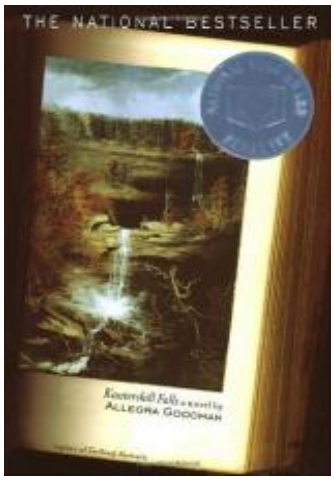
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

# Kaaterskill Falls

by Allegra Goodman




## About the Book

It is the summer of 1976. In the beautiful country of upstate New York lies Kaaterskill, a tiny town where Jewish Orthodox summer people and Yankee year-rounders live side by side from June to August. Elizabeth Shulman, mother of five daughters, needs a project of her own outside her cloistered community. Across the street, Andras Melish cannot overcome the ambivalence he feels toward his own children and his beautiful young wife. At the top of the hill, Rav Elijah Kirshner is nearing the end of his life, and he struggles to decide which of his sons should succeed him. Behind the scenes, alarmed as his beloved Kaaterskill is overdeveloped by the local real estate broker, Judge Miles Taylor keeps an old secret in check, biding his time...

Within this community Allegra Goodman weaves magic. From first word that she was at work on her debut novel, a genuine buzz began to build as the literary community awaited her results. Met with universal acclaim, **Kaaterskill Falls** , a national bestseller, fulfilled the promise and became a finalist for the National Book Award.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** The community of the Kirschners takes everything the Rav Elijah says to be the final word in how they live their lives--and treats him as someone very close to God. Does the Rav see himself that way?

**2.** Why do the members of this orthodox community stay so close to the teachings of Rav Elijah--even when they go against their own inclinations or desires? What is so important to them about this community?

**3.** Why is Elizabeth so dependent on Isaac's support to open her store? If she could have seen the Rav by herself, would she still need Isaac's blessing?

**4.** Why is Isaac so ready to support Elizabeth in a new job--after her store has been shut down and she gives birth? What

does this say about the way he views her--and her role in their family?

**5.** Andras and Nina's marriage was also of their own choice, yet it has been unhappy for many years. Why?

**6.** How has Andras's relationship with his sisters both helped and harmed him over the years? Was he too dependent on them to become a true part of his own family--with his wife and children?

**7.** Jeremy has been a confirmed bachelor throughout his adult life. How much of that is out of rebellion to his family and community?

**8.** Isaiah's wife, Rachel, is more vocal about the Rav's mistreatment of her husband. Her ambitions for her husband are high--but she still holds the position of Rav in reverence. How can she respect someone she's so angry with? How does she reconcile those feelings--or does she?

**9.** How are Cecil's rebellions--marrying Beatrix, speaking out for Zionism, having a naming ceremony for his daughter--different from Jeremy's? Why do people accept his behavior more readily than Jeremy's, and why is he happier?

**10.** Elizabeth and her daughter Chani are both rebelling against the conventions of the community in their own ways. Will this make it easier on Chani if she decides to go to Israel?

## Author Bio

Allegra Goodman?s new book is THIS IS NOT ABOUT US. Her novels include ISOLA (a Reese's Book Club pick), SAM (a "Read with Jenna" Book Club selection), THE CHALK ARTIST (winner of the Massachusetts Book Award), INTUITION, THE COOKBOOK COLLECTOR, PARADISE PARK and KAATERSKILL FALLS (a National Book Award finalist).

Her fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker* and elsewhere and has been anthologized in *The O. Henry Awards* and *Best American Short Stories*. She has written two collections of stories, THE FAMILY MARKOWITZ and TOTAL IMMERSION, and a novel for younger readers, THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ISLAND. Her essays and reviews have appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New Republic*, *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe* and *The American Scholar*.

Raised in Honolulu, Goodman studied English and philosophy at Harvard and received a PhD in English literature from Stanford. She is the recipient of a Whiting Writer?s Award, the Salon Award for Fiction, and a fellowship from the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced study. She lives with her family in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

# Kaaterskill Falls

by Allegra Goodman

**Publication Date:** August 10, 1999
**Paperback:** 336 pages
**Publisher:** Delta
**ISBN-10:** 0385323905
**ISBN-13:** 9780733610639