



Debutante Hill

Lois Duncan

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This is the first novel Lois Duncan ever wrote -- a collectors' item.

Seventeenth Summer Literary Award

Debutante Hill Details

Date : Published November 1964 by Pyramid Publications (first published 1957)

ISBN :

Author : Lois Duncan

Format : Paperback 159 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Fiction, Classics, Historical, Historical Fiction

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From Reader Review Debutante Hill for online ebook

koza says

Lois Duncan's first novel. Clearly already trying to balance her own tendencies toward the violent and sordid with the genre expectations of '50s teen romance, though inclining toward the latter. I guess she got that out of her system (after *The Middle Sister* and the Joyce books), because she gave up that effort entirely a few years later. This reads like a Cleary or du Jardin with a dash more realism. The 2013 intro by the author *almost* makes up for the glut of OCR errors in the text.

Jennifer Gibbons says

Huzzah! Lois Duncan's first novel is back in print, thanks to Lizzie Skurnick books! Duncan's regular readers might be surprised; no dead teachers make an appearance, no ghosts, no evil ghosts lurking about the fringes. However, something else is lurking: the structure of class, and the difference between haves and have nots.

Lynn Chambers is a girl of her times: she has good friends, an irritating little sister, a boyfriend who just went to college but she gets to wear his ring around her neck. At the start of her senior year, she finds out that a woman has decided to have a debutante season in Rivertown. All the upper class girls in Lynn's circle are thrilled. Lynn is beyond excited. However, her father puts his foot down: no daughter of his will be a deb. For the first time in her life, Lynn is an outsider.

However, being an outsider isn't that bad. She gets to know Annie Masters, a wonderful artist who is on the wrong side of the tracks; Annie's brother Dirk, who is crushing on Lynn. Lynn finds out her senior year that there are all types of people, and there's a difference in how they are treated by social class. This is a fantastic debut for Lizzie Skurnick books!!!

Katie Fitzgerald says

This review also appears on my blog, Read-at-Home Mom.

Debutante Hill was the first book to be reissued by Lizzie Skurnick Books. Though Lois Duncan is best known to people of my generation and younger as a writer of teen thrillers, this book does not fall into that genre. Published in 1957, it is the story of high school senior Lynn Chambers who is at the center of the popular crowd of kids who live on the Hill. When it is announced that the mother of one of the less-popular girls has decided to organize a debutante program in order to help her daughter improve her social life, it is just assumed that Lynn will participate along with her friends. To her great surprise, though, her father, Dr. Chambers, does not approve of his daughter making her debut. Suddenly, Lynn finds herself left out of everything. While at first it seems like a major disappointment, over time, Lynn's exclusion from the debutante events leads her to make a series of important discoveries about herself, her boyfriend, her friends, and some of her classmates who don't live on the Hill.

I really love this book. I like its old-fashioned sensibility, which reminds me of Beverly Cleary's *First Love* books and the later books in the *Betsy-Tacy* series. I like that it takes a superficial experience - girls wearing gowns and attending parties in order to mark their entry in society - and turns it into a commentary on class distinctions, stereotypes, and popularity. The main character is not perfect, but she is open to change and

willing to compromise, which makes her a worthy and believable role model. Even the romance storylines are handled with a heavy dose of realism - Lynn briefly dates a "bad boy" but the story resists the "good girl reforms bad boy" trope, and ultimately, Lynn is able to resolve her issues with her boyfriend in a calm and rational way, without the hysterics or drama so common in more contemporary YA novels.

High school students would probably find the writing and plot of this book too simplistic, but for grades 6 to 8, it might be just right. It's also a must-read for adults who grew up reading books by Lois Duncan - there's nothing more interesting than looking back on the early works of a favorite author. As a bonus, also read Publisher's Weekly's Q & A with Lois Duncan.

