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## Elinor Lipman

1950-

**Also known as:** Elinor Lipman, Elinor Ida Lipman

Entry updated: 09/14/2006

**Birth Place:** Lowell, Massachusetts, United States

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**Personal Information:** Born October 16, 1950, in Lowell, MA; daughter of Louis Saul (a paper jobber) and Julia (a program director; maiden name, Mazur) Lipman; married Robert M. Austin (a radiologist), July 29, 1975; children: Benjamin Austin. **Education:** Simmons College, A.B., 1972. **Religion:** Jewish. **Memberships:** International PEN, Authors Guild, Authors League of America. **Addresses:** Home: 67 Winterberry Ln., Northampton, MA 01062. Agent: Suzanne Gluck, William Morris Agency, 1325 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10019. **E-mail:** elinorlip@comcast.net.

**Career:** Massachusetts Labor Relations Commission, Boston, public information officer, 1974-75; Massachusetts Teachers Association, Boston, managing editor, 1975-81; Simmons College, Boston, special instructor in communications, 1984-85; Hampshire College, Amherst, MA, visiting assistant professor of creative writing, 1988-89; writer, 1989--. Smith College, instructor, 1997.

**Awards:** New England Book Award for fiction, 2001.

### WRITINGS:

#### NOVELS

- *Then She Found Me*, Pocket Books (New York, NY), 1990.
- *The Way Men Act*, Pocket Books (New York, NY), 1992.
- *Isabel's Bed*, Pocket Books (New York, NY), 1995.
- *The Inn at Lake Devine*, Random House (New York, NY), 1998.
- *The Ladies' Man*, Random House (New York, NY), 1999.
- *The Pursuit of Alice Thrift*, Random House (New York, NY), 2003.

- *My Latest Grievance*, Houghton Mifflin (Boston, MA), 2006.

## OTHER

- *Into Love and Out Again* (short stories), Viking (New York, NY), 1987.

Work represented in anthologies, including *New Fiction from New England*, Yankee Books, 1986. Columnist for *Boston Globe Magazine*. Contributor of short stories and reviews to magazines and newspapers, including *Cosmopolitan*, *Wigwag*, *New York Times*, *Ascent*, *Playgirl*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Self*, and *New England Living*.

**Media Adaptations:** Some of Lipman's books have been recorded as audiobooks, including *Isabel's Bed*.

## "Sidelights"

Elinor Lipman writes "comic novels" which, according to Diane White in the *Boston Globe*, display "a remarkable ear for the way certain women talk." White added: "Critics both male and female have praised [Lipman's] writing for its wit, insight, and economy of style. ... If people laugh at her work, it's because her voice is natural and spontaneous and her observations have the authenticity of everyday life." Comparing Lipman to Jane Austen in a review of *Isabel's Bed*, *Tribune Books* contributor Julia Glass observed: "Lipman is one of the last urbane romantics, her heroines the Emmas and Elizabeths of angst-ridden Baby Boom America. Brainy, introspective and vaguely virginal, they are blessed by accidents of fate that catapult them out of bland, bookish lives to land the man, the job, the self-esteem--and all without an ounce of guile."

Lipman's short-story compilation *Into Love and Out Again* presents a comedic look at men and women who are often frustrated by their careers, their appearances, and their love lives. Several of the relationships examined in the collection are either maintained or terminated as the result of compromise. The opening story features a female narrator who decides to remain betrothed to her fiancé rather than explore the possibility of romance with a Chinese student. Another spotlights an obsequious woman whose involvement with a member of the working class is terminated as the result of pressure from her snobbish family. At the heart of the book is a body of seven stories that tracks the relationship between a young man and an unwed, pregnant woman. Timothy and Hannah become involved in "what appears to be less a marriage than a compromise," according to Alida Becker in the *Washington Post Book World*. For Lipman's effort on the compilation, Sara Vogan in the *New York Times Book Review* described *Into Love and Out Again* as "a roller coaster of romantic encounters."

In her first novel *Then She Found Me*, Lipman reunites a mother and her daughter after more than thirty-five years of separation from each other. April Epner, a high school teacher who was adopted as an infant, is tracked down by her birth mother, a flamboyant talk-show host, shortly after the death of her adoptive parents. Although April initially loathes the television personality, she is intrigued when she is told that not only is Bernice Graverman her mother but that John F. Kennedy is her father. In order to discover whether she could have been the child of the president, April solicits the help of the high school librarian, a nerd who is often ridiculed by students. Her coworker reveals himself to be pleasantly affectionate, however, and the two develop romantic interest for one another. Her mother disapproves of the relationship between them because the librarian does not meet her standards, but Bernice and her daughter maintain their bond throughout the story. "That there is never a single epiphany in this process is a credit to Lipman's craft," noted *Chicago Tribune* contributor Nina Burleigh. "The mother and daughter don't end up best friends, and they don't end up estranged. Instead they end up tolerating each other's differences--the way real families do." Michele Slung in the *Washington Post* called *Then She Found Me* a "tender, funny and ultimately wise account of an intimate struggle between two women who aren't fated to remain strangers anymore."

