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Leanne Lieberman

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Ellie Gold is an orthodox Jewish teenager living in Toronto in the late eighties. Ellie has no doubts about her strict religious upbringing until she falls in love with another girl at her grandmother's cottage. Aware that homosexuality clashes with Jewish observance, Ellie feels forced to either alter her sexuality or leave her community. Meanwhile, Ellie's mother, Chana, becomes convinced she has a messianic role to play, and her sister, Neshama, chafes against the restrictions of her faith. Ellie is afraid there is no way to be both gay and Jewish, but her mother and sister offer alternative concepts of God that help Ellie find a place for herself as a queer Jew.

Gravity Details

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Author : Leanne Lieberman

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From Reader Review Gravity for online ebook

M says

This book is an insult to Judaism, young adults and the English language. It is possibly one of the worst books I have ever read and I wish passionately that I could give negative stars.

Here's a tip, people - want to write about a culture so clearly not your own? Do more than look it up on wikipedia.

Lieberman takes on a mighty interesting premise - an orthodox teenager discovers she is gay - and then writes this potentially gripping tale as if teenagers act as though they've suffered severe blows to the head. She also seems to know not much more than bagels and lox type details about the world she so boldly enters into. Ellisheva (two ls?), Eli, is fifteen, orthodox and a honking nerd. She is obsessed with the ocean and tells the reader more than she ever wanted to know about sea anemone. This is, in fact, the only thing I can tell you about her. PLucky heroine you want to root for? hardly. Just a socially awkward (or was that the lousy attempt at dialogue) dorkwad. Eli goes to spend a month (??) with her grandmother, who is not religious (parents have no problem with this?) and also happens to hate religion and is incredibly immature and downright nasty about it. She frequently rolls her eyes and constantly encourages her teenage granddaughters to break the rules whenever she can. Yep I sure would send my kids off to grandma's for lots of time unsupervised. And I would ask what fifteen year old would want that, but Eli was such an incredibly dull girl that I suppose that part worked.

Her parents go off to Israel because, I mean, where else do Jews go, ever, and her sister, the rebellious Neshama (??) goes off to camp. So Eli's summer consists of trying to keep kosher, swimming, and staring into space. In fact her summer is so very exciting that she forgets what the days of the week are and skips over Shabbos by accident.

Well things pick up when she meets the obnoxious and slutty Lindsay, a fellow fifteen year old who is not Jewish and apparently very attractive. Lindsay makes it clear (to the reader, anyway) the Eli is beneath her (honking nerd) yet Eli pursues her rather relentlessly and embarrassingly. Somehow they end up having trysts together but then Lindsay leaves the area without saying goodbye.

Oh the angst. Can Eli stay orthodox??? It is in fact an interesting conflict, to be sure, but so poorly executed! The characters speak in the most irrelevant ways, the conversations are never compelling, Lieberman makes sure to include every um and like and so. Her knowledge of orthodox is pathetic - Eli's goldfish are named Rashi, Golda Meir and Hannah Senesh - her father has no patience for anything but the messiah - her mother is a total wacko - there are several inconsistencies and outright errors.

The combination of painful writing and poor research made this an utter disaster.

Rosey says

The premise was certainly interesting - an Orthodox Jewish teenager struggles to reconcile her growing feelings for girls with her religion. I got the feeling, though, that the author was neither Orthodox nor gay. The characters seemed very trite and one-note, and I almost got a sense of condescension towards teenagers. I don't think the author liked Ellie very much.

I have to admit though, I got really upset in the middle. The book supposedly takes place in the 80s (although for no real reason, it's not really a factor in the story) but the mother complains about people talking on cell phones at the Wailing Wall. What? Zach Morris didn't even get a cell until the early 90s. Why set the book in

a particular time period if you're just going to ignore it? It seemed offensive, on top of all the other poorly written parts, like the author and editor didn't put any time or effort into making this a good book.

