatever", or "Wedding tip: don't puke". Not those exactly, but equally stupid, and often not even written in the form of a tip.

And then, for gravitas, the author muses about the nature of marriage itself (at length, and without breaking any new ground), and its meaning to society and to her. It seems like she is really grappling with her own single status, though all the while pointing out that it is better than "settling" for someone. Of course this is true, and of course there is nothing wrong with being single. However, it seems like she is to some extent trying to convince herself of that, and like she could give a little more thought to how she could herself be a better partner for someone, rather than just all the ways that someone might disappoint her as a partner.

For all of the navelgazing she does and all of the thinking about herself that she seems to do, she just doesn't seem to have arrived at some critical realizations. And there's nothing funny about that.

Kelly Tumbleson says

I admire Jen Doll's self-confidence in retelling incidents perhaps best left locked in the past, and I feel something like horrified pity for her friends.

Allow me to summarize over 300 pages:

"I wore a purple dress and high heels.
I didn't have a date and I hated it/I had a date and I hated him.
I didn't NEED a date/I didn't WANT to need a date/I didn't want the date I had.
I got really stupid drunk (againnnn) and acted like a small, undisciplined, selfish child, and while I may feel a twinge of regret, it's really okay because those were my true feelings at the time and I'm really not sorry.
That guy I was dating? He gone.
I'm happy being single. No one can make me get married.
Wine is the BEST!"

Jessica says

This might sound way bitchier than I intend it to, but I want to ask the developmental editors who worked on this book why he or she thought this was ready to be presented as a final product that could be marketed as humorous.

In many cases, I would easily chalk this up to not my not being the right audience -- that happens a lot -- but, the thing is, I'm pretty sure *I am* the right audience. I'm a lady in my late twenties who isn't hitched yet but has attended many a nuptial and likes to read other ladies' memoirs. Who should love a book full of supposedly funny wedding stories more than me?

With the exception of the curious folks who've been with their significant other since their school days, most ladies I know have at least one really bad wedding-attending experience to share with their friends. The girl who went to a wedding three weeks after a really nasty break-up, got drunk, and took home a groomsman whose name she never knew. Girls who have licked mascara off their crying friend's face so that she may continue dancing without the entire reception knowing just how sad she is about a boy that's treated her like dirt. The girl who punched a guy in the face because his dancing wasn't entirely up to her standards.

I'll let you guess which of those ladies is yours truly.

My point is that most everyone finds themselves attending approximately seven quadrillion weddings on the weekends between their 24th and 32nd birthdays. And at every one of those weddings, there's going to be someone who is depressed about singlehood and can't contain it, or someone who is cynical and bitter about the entire concept of marriage and can't contain it, or maybe someone who is naturally prone to drunkenly whipping out his cash and prizes and can't contain it. And these stories may be funny or mortifying or significant to you and the people who love you, but they generally don't mean much to anyone else. They're not really the kind of stories that you construct an entire memoir around.

So my problem here is that I didn't really find Jen Doll's stories particularly interesting or unique or insightful or funny. These were just very typical stories of one night stands and relief over not being the one to be excited that she caught the bouquet. And while she and her friends might find these stories emotionally significant, she just doesn't have the comedic chops nor the reflective insight necessary to keep me interested.

Obsidian says

This was a nope for me. I needed something to read to break up my Halloween reads and I was promised a hilarious send up of being a single girl/woman serial wedding guest. As someone who is that single friend at weddings I was ready for it. Weddings have been on my mind lately (you guys hear about that plantation wedding thing? Sigh) so I thought this would be a nice read in between horror. Too bad this book was not good.

Jen Doll's book bounces all over the place, but I can honestly say she sounds like a pain in the ass as a wedding guest, girlfriend, and friend. You don't need enemies with her around. I have unfortunately met this type of girl at weddings before. It's like a bat signal goes up. You can always tell the one that is going to drink too much, get nasty, and or mad if people are not paying her any attention. I hard cringed reading this book.

Jen provides readers with details/memories of significant weddings in her life. She even goes into her parents (she wasn't present) and while providing details on the wedding, will intersperse that with details about the bride, groom, and wedding guests. I pretty much only liked hearing about her parents and was curious about her childhood since she mentions her family moving around a lot. I was also doubly curious about her growing up in the south.

