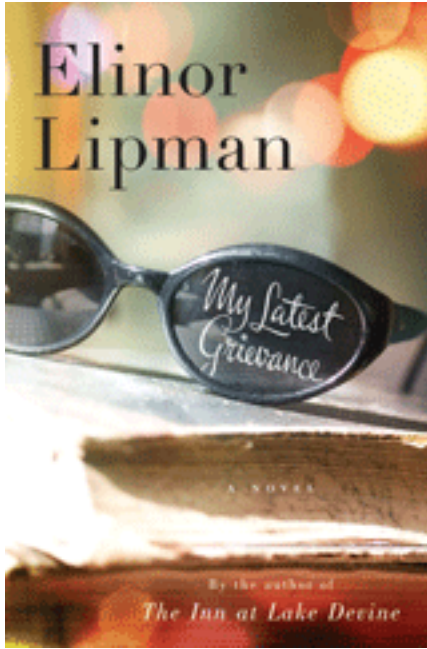


## Press Release



# My Latest Grievance

by Elinor Lipman

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"Lipman creates that rare blend of no-nonsense compassion and believable, offbeat innocence that is completely irresistible. Expect high demand for this novel and renewed interest in Lipman's previous seven. Highly recommended." — *Library Journal*, starred review

"Frederica Hatch . . . proves the perfect vehicle for this satiric yet compassionate family portrait . . . Lipman addresses sensitive issues . . . with delicacy and acerbity . . . (and) nails the shifts and moods of an angry teenager, a grandmother in denial, a philanderer in hiding, and a campus in shock. By the end, a smart young girl learns compassion for a world that can be grotesquely, hilariously, disturbingly unfair." — *Publishers Weekly*

## About the Book

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Houghton Mifflin is so pleased to welcome Elinor Lipman to its list with her new novel, *My Latest Grievance*. "Almost nobody writes serious entertainment with more panache" than Elinor Lipman, wrote the *Chicago Tribune*. From her debut novel, *Then She Found Me*, which, in the words of the *Washington Post*, revived the art of "screwball comedy for the newly dawned nineties," to her most recent, best-selling *The Pursuit of Alice Thrift*, which the *Philadelphia Weekly* hailed as "the most perfect piece of prose writing to come along in quite a while," Elinor Lipman has set the gold standard by which other comic novelists are judged.

Her pitch-perfect new novel introduces us to Frederica Hatch. Sixteen years old and accustomed to being the center of attention, Frederica has been raised in a dorm on the campus of Dewing, a women's college just outside of Boston. It's 1978, and her parents are intensely PC (before the term was coined) — two bleeding hearts that beat as one. Aviva Ginsburg Hatch is a union grievance chairperson and perennial professor of the year, and, to Frederica's frustration, she's the only mother around who doesn't own a

jewelry box and makeup. Frederica's father, David Hatch, shares his wife's political passions and agrees with her about almost everything. Chafing under the care of the "most annoyingly evenhanded parental team in the history of civilization," Frederica is starting to feel that her life is stiflingly snug.

But then Frederica's path crosses with that of the glamorous new dorm mother at Dewing, Laura Lee French, the antithesis of the Hatches. And with Laura Lee comes the best gossip in the history of the college — she is David Hatch's ex-wife. When Frederica learns the surprising news, she can't stop imagining the maternal road not taken, wondering if she was born into the wrong side of the divorce. Fearing scandal, the three Hatches and Laura Lee are forced to keep their history a secret, and havoc and hilarity ensue. The *New York Times Book Review* has compared Elinor Lipman to "an inspired alchemist," and the magic continues with *My Latest Grievance*.

## About the Author

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**Elinor Lipman** is the author of seven previous novels, including *The Pursuit of Alice Thrift*, *The Inn at Lake Devine*, *The Ladies' Man*, *Isabel's Bed*, and *Then She Found Me*. Four of her novels have been optioned for film and are in various stages of development. She divides her time between Northampton, Massachusetts, and New York City. In 2001, she won the New England Booksellers Award for fiction. She has taught at Simmons, Hampshire, and Smith colleges, which bear no resemblance to Dewing.

## A Conversation with Eleanor Lipman

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**Your narrator, Frederica Hatch, was born and raised on a college campus. Were you?**

[Laughs] Wouldn't that be a nice little autobiographical selling point? Unfortunately, no. I made her up. I did, however, graduate from an all-women's college, and I was a campus guide. My sophomore year, the system changed from housemothers to married couples. Suddenly there were highchairs in the dining hall. We students were pretty fascinated. I guess I still am — what is it like to live above the store and in a fishbowl?

**Yet Frederica's parents wear two additional hats: college professors and cochairs of the faculty union.**

The truth is, dorm parenting was the last hat I added. In the first partial draft, her parents were merely professors and agitators. I brought on Laura Lee French, new housemother, who I knew would wreak a little havoc on campus, but that presented a major point-of-view problem: How would my narrator report on what was happening at the college if she lived a mile away? Somewhere around page 40, I found the answer: the Hatch family had to relocate. When I saw Frederica as the Eloise of the campus, albeit a sixteen- and seventeen-year-old Eloise, then I knew I'd found my story.