Sophie says

I decided a while ago to read all of the Lizzie Skurnick Books titles, because Lizzie Skurnick has excellent taste and I love what she's doing, bringing back older YA books that have fallen out of print. This one, for example, was published in 1958. 1958! I didn't even know Lois Duncan was writing back then. I grew up loving her paranormal thrillers published in the 70s and 80s, and while this book contains no magic or psychic powers, it's every bit as good as those.

The themes in this book hold up surprisingly well for being half a century old. Lynn is part of a group of popular rich kids, and the girls all want to be debutantes. Lynn's father says no, though, because he doesn't want Lynn to be part of something that divides people along class lines. Lynn is upset at first, but when she can't go to the debutante events, she starts talking to people outside her social circle, and discovers there's more to them than she's always thought.

When Lynn starts dating bad-boy Dirk, I was expecting this to turn into a romance between rich girl and poor boy, but the direction it did take instead surprised and pleased me. Lynn had thoughts of being able to reform Dirk and put him on the straight and narrow, but she eventually realized that that wasn't up to her, it was up to him. Nobody in this book is condemned for being who they are, and most of them, even the "villain," are given sympathetic reasons for what they do. The relationships between characters evolve realistically throughout the book. I especially liked the relationship between Lynn and her sister, Dodie, who starts out as the bratty little sister but ends up a fiercely loyal ally who actually has some things to teach Lynn. Dodie deserves her own novel.

This is a story about a rich white girl learning about her privilege, which I understand is not a story everyone wants to read, but I really liked it.

A couple of notes about this version: I love Lizzie Skurnick Books's cover designs, and the font is delicious, but there were a lot of typos. Like, a lot. Missing punctuation, a couple of misspelled words, and even a l instead of a capital I at one point. Step up your game, dudes.

This edition also contains an introduction by Lois Duncan herself about how she came to be a published author, which is both cute and inspirational. So: A for content, B- for copyediting.

Shelley says

Oh, gosh, I loved this. I am a sucker for malt shop books, and I was so excited when Lois Duncan's first novel got republished this fall by Lizzie Skurnick. Lynn is from the wealthy part of town and while all her

friends are invited to be part of the town's first deb season, her father opposes it and doesn't want her to join. Her senior year changes drastically when all her friends are busy with their parties and she's left on her own to find new friends. It was so entirely 1958, but the core of all her experiences definitely still resonate now - being left out, wanting to help the "bad boy" with the heart of gold, etc. It was just plain fun.

Jada says

In a time when people like to lampoon the dilemmas of well-off people with lists and hashtags like #richgirlproblems, Lizzie Skurnick Books re-issues Lois Duncan's first novel about a wealthy girl whose eyes are opened to the class divides she'd never considered in her hometown. While she was somewhat aware of the stratified nature of her high school, the bigger implications of this don't dawn on our heroine until she finds herself on the outside of the popular crowd. For this edition, Duncan (of I Know What You Did Last Summer fame) wrote a wonderful introduction, detailing the process of writing the book and the beginnings of her publishing career.

Read more on my booksploitation blog

Corinne Wilson says

A 1958 reprint of a coming of age novel about a wealthy young girl who spends her senior year with her well-to-do "Hill" friends and waiting for letters from her handsome college boyfriend, until the tradition of debutantes descends on her small town and her father forbids her to participate. Lynn is suddenly aware of her peers in other social classes, and begins to form strong opinions about prejudices in her town and rethinks the relationships with everyone she's known all her life.

While a bit preachy in places, Lois Duncan's (I Know What You Did Last Summer, Hotel For Dogs) first novel has characters that ring true and enough action and romance to move it along. I can see why it sold well in its day, but I have to confess that what brought this novel to four stars for me was how (unintentionally) hilarious melodramatic 1950s teens are (How thrilling that my feminine charms might wield enough power over bad-boy Dirk Masters to turn him from his rough crowd!), and how interesting the social mores of the 1950s are (If you have a fellow's class ring, you're apparently still not exactly going steady, and it's totally acceptable to chat with him about other boys you're dating while he's out of town. And remember, girls, a real lady is always kind to the less attractive debutantes, otherwise know as "the less fortunate".) I giggled and cackled my way through the story and enjoyed myself thoroughly.

