



Bittersweet Brooklyn: A Novel

Thelma Adams

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In turn-of-the-century New York, a mobster rises—and his favorite sister struggles between loyalty and life itself. How far will she go when he commits murder?

After midnight, Thelma Lorber enters her brother Abie's hangout under the Williamsburg Bridge, finding Jewish mobster Louis "Pretty" Amberg in a puddle of blood on the kitchen floor. She could flee. Instead, in the dark hours of that October 1935 night before the dawn of Murder, Inc., she remains beside the fierce, funny brother who has nurtured and protected her since childhood. There are many kinds of love a woman can feel for a man, but few compare to that of the baby sister for her older brother. For Thelma, a wild widow tethered to a young son, Abie is the center of her world. But that love is about to undo everything she holds dear...

Flipping the familiar script of *The Sopranos*, *Boardwalk Empire*, and *The Godfather*, *Bittersweet Brooklyn* explores the shattering impact of mob violence on the women expected to mop up the mess. Winding its way over decades, this haunting family saga plunges readers into a dangerous past—revealed through the perspective of a forgotten yet vibrant woman.

Bittersweet Brooklyn: A Novel Details

Date : Published November 6th 2018 by Lake Union Publishing

ISBN : 9781503904606

Author : Thelma Adams

Format : Paperback 352 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Mystery

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From Reader Review Bittersweet Brooklyn: A Novel for online ebook

BookGypsy says

A haunting family saga told from Thelma, the youngest. This story is gritty, gangster filled and emotional. At times it was so closely related to my own family it left me wounded and shedding a tear. A family ripped apart at the seams and many of the issues that Jewish and Italian immigrants faced. A truly remarkable story that you won't forget. The writing is brilliant and so vivid it literally breathes. Hauntingly Beautiful. A great book club selection as there just so many things you'll want to discuss.

I was given this copy from Net Galley for my honest review.

Dawunny-BookGypsy

Novels N Latte Book Blog

Novels & Latte Book Club

Linda says

Thank you NetGalley, Lake Union and Thelma Adams.

This was a hard book for me to read. It touched on so many things that happened to the youngest daughter in a much unloving family. Thelma was a baby who needed love as do all children. Her mother and sister didn't know the meaning of the word love, caring or empathy. They are cruel and so mean. Very unlovable people. Abie and Louis were the boys that were just in the way. Annie, the oldest girl, was given complete control over everything, including the younger children. She treated them like they were less than human. The mother was so awful that I had a hard time with her. I hated her so much. She put Annie in the position she was in but there is no excuse for her being so full of hate for her younger siblings.

This book is full of so much emotion. From the abuse that Annie and their mother thrust on them to the pain of growing up in a broken family. No one goes through as much as Thelma. From the abuse as a baby to the stepdad that the mother chooses over her, mentally if not physically. Blame a child for the actions of an adult. That is such an awful thing. Thelma struggles through her whole life and at one point I got very angry with her. She should have been a better mother her own self. I have to admit that Annie was a very good mother though not a good sister.

This book is so well written that you feel like you are there. You feel the pain and deplorable things done. The heartache of Thelma, Abie and Louis. The losses in their lives and the few good times. It was easy to see why Thelma never truly trusted anyone or felt loved. You can't go through what she did and have trusting, loving, feelings. I could relate to some of the things that happened in her life. I felt bad for her. She as a child and an adult. She lost a lot and I believe she deserved so much more than she got.

I loved how this book started then went back to let us know what lead up to what happened. Getting to know each character whether I hated them or really liked them. It was well written and the characters were well developed. I gave it 5 stars and it's worth every one of them.

Tammy says

If you love big family sagas, Bittersweet Brooklyn fits the bill! Thelma Adams beautiful writing made me feel as though I had taken a step back in time to 1920's Brooklyn. At times, I didn't like the main character, Thelma, because of her selfishness. But the author did a wonderful job of creating a sympathetic, hard as nails character who fought her way through the adversities of her life and circumstances. Excellent!!

Rebecca Rosenberg says

Bittersweet Brooklyn rips open the raw emotions of a Brooklyn family during WWII that deals with death, poverty, estrangement, lack of love. When the father dies, the Jewish family is left to fend for themselves, distraught and bone-poor. The mother descends into abject misery, leaving the oldest daughter to raise the family. While the children face the orphanage, and complete rejection, they grow older, looking for the very aspects they missed in their demeaning upbringing. Four children, four stories, not one of them predictable. The author, Thelma Adams reached inside my gut and twisted it until I couldn't stand it a moment longer. A meaningful read about the people who matter in your life and how to treat them. Read it and change.

