

A Single Drop

Larry Cutts

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A Single Drop is a tongue-in-cheek thriller about an accountant-turned-hero whose errors are engaging.

In Larry Cutts's lighthearted thriller *A Single Drop*, a mild-mannered man faces a world of trouble, including mobsters, loan sharks, and a presidential assassination attempt.

Sterling is an accountant, and his story begins with the assassination attempt, as he and the president dodge bullets and return fire until they are rescued by the Secret Service. The text then jumps to two years later, with Sterling back at his firm in Boston, and his life back to being routine.

But then Sterling's wife asks for a divorce and is awarded a hefty settlement, and his father calls, telling him a bookie wants his money or else. Things get worse and Sterling hatches a plot to get the money to save his father, though the best way he can imagine fixing the problem is by robbing a shady jewelry store that his firm represents. This choice causes him more grief, with Sterling put up against the Russian mob and the FBI and facing a court case to decide his future.

Sterling's problems are resolved with a pleasant mixture of expected solutions and quirky ideas. Sterling uses his methodical mind to plan the perfect jewelry robbery, thinking about how to break in, leave no trace, and have a solid alibi. This all works perfectly—then cops show up at his door, claiming that he killed the jewelry store owner. He becomes trapped in his own clever thinking, resulting in a tragic comedy of errors, with each new resolution bringing a fresh problem, driving the narrative forward.

Enter Sarah, Sterling's public defender, whom he meets when he can't afford his own lawyer. The tough, beautiful attorney is taken with him. Their relationship follows a predictable path, though they end up on the run from gangsters, and is genuine and heartfelt. The remaining supporting cast of characters are more generic set pieces who function to drive the plot.

As fun as these developments are, typos and clichés weaken the work. An ongoing chess metaphor aims to help keep track of the importance of various plot points, but it instead breaks the flow of the action. Within chapters, the narrative transitions between characters' thoughts without enough notice, and clarity about what is happening is lost. The writing is at its best when it focuses on action.

Working toward a courtroom confrontation, the book leaves Sterling serving a brief sentence, in love with a beautiful woman, and working on repairing his relationship with his father. He's a character you want to pull for, even as he's making mistakes; his willingness to take wild risks and try new things, and his earnest hope that things can get better, make him a worthy hero.

A Single Drop is a tongue-in-cheek thriller about an accountant-turned-hero that adds up to be more than the sum of its parts.

JEREMIAH ROOD (July 24, 2019)

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