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‘Either/Or’ is Elif Batuman’s sequel to ‘The Idiot’

Ann Levin
ASSOCIATED PRESS

“Either/Or,” by Elif Batuman (Penguin Press)

Do you remember what it felt like to be a college sophomore? The Jell-O shots, cookie dough and moments of abject humiliation and terror as you tried, oh so self-importantly, to figure out how to live?

Elif Batuman brings back the tedium and exhilaration of undergraduate life in “Either/Or,” a charming, mordantly funny follow-up to her first novel, “The Idiot,” which was a finalist for the 2018 Pulitzer Prize.

Selin, the overachieving daughter of Turkish immigrants and Batuman’s alter ego, spent much of that book mooning over Ivan, an older, emotionally unavailable boy in her Russian class. Hence the title, “The Idiot,” a reference to Fyodor Dostoevsky and the generally clueless behavior of young people everywhere.

In “Either/Or,” whose title nods to the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard’s treatise on the aesthetic versus the ethical life, Selin decides to opt for the former and become the writer she has longed to be since childhood. “I found the idea of an aesthetic life to be tremendously compelling,” she says. “It was the first time I had heard of an organizing principle or goal you could have for your life, other than making money and having kids.”

The rest of the novel is devoted to the question of how – and whether it’s OK when virtually all her friends and family members have opted for the other, presumably more ethical, life. In the course of her explorations, she will read Andre Breton’s surrealist work “Nadja” but wonder why the titular character – naturally, a woman – has to go crazy and end up alone.

Besides her beloved books, Selin also seeks wisdom in the movies and pop songs of the era, the late 1990s; resolves to lose her virginity; and consults a psychiatrist to deal with unexplained crying jags. It all makes for an eventful year, albeit one recounted in a meandering, stream-of-consciousness style that threatens at times to sap the book of its narrative power.

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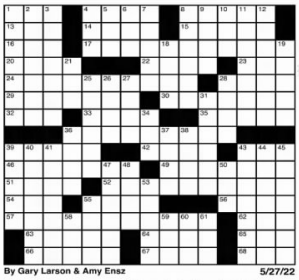
Happily, the book ends with a bang when Selin happens upon Henry James’ “The Portrait of a Lady” and finally discovers an admirable female role model in the fictional Isabel Archer. “The work of art she was creating was her own character,” Selin says. “From this perspective, the aesthetic wasn’t really the opposite of the ethical. The way Isabel wanted to be, and act, and seem, was generous and brave.”

The triumphal ending, coming after hundreds of pages of sophomore angst, suggests that Selin is well on her way to becoming Batuman, an accomplished novelist and New Yorker staff writer. You go, girl!

LA TIMES CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 ___-relief
4 Sacks
8 Loose strands of hair
13 Tonsillectomy doc
14 Class struggle?
15 Point of contention
16 Binary pronoun
17 *Genetically engineered retriever?
20 Many a Riyadh resident
22 Family chart
23 NYC airport near Citi Field
24 *Colleague of an Idaho farmer?
28 Care follower
29 Relatively small upright
30 Tammy of country
32 NFL stats
33 Socket set
35 Let up
36 *Advice to someone who doesn’t want more kittens?
39 Star in astronomy
42 Of all time
43 Hr. to go
46 ___ knot
49 Successful candidate
51 God with good aim
52 *Teaches tricks to circus animals?
54 “Better Call Saul” network
55 Interminable time
56 Nevada city
57 *Food and water supplied during a marathon?
62 Future louse
63 Clip
64 Draft category
65 New prefix
66 Nonsensical
67 Holiday song, and, phonetically, an apt description of the answers to the starred clues
68 Start to sneeze?

