



Brooklyn Zoo: The Education of a Psychotherapist

Darcy Lockman

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A compelling memoir of a psychotherapist's clinical and personal education amid chaos and dysfunction that delivers an emotional impact to rival Susan Sheehan's classic *Is There No Place on Earth for Me?*

Seven years after her college graduation, Darcy Lockman abandoned a career in magazine journalism to become a psychologist. After four years in classrooms, she spent her final training year at the Kings County Hospital, an aging public institution on the outskirts of Brooklyn. When she started, little did she know that the hospital's behavioral health department—the infamous G Building, where the Son of Sam serial killer David Berkowitz and the rapper Ol' Dirty Bastard once resided—was on the cusp of its darkest era yet, one that culminated in the death of a patient in a psychiatric emergency room described by the *New York Post* as a “Dickensian nightmare.”

Brooklyn Zoo unfolds amid the constant drama and disorder of the G Building. Lockman rotates through four departments, each of which presents new challenges and haunting cases. She works with forensic psychologists to evaluate offenders for fitness to stand trial—almost all of them with pathos-filled histories and little hope of rehabilitation. The thorny politics of the psych ER compound her anxiety about working with its volatile patients, but under the wing of a charismatic if brusque mentor she gains a deeper insight into her new profession as well as into her own strengths and limitations.

As she moves to the inpatient ward and then psychiatric consultation liaison, Lockman's overstretched supervisors and the institutional preference for pills over therapy are persistent obstacles. But they eventually present a young clinician with the opportunity to reexamine everything she believes and to come out stronger on the other side.

Lockman's frank portrayal of her fledgling role in a warped system is a professional coming-of-age story that will resonate with anyone who has fought to develop career mastery in a demanding environment. A stark portrait of the struggling public mental-health-care system, *Brooklyn Zoo* is also an homage to the doctors who remain committed to their patients in spite of institutional failures and to the patients who strive to get better with their help. And it is an inspiring first-hand account by a narrator who triumphs over self-doubt to believe in the rightness and efficacy of her chosen profession.



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