Another novel of reunion is *My Latest Grievance*. The narrator Frederica Hatch is a high-school student living on the cozy college campus where her parents teach psychology. Her somewhat mundane life in academe, as neither faculty nor student, is brightened by the arrival of a new residence hall mother who is quite the opposite of a typical academic. Laura Lee French is flashy and audacious and apparently on a clear course to trouble; she is, also, to Frederica's great surprise, her own father's ex-wife and cousin. Mayhem ensues as French breaches the

peace of ivy-laced gentility and Frederica learns about the haphazard and sometimes hazardous world beyond the ivory tower. "As in previous novels," reported a *Publishers Weekly* contributor, "Lipman addresses sensitive issues ... with delicacy and acerbity" and allows her young protagonist to learn important life lessons.

The novel, *The Way Men Act*, features a multitude of characters who reside in the small town of Harrow, Massachusetts. Centering on the life of a single floral designer, the book charts the woman's difficulties in pursuing a meaningful relationship. Noting that the book "proceeds like a tilt-a-whirl ride at the county fair, full of spins and wrenches and abrupt switches of direction," *Boston Globe* correspondent Michael Dorris reported that in *The Way Men Act*, Lipman "emerges as a full-fledged talent, a witty, compassionate chronicler of modern sensibility, wise without beating the reader over the head with her insights."

Lipman's next novel, *Isabel's Bed*, "is a delightful, gentle, knowing satire of writers, the publishing and entertainment industries, the art world, and the vagaries of love," according to *Booklist* contributor George Needham. In the novel, "Lipman takes on the question of how women and men, in and out of love and jail, should treat each other," commented Paul Kafka in the *New York Times Book Review*. The story showcases Harriet Mahoney, a forty-one-year-old aspiring writer who, after being dumped by her boyfriend of fourteen years, moves to Cape Cod to ghostwrite the life of Isabel Krug, the former mistress of an executive recently murdered by his wife. "Lipman has a genius all her own for offbeat pairings of women who engender a deliciously, uniquely feminine chemistry," wrote Glass. "Here, one is a repressed but lovable egghead, the other a garishly sexy but lovable narcissist. How such women negotiate the emotional Grand Canyon between them and share their vastly differing visions of love is the true grit of the story; the real romance is theirs." Glass further commented that the "narrative seemed sluggish at times" but nevertheless concluded: "Lipman makes us laugh out loud, if not, this time, till we cry." Kafka called the work "serious entertainment ... alternately flirting with melodrama and pulling back from the form's seductive ease." In this "warm, affecting tale," observed Paula Chin in *People*, "the prose is spare and breezy, but there's wry wisdom beneath the chuckles."

*The Pursuit of Alice Thrift* takes place in and out of a Boston hospital. Alice, a hardworking surgical intern with little or no social grace, is swept off her feet by Ray, a tacky salesman with more social skills than scruples. Though she resists at first, lonely Alice eventually gives in to the man who will not give up. She marries Ray only to learn that the scoundrel already had another girlfriend all along. The marriage ends as abruptly as it began, and Alice is back to square one, but she carries with her a newfound wisdom and the potential for happiness. "That Lipman can make this story plausible, and tell it with humor, psychological insight and rising suspense, is a triumph," wrote a reviewer in *Publishers Weekly*. A *Kirkus Reviews* contributor called *The Pursuit of Alice Thrift* "a clever sweet tart, more tart than sweet."

When asked about the humor in her books and personal life in an interview following her fourth novel, *The Inn at Lake Devine*, Lipman responded to *Boston Globe* contributor John Koch: "I'm aiming for a certain wry tone, and sometimes I'm surprised that something I don't mean to be even wry strikes someone as funny. ... I don't expect people to laugh out loud. ... I think I'm considered witty by my friends." Lipman added: "In my family, it was important to be funny--I saved up anecdotes for the dinner table." In fact, *The Inn at Lake Devine* takes up the theme of Jewish humor in a Gentile environment, in this case a country inn in Vermont. *Library Journal* reviewer Molly Abramowitz found the novel "very funny ... entertaining and thought-provoking."

Lipman once told *CA*: "I began writing fiction in an adult education workshop at Brandeis University in 1979, with no previous experience. A little over two years later, my first story 'Catering' was accepted by *Yankee*. I have now converted, happily, to writing only novels."

## FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

### PERIODICALS

- *Antioch Review*, spring, 1987, review of *Into Love and Out Again*, p. 246.
- *Belles Lettres*, January, 1996, Joan Mooney, review of *Isabel's Bed*, p. 12.