Barbara White says

BITTERSWEET BROOKLYN is a haunting family saga that pins the reader in a specific moment of history, yet tells a timeless tale of immigrant, dysfunctional family patterns, and the desperate need to survive in a sometimes inhospitable world. It is a dark, intense read. There is hate, there is violence, there is mental illness that is neither understood nor treated in an effective manner, and yet there is also love and dancing, a fascinating heroine, and a bond between a brother and a sister that I will not soon forget. This is a book to savor.

Madalyne says

I received a copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. This story follows the lives of the Lorber children into their adulthood. I was initially interested in the mob plot, but this story is more than that. This story covers everything from first loves, yentas, Italian festas, to the more depressing and grisly factors of life (mental illness, child abuse and death). Overall a good read that makes you feel like you stepped back in time and want to go to Coney Island for a knish.

Reading.Between.Wines says

??????? / 5

Bittersweet Brooklyn by Thelma Adams is a heart-wrenching historical fiction novel that was not at all what I expected.

What it's about: Thelma is the youngest of a family of 4 children, fatherless, and has a mom that prefers her oldest Annie while struggling with life as a Jewish widow. Annie is left in charge of the 3 younger siblings, including Thelma, and isn't exactly the picture of love and affection when she is just a kid herself. Told from 1905 through 1935, this is a family saga focusing on the family mostly through Thelma's eyes; and what happens when a child (who isn't all that nice) is left to act like the mother to her younger siblings. Ending with 1935 where mobsters are prominent and Thelma's brother Abie has gone too far.

Honestly I expected this book to focus a lot more on the mob than it actually did. At a young age Thelma's brother Abie is into things he shouldn't be, but the main focus of this novel is Thelma as she grows up in a home where the only family that acts like they love her are her 2 brothers (and they aren't really around). There is a lot of tough material in this novel, and I definitely teared up more than once. I loved Thelma and felt for her, but I was also a little frustrated with her as well.

The characters were well fleshed out, and besides Thelma we do also get the occasional viewpoint of other members of her family, including her mom and Annie. There are a lot of people I hated in this novel, and unfortunately only a few I liked, but I'm pretty sure that was how it was supposed to be. Thelma and her family had it pretty rough, but Thelma made me so sad. She was treated terribly and it made my heart break for her. You could argue that none of her family had it all that easy, considering everything that happens, but I connected the most with Thelma.

Final Thought: If you are looking for a historical fiction novel about the mob, this isn't it. But if you are looking for a historical fiction, family saga set in New York in the early 1900s then this is your book! Sad for sure, but the end leaves you hopeful... at least for Thelma. I also liked that even though the end catches up with the beginning, it wasn't word for word like some novels. Definitely recommend for lovers of family sagas, just beware *Bittersweet Brooklyn* will leave your heart in pieces!

Nenia ? Queen of Literary Trash, Protector of Out-of-Print Gems, Khaleesi of Bodice Rippers, Mother of Smut, the Unrepentant, Breaker of Convention ? Campbell says

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I've never read a bad historical title from Lake Union Publishing. This imprint seems to publish mostly historical fiction, thrillers, and women's fiction - three genres of books that I used to avoid, but now love, and features two of my favorite historical fiction authors: Amy Harmon and Lindsay Jayne Ashford. Every time I see new books from this publisher on Netgalley, I immediately request all of them, and I'm *constantly* buying them on sale from Amazon. I had visions of a small publisher, probably where the CEO wears a sunhat and evening gloves and all hands meetings are had over high tea, but no - apparently it's an imprint of Amazon Publishing, how very disillusioning.

BITTERSWEET BROOKLYN attracted me with that exquisite cover, and held me with the premise. Thelma Lorber is a young Jewish woman when we first meet her, cleaning up the dead body from one of her mobster brother's "fixings." She wonders, as she cleans, how she got to this place. The narrative is only to happy to show us, transporting us to Thelma's childhood in an abusive home with a neglectful mother and cruel, domineering sister. Her brothers, the only people who care about her, are torn from her and sent to an orphanage while she suffers under the tyranny of her female relatives and, later, under the attentions of a

predatory stepfather.

I thought it was interesting that the author gave this character her first name. I wouldn't be able to do that - it feels too personal, especially considering all the bad things that befall the main character in the book. Thelma's life is one big heartbreak, and even the good things that happen to her - like being taken in by a warm Italian family or meeting her true love in a dance hall - don't have happy endings. I think if you read this book expecting a thriller or a romance, you'll be unhappy, since it is neither. It's a character study in regret and disappointment, and Thelma's insights as she looks back on her life through the experience of adulthood at the end are probably the best part of the novel.