Anyway it was a good premise, just poorly executed, and I'm glad to see that Ellie didn't go the full cliché route and denounce her entire family and religion, that she at least tried to reconcile the two. (Not to say that's not an option, just that it makes sense for someone so supposedly devout to at least try to hold on to what they've been taught is true for their entire life.) So I guess there's that. Perhaps this will open the door for additional, better books to be written on similar topics.

Angie says

Gravity is the interesting story of fifteen year old Ellie as she figures out how to fit her new found sexuality into her Orthodox Jewish upbringing after a summer at her grandmother's lake cottage. It's also set in the 80s, which is awesome. But anyway, Ellie meets Lindsay and cannot stop thinking about her (especially her boobs). Things might be over when they leave the lake, but the girls don't live too far from one another. Now Ellie is terrified of being caught due to the mixed messages her religion sends about homosexuality.

Ellie's parents are very, very, very religious. The Torah is everything, so there's no way she can talk to them about what's going with her. Luckily, her older sister is sick of the sexism and restrictions placed on them by their faith and is letting it go. Ellie doesn't want to stop being religious, she just wants to figure out how to make it work for her without being like those hypocrites who pick and choose which scriptures should be followed literally and which are out of date. I really enjoyed going on this journey with Ellie. There was a great balance between her being totally lost and her finding her own way. She asked questions even if she remained vague so her parents wouldn't know exactly what she meant.

The only thing that kind of annoyed me about *Gravity* was the romance. At least in the beginning. Lindsay is not a very nice girl. Ellie likes her at first because she's hot (duh) and confident, like how she wants to be. But Lindsay toys with her a lot. I would also describe her as a manic pixie dream girl. She has all of the qualifications, including getting Ellie to open up and be herself. Ellie also stalks Lindsay for several weeks before making contact. It's kind of weird. Like, she's super obsessed with her and at times it made her feel younger. I'm sure you can all remember lingering around places to get a glimpse of your crush then giggle back to your friends about it. It was like that, so it was weird to see Ellie like that, but then she's also having a sexual relationship later. If that makes any sense at all.

In the end, I did like *Gravity*. I found it really interesting to learn more about Judaism, which I'll admit I didn't know much about at all. I also thought that Ellie discovering her sexuality felt very realistic. She noticed that she never thought about boys the way she thought about Lindsay, did some research, discovered it wasn't the end of the world, and accepted it. I do kind of wish there had been a coming out scene though. I would have liked to know how her parents reacted. I'm sure Bubbie would have been 100% supportive though.

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Eileen says

I feel like there's a dramatically increasing amount of both 1. LGBTQ and 2. conservative religious YA fiction out there, and this is a prime example. It's also Canadian! Anyway. So, Ellie Gold, second daughter in a Toronto orthodox Jewish family/developing oceanographer, goes off to spend a vacation at a summer cabin with her not at all orthodox grandmother. Besides hesitantly wearing clothes she would never be allowed to wear in the city (bare shoulders!) and singing prayers outside, she meets Lindsay, a neighbor, also down from Toronto but not at all orthodox or even Jewish. After some highly charged yet extremely slow-moving sexual exploration, their vacations end; back in the city, Ellie tries to find some resolution as her sister and mother deal with their own problems. Yeah. It's interesting to see the balance between sexuality and religion, as well as between feminism and religion. Ellie is actually quite a serious believer, which makes it exceptionally difficult for her to come to terms with her lesbianism. At the same time, her mother and sister are also combating the strictures of orthodoxy, illustrating not only two paths available to Ellie, but a whole spectrum of options from outright rejection to acceptance. Nothing is a throwaway; everything is complex. Delicate handling and solid characterization make the resolution believable.

Dennis Fischman says

Nice prose combined with an utterly believable voice. The adult characters are not fleshed out well enough, particularly the father, but the teenage girl growing up in an Orthodox Jewish home who finds herself in love with a non-Jewish girl, the protagonist of the book, is wonderful. In the course of this book, the author can only gesture at other ways of being authentically Jewish that would include and celebrate young Ellie, but at least she lets readers know they are there. I wonder if in anyone's coming out story, this book plays a major role?