She wrote for a lot of well known magazines like The Atlantic, Cosmopolitan, The Village Voice, and others. So she can definitely write. That's not the problem.

I think the problem is that she made herself the anti-hero in her own story. You will probably come away with not liking her very much and or thinking she may have a problem with alcohol. She even gets into a fight with an ex-friend's husband at a wedding and he goes of course Jen is drinking again which to me shows that a lot of people think she drinks a lot.

I think most of these stories center around Jen and how the weddings and people made her feel. I just don't know if she got or understood that unless you are the bride, you don't make a wedding about you. She revisits one awful wedding where she got drunk and hit friends of hers that were trying to take her back to her hotel room. I just cringed inside while reading. She claims to have blocked things out because she doesn't want to remember, but yeah I bet she does. God knows I remember every dumb ass thing I have done too. When you think she has finally learned her lesson, she goes to a wedding with a guy who sounds interesting/shows promise, and then flips out because he's not paying enough attention to her. I would have cursed her out and went about my day.

My rules for attending weddings:

1. Are you the bride? No. Then shut up and be helpful and make sure you don't cause drama.

As someone who has been a maid of honor at a destination wedding (what a pain the ass that was) and was

also in my brother's wedding, I can say that I was thrilled when my last two friends who got married did not ask me to be a bridesmaid. I don't get hurt by it, and don't give two craps. That means I can chill all day til the ceremony, then make sure I bring something to snack on in the car on the way to the reception. And then I will smile, toast, take pictures, be helpful (once was in the bathroom for an hour untangling a friend's long ass train) and go back to my room and sleep away til the next day.

I think without realizing it, that Jen's inability to put her friend's first caused some of them to not turn away from her, but towards the end of the book, she was just a guest and not in the wedding parties for some of the girls who were in wedding parties with her before. Frankly, I don't blame the brides, who wants that headache?

The sections that made me die the most inside though was Jen going into her friend's Ginny's marriage and being mad that Ginny wouldn't leave her husband cause Jen didn't like him. It didn't sound abusive, it just sounded like the guy was kind of a dick. I just don't know why she was so overly involved in it. It just sounded like drama and she was feeding on it. Ginny gets brought up throughout this book, so you don't know what happened at first, but we eventually get there. And even after the friendship is broken, Jen can't help poking at it like a scab. I can see why the mutual friends were tired of it.

I was hoping for more of a girl power book (being happy being single and attending weddings solo) and having some funny remembrances that occurred at weddings. This book was totally not what I thought it was going to be.

Ann says

I read this book thinking it would be a light-hearted memoir of, well, attending lots of weddings. The wedding-industrial complex has created some very high expectations of what weddings should be, and I figured it would be fun to read some of the more extreme examples. I also thought that an eagle-eyed observer would be able to come up with some interesting insights about how we celebrate one of the most important relationships in our life.

Unfortunately, this is not that book. Yes, Jen Doll has attended a lot of weddings. And we get many details about each one : how the bride and groom met, what type of wedding it was and where it was held, and what the bride wore, and what Jen herself wore. This type of repetition gets old very fast, especially since it's complicated to keep track of the network of friends-of-friends who keep on popping up. Also associated with each wedding is a section of Jen's own love life at the time. And that never seems to be going well. Not a single one of Jen's dates or boyfriends seems a genuinely nice guy, except perhaps a much younger man who takes her to a wedding of his own friends (reversing the roles), and with whom she then picks a silly quarrel. I did not sense a single episode of true love, true passion, a real connection, even if it might have come to a crashing end. Much about dating, nothing about love. The author does seem to want to use her personal dating life as a springboard for musings about love and the search for a life partner, but these ramblings seem forced and do not contain anything original.

So, in essence, I found this book boring because :

1. it gets old reading all these details about flower arrangements and dresses and strappy heels
2. it gets old reading about the wrong guys that the author seems to persist on dating, despite all the obvious red flags.

3. It gets very old reading about all the drinking that the author does, and all the stupid things that happen as a consequence. Many of the weddings she describes are multiple-day affairs, and it seems that she gets sloshed at each one. So... from vomiting in the bathrooms, to ruined shoes to sleeping with a just-met wedding guest, there are pages and pages of bad decisions and their inevitable consequences. Perhaps she thought this would be funny? I just found it dreary.

