



## Leaving Brooklyn

*Lynne Sharon Schwartz, Ursula Hegi (Introduction)*

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An injury at birth left Audrey with a wandering eye. Though flawed, the bad eye functions well enough to permit her an idiosyncratic view of the world, one she welcomes in the stifling postwar Brooklyn of the 1950s. During a journey to Manhattan to see a doctor about her sight, she begins to explore the sexual rites of adulthood. But can her romance last? In this beautifully observed novel, Lynne Sharon Schwartz raises themes of innocence and escape while illuminating the rich inner life of a singular girl.

## **Leaving Brooklyn Details**

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## From Reader Review Leaving Brooklyn for online ebook

### Larry Bassett says

Brooklyn is the place where our first person narrator Audrey grew up, was a child, and this book is about leaving Brooklyn. It is filled with the insights that belong to a child; you know that when you read them because some recall your own childhood. But there is an unusual character playing a major role, Audrey's right eye, her wandering eye. This eye gives her a unique view of the world and the effort of her parents to remedy the "problem" brings her to the office of an eye doctor who takes Audrey to a new level of existence. Brooklyn is another major player in the book. Its habits and mores sometimes guide and sometimes mislead Audrey. This is Audrey looking back on her youth.

Audrey had a thirst for knowledge and experience.

Earlier, in an acting class I took when I was fifteen, I saw branded on the forearm of a pale girl a many-digitated number two and a half inches above the wrist. I had known the girl through the fall and winter, but only in the spring when we wore short-sleeved blouses did the number show itself. I knew it for exactly what it was, though in Brooklyn we never spoke of those details of the war and I did not read the papers much. It was something one knew, that was all, like competition and death. I felt a twinge of envy between my ribs and was immediately ashamed and horrified, for we were trained, in Brooklyn, to feel shame at every wayward emotion, but I forgive her now, that girl I was. She was ignorant and impoverished. I didn't covet the other girl's suffering, only her knowledge; I wished it were possible to have the one without the other.

We see the small things of her daily life, her awareness.

With all my mother's shaking, a ring of cream still clung to the neck of the bottle; it could not be fully homogenized by hand. Even after milk arrived homogenized, it was a long time before I lost the habit of shaking it as my mother had done. Thus do our parents cheat mortality, for a while.

Love is a part of her life and suddenly it is not. This will be an important factor as the plot thickens.

From as early as I can remember, until I was about twelve years old, I was always in love . . . Sometimes it was a boy in my class; more often it was someone older and unattainable . . . I would see them two or three times, barely speak to them, and spend the next few months talking to them in my head . . . So I was never alone. This being in love, in my early years, felt like a condition inherent to life, like having a body temperature . . . And it never seemed strange that love was always with me, attached to someone ignorant of the attachment. . . And then at twelve years old, just when most girls are starting, I stopped falling in love. . . Love had disappointed me, and I broke myself of the habit of loving and gave myself to solitude.

At a young age, she learns what is important in life.

"Accuracy and speed." The sort of prayer that, no matter what the political climate, is always permitted in the public schools. "Those qualities are not only for the test. They will help you get through life as well."

. . .

The girl I was saw warriors welcomed back from Korea with a bit less fanfare . . . She couldn't know that later ones would be received even more grudgingly, without any celebration . . . we were never again able to claim innocence. We had television, and we were forced to acknowledge what they had done to return alive, that living flesh had yet again been rendered to ashes. It shook us with doubt, which may be the only kind of progress or education there ever is.

. . .

I could not call spirits from the briny deep, maybe because during the first two weeks of chemistry I myself had be exiled to the far end of the lab, which the teacher called Siberia. My crime was touching the equipment – test tubes and Bunsen burner – before being given official permission to do so.

And then Audrey finds a book in her parent's bedroom.

It was a manual for first-timers. It called the man "the husband" and the woman "his bride." . . . It was hard to gauge from the book whether his bride knew what her role was, or whether she had any functioning consciousness at all, since the text was addressed to the husband.

Audrey begins to form an illicit relationship with the eye doctor on her second visit when her mother does not come. That relationship may be seen as a perversion or statutory rape. But it is presented as much more nebulous and not easily categorized. It is Audrey's view that we have for the balance of the relationship and the balance of the book. Depending on your attitudes, feminist or not, you will see the relationship as fuzzy as if seen by Audrey's wandering right eye. The eye doctor is married, two sons, and in his mid thirties. Audrey is fifteen. Guilty. Case closed. But . . .

But a seed of doubt is planted:

I know that I – she – was not the kind of girl who could do that. In my old nighttime fantasies I had never touched a man that way. I was the one who was touched, gentle, romantic touches awakening me part by part. Even as I recall it, record it, I suspect I really didn't do such an outrageous thing and memory is falsifying, inventing what I wish I could have done or imagining it from what I have since become capable of doing.

And then at the very end, the very last sentences, after all the fantasies or realities have been explored, we read

Does being true to one's self mean offering the literal truth or the truth that should have been, the truth of the image of one's self. . . no longer a case of double vision, but of two separate eyes whose separate visions – what happened and what might have happened – come together in what we call the past, which we see with hindsight.

Memory is revision. I have just destroyed another piece of my past, to tell a story.

*Leaving Brooklyn* was published nearly twenty-five years ago. No doubt it has redeeming social value. A lot of it. But it also has descriptions of sex that may or may not be true. Four stars and I am looking forward to reading some of her other books that I have on my shelves.

More about the author: <http://www.lynnesharonschwartz.com/>

More about the book: <http://www.lynnesharonschwartz.com/le...>

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### **Michèle Demoete says**

moving, brilliant and puzzling

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### **Caroline says**

This book was on my library's Book Club list, so I decided to read it, especially since it was only 153 pages. I was curious about the themes of innocence, escape, vision--real and obscured, and coming of age for 15 year old Audrey. It satisfied my curiosity.

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### **Beth Lind says**

A tale of teenage angst and a creeper eye doctor and watching on the sidelines as a young girl learns the ways of the world. Makes me want to read more about McCarthy and that era of communism fear. Audrey was a contradiction of maturity and naivety who is taken advantage of by her eye doctor. There are a lot of things to absorb in this book and I have a feeling that I will be thinking about this one for a while.

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### **Tracy says**

Another great read published by Hawthorne Books.

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### **Heidi says**

Can a book be realistic an surreal at the same time?

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### **Emily says**

It was a well written book with some incredible areas of the main character really becoming in touch with herself. It was a bit graphic and disturbing on one hand, and a tad unbelievable. So well some of the actual writing was incredibly descriptive and well done, I wouldn't really recommend this to most people.

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### **Julie says**

"Audrey", the main character who is somewhat of a blur between the fictional character and the author, tells

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the story of her experiences as a fifteen-year-old. Audrey lives in Brooklyn with her Jewish parents in a very traditional and conservative home. She has a wandering eye, and her mother takes her to an eye doctor in Manhattan to have a cosmetic lense fitted. Audrey ends up having an affair with the married doctor. The story becomes a metaphor for leaving one's protected innocence. It also explores the overlap between actual and reconstructed memories. Different writing style; not really an enjoying read; but an interesting read.

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