



Commuters

Emily Gray Tedrowe

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After losing her husband of many years, seventy-eight-year-old Winnie Easton has found love again with Jerry Trevis, a wealthy, elderly Chicago businessman; their decision, however, to buy one of the biggest houses in the small, upstate town of Hartfield, New York, ignites anger and skepticism in their families. Jerry's daughter, Annette, fearing for her inheritance, takes drastic action to freeze Jerry's assets; Winnie's daughter, Rachel, struggling with her own finances, accepts Jerry's offer of a loan; and Avery, Jerry's twenty-year-old grandson, a hotshot chef with a cocaine-fueled past, scouts out Manhattan venues in which to start his own restaurant—with Jerry's money to back him up. With so much riding on Jerry's wealth, a rapid decline in his physical health forces hard decisions on the family, renewing old loyalties while creating surprising alliances.

Commuters traces the interwoven stories of Winnie, Rachel, and Avery as each is changed by the repercussions of one marriage, and by the complex intertwining of love, family, and money.

Commuters Details

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Caitlin says

My mother's father died when I was 7 or 8. I remember going to Mississippi with my folks for the funeral and all the family being there and I especially remember my grandmother sending us all home shortly after the funeral. She said she needed to learn to live alone and the quicker she got started the easier it would be. In later years when people would ask her if she'd ever remarry she'd always say that she was very happy as it was and didn't need some old man to take care of. She continued teaching reading at the local elementary school until she retired and took all kinds of trips all over the US and the world. It was very cool to watch her remake her life and expand her horizons.

When she was 70 she became reacquainted with a man she and my grandfather had known in college. In fact, they had double-dated with him and his wife who had died the year prior to them meeting again on a fall foliage tour. They fell head over heels in love and remarried and my grandmother started a whole new life. They had ten good years together before he passed away and it was so life-affirming to see them together, so happy and so in love.

Commuters is a multi-generational tale of what happens when two older people fall in love and marry. Both of their spouses are gone and they join forces to create a new life together. Told from the perspective of several family members, the novel explores all of the complexities of love late in life - the surprising resentments of grown children, the necessities of navigating inheritance and changing relationships, the simple pleasures of finding a new life partner. With strong clear voices this simply told and elegant novel was a real pleasure. I wish my grandmother was alive to read it - she would have approved.

Tiffany says

I purchased this one on a recent trip to San Francisco and finished it on the plane ride home. The story is told from the point of view of three characters and rotates through them as the plot develops. I enjoyed the author's portrayal of family life during complicated and stressful life events. It's a fun and quick read.

Jane says

Some spoilers here! Liked the chef Avery and Winnie the matriarch. Those characters grew the most and I was rooting for them more than any of the other characters.
Could picture the grand house, tree and pool. Rachel annoyed me to no end.
Not sure a car accident can exacerbate Alzheimer's disease though Jerry may have had a seizure due to his condition. That would be an Alzheimer's plateau - breaker.
What ever happened with the recording Rachel was making while she tried to talk with Jerry? The last we knew-the recorder was still running inside Rachel's purse.

K says

I think I'm just too picky.

I liked what this book was trying to do; trying being the operative word. Decent writing plus an interesting situation -- two people marry late in life and the ensuing family politics, with various family members and temperaments and complex situations -- should equal a good book. There were times when it almost did. Almost.

Winifred, the 78-year-old bride, is clearly meant to be a kicky old lady with no patience for social convention. She *will* insist on a traditional wedding with all the trimmings, her age and people's disapproval notwithstanding; she *will* cut down the sycamore in front of her house to make room for a swimming pool for her new husband, and to hell with the neighbors and the radical environmentalists who want to stop her (all of them, with their increasingly desperate tactics for which I had to suspend some disbelief)! She even gains the trust and admiration of her new step-grandson, a tough guy fresh from rehab, because she's spunky and cool and knows how to talk to him. It's not an unbelievable scenario; cool old people do exist. It was Winnie who never quite seemed real to me. For a richly drawn aging woman, see Olive Kitteridge; it was clear to me what Emily *wanted* Winnie to be, but it wasn't clear to me that Winnie actually *was* that.

Emily's heart was in the right place as she tried to craft a complex relationship between Winnie and her daughter Rachel, who was struggling with problems of her own -- a newly disabled husband and money troubles. But Rachel, too, didn't quite realize her potential as a multi-dimensional character and neither did her relationships, not with Winnie or her husband or anyone else. Other situations also carried unrealized potential for conflict -- Winnie's wealthy new husband's daughter, convinced that Winnie and her family were gold-diggers, made only token appearances; her son Avery's girlfriend and business difficulties also failed to drive the story the way they might have.

The book was readable enough, and worthy of three stars. You could definitely do worse if you're stuck on an airplane or a desert island. But if you have access to a wider book selection, you can probably do better.

Beth says

"After losing her husband of many years, seventy-eight-year-old Winnie Easton has found love again with Jerry Trevis, a wealthy, elderly Chicago businessman; their decision, however, to buy one of the biggest houses in the small, upstate town of Hartfield, New York, ignites anger and skepticism in their families."

Quite a struggle for me! There were times when the story would pick up and I'd think Finally, we've got some momentum! However, it didn't happen; little to no momentum. I don't like to abandon books so I limped through this one.