Kelsey says

Age: Middle - High School

"Ellie Gold is an orthodox Jewish teenager living in Toronto in the late eighties. Ellie has no doubts about her strict religious upbringing until she falls in love with another girl at her grandmother's cottage. Aware that homosexuality clashes with Jewish observance, Ellie feels forced to either alter her sexuality or leave her community. Meanwhile, Ellie's mother, Chana, becomes convinced she has a messianic role to play, and her sister, Neshama, chafes against the restrictions of her faith. Ellie is afraid there is no way to be both gay and Jewish, but her mother and sister offer alternative concepts of God that help Ellie find a place for herself as a queer Jew" (Goodreads feature review).

A truly unique perspective where the protagonist does not abandon her religion, the same religion that has kept her whole throughout her life. Instead, Ellie reinterprets it by keeping the beauty and discarding the unnecessary hatred.

Barb says

I was disappointed in this book as a Jew and as a lesbian. At times, I really questioned the author's specific understanding of both identities. Although there was a little bit of creativity here and it seems to cover new territory, the book seemed oddly didactic (all the Hebrew and Yiddish transliterations are irritatingly italicized and defined in the back of the book, with no Hebrew letters in sight), but I was irritated by the sentence on page 227 of my copy, "Not only sedimentary and igneous (sic metamorphic?!), but volcanic." It ought to be common knowledge that igneous rocks are volcanic in origin. That should have been changed before printing. Largely, the novel seemed formulaic and fairy-tale-ish to me. I did not find the characters to be particularly well-rounded- especially the protagonist's mother (we're told what she does, but she doesn't really have an authentic voice backing up her behavior), and it irked me that the protagonist and her mother didn't seem to have anything close to a three-dimensional conversation before the last 20 pages of the book. I'd be interested in what other readers thought.

Hannah says

Oy vey. I guess I have to give someone props for writing an Orthodox lesbian young adult coming-of-age novel just so one exists, but really? From the acknowledgments it's apparent that the author herself isn't and has never been Orthodox, which is pretty problematic in itself. I'm also not clear on who the intended audience for this book is--you can bet that a book with a Catholic schoolgirls' exposed legs on the cover is not going to be a safe library pick for Orthodox teenagers to leave lying around. And it only gets worse when the story actually starts: the characters are cliched beyond any appropriate metaphor, and the writing and editing leave much to be desired. Case in point: the beginning of the book alludes to how events unfold over the summer of 1980whatever (the exact year escapes me, and I've already returned this to the library in a fit of disgust). There seems to be no reason the book takes place in the 80's and no allusion to anything associated with that decade and then, in the middle of the book, a character complains about how rude it is when people talk on their CELL PHONES at the Wailing Wall. What editor wouldn't catch that?

Thumbs down!

Anna says

Gravity is set in the 80s in Toronto and revolves around a family of Orthodox Jews. Although the narrative is from the perspective of the younger daughter, Ellisheva Gold, who falls in love with a girl she meets while on vacation, the story is really about the entire family and their struggle with faith. Ellie's mother works to find ways to express her faith despite the restrictive confines of orthodoxy, Ellie's sister Neshama is determined to leave and never look back as soon as she finishes high school, and Ellie's father believes that if the Jews had been more observant, the Holocaust would never have happened. Against this background, Ellie fights doggedly against her attraction to Lindsay and also her desire to know more about the world and science than her religion finds strictly acceptable. When she accepts that she does prefer girls over boys, she must come to terms with what that means for her belief in God. The story resonates at the end with the balance she finds between her faith and her sexuality.

