



## Isabel's Bed

*Elinor Lipman*

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When Harriet Mahoney first sees it, Isabel Krug's bed is covered with sheared sheep and littered with celebrity biographies. The unpublished, fortyish, and recently jilted Harriet has fled Manhattan for a room atop a Cape Cod dune. There, in Isabel's loudly elegant retreat, she'll ghostwrite *The Isabel Krug Story*, based on a sexy blonde's scandalous tabloid past. Unusually talented in the man department ("I give lessons"), Isabel revamps and inspires Harriet as they gear up to tell all, including the tangled history Isabel shares with her odd lodger, Costas. Life according to Isabel is a soap-opera extravaganza, an experience to be swallowed whole-- and the attitude is catching...

## Isabel's Bed Details

Date : Published May 1st 1998 by Washington Square Press (first published 1995)

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Author : Elinor Lipman

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## From Reader Review Isabel's Bed for online ebook

### Jenn says

What to say about this? Definately not what I expected. Although I can't pinpoint what I was expecting either. A story of loss and gain (even if that sounds cheesy) but still a novel that leaves you saying: that's it? Not that I want to read more, I just kind of feel like I finished a book that told me...well...nothing. At least it was a quick read.

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### Mike Finn says

"Isabel's Bed" is a gentle, amusing, charter-driven read, filled with kindness and comedy that lifted my spirits. It deals honestly but sympathetically with story of Harriet Mahone, a wannabe writer running for cover from a recently failed twelve year relationship with a man she now sees has always been a jerk.

Although the story is told from Harriet's point of view, she is one of the most ordinary and most passive characters in a novel which is dominated by colourful, larger than life people. Yet Harriet does not fade into the background or become just a cypher for observing more interesting people. In a way, the whole book is about her building a more solid understanding of herself and acting upon it-

Harriet takes refuge with Isabel, a woman who's notoriety Harriet is unaware of when she agrees to ghost write her autobiography in exchange for living in Isabel's house for a year.

Isabel is funny and smart and totally overwhelming. The dialogue in the scenes she's in sparkles. I found her extraordinary and yet completely convincing. She is a woman who takes charge of her life and lives by her own rules. She is Harriet's opposite and so finds Harriet novel and intriguing. The friendship that builds between the two woman is drawn with a light touch that gives it credibility and emotional value.

Hattie has a a low simmer, never quite getting to the boil, relationship with Isabel's handy-man/driver which manages to avoid rom-com clichés and serves mostly to help Harriet understand what had been missing in her previous twelve-year-too-long relationship.

I enjoyed the sideways glance into writers and writing that the novel provides. Harriet writes to escape from her life. Being a writer is a transformational fantasy for her. We see that it is not the writing itself that motivates Harriet but the opportunity to been seen as a writer in her local writers' group which sustains her dream by listening with attention and providing encouraging feedback.

Harriet is competent rather than talented at writing. Her first draft of the autobiography is so bland and dull and so NOT Isabel, the Isabel has a go at re-writing the piece "to make it sound more like me". Isabel is a natural raconteur and produces an opening to the the autobiography that is witty, energetic and gives a strong sense of her personality. The contrast between the two pieces is the start of Harriet coming to understand that writing might not be her route to personal fulfillment

The ending of the novel made me smile. It was unexpected yet realistic. One of those things that makes everything click into place so that you say, "that's so true and obvious. How did I not see that coming?"

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## Gale Martin says

I picked up this book second-hand at The Book Mill in Massachusetts and thoroughly enjoyed it. Fresh premise, wonderful execution. Ms. Lipman is a really a stunning writer--first-rate. As a writer, I'm learning a great deal from her. The story was unpredictably funny and quirky. Nothing ends the way you think it will, and yet, it was all wrapped in a very affirming way.

Lipman creates real people who are funny and flawed. Did it change my life, no? Are there innumerable lessons in it for people who write women's fiction? Yes.

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## Robin Wright Gunn says

I love Elinor Lipman's novels. Her writing is light but always makes me laugh, makes me stay up way too late when I should have turned off the light, makes me "see" the characters by revealing one or two key traits or habits, and reveals their vulnerabilities.

If you are looking for War and Peace this aint it. If you are looking for smart fresh down to earth writing that is still mostly for entertainment, here you go.

