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Wednesdays at Michael's by Diane Clehane

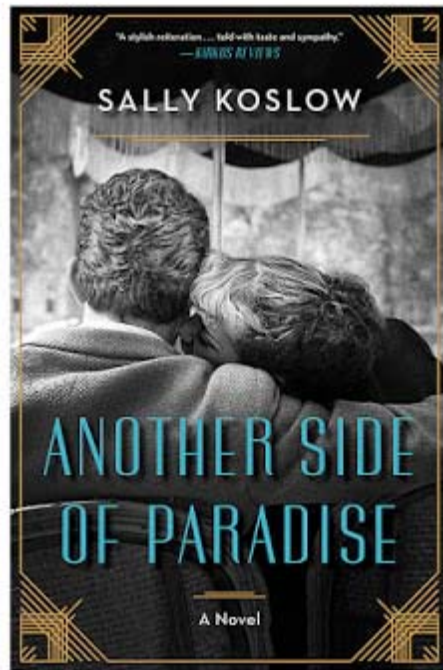
Lunch with Publishing Powerhouses Sally Koslow & Sara Nelson



Sara Nelson, Diane Clehane & Sally Koslow

Not that you'd know it, but summer is officially over in the city, and the faithful have returned to Michael's. After taking my first-ever summer hiatus from the column, I was thrilled to be back on the beat and eager to see who was dining and dishing at 55th and Fifth today. I was not disappointed. One of the great things about Michael's for me is that I can always count on random celebrity sightings that get tongues wagging. Today there was a bumper crop of bold-faced names -- and most at one table to boot. Where else are you going to see **Jerry Hall** (yes, Mrs. Rupert Murdoch looking absolutely ageless. Could it be love?) and **Judge Judy Sheindlin**? Just wait until you read who they were with. I have to tell you about my own fabulous lunch first.

I was joined today by **Sara Nelson**, VP executive editor and special advisor to the Publisher at Harper. (How's that for a title?) And author **Sally Koslow**, who is wrapping up the promotional tour for her latest novel, *Another Side of Paradise*. I've really only known both of them through mutual acquaintances and, of course, on Facebook, so I was glad to get the chance to meet in person. Sara has had a storied career in publishing at Publisher's Weekly, Amazon and O The Oprah Magazine where she relaunched Oprah's legendary book club and suggested titles to the world's most well-known voracious reader. She joined Harper two years ago and shortly after that, the manuscript for *Another Side of Midnight* landed on her desk.



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"I just got that feeling when I was reading it," Sara told me between bites of Cobb salad. The book, as Sally described it, is a "biographical novel" that imagines the interior and emotional lives of F. Scott Fitzgerald and his lover, gossip columnist Sheilah Graham. The book chronicles the couple's affair that began in the late 1930s as Fitzgerald's life and career became increasingly undone by his alcoholism, while Graham's star was on the rise. "I knew she was with him when he died," said Sara. "But [there were details where I thought] did Sally make this up? That's what really sold it for me."

This is Sally's sixth book and first historical novel whose title is a clever twist on one of Fitzgerald's most notable books. "All my other novels have been contemporary. This was a different voice for me." Sally has become quite prolific since leaving magazine publishing having been at the top of the masthead at McCall's and Lifetime magazine ("a tenuous start-up"). Her first novel, *Little Pink Slips*, was a page-turner about the glossy, gossipy and celebrity-obsessed world of magazines which was published by Putnam in 2007. She also penned the non-fiction tome, *Slouching Towards Adulthood*, in which she offers a bird's eye view of what it's like to raise today's "adultescents" while exploring what lies behind the current generation's unwillingness—or inability—to take flight. Not surprisingly, she doesn't regret leaving magazines in the least recalling that at the time of her departure, "celebrity [driven] magazines were having a moment" and that wasn't exactly her forte. "I found lining up [celebrity] covers particularly onerous," recalled Sally over her Cobb salad.

"F. Scott Fitzgerald is one of my favorite writers," she told me of her decision to venture into historical and biographical fiction. And the more Sally learned about Sheilah Graham's you-can't-make-this-stuff-up life; the more intrigued she became. "Sheilah completely reinvented herself. I'm always fascinated by people who have the wherewithal to do that, and I always wanted to write a biographical novel. I think it's such an interesting genre."

However, explained Sally, "You have to stumble over the right person. Sheilah was that [person] for me." Working from Graham's memoirs, interviews and letters, Sally discovered the fascinating details about Graham's life including the little-known fact she had been raised in a Jewish orphanage. Over the course of many years, Graham transformed herself into a woman whose orbit included the glittering social scenes of London and later, Hollywood. "She was the female Jay Gatsby."

The love story at the center of the novel was equally compelling to her. "Their romance was very real," said Sally. "For most people [Fitzgerald's] story ends in the thirties when his wife, Zelda, was institutionalized. Sheilah was with him when he wrote *The Last Tycoon* in Hollywood and helped him revive his career." In examining Fitzgerald's and Graham's relationship, Sally has written a very cinematic book that transports the reader to the era of Hollywood's Golden Age up until 1959 vividly recreating the events that shaped the author's final years while imagining how these two people loved each other. "I tried to animate the emotion. While people saw [Fitzgerald] as a drunk, she didn't see him that way. She saw it as an illness. [The book] completes the jigsaw puzzle of F. Scott Fitzgerald's life," said Sally.

Another Side of Paradise has gotten uniformly excellent reviews from a number of outlets including *People*, *USA Today*, *Newsday* and Oprah.com. Amazon's readers have also given the book high marks. "Eighty percent of the reviews have been five stars, and the rest are four stars," said Sally. Impressive, no?

Sally has several events where she'll talk about *Another Side of Paradise* coming up this fall including an appearance at the Chappaqua Public Library on October 3 and an author talk at the Jewish Community Center of Northern New Jersey on November 3 as well as other stops in Baltimore and Michigan.

So what's next? *Another Side of Paradise* will be released in paperback next spring and is currently "out there" looking like a possible theatrical property. Sally is already at work on her next book. "But I can't really talk about it." When you are, we'll be here.