Amy Mathers says

<http://amysmarathonofbooks.ca/gravity/>

John Clark says

Ellie Gold is so wrapped up in rituals that she doesn't know who she really is. Her parents are reborn Jews, her sister is beginning to rebel with college on the horizon and her grandmother Bubbie, is the coolest of the lot, a free thinker who listens to Ellie and shocks her with her casual dismissiveness of some of the daily rituals that Ellie practices.

When her parents take a long desired trip to Israel, Ellie goes with her grandmother to the summer cottage she's rented for years. The only time Ellie has ever been there was when she was eight and she has mixed feelings about going there. On the one hand, she wants to experience swimming and all the things that nature offers, she lives in Toronto, after all, but she's worried about what might happen to her rituals.

One day, she's sitting on the dock when another girls paddles up in a canoe. Enter Lindsay, also from Toronto but very daring and worldly wise. She shocks Ellie, but even more frightening, Ellie realizes that she's very attracted to Lindsey. Suddenly she's faced with a huge and perplexing dilemma. Can a nice orthodox Jewish girl be comfortable as a lesbian? What a thing for a fifteen year old to face.

When her month long stay at the camp comes to an end, she's confused, but determined to see more of Lindsey. That's not easy as they go to different schools and when she tries to connect, her summer crush blows her off. If that wasn't bad enough, her parents returned even more fanatical about Judaism, her mother so much so that her behavior soon alienates most of the congregation at their synagogue.

Readers will find that the way Ellie navigates the confusing mess created by her own dilemma, combined with family chaos makes for a very interesting read. Ellie is a very strong and likable female protagonist. This is a great book for teens who are wrestling with big issues in their lives, be they dealing with sexuality, religion or family dynamics.

Jennifer Wardrip says

Reviewed by Andrew S. Cohen for TeensReadToo.com

This book by Canadian first-time author Leanne Lieberman centers on the coming-of-age of Ellie Gold.

The story begins during the summer vacation: Ellie goes to her grandmother's cottage in the midst of immaculate natural beauty, a place that she has looked forward to returning to since her first visit. This trip ends unexpectedly, as Ellie ends up falling in love with a girl her age, realizing her homosexuality.

However, Ellie has been brought up with strict religious values and traditions, which do not accept homosexuality, and she is forced to choose between shunning her community or denying her true sexuality.

Ultimately, through the multiple conflicts illustrated between tradition and modernity, Lieberman establishes that there is a place for all types of people, including Ellie, in society and religion.

I definitely enjoyed this story. Lieberman successfully develops her characters, and does not shy away from the lust commonly experienced by teenagers. And, coupled with the homosexual storyline, this story provides for a very interesting read, and is friendly to those who are not familiar with Judaism, specifically Orthodoxy.

GRAVITY is a good read for any, and despite my initial questions of how Lieberman would create such a challenging story, my concerns were for naught, as the story is an excellent work.

Nightfalltwen says

I'm not going to comment on the religion because I'm not Jewish. I'm also not going to comment on the sexuality because I'm not a lesbian. What I will comment on is the story itself. And I found it kind of lacking in strength throughout the whole story. As if it was trying too hard. Which I seem to find with a lot of YA books these days.

tamarack says

Despite this book being an aware winner, I was left less than wildly impressed. I'm not sure whether my lukewarm reaction is in part because I'm not a teenager myself, or if the book's characters truly lack believability. Ellie is mostly convincing, with the exception of her one-moment epiphany regarding her gayness. Her love interest, Lindsay, is a one-dimensional character who adds no depth to Ellie's struggle. I was much more impressed with *Book of trees*.

Alexis says

Full disclosure- This book won a novel contest that I entered. This book completely kicked my novel's ass, but then my novel kinda sucks. It was my first time writing a novel, and I am still not happy with my book.

On the other hand, this book is GREAT. It deals with the issues faced by an Orthodox Jewish teen who discovers that she likes girls. I thought it was realistic and I loved the many layers and interests of the main character and the depiction of how she and her sister struggled against the traditional elements of their Jewish family. It was a great story, with good writing and it was thought provoking. I've already started recommending it to people!

Great YA.