**Yet she's narrating the story from adulthood . . .**

Because I wanted her to have the sensibility, the vocabulary, the insight, of an adult narrator. I wanted her worldview to read as smart, not precocious.

## **Why did you decide to make Dewing College a mediocre school?**

For fun. I wanted Frederica to feel superior to the hundreds of girls who surrounded her, and once I got a taste for her high self-esteem, deserved or not, I was having a lot of fun with it. As a result, Dewing had to suffer in its *U.S. News and World Report* college ranking.

## **Is Dewing based on a real college?**

Am I crazy? No. But I'll probably hear from a lackluster institution that has a "Longfellow Lane" running across its campus.

## **Laura Lee French, the new housemother who wreaks havoc on campus, comes to Dewing with a secret history.**

Not so secret that I don't announce it in the first chapter: She was once married to Frederica's father.

## **A fact her parents choose not to reveal to Frederica.**

Oh, that. Might I say on their behalf that their premarital secret was the what-if from which the whole novel sprung? I was reading Richard Russo's *The Risk Pool*, which is about a boy whose parents are divorced, and I wondered, "What if a child found out rather late, say at sixteen, that her father had been married before?"

## **Is that typical of where a book begins for you? A what-if?**

Some begin with that, a question that intrigues me. Others with a first line or a premise. But then its characters lead the way, and usually hijack the story.

## **So you don't follow an outline?**

Can't do it. It takes me months to come up with an idea for a new book, so when the opening sentence or the premise finally suggests itself, I just want to sit down and get going. I'm constantly puzzling over what comes next, what will my character do today and tomorrow, which leads to some trial and error, but also brings in an element of surprise — organic surprises, we hope; nothing that strains one's credulity. With Frederica and company, big things, huge things, unfolded with a coincidence of timing — the Blizzard of '78 in Boston — and from then on I felt as if I were, to borrow a phrase from Mr. Faulkner, chasing after the characters with a pencil.

## **Not to be too coy, but where were you in the winter of '78?**

Boston! Snowed in for four days, running out of food. On the fifth day, my husband set out for work on foot, four or five miles, promising to call when he arrived. The snowbanks were up to the roofs, no sidewalks. Hours went by. Because he's exceedingly punctual and compulsive, when I didn't hear from him, I was sure he was lying by the side of the road. It turned out that the National Guard was picking up medical personnel (he was a resident, heading for the Veterans Administration Hospital in Jamaica Plain), taking them to the armory, then to their respective hospitals in alphabetical order, i.e. "V.A." was last. When he finally got on a truck, it broke down. By the time he called, about five hours after he left, I was, figuratively speaking, dressed in black.

## **The "grievance" of the title refers to what?**

Well, a generation earlier, Frederica would have been called "a red-diaper baby." Her parents are deeply if not comically committed to the rights and wrongs of the world and their fellow employees. I refer often to the college's grievance procedure, which Frederica views as a drain on her parents' attention. She often complains — so maybe that's her main grievance — that she's raising herself.

## **Employee relations and unions — you know something about that, obviously.**

I was public information officer for the Massachusetts Labor Relations Commission for eighteen months, and a writer for the Massachusetts Teachers Association for six years. My beat was arbitration awards, contract negotiations, and what I called "teacher features." At one point, I considered being a labor lawyer, and I think you can guess which side I wanted to represent.

## **Any news from Hollywood?**

For years and years my answer to that questions was "a few books optioned, none produced," but I seem to have turned a corner. *Then She Found Me*, which was published in 1990, might be the first one out of the gate, thanks to Helen Hunt, who wrote a terrific screenplay and will direct it and star in it. Killer Films (*Boys Don't Cry*, *Happiness*) will produce it. And Robert Benton, who wrote and directed *Kramer vs. Kramer* and has won a couple of Academy Awards, is well along in the screenplay for *The Ladies' Man*. He will also direct it, and Tom Hanks's company, Playtone, will produce, with Hanks allegedly to star. *Isabel's Bed* is in the final stages of a second draft by the indie producer and director Eve Annenberg. Most recently, *The Pursuit of Alice Thrift* was optioned by Universal Studios for the producer Chris Weitz, who wrote and directed *About a Boy*.

## **We've seen your name in dozens of acknowledgments pages and several dedication pages. Who are all these people?**

Well . . . friends or students whose manuscripts I read or whose chapters I edit as the writing goes along. Sometimes it's because I helped them get an agent or a publisher. It's hard to talk about this without sounding saintly and altruistic, but my unofficial agenting is basically a selfish act because I get so much pleasure out of making the match and getting the jubilant phone calls.

## **What tips or advice do you have for writers still looking to be discovered?**

The most heartening thing I've ever heard from an editor, when she was asked, "What are publishers looking for? Are they looking for big commercial books about war and submarines and socialites?" was her answer, "I'm looking to fall in love on the first page." Another piece of advice I have to dispense gingerly every so often is "Sometimes the best form of revision is to start something new."