- *Booklist*, April 15, 1990, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 1608; February 1, 1992, Denise Blank, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 1010; March 1, 1995, George Needham, review of *Isabel's Bed*, p. 1179; May 1, 1998, Margaret Flanagan, review of *The Inn at Lake Devine*, p. 1502.
- *Boston*, August, 1987, Gail Banks, review of *Into Love and Out Again*, p. 117; May, 1990, Katherine A. Powers, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 89.
- *Boston Globe*, March 1, 1992, Michael Dorris, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. B40; March 21, 1993, p. A16; March 5, 1995, p. 103; April 6, 1995, p. 61; December 31, 1995, p. 20; May 24, 1998, interview by John Koch, p. 10.
- *Christian Science Monitor*, July 9, 1998, Merle Rubin, review of *The Inn at Lake Devine*, p. B7.
- *Cosmopolitan*, March, 1992, Louise Bernikow, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 26; March, 1995, Chris Chase, review of *Isabel's Bed*, p. 28.
- *Detroit News*, October 23, 1991.
- *Entertainment Weekly*, March 20, 1992, L.S. Klepp, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 62; March 24, 1995, Kate Wilson, review of *Isabel's Bed*, p. 59; August 9, 1996, review of *Isabel's Bed*, p. 55; June 26, 1998, review of *The Inn at Lake Devine*, p. 119; July 24, 1998, p. 70.
- *Glamour*, May, 1990, Laura Mathews, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 210; March, 1992, Laura Mathews, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 176; March, 1995, Laura Mathews, review of *Isabel's Bed*, p. 172.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, January 1, 1987, review of *Into Love and Out Again*, p. 11; February 1, 1990, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 129; December 1, 1991, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 4190; December 1, 1994, review of *Isabel's Bed*, p. 1565; April 1, 1998, review of *The Inn at Lake Devine*, p. 426; April 15, 2003, review of *The Pursuit of Alice Thrift*, p. 560; February 1, 2006, review of *My Latest Grievance*, p. 104.
- *Kliatt*, May, 1993, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 8.
- *Library Journal*, February 15, 1987, Johanna Ezell, review of *Into Love and Out Again*, p. 112; March 15, 1990, Andrea Caron Kempf, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 113; December, 1991, Andrea Caron Kempf, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 197; October 15, 1992, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 128; February 1, 1995, Rebecca S. Kelm, review of *Isabel's Bed*, p. 100; February 1, 1998, Molly Abramowitz, review of *The Inn at Lake Devine*, p. 111; November 15, 1998, review of *The Inn at Lake Devine*, p. 124.
- *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1991, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 14; June 16, 1991, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 10; April 3, 1992, p. E5; May 2, 1995, p. E7.
- *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, April 28, 1991; June 16, 1991; March 28, 1993, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 9.
- *New Yorker*, July 16, 1990, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 86.
- *New York Times Book Review*, April 26, 1987, Sara Vogan, review of *Into Love and Out Again*, p. 24; November 27, 1988, review of *Into Love and Out Again*, p. 34; May 27, 1990, Randy Cohen, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 5; May 5, 1991, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 32; March 1, 1992, p. 14; April 12, 1992, Jill Eisenstadt, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 16; February 7, 1993, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 28; February 12, 1995, Paul Kafka, review of *Isabel's Bed*, p. 23; March 23, 1997; July 19, 1998, Lore Dickstein, review of *The Inn at Lake Devine*, p. 30.

- *People*, June 25, 1990, Leah Rozen, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 32; May 4, 1992, Leah Rozen, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 29; March 27, 1995, Paula Chin, review of *Isabel's Bed*, p. 36.
- *Publishers Weekly*, January 23, 1987, Sybil Steinberg, review of *Into Love and Out Again*, p. 63; September 9, 1988, review of *Into Love and Out Again*, p. 129; February 9, 1990, Sybil Steinberg, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 44; February 22, 1991, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 217; December 20, 1991, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 65; January 11, 1993, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 61; January 9, 1995, review of *Isabel's Bed*, p. 55; June 17, 1996, review of *Isabel's Bed*, p. 62; March 23, 1998, review of *The Inn at Lake Devine*, p. 75; March 10, 2003, review of *The Pursuit of Alice Thrift*, p. 50; January 9, 2006, review of *My Latest Grievance*, p. 29.
- *Quill and Quire*, July, 1990, review of *Then She Found Me*, p. 59.
- *Rapport: Modern Guide to Books, Music, and More* (annual), 1992, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 39.
- *Red Cedar Review*, March, 1995, interview by Tom Bissell, pp. 39-41.
- *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 8, 1990.
- *Times Literary Supplement*, February 12, 1993, Nicholas Clee, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 22.
- *Tribune Books* (Chicago, IL), May 15, 1990, Nina Burleigh, review of *Then She Found Me*; April 9, 1995, Julia Glass, review of *Isabel's Bed*, p. 3; September 8, 1996, p. 8.
- *Washington Post*, April 24, 1990, Michele Slung, review of *Then She Found Me*; March 6, 1992, p. B2; April 28, 1995, p. D2.
- *Washington Post Book World*, April 5, 1987, Alida Becker, review of *Into Love and Out Again*, p. 6; October 30, 1988, review of *Into Love and Out Again*, p. 16; March 1, 1992, review of *The Way Men Act*, p. 12.