DOWN
1 “You should smile more”
2 Barometer type
3 Soprano Teresa known for her recording of Berg’s “Lulu”
4 Sack
5 Body spray brand
6 Beetle juice?
7 Clobber, biblically
8 Port producer
9 “Amazing Grace” ending
10 Abbreviation on old maps
11 Young hens
12 Data storage company
18 Got bigger
19 Exposed
21 Shut out
25 Promotional links
26 Chalcedony with black and white bands
27 One who’s well-versed
28 Exhausted
31 Not as far
34 Binary pronoun
36 In things
37 Square
38 Hibernian, e.g.
39 ___ jar
40 Meteorological concern
41 Ristorante dumplings
43 ___ Aligner: fashion house known for accessories
44 Sneaks on the court?
45 Classic autos advertised with the Cole Porter song “It’s De-Lovely”
47 Cow owner in a Rockwell painting
48 Real hoot
50 Caboose, e.g.
53 Salad topper
55 Shrinking Asian sea
58 Caterpillar roll fish
59 Peace activist Yoko
60 Word that indicates a name change
61 ESPN reporter Paolantonio

By Gary Larson & Amy Ensz 5/27/22

Thursday’s Puzzle Solved

E	S	O	■	C	S	N	Y	■	O	H	F	U	N	■
A	P	R	■	A	C	I	D	■	C	O	R	R	A	L
T	U	B	E	P	A	N	S	■	T	W	E	N	T	Y
■	R	I	V	E	R	A	■	B	O	D	Y	S	U	R	F
A	R	T	E	R	Y	■	P	O	P	O	■	■	R	I	A
P	E	E	R	■	G	A	R	N	I	■	S	P	E	C	K
E	D	D	Y	■	O	R	E	■	S	U	I	S	S	E	■
■	■	■	S	L	O	C	K	C	H	A	I	N	■	■	■
A	L	L	I	E	D	■	■	O	O	F	■	E	V	A	N
D	I	E	T	S	■	P	E	N	N	E	■	K	A	L	E
A	L	T	■	■	R	O	L	E	■	G	A	N	G	E	S
M	I	S	C	H	I	E	F	■	S	U	B	O	U	T	■
■	E	N	C	L	O	S	T	■	A	W	A	Y	T	E	A	M
■	S	O	U	R	E	R	■	C	A	R	S	■	S	P	A
■	T	E	E	N	Y	■	E	N	D	S	■	T	S	P

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CRYPTOQUOTE

AXYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In the sample above, A is used for the three Ls, X for the two Os, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

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J QZRRGL YJVSEY XCYE EVNGI CR J QZRRGL IZYJCLZT. — TI. IVYE XZRYEZCNZI

Yesterday’s Cryptoquote: BEFORE YOU SPEAK, ASK YOURSELF: IS IT KIND, IS IT NECESSARY, IS IT TRUE, DOES IT IMPROVE ON THE SILENCE? — SAI BABA

HOROSCOPE | HOLIDAY MATHIS

Aries (March 21-April 19). You’ll do what it takes to make your plans happen as close to your imaginings as possible.

Taurus (April 20-May 20). You’re well aware of the risks involved in a venture, which is why you prefer to be around the optimistic people who don’t mention danger at every turn.

Gemini (May 21-June 21). There’s no point to longing, regret or wishing things were any other way than they are right now.

Cancer (June 22-July 22). Some things only come one way. The rarer a thing is, the fewer your options. All the more reason to appreciate this unique package.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22). You may not get the reaction you were going for. Roll with the improvisational moment and brilliance ensues.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). While accidentally ignoring things is a recipe for disaster, ignoring a thing on purpose will be an effective tactic for the win.

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). A deadline looms. Here are your choices: Do it well, do it on time or do it within your budget. Only two are possible.

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Unconditional love is real. You know this because you give and receive it.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). You can't stick to the recipe when you don't have all the ingredients. You'll change it up and create something better for the challenge.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). You take on the issues of society like they were your own.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). You don't have to have the necessary experience before you start. You'll pick it up as you go.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20). Relationship success is creating fun in one moment at a time.

