

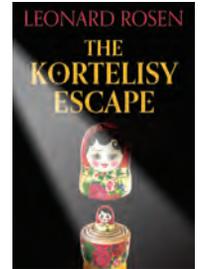
THE KORTELISY ESCAPE

By Leonard Rosen

Price: \$29.95

Available from *Amazon.com* and other book sellers

Review by Jim Kleefeld



As an avid reader and a collector of fiction with a magic theme, I was thrilled to get a preview copy of this new novel by Leonard Rosen, already established as a superior writer. The new tale does not disappoint. His writing style is smooth and easy, so it flows effortlessly. You never feel like things get too complicated; you just sit back and let the story flow into you.

And what a story it is. At 66 years old, Nate Larson has been unjustly caught up in a legal tangle and ends up in prison. There, he has been kept from his granddaughter, his only living relative, who has been mercilessly shuffled from one bad foster home to the next. In trying to care for a girl who trusts no one and hasn't even seen a relative of any kind since she was four, Nate has to learn how to live in society, care for a rebellious teenager, and provide for himself with no job prospects.

He turns to magic — creating routines, teaching tricks to his granddaughter, and booking a New England tour of paid performances. Grace slowly comes around to his plan, despite interventions from past foster parents, bureaucratic social workers, and the occasional personal slip-up. The two lost souls find a common bond in creating personal stories to use as patter for their magic, as Nate insists that performing is about touching the hearts and sympathies of your audience.

Through the pair's development

of the patter to go along with the tricks, we discover more and more about Nate's curious background, his desire to perform, and his plan to extricate himself and Grace from the throes of a scheming almost-business partner. Nate's older brother Dima is struggling with Alzheimer's, the family grocery store is being taken over by Max (a "connected" man), and the county prosecutor is eagerly trying to put Nate and Dima away for either drugs or human trafficking or something else. Nate's carefully constructed plan involves using the magic plots and patter to try to trap Max, vindicate himself and his brother, and keep his granddaughter from being swept back into the system. I spent thirty years teaching inner city kids in a large urban environment and I had more than my share of run-ins with disrespectful, inconsiderate, officious county social workers. Rosen's depiction of uncaring DCFS staff was spot on.

I absolutely loved how much the story depends on the magic tricks, magic patter, and magic shows to advance the plot. This isn't just a crime novel with some magic thrown in, but rather the magic is at the core of the plot. But I feel that even were I not a magician I would have loved this story, because the characters are so vividly written and the events happen so logically. Nothing feels forced. Nate uses his background of growing up in war-torn Ukraine as a

patter line for an escape trick, but as he advances along his gig route, the story slowly changes and we discover that things are not always what they seem. Life is not just what happened to us, but also how we remember it.

Some novels are great for escape — get through it and have fun. Others are great for puzzle-solving — solve the mystery at the end. This book is a great one for immersion — let yourself get involved in the story but leave time to stop and reflect often. It is not about getting to the end, it is about what is contained, even layered inside. There are just so many nice *moments* in the book, especially where the author treats magic with respect. I'll spill just one, but you are in for lots more like this. Grace, the granddaughter has just performed a trick for a lady in the park and is telling Nate, her grandfather about it:

"Her face," I said, struggling for the words. "It went blank, Nate. Then she went 'Oh my!' Then she smiled. Then she started laughing. She loved it! I really did something to her."

Nate touched her cheek. "No," he said. "You did something *for* her."

See what I mean about *moments*? This book is full of great ones. Go buy it.

The Kortelisy Escape will be available starting November 30.