## ONLINE

- *Elinor Lipman: A Suitable Web site*, <http://www.elinorlipman.com> (March 20, 2006).

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## The Inn at Lake Devine by Elinor Lipman

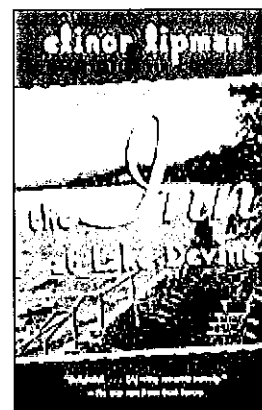
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### Excerpt

#### Further Reading

- Ellen Foster
- Hotel du Lac
- The Reader

#### Related Guides

- Ladies' Man

#### Random House

### About this title

The questions, discussion topics, and suggested reading list that follow are designed to enhance your reading of Elinor Lipman's **The Inn at Lake Devine**. We hope that they will suggest a variety of ways to talk about this delicious new romantic comedy by the author of **Isabel's Bed**.

In the spring of 1962, in response to her inquiry about summer vacation accommodations at a lakeside Vermont inn, Natalie Marx's mother receives a letter saying "our guests who feel most comfortable here, and return year after year, are Gentiles." Feisty thirteen-year-old Natalie, whose heroine is Anne Frank and who is named for an aunt who died in the Holocaust, sets her sights on infiltrating this exclusive WASP establishment and teaching its proprietor, the frosty Ingrid Berry, a lesson. At first Natalie limits herself to a hilarious series of covert actions, but when she meets blonde-haired Robin Fife at camp the following summer, she manages to get herself invited for the Fifes' annual visit to the Inn at Lake Devine. After a week among the *goyim*--nettling Mrs. Berry and flirting with her handsome elder son Nelson--Natalie returns to her own family and thinks no more of Lake Devine.

Ten years later, Natalie is a struggling chef trying to break into the world of French cuisine when she meets Robin again, who invites her to attend her marriage to Nelson Berry. So Natalie makes a fateful return to wintry Vermont where, in the aftermath of an unexpected tragedy, she finds herself drawn to Kris Berry, who has emerged from his brother's shadow to become a

charming, witty, and undeniably attractive young man. Their nascent romance is cut short by Natalie's meddling parents, whose interference only weakens their influence on their daughter. Expertly combining tragedy and romance in a provocative comedy full of sparkling social mischief, Elinor Lipman has created a truly memorable novel in the vein of Jane Austen.

#### Discussion Questions for *Inn at Lake Devine*

1. What fascinates Natalie most about the offensive note from Mrs. Berry is its "marriage of good manners and anti-Semitism" [p. 4]. Does Natalie show, later in the novel, what truly having "good manners" might mean?
2. What does Natalie mean when she mentions the "Gentile ambitions" [p. 65] that led her into a friendship with Robin Fife?
3. Although Eddie and Audrey Marx are both Jewish, they were originally drawn together because of their differences. For the spritelike Audrey, "there was something . . . about Eddie's jumbo presence, something like a bodyguard's or a football player's, that was normally off limits to a Jewish girl" [p. 19]. They were forced to marry when Audrey became pregnant at nineteen. Given the circumstances of their own history together, are Natalie's parents hypocritical in trying to stop Natalie from seeing Kris Berry?
4. Natalie says that her sister, Pamela, in marrying a Catholic (in a Catholic mass, no less), "used up our family's mixed-marriage chit, even our liberal-dating chit. It was up to me to bring home the perfect Jewish son-in-law" [p. 144]. Are Jewish parents more insistent than others about keeping their children from marrying outside their faith? If so, why?
5. **The Inn at Lake Devine** might be called a "revenge comedy." At the end the Berrys lose the Inn, and both of their sons take up with Jewish women. Is this a fitting comic closure for Ingrid Berry? What about the feckless but kind Mr. Berry, who loses his business because of carelessness in mushroom hunting? Should he have been more active in preventing his wife's exclusion of Jews from the hotel?
6. What are the social and class markers that Lipman uses to create a sense of realism at the Halseeyon and at the Inn at Lake Devine? How well do Kris and Nelson Berry respond to their weekend immersion in Jewish culture when they visit the Halseeyon with Natalie?
7. What role does food play in this novel? How do the

significance and style of dining differ among social groups at Lake Devine and at the Halseeyon? Does food have more meaning for the Jews in the Catskills than it does for the WASPs in New England? What does the desire to be a chef reveal about Natalie's character?