## **Do you have any special writing rituals? For example, what do you have on your desk when you're writing?**

I try to begin by eight a.m. I have to have a cup of coffee in hand. My desk is usually a mess, just enough room for my mouse on my mousepad. My to-do list, the stickies, the Post-its, are always reminding me of the practical side of life — calls to make, thank-you notes to write, errands to run. If I had a stronger will, I'd shut off the e-mail and phone until I met my daily quota (five hundred words), but I'm too weak.

## **What are you working on now?**

A new novel, no title yet. But I think I can safely categorize it as a love letter to New York City.

## **Give us three "good-to-know" facts about you.**

1. I was nearly fired from my second job out of college, which was writing press releases for Boston's public television station. I couldn't do anything right in the eyes of my newly promoted and therefore nervous boss. I quit after three months, one step ahead of the axe, feeling like an utter failure. When I speak to students, I always tell them this.
2. Pride and joy: son Benjamin, born in 1982. Wittiest and most quotable person I know.
3. I was runner-up for the best-actress award at Lowell High School, Lowell, Massachusetts, class of '68, after playing Gabrielle (the Bette Davis role) in *The Petrified Forest* and Elaine (the ingénue-niece) in *Arsenic and Old Lace*.

## **What else would you like your readers to know?**

I knit a lot. I wear a pedometer, aiming for five miles a day (don't be too impressed; that includes walking around my house and food shopping). Sometimes I walk no farther than my own driveway (because I can hear the phone ring; twelve round trips equal one mile). I cook quite seriously, which I think is an antidote to the writing, i.e., I finish the project in an hour or two and get feedback immediately. I watch golf on television, although I don't golf, except for visits to the driving range in spurts. I wake up at six a.m. no matter what time I go to bed. I was a roving guard on the Lowell Hebrew Community Center's girls' basketball team all through high school. My specialty was stealing the ball, but my only shot was a lay-up.

## Praise for Eleanor Lipman

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### Praise for *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." — *Book*

"Lipman is the diva of dialogue; her repartee flashes like Zorro's sword." — *People*

"Simply, wonderfully, memorably human and therefore complicated and compelling . . . A total treat." — *USA Today*

"A witty, satirical novel rich in wry, observant, narrative reminiscent of Jane Austen's deceptively benign satiric genius." — *San Francisco Chronicle*

### Praise for *The Ladies' Man*

"I loved every page of this very funny, insightful, sophisticated yet good-natured book." — Anita Gates, *New York Times Book Review*

### Praise for *The Way Men Act*

"Elinor Lipman's language is so superb that to paraphrase would be murder. Part of the joy of this wise and charming novel is in the writing. The rest is in the thinking — smart, offbeat, funny. What a pleasure." — *Cosmopolitan*

### Praise for *The Inn at Lake Devine*

"A tale of delicious revenge." — *USA Today*

"An author who was born with an autoimmune system already primed against clichés and an ear for dialogue sharper than an electronic listening system." — *Times* (London)

## 2006 Tour Schedule

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### Massachusetts

Broadside Bookshop, Northampton, April 5, 7:00 p.m.

Brookline Booksmith, Brookline, April 11, 7:00 p.m.

Grub Street Writers, Boston, April 13, 7:00 p.m.

Odyssey Bookshop, South Hadley, May 2, 7:00 p.m.

Porter Square Books, Cambridge, May 24, 7:00 p.m.

Edwards Books, Springfield, May 11, 12:00 noon

West Springfield Library, May 25, evening

Book Rack, Newburyport, June 4, 3:00 p.m.

Swampscott Public Library, June 5, 7:00 p.m.

Buttonwood Books, Cohasset, Coffee with Authors, June 6, 10:00 a.m.

Borders, Braintree, June 6, 7:30 p.m.

Concord Bookshop, Author Tea, June 25, 3:00 p.m.

Cabbages & Kings, Chatham, Brunch Event, June 26

Armchair Bookstore, Dennis, June 26, evening

**New York**

Westchester Library Annual Luncheon, Tarrytown, April 4, 12:00 noon  
Barnes & Noble, Upper West Side, April 18, 7:00 p.m.

**Washington, D.C.**

Politics & Prose, April 19, 7:00 p.m.

**Seattle**

Third Place Books, April 20, 7:00 p.m.

**Portland**

Wordstock Festival, April 21-22

**San Francisco**

Mrs. Dalloway's, Berkeley, April 24, 7:00 p.m.  
Book Passage, Corte Madera, April 25, 1:00 p.m.  
Contra Costa Times Book Club Anniversary Gala, April 25, 7:00 p.m.

**Los Angeles**

Dutton's Beverly Hills, April 26, 7:00 p.m.

**Milwaukee**

Harry Schwartz, Mequon, April 27  
"Bacchus and Books," Luncheon Series, April 28

**Connecticut**

Atticus Books, New Haven, May 18, 5:30 p.m.  
New Canaan Library, Author Breakfast, May 19

**New Hampshire**

Water Street Books, Exeter, Author Luncheon, June 5, 12:00 noon