Nicholas says

I don't want to go so far as to say that the book was downright bad, but it definitely wasn't good. Ostensibly the tale of all the weddings Jen Doll has attended, with each chapter nominally organized around one of them, it's really just a memoir about Jen Doll's life. If there is a "point" to the book, it's sort of a rumination on what it means to be a single gal about town who hasn't married by her later thirties and may not do so. And all of that is just fine for what it's worth. I didn't have a problem with the organization of the memoir or what she was trying to do.

But, like other reviewers here, I didn't find the book particularly funny, and it bills itself this way (I may have laughed out loud twice) and I don't think Doll is any more insightful about what marriage means in contemporary society (answer: a whole lot, and simultaneously very little) than anyone else I've read on the subject. Both of these things, combined with the fact that Doll doesn't actually seem to have been to any more weddings than any of the rest of us in our late thirties, made me wonder how an agent and an editor thought that this was such a good idea.

And then there's the matter of Jen Doll and booze. I think the one thing that shocked me about this book was both that she was willing to tell us so much about her friends and their weddings and her exes (all of whom will surely recognize themselves in these pages despite the pseudonyms), but that she also was so forthcoming about her own drunken mishaps. And I do mean drunken. Doll seems to be one of those drunks who crosses an invisible, yet significant, line when she drinks and everything after that crossing is angry and sad and nightmarish for everyone around her. I suspect that most of her friends have had conversations about her drinking when she is not present. And she only kind of gets that. In that respect the use of the word "mortifications" in the subtitle is entirely accurate. But I just couldn't believe a person could simultaneously recognize how problematic this drinking behavior was and then also want to relive it all with other people. Through the printed word, always and forever. It made me suspect that she really didn't get that she might have an actual problem. Because even after the one truly most awful drunken wedding incident (and who knows how many happen NOT at weddings?), she still has others, albeit more minor ones.

All that said, I downloaded the thing to my iPad at about 4 pm and finished it by 11, with a healthy-sized dinner break. It was entirely readable, sometimes even engrossing (there were no moments when I felt the prose was actually bad), I just don't think it was particularly successful at what it set out to do.

Becky says

I was really ready to like this, but I ultimately just was not that interested in the author's stories or writing.

They all started to feel the same, and I didn't end up getting much out of them in terms of humor, entertainment, or life lessons.

Mary says

Based on the book jacket, I expected a bright and breezy behind-the-scenes look at the bridal industrial complex and fancy "Sex in the city" type weddings (lavish country club or beach ceremonies, exotic destination weddings, cool/hip wedding guests, etc.) Instead, I was disappointed by the author's excessive navel-gazing. Pretty much every story revolved around her- her moods, her needs, her excessive drinking (which usually leads to her either having a melt down or passing out), her "justifying" that it's OK to be single at age 36, she's not jealous that all her friends are getting married and she's still single, etc.

Michelle says

Dear Author,

I greatly enjoyed your book, but as I started to get to the end, it began to make me feel a bit exhausted. Why is that? Because as self-aware as you seem to be and through all lessons you so eloquently talk about, and the emotional ups and downs of relationships seen through the veil of the wedding attendee, one thing stands out. YOU DRINK TOO DAMN MUCH. The "occasional mortification" mentioned in the subtitle is because you always allowed alcohol to be the way you found to fit in and feel part of the event.

By the end of the book, the last two weddings, I kept hoping against hope that you would have finally realized that you don't need to be blotto to have fun, that an open bar or an after party isn't always your friend. I gave up in disgust when you talked about your childish outburst at Will for playing beer pong.

If I had been your friend at any point during these years you talked about, I probably would have staged an intervention. Seriously, girl, get into AA or something.

The common denominator in all your wedding disasters isn't being young and foolish, or not understanding something, or whatever. It's because you drank too damn much.

Your book would carry way more weight if you had been introspective enough to recognize that you have control issues when it comes to drinking.

I really hope you and Ginny somehow can patch things up in the future, but her husband's comment in New Orleans should have been your books subtitle: "Here comes Jen, drunk off her ass again."