8. At camp, Natalie first befriends Robin Fife in the hope of being invited by her family to the Inn at Lake Devine, but she is bored by the dull-witted Robin who, she notes, "couldn't take, make, or get a joke of any kind" [p. 41]. Her relationship with Robin at fourteen could be seen as mere opportunism; how does this change when they meet again ten years later?
9. Why do you suppose Elinor Lipman has chosen to leave out any details of Natalie's college years, including her experience of dating and sex?
10. The novel of the Jewish person coming of age in modern America--the most famous examples are Philip Roth's **Portnoy's Complaint** and Mordecai Richler's **The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz**--is usually told from a young man's perspective. How does the shift to a female narrator in **The Inn at Lake Devine** challenge and transform this tradition?
11. Do some of the characters come across as more true to life than others? Which of the three families--Marx, Fife, or Berry--seems most realistically depicted? Does the role of surprise in the novel feel realistic? Does the unexpected always work? Does it add or detract from your enjoyment of the story?
12. This novel is based upon the reality of intermarriage and assimilation in American life, issues that are especially painful among the more observant Jewish communities. Lipman expertly draws the difference between the habits of Natalie's Reform family and those of her Orthodox friend Linette Feldman. Is it easier to feel good about the pairing of Natalie and Kris than that of Linette and Nelson? Do you feel that love rightly triumphs over religion in this novel?
13. One reviewer of this novel wrote, "Prejudice, in all its many disguises, is an unusually worthy but often ponderous subject; its very weightiness . . . often threatens to sink otherwise well-written and well-meaning tales."<sup>1</sup> What aspects of Lipman's style allow her to avoid this pitfall?
14. What do you find most satisfying about the way that Lipman brings her plot to closure?
15. In a recent interview Elinor Lipman said, "I like novels that are funny, quirky, intelligent, and humane."<sup>2</sup> How well, for you, does **The Inn at Lake Devine** fit this description?



## Inn at Lake Devine

"A punchy little comedy of manners. . . . Think Jane Austen in the Catskills."

--*Chicago Tribune*

"A tale of delicious revenge."

--*Los Angeles Times*

"A funny, knowing novel about how love really does conquer all. . . . Thanks to Lipman's deft touch, the novel . . . rivals her own best work for its understanding of the way smart, opinionated people stumble toward happiness."

--*Entertainment Weekly*

"Delightful. . . . [A] witty romantic comedy."

--*The New York Times Book Review*

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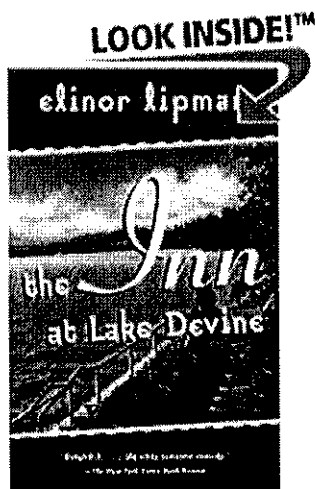
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## Editorial Reviews

### Amazon.com

In the early 1960s, a Massachusetts family suffers a polite awakening. Inquiring about summer openings at a Vermont inn, the Marxes receive a killing civil response, which ends, "Our guests who feel most comfortable here, and return year after year, are Gentiles." Apparently the Marxes are not quite as ideally average as they thought, at least on the basis of their surname. So begins *The Inn at Lake Devine*, Elinor Lipman's disarming and very funny exploration of the power of pride and place. Natalie, the youngest Marx daughter, will literally spend years responding to this rebuff. At first she taunts the innkeeper, Ingrid Berry, by phone and mail, stressing by exaggeration that a system which welcomes WASP wife-murderers but not famed convert Elizabeth Taylor is both unfair and inane. In 1964, our Anne Frank adept even goes so far as to send off a copy of the newly minted Civil Rights Act: "Who knew if I'd ever exchange another letter with a documented anti-Semite?" she asks. "Just in case no one ever insulted me again--in this land of religious freedom and ironclad civil rights--I employed the big gun I was saving for future transgressors: 'P.S.,' I typed and underlined: 'In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart.'"

The next summer Natalie manages to engineer an invite to Lake Devine, coming in on the coattails of Robin Fife, a good-natured, none-too-swift fellow camper whose family are regulars: "We all wanted to cross the threshold as guests and not visitors, and maybe I, in my early-teen disguise, was best suited to be a spy in the house of Devine. It was our duty to show that we--with the blood of Moses, Queen Esther, Leonard Bernstein, and Sid Caesar coursing through our veins--were the equal of any clientele." But by the end of her stay, Natalie is fed up with the Fifes' relentless good will and Mrs. Berry's covert ill will. All in all, she is relieved to return to firm social ground, and doesn't devote much thought to her "Gentile ambitions" for the next 10 years. A letter about a Camp Minnehaha reunion, however, brings Robin back

into the picture, and Natalie is again invited to Lake Devine--this time for her campmate's marriage to the eldest Berry son.