JUMBLE

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

THHIC
TNNIH
LBTALE
BCPLIU

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THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: GRUFF POISE APATHY RODENT
Answer: The young horse was bought by a family that was happy to — PONY UP FOR IT

SUDOKU | CREATORS

Insert numbers 1-9 in each box with every row, column and 3x3 box containing the digits just once. Difficulty level ranges from Bronze (easiest) to Silver to Gold (hardest) **RATING: SILVER**

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

3	7	8	6	9	2	4	1	5
4	1	6	5	7	3	9	8	2
2	9	5	1	8	4	7	6	3
1	5	3	8	2	7	6	4	9
8	4	2	9	6	5	3	7	1
7	6	9	3	4	1	5	2	8
5	2	4	7	3	8	1	9	6
6	3	7	2	1	9	8	5	4
9	8	1	4	5	6	2	3	7

	3	8				7		2
			8		5		3	
	6			3			1	
	8				9			
9	5	3		7		1	2	4
			3				9	
	7			8			4	
	9		5		2			
4		2				6	8	

DEAR ABBY | ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

Conniving boyfriend sabotages longtime friendship with lies

Dear Abby: I have a gay friend I'll call "Allen." We have been close friends for 13 years. Allen has visited me often with his friends from England, and two years ago, when I could finally afford to visit him, he invited me to stay in the home he shares with his boyfriend, "Rupert." Rupert took an instant dislike to me. He treated me rudely and mocked my American accent the entire time I was there. I let it be and concentrated on the beautiful scenery, the beautiful people I met and my longtime friend.

On my last day there, Rupert offered to take me around London, which surprised me. But I was happy to get into the city, so I agreed. It was extremely unpleasant. He berated me loudly in public, called me old and ugly and yelled at me at top of his lungs in a gift shop.

I texted Allen later that day asking if I could stay the last night at a hotel instead of their guest room. He replied by telling me all the stuff Rupert had texted to him that day about how I had been treating HIM badly. I was shocked. I hadn't mentioned anything about Rupert, but simply asked if he would be able to drive me to a hotel near the airport for my last night in England. I have since tried to reach out to Allen to explain my side of the story, but he continues to ignore me. Any advice on how to move forward would be helpful.

Sad Traveler in Nevada

Dear Sad Traveler: For whatever reason, Rupert regarded your long friendship with Allen as a threat, so he used the afternoon in London to cut you off at the knees. As long as Allen continues to ignore your efforts to mitigate the damage, consider him unreachable. With the passage of time, he may eventually realize how devious Rupert is, but this is a conclusion he must arrive at without your help. Please accept my sympathy for the loss of your friendship, which I am sure was important to you.

Dear Abby: Everywhere, it seems, there are books and guides for caring for aging parents. But what about aging siblings? The age difference is smaller, so it can end up with the elderly caring for the elderly – especially if there isn't a next generation of family members on whom to rely.

As we baby boomers hit our 70s, we can find ourselves caring for siblings in their early 80s, and they're even less likely to listen to us than our parents. Frankly, some of us are already worn out from caring for elderly parents. We're at the point of concern about our own health and that of our spouses. When you've got a 73-year-old trying to take care of an 80-year-old who is childless and lives 700 miles away, and who says only, "I'll let you know when I need you," it's frightening. Any guidance?

Daunting in the South

Dear Daunting: Yes, I think you should follow the directive of your 80-year-old sibling. Familiarize yourself with what senior services are available in their community and cross your fingers they will not be needed. In addition, take whatever relevant guidance you can from the books on caring for parents because there may be similarities.

Contact Abby at www.DearAbby.com.

CELEBRITY CIPHER | LUIS CAMPOS

“KSNPN JW CUKSJCE VUPN WUDZ-WXKJWILJCE KSXC KSN IJPWK WDTTDZNCK RJKN JCKU KSN GDJTL IPXCFIDPKNP.” — YJCTNCK BPJTN

Previous Solution: “I've realized that I'm probably just perfect and it's everybody else around me that's got issues.” — Scott Disick

TODAY'S CLUE: J equals I

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