Thanks to Netgalley/the publisher for the review copy!

3.5 stars

Camille Maio says

Bittersweet Brooklyn is gripping from Page one. An intimate look at the dynamics of a broken family in gangster-riddled New York, it will have you rooting for protagonist and antagonist alike as wounds are open, healed, scarred, and exposed. With some of the finest dialogue I've ever come across, this is one I will not soon forget.

Sally Koslow says

Bookies! Bubbes! Bossy big-mouths! Thelma Adams' Bittersweet Brooklyn takes you back to an early twentieth century Williamsburg teeming not with too-cool-for-school Millennials, but rough-and-tumble Jewish and Italian immigrants. You'll race through this raucous historical saga, admiring its gritty detail and street-smart dialogue. Thelma Adams brings to life an unforgettable family ruled by filial love, yet divided by biting dysfunction.

Jypsy says

Bittersweet Brooklyn is, unfortunately, not for me. I disliked the violence and much of the story line. For this reason, I couldn't connect with this story.

DJ Sakata says

Favorite Quotes:

His response to those who disliked or disrespected him was schmuck. It was his favorite Yiddish word in a language that contained more bendy terms for shaming and cursing than the Eskimos had for snow.

There's nothing wrong with those gams, little sister. You got the magic leg. You step off a curb and shake it, and the Prince of Wales is going to stop his carriage.

It aggravated her that Annie could nurture Julius, Adele, and Eli and, with a swivel of her head, spew dragon fire toward Thelma.

Vulnerability had been a dangerous condition around Annie and Mama as they carped on the physiques of the people strolling past, laughing at this one's little pecker visible in swim trunks too small, that one's jiggling fat rolls as she lunged for a rogue rubber ball. Meeskait, they'd pronounce, little ugly one. What a tuchus, they'd say and point at someone with a seat that could fill a subway car. And yet, the pair hadn't been bathing beauties, either: the walrus and the sea lion. Mama covered in a floral muumuu and Annie squeezed like a sausage into a swimsuit one size too small, revealing back fat that she didn't notice from the front, impressed by her own cleavage.

My Review:

I marveled at the sublime storytelling and writing quality, even though the story was taut with tension and full of heartbreaking scenes and emotive insights that gutted me as I read, I couldn't seem to put it down. I passionately despised the useless mother and heinous sister – they were atrocious creatures, yet expertly crafted. Every character was well-nuanced, cunningly detailed, and compellingly complex. The storylines were intriguing, shrewdly paced, and hit all the feels with occasional lashings of clever levity that had me laughing aloud. Thelma Adams's word voodoo is strong; I was appalled, riveted, mesmerized, and totally engaged. She turned me inside out with this one – yet I regret nothing.

Karen Kay says

I received this from netgalley.com in exchange for a review.

In turn-of-the-century New York, a mobster rises—and his favorite sister struggles between loyalty and life itself. How far will she go when he commits murder?

Great story, good read! A few great things going for this historical fiction book set in New York. There were many iconic images and how city living is described made me feel like I was right there in the tenements. The writing is good and moves the story along at a good pace. I liked how the saga is played out over the years involving several family members.

4?

Ann Creel says

Enthralling historical fiction

In Bittersweet Brooklyn, Thelma Adams shows us a family living rather dark lives, and yet she manages to make them into sympathetic characters. The historical details enrich the novel, and lots of strong dialogue makes it feel fast-paced. The story had me in its grips from page one and continues to haunt me. Kudos to the author for wrenching so much emotion out of me. A great read.

Literary Soirée says

BITTERSWEET BROOKLYN takes the reader into the heart of gangster-controlled New York during the 1920s and '30s, in this fully absorbing tale about Thelma Lorber, a woman thrust into mobster life through her beloved older brother's involvement. She's faced with the ultimate struggle when he commits murder. As a widow with a young son, she has much on the line in this engaging novel that exposes the impact of mob violence on women. Immerses you in this tragic family's life over decades, shown through the eyes of a truly gutsy woman. I agree with best-selling author Sally Koslow, who says, "You'll race through this raucous historical saga, admiring its gritty detail and street-smart dialogue. Inspired by real events, Thelma Adams brings to life an unforgettable family ruled by filial love divided by biting dysfunction." 5/5

Thanks to the author for inviting me to do this review, which was so much fun! I also thank Lake Union Publishing and NetGalley for the ARC; opinions are mine.

#BittersweetBrooklyn #NetGalley
