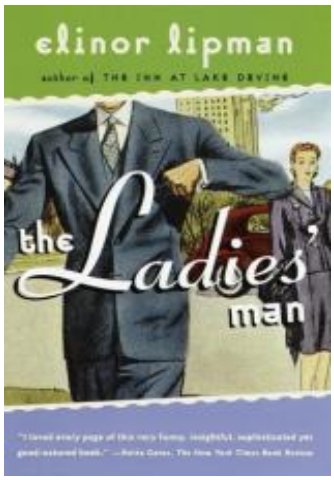
ReadingGroupGuides
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The Ladies' Man

by Elinor Lipman



About the Book

The questions, discussion topics, and author biography that follow are designed to enhance your group's reading of Elinor Lipman's novel **The Ladies' Man**. We hope that they will provide you with new ways of looking at and talking about one of Lipman's most successful romantic comedies. Like **The Inn at Lake Devine**, **The Ladies' Man** is a mischievous tale of tangled love and second chances--an enormously rewarding story with a winning mix of appealing heroines, vivid writing, and wickedly funny social commentary.

Nineteen sixty-seven was a defining year for Adele, Lois, and Kathleen Dobbin. That March, Harvey Nash failed to attend the party at which he and Adele were to announce their engagement. Thirty years later, the three sisters--graying, stolid, content (albeit lonely)--blame him for what unkind relatives refer to as their spinsterhood. But late one cold April night, the buzzer sounds at the Dobbin sisters' apartment. It is Harvey, in out of the blue from the west coast--where he's reinvented himself as Nash Harvey, composer of jingles--to apologize.

After Kathleen greets Harvey by hitting him over the head with a casserole dish, the Dobbin sisters find themselves in the awkward position of having to look after him for a spell. Older, seemingly filled with regrets, still as charming and arousable as ever, he becomes a catalyst for the untried and the long overdue in the three women's lives--though surely not in the ways he might have hoped. Level-headed, cautious Adele, who works for a public television station, finds herself flirting with her boss on the air during a campaign drive. Kathleen, the shy owner of an elegant lingerie boutique, seduces Lorenz, a sweet, unassuming doorman who lives with his father. Lois, the only Dobbin to have embarked on the road to matrimony (and subsequently, divorce) dusts off her girlhood notion that Harvey abandoned Adele rather than indulge his preference for another member of the family: Lois herself.

Meanwhile, Cynthia--a bright, sophisticated woman Nash seduced en route to Boston--discovers that Nash is not the man she had hoped he was. And Dina, Nash's jilted lover back in California, gets into a fender-bender with a handsome stranger. If she plays her cards right, she may land the man of her dreams (or at least a competent sperm donor). And if

she doesn't, there may be an opportunity to get Nash back. Sharp, sexy, unfailingly funny, **The Ladies' Man** is a charming look at modern American sensibilities and the timeless pursuit of love.

Discussion Guide

1. Harvey Nash is certainly not the kind of man with whom most women would choose to become involved. Yet despite his oily loyalties, arrogance, and opportunism, he charms nearly all of the characters, to some degree, at some point in the novel. How does Harvey--now called Nash--make his way into Adele, Kathleen, and Lois' good graces? How does he maneuver his way into the arms of an intelligent, beautiful, and successful woman like Cynthia? What is it about this type of man that continues to be attractive to women and despite their better judgment they continue to succumb to his charm?

2. To what extent does the notion of good manners prevent the Dobbins from getting rid of Nash? To what extent are all three--on some level--curious about him?

3. How does fear threaten each female character's ability to act on her attraction to others? How does Nash confirm their fears? How does his behavior play a role in diffusing their fears?

4. How are the Dobbin sisters' loyalties to one another threatened by Nash's reasserting himself into their lives?

5. What role does Richard Dobbin play in the novel?

6. Perhaps one of the most hilarious scenes in **The Ladies' Man** is Cynthia's big party for Nash. How do the events leading up to the big night infuse each guest's entrance with tension? How does dialogue up the ante once the party begins?

7. How does Kathleen handle Cynthia's feelings for Nash? How does Kathleen and Cynthia's friendship effect the course of the novel?

8. Nash performs one notable and noble act in **The Ladies' Man**: he makes Marty Glazer jealous. What prompts this act of selflessness? Is it completely selfless? If not, how does his gesture endear him to us nonetheless?

9. How does Elinor Lipman keep us interested in so many different characters over the course of the novel? Were there characters you cared about more than others?

10. How do the characters in **The Ladies' Man** highlight different ways we approach--or shrink from--love today? What aspects of modern American culture make the pursuit of romance more difficult than in the past? What aspects make it easier?

Author Bio

Elinor Lipman is the award-winning author of 17 books of fiction and nonfiction, including THE INN AT LAKE DEVINE, ISABEL'S BED, I CAN'T COMPLAIN: (All Too) Personal Essays, ON TURPENTINE LANE, RACHEL TO

THE RESCUE, MS. DEMEANOR and EVERY TOM, DICK & HARRY. Her first novel, THEN SHE FOUND ME, became a 2008 feature film, directed by and starring Helen Hunt, with Bette Midler, Colin Firth and Matthew Broderick. She was the 2011?12 Elizabeth Drew Professor of Creative Writing at Smith College and divides her time between Manhattan and the Hudson Valley.

Critical Praise

" You won't find better reporting from the front lines of the battle between the sexes. "--***The Seattle Times***

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