

*The Matzah Ball* is an entertaining debut novel by Jean Meltzer. Meltzer's characters and situations are delightfully familiar, yet the novel is not all light and fluffy. Rachel Rubenstein-Goldblatt is a nice Jewish single girl living in Manhattan. She has an extremely successful and very secretive career as a Christmas romance novelist. Rachel's job and love of Christmas are especially problematic because her father is an acclaimed Long Island Rabbi. She writes under a pseudonym to avoid upsetting her parents and her father's congregants! Rachel also hides her debilitating chronic illness from most people. She suffers from myalgic encephalomyelitis, aka chronic fatigue syndrome. There are often days she cannot get out of bed. Rachel has written twenty popular Christmas novels and so she is shocked when her publisher ends her Christmas series and demands she write a Hanukkah romance instead. Rachel finds the perfect place to research her story when she learns about an extravagant Hanukkah event being held in NYC- the Matzah Ball. Unfortunately, the gala is sold out, but Rachel knows someone who may have an extra ticket. Rachel's former summer camp boyfriend, Jacob Greenberg, is the successful CEO of the event company that is hosting the party. Fortunately, Rachel's matchmaking mother has invited Jacob for Shabbat and Rachel plans to use this unexpected reunion to plead for a ticket. Jacob met Rachel when he was twelve and has not seen her since. He moved to Paris after that summer and never returned to camp. Rachel knows nothing about Jacob's difficult childhood. Eighteen years have passed and Jacob longs to see Rachel again. He hopes that holding the Matzah Ball in New York and involving Rachel's parents in the event will lead to rekindling his romance with their daughter. Could they be each other's bashert? Meltzer does an inspired job of illustrating the realities of living with chronic fatigue syndrome and the dangers of keeping secrets from your loved ones. Reading *The Matzah Ball* is an illuminating experience.