But enough plot summary. *The Inn at Lake Devine* is full of sweet and sharp surprises that would be churlish to reveal. Lipman offers up sparkling scenes of serious social mischief, explorations of identity, delicious food (though a deadly mushroom lasagna momentarily clouds the picture), and a wedding party or two. All this and a pair of the menschiest WASP brothers in literary history--not to mention phrases such as *shnook*, *shmendrick*, and *shmegege*--make *The Inn at Lake Devine* the perfect, provocative comedy. --*This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.*

#### **From Library Journal**

A story of Jews and Gentiles, this very funny novel begins with a segregated inn in Vermont and ends with all the characters getting their comeuppance. In its skewering of assimilation and cultural diversity, it is reminiscent of Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* (LJ 3/15/96), only here Lipman uses Christians, not Chinese, to tweak social consciousness. Natalie Marx is shocked when, in response to an inquiry, her mother receives a note from the proprietor of the Inn at Lake Devine baldly stating that the guests who feel most comfortable there are Gentiles. Natalie inveigles an invitation from a friend to go to the inn and thereby sets off a lifelong fascination with breaking the rules. Both entertaining and thought-provoking, this delightful new work is highly recommended for all fiction collections. Molly Abramowitz, Silver Spring, Md.

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#### **The New York Times Book Review, Lore Dickstein**

Her touch is light and breezy, more benign stand-up comedy than meanspirited satire. --*This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.*

#### **Entertainment Weekly**

Along with a tenacious exploration of anti-Semitism, the spirit of Jan Austen undergirds this witty novel about love and intermarriage. --*This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.*

#### **From Booklist**

In 1962 the Marx family of liberal Newton, Massachusetts, is politely discouraged from vacationing at a placid Vermont resort by a thinly veiled response to the innocent inquiry about accommodations, stating that the "guests who feel most comfortable here, and return year after year, are Gentiles." Experiencing her first taste of overt anti-Semitism, 13-year-old Natalie Marx becomes instantly obsessed with the Inn at Lake Devine and the seemingly bigoted family that owns and operates it. Wangling an invitation from friends to stay with them at the inn one summer, Natalie embarks on a humorously enlightening 10-year odyssey, entangling the course of her professional and romantic destiny with the lives of Ingrid Berry, the rigidly implacable proprietor of the inn, and her two naive and attractive sons, Nelson and Kris Berry. Skillfully interweaving the bittersweet narrative with threads of both tragedy and comedy, Lipman displays a healthy amount of empathy and affection for her flawed and slightly eccentric cast of characters. *Margaret Flanagan* --*This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.*

#### **From Kirkus Reviews**

Lipman (*Isabels Bed*, 1995, etc.) again celebrates romance grounded in the real world as she wittily details love's rout of prejudice by two young couples. Natalie Marx is the Jewish narrator of this good-humored tale of lovers of different faiths, who find happiness and even manage to be accepted by their initially not-so-happy parents. Natalie's family, who live in Massachusetts, summered each year in the 1960s either at the beach or on the lakes; one summer, in response to an inquiry her mother addressed to the Inn at Lake Devine in Vermont, a letter came from the proprietor, Ingrid Berry, saying that their guests were all Gentiles. Young Natalie was both angry and intrigued. She finessed a summer in her teens at the Inn by befriending WASP Robin Fife, whom she met at a summer camp, and then found both the Fife family and the Inn bland and boring. Now in 1970s Boston, Natalie, training to be a chef after college, runs into Robin, who asks her to come to her wedding at the Inn: She's marrying Nelson Berry, Ingrid's eldest son. Natalie goes, and cooks up a storm as the families grieve after Robin is killed on her way to Vermont, then falls for Kris, the younger Berry son. Neither the Marxes nor the Berrys are pleased. But their biases are nicely balanced when Linette Feldman, whose family owns a kosher hotel in the Catskills, falls for Nelson Berry, and her parents have also to be brought round. Love wins out, of

course, thanks to perseverance and good sense. An upbeat and amusing romp through what is usually a minefield, by a writer who deftly makes her points but never preaches. (Author tour) -- *Copyright ©1998, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.*

### **The Philadelphia Inquirer, Karen Heller**

...[A] charming, wholly addictive [novel] ... easily devoured in a single sitting. --*This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.*

### **Review**

"A punchy little comedy of manners. . . . Think Jane Austen in the Catskills." --Chicago Tribune

"A tale of delicious revenge." --USA Today

"A funny, knowing novel about how love really does conquer all. . . . Thanks to Lipman's deft touch, the novel . . . rivals her own best work for its understanding of the way smart, opinionated people stumble toward happiness." --Glamour

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In this beguiling novel, Elinor Lipman charts her heroine's fixation with a small bastion of genteel anti-Semitism, a fixation that will have wildly unexpected consequences on her romantic life. As Natalie tries to enter the world that has excluded her--and succeeds through the sheerest of accidents--The Inn at Lake Devine becomes a delightful and provocative romantic comedy full of sparkling social mischief.