Don't skip the intro. Lois Duncan was clearly the most fantastic child ever.

Also: Holy typo, Batman! There are a disproportionate number of errors in this text. Like ten that I found without looking.

Majenta says

As I was reading this, I was constantly reminded of NICE GIRL FROM GOOD HOME (Fran Arrick) which I had read first although it had been published much later. How many of you who have read both would agree?

What did I actually think of DEBUTANTE HILL? I liked it. It was interesting to read a nonthriller from a thriller author.

Thanks for reading.

Kristen Landon says

Lois Duncan is my all-time fave, so when I found this on audio book I had to give it a try, even though I knew it would be different from most of her other books and very dated. It was. Dated. I wanted to scream at these characters at times. For example, the main girl is forbidden to be a debutante by her father, because it is snobbish. But then her older brother is allowed to go to the debutante parties with his girlfriend and no one says a thing! The main girl doesn't even have a single thought about how unfair that is. What a double standard!!

Jen says

I grew up on Lois Duncan's horror books from the 80's and 90's, and have always been a big fan of hers. I've had Debutante Hill on my TBR list for a while now, and decided to finally read it after hearing of her recent passing.

I really enjoyed this first novel of hers. Written and set in the 1950's, it was a nice look into the lives of teens and social classes of that time period. The characters all felt real, and even though the story was authentic to the 1950's, the message of the book wasn't dated and is still meaningful in the world we live in today.

Kerry says

Lois Duncan's first book (reissued by Lizzie Skurnick Books) was such a fun reading experience. Dating in the 1950s sounded bizarre and confusing and I LOVED reading about it. There was a kind, helpful rich boy and a down-on-his-luck bad boy (named DIRK!) and they were both cute (duh). At one point, a character unironically said "see you in the funny papers." Now I want to read all of Lois Duncan's early works. I'm sad that Lizzie Skurnick Books isn't acquiring new titles anymore, but at least all the old ones are still available to read.

Amy Rae says

I was torn between rating this three or four stars, but I think I'm going to go with four.

On the one hand--the three-star hand--the structure of this book is kind of disappointing. Duncan has the setup for a lot of class-based conflict in the arrival of a debutante tradition, but almost all discussion of it happens off-screen. She has the option of having Lynn make new, diverse-by-1957-standards friends (a Jewish girl and a Spanish Catholic girl are pretty different from the Hill's WASP-y in-crowd), but instead, she only really develops two non-Hill friends over the course of the book.

Plus? I'm sorry, but Paul is *boring*. I'm reminded of Mr. Harrison explaining why everyone prefers the villain in Anne's story in *Anne of the Island*:

"AVERIL couldn't have married MAURICE. He was bad."

"She'd have reformed him. You can reform a man; you can't reform a jelly-fish, of course."

Paul isn't a jellyfish, but I liked Dirk so much better than him. I felt like we got a better idea of who he was and why he and Lynn might be sweet together.

On the other, four-star hand, what the book actually *is* is still enjoyable. The characters grew on me way more than I expected, and I was really invested in where the story was going. I appreciated that everyone (save, I suppose, for Brad) had a little good in them; even Dirk, who Duncan later described in at least one interview as the "villain" of the book, wasn't really a bad boy. He was just the wrong boy for Lynn. And while I obviously would have preferred it if the two of them got together, I thought the reasons that they didn't made a lot of sense in context. Even poor, mousy Brenda Peterson (who's a great forerunner to Carrie White, in personality if not in circumstance) genuinely touched me by the end.

Ultimately, I'm rating it on personal enjoyment, because I had a great time listening to this book (though the narrator took a little getting used to) and am now hoping to read more by Lois Duncan in the future.