John says

Having only been to three weddings in fifty-four years, I was a bit intrigued by the premise of this book, which looked well-written and interesting when I looked through it in the library. However, I was unable to relate to the author, or her lifestyle; in many of the cases, the scene revolves around her being drunk, and ... pairing off with another guest. Ho Hum. Moreover, the couples are all friends of hers from the same demographic, no real variation on age and race; she attends one same-sex wedding, as a part of the press,

from a distance. There is a chapter where she talks about her parents' wedding/marriage. I guess my biggest issue, after reading the entire thing, was that Ms. Doll didn't seem to have changed (or learned) much from the times things didn't go as well as she might've hoped. To be honest, I wouldn't much *want* to have attended to a lot of these affairs, but then again, I'm a nerdy old goat.

Not particularly recommended, although if she wrote essays on another subject I'd consider giving her a second chance.

Joanna says

I have mixed feelings about this book. I was already in something of the wedding spirit when I picked it up, having just attended a string of happy spring nuptials. So I was primed and ready for a few laughs and some deep reflection on weddings and love and friendship.

I really wanted to love it, and while I did find it at times mildly entertaining (I may have chuckled in a couple places), I didn't find it funny so much as cringe-inducing. I just couldn't find any humor in the author's immature, self-involved, dramatic antics. If anything, reading these stories just made me sad. Sad to see the exploits of a grown woman cycling through the same old behavioral patterns: excessive drinking, pulling focus away from the bride and groom on their special day, creating unnecessary drama, naively misreading social cues that were beyond obvious to the reader (as in, this guy clearly wants nothing to do with you....put the drink down and walk away NOW). There didn't seem to be an end in sight to her indulgent, reckless behavior. Did she learn from her mistakes? I didn't get the sense that she learned anything, but who knows?

If the author's Twitter stream is any indication, she seems like a bright, funny, interesting person. I certainly admire her candor in revealing her past foibles and missteps, and I'm sure she has every intention of moving past them. I just wish it made for a funnier, more light-hearted story instead of the cry for help I suspect this book really is.

Emily Hoornstra says

Being her debut novel, I guess we're supposed to extend some extra grace towards Ms. Doll. I made myself finish the book but it wasn't because I was so intrigued nor amused. Although I had hoped to be! Her self-deprecating humor through the course of all these wedding recollections falls flat and you can't help but feel sorry for her. She reveals some lengthy inner monologues about marriage but it isn't clear, even by the end, that she has drawn any conclusions nor figured anything out. And if she goes to one more wedding, dresses up pretty, gets herself roaring drunk and says something(s) stupid, don't we all just want to reach through the pages and give her a good shake? What was forgivable behavior at 23 is going to look increasingly ugly at 40 and beyond. One thing I did appreciate at the end of the book was that she talked about not settling for just anyone because you have a strong desire to be married and/or have children. I agree wholeheartedly with that idea but would caution that some individuals today can have unrealistically high standards for a significant other. They can demand more of the other than they do of themselves and, in that, consider all other humans as "settling" material. All in all, I had hoped the book would be much more humorous and that I would be eager to pass it along. That didn't happen this time.

Beth says

Just because someone says "Wow, you should write a book!" doesn't mean you should. That is all.

Rob Slaven says

As usual I received this book for free in exchange for a review. This time it was from LibraryThing. Despite that kindness I give my candid opinions below.

The nutshell view of this one is easy. This woman goes to a LOT of weddings, as I'm told women tend to do. While there she's made some insightful observations about the human condition. It should be noted this isn't a book full of witty wedding mishaps. This is no America's Funniest Weddings. It's a pointed and thoughtful look at how humans match up with each other.

To the positive side, the author is obviously a wonderfully bright and introspective soul. I started this book expecting something rather vapid but instead got a very thoughtful view of weddings. These are the sorts of observations that I would quietly make to myself during such a ceremony and never tell anyone about. Jen Doll has chosen to tell the world.

To the negative, as much as I appreciate the author's viewpoint, I just couldn't care enough about the her detailed observations of the human psyche to slog through the sometimes minute details of the her own personal experiences. By all means yes, let us converse about the factors that make people find each other in this mad and mixed up world but let's not talk in detail about what you had to drink last night, what you were wearing or how hungover you feel tonight.

In summary, there's a bright light in this book but it is buried under a bushel of randomness. Lots of potential for a more focused treatise but it's not there yet.
