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Florence Adler Swims Forever

Rachel Beanland

Author Biography:

Rachel Beanland is the author of two novels, *The House Is On Fire* (Simon & Schuster, 2023) and *Florence Adler Swims Forever* (Simon & Schuster, 2020).

Beanland's debut novel, *Florence Adler Swims Forever*, was selected as a book club pick by Barnes & Noble, a featured debut by Amazon, an Indie Next pick by the ABA, and one of the best books of 2020 by *USA Today*. It was also named a *New York Times* Editors' Choice and was recognized with the 2020 National Jewish Book Award for Debut Fiction.

Bio

Facts & Trivia:

Based on a true story of Beanland's great-great-aunt, Florence Lowenthal, the family saga is a breathtaking portrait of just how far we will go in order to protect our loved ones, and is an uplifting portrayal of how the human spirit can endure—and even thrive—after tragedy.

Beanland wrote the novel while working full-time, raising three kids, against a backdrop of her own loss and grief, as well as diverging family opinions on how to support each other in crisis. Rachel set her alarm for 4:30 a.m. and wrote for two-and-a-half hours a day, seven days a week, for two straight years!



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Summary:

Over the course of one summer that begins with a shocking tragedy, three generations of the Adler family grapple with heartbreak, romance, and the weight of family secrets in this stunning debut novel.

Atlantic City, 1934. Every summer, Esther and Joseph Adler rent their house out to vacationers escaping to “America’s Playground” and move into the small apartment above their bakery. Despite the cramped quarters, this is the apartment where they raised their two daughters, Fannie and Florence, and it always feels like home.

Now Florence has returned from college, determined to spend the summer training to swim the English Channel, and Fannie, pregnant again after recently losing a baby, is on bedrest for the duration of her pregnancy. After Joseph insists they take in a mysterious young woman whom he recently helped emigrate from Nazi Germany, the apartment is bursting at the seams.

Esther only wants to keep her daughters close and safe but some matters are beyond her control: there’s Fannie’s risky pregnancy—not to mention her always-scheming husband, Isaac—and the fact that the handsome heir of a hotel notorious for its anti-Semitic policies, seems to be in love with Florence.

When tragedy strikes during one of Florence’s practice swims, Esther makes the shocking decision to hide the truth about what happened from Fannie—at least until Fannie’s baby is born—and pulls the family into an elaborate web of secret-keeping and lies, bringing long-buried tensions to the surface that reveal how quickly the act of protecting those we love can turn into betrayal.

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Questions for Discussion

1. *Florence Adler Swims Forever* opens with Florence's death and ends with the birth of Fannie's baby. In what ways do life and death frame this novel?
2. Early on, Gussie says that Florence always spoke to her like both a "beloved child and a trusted grown-up" (4). Apart from Florence, how do the other adults in Gussie's life treat her? Do you think it was right to send her to live with Esther for the summer, or appropriate to make her keep such a big secret from her mother?
4. In the early 1930s, Atlantic City was seen as the "Jewish Riviera" of the East Coast. In what ways do you see Jewish culture celebrated within this community? In what ways do you see it under threat?
5. Describe Fannie and Florence's relationship. Do they have roles that they fall into? What do you think is gained by a seven-year age gap? What complications are introduced?
6. When Florence dies, Esther's first instinct is to keep Florence's death a secret to protect Fannie and her pregnancy. Discuss how others respond to this request. If you were in each character's shoes, do you think you could have kept this secret?
7. When Joseph and Stuart go to see Florence's ship sail out of New York, Joseph explains that "you give your children every possible chance" in life (188). What chances do the parents in this book give their children? Do these chances come with sacrifice? What chances seem to carry more weight—Anna's parents sending her away (financial), the Adlers supporting

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Florence's dreams (emotional), or Fannie staying on bed rest so her child can be healthy (physical)? Is one any more important than another?

8. When Anna visits Fannie at the hospital and reads to her from *Tender Is the Night*, she tells her that “we’re all beholden to someone” (228). Who are the various characters “beholden” to in this novel? Are they willingly so, or are they bound by structures that seem unshakeable—like marriage, faith, or secrets?

9. Fannie is devastated by the death of her infant son, Hiram. Her mother, Esther, doesn't understand her grief, saying he doesn't need a gravestone because Fannie “didn't need a place to go and wallow” (33). What does it mean to Fannie to be pregnant again? How do these two mothers—Fannie and Esther—handle the death of their respective children?

10. The rise of the Nazi party and anti-Semitism in Germany, which had monumental effects on the lives of Jewish people in Europe leading into World War II, is a lingering threat throughout the book. Did anything surprise you about the experiences of Anna and her family? How would you have felt in their position?

11. How do you feel about Anna and Stuart's love story? What do they each bring to the relationship? Why do you think they are drawn to each other?

12. Near the end of the novel, Joseph strikes a deal with Isaac to entice him to leave the family forever. What do you think of Isaac's decision? Do you think—if he stayed—that he could have changed? Or was he meant to pursue something different with his life?

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13. The novel ends without the reader learning of Fannie's reaction to the news of Florence's death and Isaac's departure. Based on what you know about Fannie, how do you think she took the news? What do you think her life looks like after these revelations? How would you have reacted if put in the same position?

Discussion questions by the author

[Rachel Beanland](#)

Other Books

The House Is on Fire

Simon & Schuster (April 2023)

A riveting reimagining of one of early America's deadliest tragedies, the Richmond Theater Fire of 1811, told from the perspectives of four characters whose lives are irrevocably altered in the aftermath of the inferno.