



One 'Last Summer' in the Catskills?

Growing up in the mountains' golden era

FICTION

Last Summer at the Golden Hotel

By Elyssa Friedland (Berkley)



Filled with mishaps and mysteries, *Last Summer at the Golden Hotel* is a Catskills caper wrapped in many expressions of love—romantic, marital,

filial and platonic. While the title hints at the arc of the story, the

surprises keep coming at a steady beat.

The Golden Hotel was founded in 1960 by a pair of best friends, Benny Goldman and Amos Weingold, who grew up together on New York City's Lower East Side. Their children also grow up together, spending summers on the hotel grounds as Catskills royalty. When the novel opens in the summer of 2019, three generations of the families are gathering for an emergency meeting at their vacation palace to make tough decisions about the future.

Memories of the golden era of the Catskills are as clear as the mountain air: The Golden, as it is affectionately

known, was a Jewish paradise, with top musical and comedy stars playing the social hall, lively bridge games around the pool and all-you-can eat meals served by wise-cracking waiters. The 1960s and 70s were a time of great optimism for the families running the Golden and for their guests, who repeatedly booked their stays seasons in advance.

Now, the lobby is growing threadbare, the aging waiters are tottering under the weight of trays piled high with borscht, pickled herring and desserts, and most of the regular guests have either died or vacationed elsewhere. Still, the bartender who has been working for decades knows everyone's drink and keeps the vacation-goers' secrets.

"So what if the Sullivan County health department gave our kitchen a C last year?" one family member asks herself. "We were once in the Guinness Book of World Records for smoking the largest sturgeon in history!" Amid this decline, younger family members brainstorm serving vegan cuisine and using bee pollen soap to add a cool, hipster vibe.

The story unfolds through multiple points of view, a device that allows the reader to peek into the emotional lives and perspectives of each generation.

The Catskills era has become something of a beloved modern literary genre, with an abundance of novels (*Hotel Neversink* and *Paradise, New York*) and memoirs (*Growing Up at Grossinger's*). Television and films continue to lean into the era's appeal (see season two of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* and the modern classic *Dirty Dancing*, with a sequel reportedly starring Jennifer Grey in the works).

Author Feldman's previous novel, *The Floating Feldmans*, is centered

around another multigenerational Jewish story—an extended family trip on a cruise ship. *Last Summer at the Golden Hotel* is yet another proof of her ability to mine any theme and genre and write with humor and heart about families coming together for hard-won reconciliation and celebration.

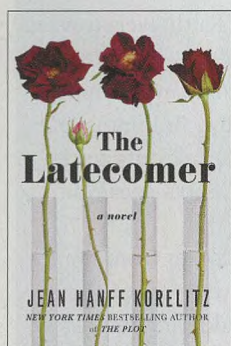
—Sandee Brawarsky

Sandee Brawarsky is an award-winning journalist, editor and author of several books, most recently *212 Views of Central Park: Experiencing New York City's Jewel From Every Angle*.

The Latecomer

By Jean Hanff Korelitz (Celadon Books)

How can one write a book about secrets without giving any of them away? That is the conundrum presented by best-selling author Jean Hanff Korelitz's complex new novel, *The Latecomer*, which opens with a tragic car accident. Salo Oppenheimer, a wealthy Jewish college student in New York, is the driver in a crash that kills two fellow Cornell students and leaves one seriously injured. He meets his future wife, Johanna Hirsch, at one of the funerals for the victims, and she makes it



her mission to heal his psychological wounds. The crash forever changes Salo, yet neither he nor Johanna share the story—the source of his emotional distance—with their four children.

The three oldest children—triplets Harrison, Lewyn and Sally, born through in vitro fertilization—are meant to be Johanna's gift to Salo, to heal him. They are reared with every advantage that wealth and Johanna's devotion can offer, but Salo remains an absentee father and husband. He saves his passion and interest for his contemporary art collection, stored in a warehouse for his viewing alone.

Tolstoy famously noted that every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way, and this is one very unhappy family, with the children and Johanna struggling to understand why. At some point, each of the triplets wonders at their disconnect from each other, why they seem to be “in full flight from one another as far back as their ancestral petri dish,”

as Korelitz writes. Or perhaps their unhappiness is caused by progressive excesses in the American private education system. All of them despise their elite Brooklyn school, despite its policy of no tests, no grades and praise for every student.

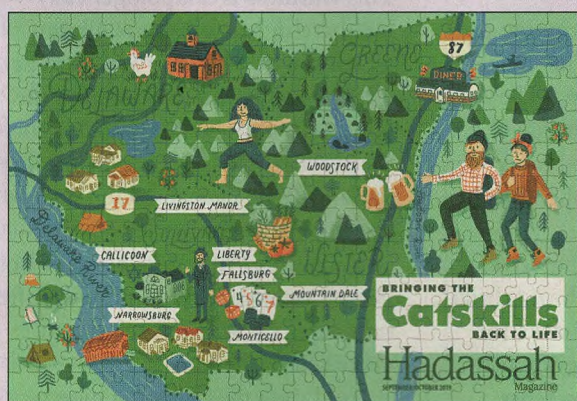
The book is divided into three sections: The first focuses on Salo and Johanna; the second on the triplets; and the final section on Phoebe, the titular latecomer and fourth child, born just before the triplets leave for college. She is born via surrogate from a frozen fourth embryo that had remained after the IVF treatments that produced the triplets, but that fact is kept secret from Phoebe. This daughter might be Johanna's final attempt at a “gift” for Salo, to bring him back to the family, or a way to punish him when she uncovers one of the secrets behind his many absences from the family.

Korelitz's last novel, the best seller *The Plot*, revolved around one big secret. *The Latecomer*, however,

ONE BOOK, ONE HADASSAH



Join us on Monday, August 15, at 7 p.m. ET, as *Hadassah Magazine* Executive Editor Lisa Hostein interviews author Elyssa Friedland about *Last Summer at the Golden Hotel*. Secrets, scandals and rivalries are revealed as two families—long-time co-owners of a storied Catskills vacation spot—gather for an extended summertime reunion in order to decide the fate of their beloved but declining resort. Filled with heart, humor, romance and plenty of Borscht Belt schmaltz, the charming multigenerational caper asks how we can value legacies and preserve traditions in the face of change. This event is free and open to all. To register go to hadassahmagazine/books.



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