Ms. Yingling says

Lynn Chambers is a bit excited that a debutante season has been arranged by the unfortunate Brenda's mother, especially since her beau, Paul Kingsley, is off to college. The parties will give her something to do during her senior year. Unfortunately, her father, who is a doctor who ministers to everyone in town, including the poor, tells her that she will NOT be going to the parties, because they will serve only to socially divide the town even further. This is a bummer, because all of her friends ARE going to the parties, and Brenda even gets Paul to take her to some. Understandably upset, Lynn manages to get herself invited out by the poor and dangerous Dirk, who takes her out to a road house and is generally a bit rude to her because she has money and he doesn't. Lynn does start to understand a bit what it is like to not have the advantages that she has had, and her sister Dodie, with whom she hasn't gotten along, shows her that just because people are Not Our Kind doesn't mean that they are bad people. Except for maybe Dirk, who falls head over heels with Lynn, gives her his mother's jewelry, and then generally acts dysfunctional.

Strengths: This is a fascinating look at this time period. I bought a copy to go with *The Outsiders* unit, and I think it would be good to read in preparation for that book, since it predates it. It's by Lois Duncan-- her first work, in fact, and one for which she won the Maureen Daly Seventeenth Summer First Novel competition. It's forward thinking for the time (and I collect teen novels from this period, so have read a lot), and holds up well even today. The best part, however, is the level of detail about everyday life at the period that a modern book would never begin to match, from the father calling Lynn "Daughter" to the clothes for dates, lingo, etc. Very fun to read.

Weaknesses: Modern teens will find the writing a bit stilted, and might not believe that things were as portrayed in the book. I almost wish Lizzie Skurnick books had gone with the original cover!

Stasia says

I came across this book a few years ago when I was absolutely enthralled with the 1950's era, and looking to read anything from the time period I could get my hands on!!

I wish we had more books like this today!! It resonated with me and reminded me of times in my teen years when I didn't go along with the crowd, and how it was hard sometimes to be set apart, or the 'odd one out'. I had anticipated a completely different direction to the ending, and was pleasantly surprised when it ended how I had hoped it would!!!

Liralen says

First published in 1957, this was reprinted a few years ago. It's Duncan's first book, and she notes in a foreword that she originally wrote it as a short story: she turned it into a book after an editor told her that it was too much story for a short story. For readers who grew up with Duncan's *I Know What You Did Last Summer*, this is quite the change of pace. No murder, nothing supernatural...just a relatively quiet story about a girl from a 'good' family who must learn a lesson about class and perception.

I'm giving this four stars because I found it so fascinating. It's not without its problems, though. Modern readers will notice that 'diversity' in the book extends only as far as how much money the white characters have (note that the modern cover includes a few black men, all of whom are clearly in blue-collar-worker roles); there's something of a rich-white-saviour aspect to one of the book's conflicts; there's never really any suggestion that Lynn (the girl from the 'right side of the tracks') might *actually* end up with Dirk (the boy from the 'wrong side of the tracks'), because that would be a bridge too far. It's a reflection partly of the times, I think, and partly of Duncan's youth and relative inexperience at the time of writing. To Lynn, the protagonist, it's genuinely mind-blowing to realise that people outside her narrow, privileged social circle can also be good people, smart people, people worth knowing. It feels realistic that there's a limit to how far Lynn's changes, over the course of the year, can stretch, and I appreciate that she grows aware of her privilege throughout the story: that even though all her friends are 'coming out' as debutantes and she's not (her father doesn't approve of coming out, as he thinks debutante activities are classist), she has access to privileges that lower-class girls don't. Among other things, Lynn is never ostracised: her friends are sorry she can't participate, and Lynn often *does* end up feeling left out, but it's not intentional. In a contemporary story, I'm not sure this would be the case; I think it's likely that a lot of the plot would revolve around a 'mean girl' from either side of the tracks.

But as a historical piece of reading, it's fascinating. I'm really only sorry that the reprint didn't include Duncan's original short story!