Sort of a book version of the smarter date movies--e.g. Four Weddings and a Funeral, etc.

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## Antof9 says

A quote from Julia Glass (Chicago Tribune) from the back of the book: "If Jane Austen had been born about two centuries later, gone to Smith, then palled around with Fran Lebowitz, chances are she'd have written like Elinor Lipman. She is one of the last urbane romantics. As always, Lipman makes us laugh out loud."

well. . . . she's no Jane Austen, I'll say that! This was mildly entertaining, but not quite the amazing book I expected after the back cover.

To start with, I found what the title *should* have been on page 368: "Don't call me, don't write me, don't FedEx me bagels." This would have made me like the book so much more :)

Isabel's character was totally and completely annoying. And there is nothing magical about her bed. I'm sad that Harriet is the author (it's from her perspective), but she is subordinated throughout the book. Isabel is spoiled, annoying, self-centered, and a "one-hit wonder". She should have been more of an ancillary character. Harriet, like so many of the key characters in chick lit is all about the angst, is unhappy with herself, her hair, her makeup (or lack thereof), etc. In the end, of course, she finds a perfectly wonderful man, and isn't the man-repeller she thinks she is.

To this day I don't understand the Costas character. Maybe the next reader of this book will, and can explain him to me! He was the "appendix" of this book. . .

This is a good, light read, and was great for me while sitting on our back deck on a lovely sunny day.

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## **Georgina says**

I wasn't sure how I felt about the protagonist initially but she grew on me, and overall I really enjoyed the book. Lippman created very authentic characters and was particularly successful at delving into the heart and mind of a recently scorned lover.

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## **Elizabeth says**

A fun read about a 40 something woman, recently dumped by her jerk of a boyfriend, who is hired to ghostwrite the story of an infamous love-triangle murder by the mistress of the murdered man, and becomes drawn into a world very different (and a lot more interesting) than her own. Sometimes predictable (will she get together with the hunky handyman?), sometimes twisty (the murdering wife gets released from the mental hospital and comes for a visit), but always enjoyable. Lipman does a good job creating realistic and likeable characters.

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## **Kandice Newren says**

Isabel's Bed is another great story by Elinor Lipman. It is still light, funny, and engrossing. The funny thing about this book is it's pretty much all about sex, not in the detailed sense, but how it's a part of everybody's life. The writers in the story talk about how they don't want to write about sex in detail, but it's what everybody wants. Then there is one of the main characters whose life is pretty much about sex, and a book she's having written about a scandal she was a part of (yes, dealing with sex). The irony is that the author doesn't go into detail about the sex the characters engage in, but she does leave enough tidbits that you can figure out what she means. It's all around a humorous book, not nearly as funny as *The Family Man*, but the characters are more developed (at least I think so).

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## **Kathleen says**

I am in the early stages of reading those Elinor Lipman novels that I may have irresponsibly missed along the way. I wasn't sure how I was doing with this one in the early pages, but in the end, I was more than satisfied. Her characters maintain a sense of self, honesty and integrity that made me want to cheer for them as they figured out their lives and sorted through some complicated pieces. Her writing is crisp, as always; her insights into the human spirit, funny yet respectful.

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## **Fatima says**

First of all, it took me a long time to finish the book. There is a quote on the cover of my edition that says "By about page ten of this novel, the reader gets a grin on his face, and that grin doesn't really stop for about a week." This cannot be any further from the truth.

I started the book in December 2016, stopped on page 60 because it was too boring for me to finish, and picked it up again in the beginning of August 2017 to try and finish what I started.

I say that it doesn't start to get interesting before at least chapter 11 or 12 (roughly, page 100 or something

like that.)

Second, I absolutely didn't like how insecure and sad and (dare I say, made to sound ugly) Harriet was. I don't mind a book showing the flaws of characters as well as their qualities, but I sensed that the author focused only on certain characteristics/flaws/qualities for each of the characters. For example, Harriet was the sad, ugly one. Isabel's description focused only on showing her as an annoying, (most of the time) self-centered woman. Nothing was said about Costas other than to emphasize how rude he is.

It shows, in my opinion, a lack of creativity or maybe effort in showing the characters from more than one point of view. It's lazy and boring.