M says

This is more of a 3.5-er, bordering on 4 - but it rests on a shelf of books I enjoyed a lot but really can't recommend - this was an extensive, well written look at two families coming together when their elderly father/grandfather and mother/grandmother wed - and not all that much happens except the vicissitudes of

life which I love but a lot of people might find boring. The characters are well sketched, the dialogue rings true and the conflicts - old and young, money and what it does to people, emotions, relationships - were dealt with really nicely. I am laying off the fourth star because it was a bit too easy to put down - that being said it's a worthwhile read if you're into character heavy, plot light.

Christine Eberle says

Not quite a literary novel, I think (based on how few passages I highlighted), but not fluffy like a beach read. The characters' dilemmas felt real, and I was eager to stay with them to see what happened next, while rooting for almost everyone. If you're an actual commuter (e.g. daily train or metro), this could be a very nice way to pass a week's travels, but I wouldn't save it for vacation.

Bailey Olfert says

Highly readable, but not remarkable.

Jan Polep says

I was roaring right along, enjoying the story of 2 seventy somethings who marry and bring family baggage of all kinds into their lives in a bedroom community north of NYC. Each chapter is told from the point of view of either the grandmother/bride, daughter, or grandson. The grandfather/groom's money leads you to believe that everything will get straightened out if they just hit it with enough money. But no. As one character descends into dementia, another recovers a life lost...but it just wasn't a very satisfying ending for me. You can have my copy if you want it.

Maria says

A unique story that illuminates the changes that happen in one's life through various generations. I enjoyed the characters that were chosen to tell the story through. It gets three stars for the storyline and its uniqueness. However, it was not a book that I needed to devour.

Teresa says

Wanting to read a local author, I bought this book, as a trip souvenir, last month in a great little bookstore on North Broadway in the Lakeview neighborhood of Chicago. I was disappointed when I realized it wasn't set in Chicago at all (a couple of characters are from Chicago, but they don't return there in print), but that was my assumption (thinking there would be 'commutes' between Chicago and NY), so I can't blame the author.

I almost abandoned it several pages in, thinking it wasn't for me (especially after coming to GR for

encouragement and seeing that a GR friend hadn't finished it), but I needed something 'easy,' something I could get lost in, something that wouldn't require me to think too much (unlike my previous read, John Banville's *Eclipse*). It got better, or, more likely, my expectations changed. Despite a couple of sentences near the end that jarred me out of the story (one involving a tense change and another in an excerpt from an essay that was said to be published in *The Atlantic*), the writing is fine -- otherwise, I really wouldn't have been able to finish it. Even in 'escapist' novels, I can't read bad writing.

In the beginning I would've given this 2 stars for being ok. That grew to **2.5 stars** as I went on, but I did end up liking it for what it was: mostly good writing (there are some plot-lines that seemed unnecessary and then they were dropped, proving it to be so) with memorable characters (though I had a hard time believing some of the stuff that the 20-year old grandson could do -- I know he'd been through a lot before the reader met him, but, still, he was only 20); and a pretty good read.

Oh, and, yes, I liked how the word 'commuter' came to mean more than what I thought it meant.

Katie says

I picked this up at the library the other night and finished it this morning.

This was an easy book to fall into and breeze through--exactly what I was looking for. The story and the characters were interesting enough to compel me to finish the book. (I particularly liked Rachel and Avery as characters) But along the way, I found myself editing/rewriting some of the sentences to make them more crisp, less redundant. Arrogantly, I kept on saying to myself, "I can write better than this." And I lost a little bit of interest at the very end.

But all in all, for a first novel? Good job, Emily Gray Tedrowe. We all know that pulling it all together is no easy task.

Lesley Korna says

I couldn't say I would recommend this book but I did read it to the end and somewhat enjoyed it. Writing was good but it was very character driven and the author ran out of time to tie up all the loose ends. Found Winnie the 78-year-old granny a little bit unrealistic. Big splashy white wedding at 78!! Very tacky. By the time she rubbed the stardust from her eyes, the husband was dying. There was no real ending. Left hanging with assumptions on all fronts as to how all the characters ended up. Could have been so much more because the storyline was plausible but it just wasn't.

Lisa says

Good one

I really enjoyed this story from the beginning to end, and its character development. Hope to read more by this author.

Andrea says

The storyline itself was good: a 78-year-old widow marries a rich widower, and all sorts of family drama ensues. It's told from 3 perspectives: the grandmother's, her daughter's, and her step-grandson's. Takes place in a suburb of New York.

But there were several problems with the book, the least of which is that it left a few plot lines hanging. It felt sloppy and hurried at times, like the book was rushed to publication, for reasons I can't understand why. It was a debut, so maybe that's why? Still, with some extra copy editing, it could have been tightened up significantly.

The language was overly workshopped, there were too many characters, and the grandmother, the strongest character, fell weak by the end of the book. The whole novel seemed like it was trying to be some monumental Roth-ian or Franzen-esque family-generational epic full of meaning... but just couldn't quite get there.

The author has an irritating way of interjecting herself into the book by mentioning authors and book titles that the characters are supposedly reading but which seem like more of a ploy to make the author herself seem smart, because they really (really) do not add anything to the characterizations. She also misused "nonplussed" and there were two proofreading errors in a HARPER book, for chrissakes. For a self-pubbed novel, I can let a few slide, but a big six publisher? That just means they rushed this one out and didn't care too much themselves!

And I'm getting pretty sick of literary fiction that employs more than 2 points of view, to be honest.

You could do worse than this one, but you could definitely do better.
