



Shopgirl: A Novella

By Steve Martin

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With more than 340,000 copies in print, Steve Martin's *Shopgirl* has landed on bestseller lists nationwide, including: *New York Times*, *Publishers Weekly*, *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*. Filled with the kind of witty, discerning observations that have brought Steve Martin incredible critical success, this story of modern day love and romance is a work of disarming tenderness.

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Shopgirl: A Novella By Steve Martin Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Steve Martin's first foray into fiction is as assured as it is surprising. Set in Los Angeles, its fascination with the surreal body fascism of the upper classes feels like the comedian's familiar territory, but the shopgirl of the book's title may surprise his fans. Mirabelle works in the glove department of Neiman's, "selling things that nobody buys any more." Spending her days waiting for customers to appear, Mirabelle "looks like a puppy standing on its hind legs, and the two brown dots of her eyes, set in the china plate of her face, make her seem very cute and noticeable." Lonely and vulnerable, she passes her evenings taking prescription drugs and drawing "dead things," while pursuing an on-off relationship with the hopeless Jeremy, who possesses "a slouch so extreme that he appears to have left his skeleton at home." Then Mr. Ray Porter steps into Mirabelle's life. He is much older, rich, successful, divorced, and selfish, desiring her "without obligation." Complicating the picture is Mirabelle's voracious rival, her fellow Neiman's employee Lisa, who uses sex "for attracting and discarding men."

The mutual incomprehension, psychological damage, and sheer vacuity practiced by all four of Martin's characters sees *Shopgirl* veer rather uncomfortably between a comedy of manners and a much darker work. There are some startling passages of description and interior monologue, but the characters are often rather hazy types. Martin tries too hard in his attempt to write a psychologically intense novel about West Coast anomie, but *Shopgirl* is still an enjoyable, if rather light, read. --*Jerry Brotton*

From Publishers Weekly

Movie star Martin shone in the comic essays of last year's *Pure Drive*. But can he write serious fiction? His debut novella gives fans a chance to find out. Shy, depressed, young, lonely and usually broke, Vermont-bred Mirabelle Butterfield sells gloves at the Beverly Hills Neiman Marcus (nobody ever buys); at night, she watches TV with her two cats. Martin's slight plot follows Mirabelle's search for love or at least romance and companionship with middle-aged Ray Porter, a womanizing Seattle millionaire who may, or may not, have hidden redeeming qualities. Also in and out of Mirabelle's life are a handful of supporting characters, all of them lonely and alienated, too. There's her father, a dysfunctional Vietnam vet; the laconic, unambitious Jeremy; and Mirabelle's promiscuous, body-obsessed co-worker Lisa. Detractors may call Martin's plot predictable, his characters stereotypes. Admirers may answer that as in Douglas Coupland these aren't stereotypes but modern archetypes, whose lives must be streamlined if they are to represent ours. Except for its love-hate relations with L.A., little about this book sounds much like Martin; its anxious, sometimes flat prose style can be affecting or disorienting, and belongs somewhere between Coupland and literary chroniclers of depression like Lydia Davis. Martin's first novel is finally neither a triumph nor a disaster: it's yet another of this intelligent performer's attempts to expand his range, and those who will buy it for the name on the cover could do a lot worse. (Oct.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Mirabelle, the image of fragile, feminine loveliness, is the shopgirl. She works in the glove department at Neiman's in L.A., where she's come to escape the provincialism of her Vermont hometown. And though she may remind people of Olive Oyl, once the resemblance is noted, many readers also will find a likeness to Chaplin's little tramp, the poor, lonely soul with a heart of gold. But Mirabelle is not just a shopgirl; she spends her nights toiling as an artist. Her specialty is creating a striking image surrounded by a black background. Mirabelle lives with two cats; one is always hiding. She has a few friends, who invariably forget to include her in their social activities, and she can barely claim the interest of Jeremy, an awkward,

inexperienced young man without means, whom she met in a laundromat. Then, abruptly and mysteriously, Mr. Ray Porter, a millionaire, comes into her life. They become lovers, and that initiates the ire of Mirabelle's antagonist, Lisa Cramer. Cramer's aim in life is to be flawlessly pleasing to men, to which end she has viewed a few "educational" porno tapes," discussed techniques extensively with other women, and "once attended a class given by Crystal Headly, a down and going sex-film actress." The action moves quickly, yet the narrative takes its time to develop, which is a very skillful bit of writing business. Martin's literary fable of a novella is disarming, particularly for those who come to it expecting the biting, zany humor of *Pure Drivel* (1998), but it may mark a new direction in a noteworthy writer's career. *Bonnie Smothers*

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Users Review

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