Overall, it started being mildly entertaining by the time I reached half the book, but I wouldn't read it again nor would I recommend it as a page-turner for a friend.

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### **Sarah says**

I would have liked this book a lot better if Harriet wasn't such a sad sack. Flawed protagonists are fine, but she was kind of pathetic. I know it took place in the mid-1990s, but stirrup pants? Come on, Harriet. I didn't mind the fact that the plot was predictable (except for the epilogue, which came a bit out of nowhere). It just made Harriet seem that much more dense. Still, it was a quick read on a hot day. I'll probably pass it on to my mom.

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### **Ladyslott says**

Harriet Mahoney is an aspiring writer with a boyfriend of 12 years and is a member of a writing group where she feels like an outsider. Forty one and lacking self esteem Harriet's life is in a rut. Harriet soon finds her boyfriend has met someone else and wants to get married ASAP, so Harriet needs to find a place to live and fast. Responding to an ad in New York review of books she takes a job as a ghost writer for Isabel Krug and moves to Cape Cod.

Isabel Krug is quite a character. She was in bed with her lover when his wife came in and shot him to death. Nan VanVleet is found not guilty by reason of insanity and goes to a psychiatric hospital instead of jail. Isabel moves on with her life and moves to a mansion in Cape Cod to escape her notoriety. She has now decided she wants to tell her side of the story and that is where Harriet comes in. Isabel seems to love drama and mystery and lives in her avant garde home with her handy man and a mysterious man named Costas.

As Harriet begins to gather the notes and tapes Isabel has furnished about the night of the tragedy the more she learns about Isabel and the closer friends they become. It is apparent that these two women need each other's friendship. Together they become better people with the help of each others insights.

Lipman is the master of witty conversation and writes truly believable characters that you really care about, flaws and all. Isabel could have been a caricature but comes across as a believable person and Harriet's growth and learning what her true passion is was very convincing. The twist in the story towards the end was inventive and realistic. This was a charming book that made me smile, and even though you know some of what will happen almost from the start it is still fun getting to the final page.

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## **Lynn Pribus says**

This book just tickled me. Great narrator. Amusing plot. What I especially liked was the way she handled two scenes simultaneously. Hard to explain, but here's just one example

The son of Nan, the woman who has killed her husband (in a moment of temporary insanity, so she is now out of the mental hospital), is a star on a soap opera.

Nan; Isabel, the woman who was in bed with said husband at the time he was murdered; Isabel's sometimes estranged husband, Kostas; the handyman Peter; and Harriet, the ghost writer for Isabel who is writing a book about the entire incident are watching an episode of the soap opera. Their dialogue intertwines with the episode on the screen.

Hard to describe, but Lipman juggles it all so nicely. Very witty and clever and deft and bright and lots of fun.

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## **Celia says**

A light and breezy tale that takes place on the Cape, so naturally, I had to read it. Harriet has just been jilted by her live-in boyfriend, and after giving him almost 10 of the best years of her life, she has to move on. She has been in a writing group in NYC, but still has nothing to show for it. A new situation arises, and Harriet heads to Truro in winter, to ghost-write a scandalous story of Isabel, who was in her lover's bed when he was shot dead by his wife. This is funny and cute, a good summer read.

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## **Linda says**

When aspiring author Harriet Mahoney signs on to write the memoirs of Isabel Krug, whose lover was shot by his wife while they were in flagrante delicto, she's ready for a change, and that's exactly what she gets. Isabel has fled to Cape Cod to escape notoriety, and leads an unconventional life in an unconventional house, with her husband Kostas, a disgraced artist. After a few days, Isabel and Harriet warm to each other, becoming friends as well as collaborators.

What I liked:

A la the Seinfeld television series, IB is essentially a novel about not very much. The central theme is the relationship between two women, one excessively conventional and the other excessively quirky. Not much writing is going on, but learning takes place on a consistent basis. It is pleasant to watch their friendship develop.

There are four main characters, and I liked Harriet, Isabel, and Pete (the handyman who is the only person on the scene with a grounded sense of reality.)

The setting.

The occasional surprises.

What I disliked:

The character of Kostas, who is extremely narcissistic and just plain obnoxious.

The ending, which seemed rushed and "tacked on."

I listened to the audio version of this novel, and it's doubtful whether I'd have finished it if reading it in print.

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