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### About the Author

Elinor Lipman is the author of seven books: the novels **The Pursuit of Alice Thrift**, **The Dearly Departed**, **The Ladies' Man**, **The Inn at Lake Devine**, **Isabel's Bed**, **The Way Men Act**, **Then She Found Me**, and a collection of stories, **Into Love and Out Again**. She has been called "the diva of dialogue" (*People*) and "the last urbane romantic" (*Chicago Tribune*). *Book Magazine* said of **The Pursuit of Alice Thrift**, "Like Jane Austen, the past master of the genre, Lipman isn't only out for laughs. She serves up social satire, too, that's all the more trenchant for being deftly drawn."

Her essays have appeared in the *Boston Globe Magazine*, *Gourmet*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *The New York Times'* Writers on Writing series. She received the New England Booksellers' 2001 fiction award for a body of work.

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It was not complicated, and, as my mother pointed out, not even personal: They had a hotel; they didn't want Jews; we were Jews.

We were nothing to them, a name on an envelope, when it began in 1962 as a response to a blind inquiry my mother had sent out in multiples. We'd been to Cape Cod and Cape Ann, to Old Orchard, Salisbury, and Hampton beaches, to Winnepesaukee and the Finger Lakes. That year she wrote to Vermont, which someone had told her was heaven. She found a lake on the map that was neither too big nor too small, and not too far north. The Vermont Chamber of Commerce listed some twenty accommodations on Lake Devine. She sent the same letter to a dozen cottage colonies and inns inquiring about rates and availability. The others answered with printed rate cards and cordial notes. But one reply was different, typed on textured white stationery below a green pointillist etching of a lakeside hotel. Croquet on the lawn, the Vermont vacation guide had said; rowboats, sundown concerts on Saturday nights; a lifeguard, a dock, a raft, a slide. The Inn's letter said, "Dear Mrs. Marx: Thank you for your inquiry. Our two-bedroom cabins rent at the weekly rate of sixty-five (U.S.) dollars. We do have a few openings during the period you requested. The Inn at Lake Devine is a family-owned resort, which has been in continuous operation since 1922. Our guests who feel most comfortable here, and return year after year, are Gentiles. Very truly yours, (Mrs.) Ingrid Berry, Reservations Manager."

I hadn't known up to that moment that I had a surname that was recognizably Jewish, or that people named Marx would be unwelcome somewhere in the United States because of it. I asked if these were Nazis. My mother sighed. I had been wed to the subject since reading, without her permission, *The Diary of a Young Girl*--specifically obsessed by where we, who had no attic, could hide that would be soundproof, and who among our Gentile acquaintances would bring us food under penalty of death.

My mother explained: There were people, unfortunately--for reasons it was hard to explain or understand--who weren't Nazis but didn't like Jews. Not that she wanted me to worry, because this was America, not Germany, not Amsterdam. We were safe here, remember? The letter was ignorant, and very bad manners. Someone should give this Mrs. Berry a piece of their mind.

I said, "Can we go?"

"You don't go where you're not wanted," my mother said. "Anyone who could write such a letter doesn't deserve our business." She took it back and stuffed it in its envelope with no particular archival care. Two days later, I removed it from the dining-room sideboard to a safer place--my sweater drawer. It fascinated me, the letter's marriage of good manners and anti-Semitism. Why bother to answer Jews at all if you don't want them at your hotel?

I tried to picture this Ingrid Berry who had signed neatly in blue ballpoint--the nerve of her insincere "Very truly yours." Was she old? Young? Married? Was Ingrid a German name? Did she get pleasure from

insulting the people she banned from her hotel? And why didn't my parents respond to this slap in the face? "If you paid us a million dollars, we wouldn't come to your stupid hotel," I thought we should say. "If you had a baseball team, would you tell Sandy Koufax he couldn't pitch for you? Would you let Danny Kaye rent a room? Tony Curtis? Albert Einstein? Milton Berle? Jesus Christ?"

My mother didn't show the letter to my father, because she knew that he, like me, would want to jump in the truck and fix the problem. And so I produced it for him with the same flourish my mother had staged for me. "Good God!" he said, struggling with one hand to put on his reading glasses. I asked him if people who didn't rent rooms to Jews knew about the concentration camps.

"Everybody knows by now, honey."

I asked if he thought they had seen *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

"Probably not," he said. Then, "You know what I think we should do? Let's write back and tell her we want one of her stupid cabins."

I said, "I don't think they have cabins. It looks like a hotel."

He embroidered a little drama--not too seriously, but enough to get my mother's goat: We'd go as the Gentiles! Ed and Audrey Gentile. He'd known a man named Gentile in the navy from somewhere like Delaware or Pennsylvania. It was a real name. People truly had that for a name.

My mother said, "You'll have to drag me there."

"You don't want to see what a place like this is like?"

"And lie for the whole time we're there?"

"About what?"

"Church," said my mother. "You can bet the whole place empties out to go to church on Sundays."

"The Gentile family doesn't go to church when they're on vacation," my father said. "We go regularly on the other fifty weeks, but we pray in the cabin when we're on vacation."

"People will know," she said.

He thought they wouldn't. He was tall, taller than most Christians I knew, while my mother was a redhead no bigger than Gidget. And his two daughters looked like any two little American girls. "Except," my father said, smiling broadly, "nicer and smarter."

"And how would you make your point? Announce as you leave that we were the Eddie Marx family? Jews?"

"We wouldn't even have to tell them," said my father. "We could come and go and just know we fooled them."

Of course we didn't go. My mother found a place to rent on the opposite shore of Lake Devine--not a resort, but a heated cottage on a dirt road of private camps, listed with the Chamber of Commerce. We went there for two summers and found it, if not heaven, then very nice. The air smelled like bayberry. Indian paintbrush, a wildflower we didn't have at home, dotted every field. We swam and fished from a rowboat without an anchor, caught only ugly black-horned pouts we couldn't eat, and took a day trip to Fort Ticonderoga. The best miniature-golf course I'd ever played was a five-minute car ride away. The local dairy, which offered not only milk but cheddar cheese, made home deliveries even to the summer population.

My older sister and I often rowed past the Inn at Lake Devine, and studied it as best we could from offshore. It had a very green lawn, broad and sloping to the water, a white flagpole, and a chalky string

of buoys marking off its swimming area. Closer to us, a raft covered with teenagers floated on shiny black oil drums. My sister and I had only each other for company, and a dock with no wading area, but here there were kids our age from what had to be a dozen families, swimming and diving as well as if they were on teams.

The following winter, having studied it and envied its postcard perfection, I put a long-thought-out plan into effect as a thirteenth-birthday present to myself. With a deerskin purse full of coins, I went to a pay phone. I called the Inn at Lake Devine and asked for Mrs. Berry. Amazingly, the party said, "This is she."

I read from my notes: "I was wondering if you had a cottage available for the entire month of July?"

"With whom am I speaking?" she asked.

"Miss Edgerly," I said, having elected the name of a Massachusetts man recently tried for murdering his wife in a particularly hideous fashion.

Mrs. Berry asked the caller's age, and I said fifteen; yes, I knew I was young to be making inquiries about accommodations, but my mother was recently deceased and my father was spending long hours in court.

She said, "We do have two lovely cottages with sleeping porches."

"Are they really, really nice?" I asked.

"They're in great demand," she said. "Electric stove, baseboard heat, stall shower, picnic table--"

"Is it private? Because my father's kind of famous. He really needs an escape."

"We're quiet and peaceful here," said the Berry woman. "It's a perfect hideaway vacation."

"Can you save it for us?"

"Do you want to inquire about our rates first?"

I told her that my father, Mr. Edgerly, had instructed me to get the best accommodations available no matter what the cost.

"We require a deposit," said Mrs. Berry. "Do you have a pencil?"

I took my time, pretending to record every syllable. "My father will send you a cashier's check first thing tomorrow," I said, adopting the disbursement method repeated daily on *The Millionaire*.

"You are a very smart young lady," said Mrs. Berry.

The next morning on my way to school, I anonymously mailed Mrs. Berry an old *Globe* clipping, its three-column headline blaring, Edgerly trial enters 6th week; jury sees "gruesome" photos, to make the point vividly to Mrs. Berry that her system "rooms open to any Gentile who dials her number" was unfair. I enclosed another clipping from my archives (Liz and Eddie/say I do's/before Rabbi) "this one from *Photoplay*" which spoke respectfully, even warmly, about Liz Taylor's conversion. The wedding shot showed them under a chupa, the new Mrs. Fisher in a flowered headband and Eddie in a somber dark suit and white satin yarmulke. Honored guests included their best friends, famous and beautiful Hollywood Jews.

In 1964, I would send Mrs. Berry a copy of the new Civil Rights Act. I wrote, "U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.," in the upper-left-hand corner of the envelope, and typed a letter that said, "Dear Hotel Owners, It isn't only Colored people who are helped by this law. Jewish people and others you have excluded in the recent past must now be welcome at your accommodations. It is the Law of the Land."

Who knew if I'd ever exchange another letter with a docum...

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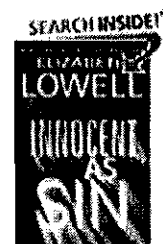
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