

# **SOUVENIRS FROM ANOTHER LIFE: STORIES**

**by Leah Browning**

**Trade Paperback | \$18.00 | 288 pages | ISBN: 979-8-9990752-0-8**  
**Library of Congress Control Number: 2025911108**  
**E-book ISBN: 979-8-9990752-1-5**  
**Audiobook ISBN: 979-8-9990752-2-2 (retail)**  
**Audiobook ISBN: 979-8-9990752-3-9 (library)**  
**Quiet Ocean Studio & Press | Publication date: February 2026**

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. How do you think the title of the book, *Souvenirs from Another Life*, relates to the collection as a whole? Did you find the title meaningful?
2. The book has been described as “a collection of stories in which nothing is quite what it seems.” Many of the characters are hiding or disguising parts of themselves. In one of the stories, the main character is literally wearing a costume. Could you relate to that idea of concealment? Why or why not?
3. Leah Browning has said that, as a reader, she likes a lot of variety. For that reason, it was an intentional choice on her part to include stories of different styles and lengths in the same collection. As a reader yourself, did you like that variation? Why or why not?
4. In your opinion, what were some of the central themes or messages of the book? Which stories highlighted those themes?
5. Many of these stories are about relationships, whether between friends, partners, parents and children, extended family members, neighbors, or coworkers. Did you feel that the portrayals were realistic? Which could you relate with most closely?

6. Starting with “Punch,” the first story in the collection, many of the stories draw attention to different facets of being a parent. Could you relate more to the parents in these stories, or to the children? In what way?

7. The wife in “Small Kindness” is experiencing the dissolution of a long relationship. Have you ever found yourself in this situation, and how did you respond to it? In her place, what would you have done?

8. Several of these stories involved elements of fabulism or magical realism. Did you prefer the more realistic stories, or the more absurd or surreal stories? Why?

9. In “Caught,” a man finds his Tinder date surrounded by vaguely threatening birds. Toward the beginning of “The Surrogate Wife,” a woman returns after a long journey to discover that her husband’s new housekeeper has taken over her home. Did you interpret these and other stories with elements of curiosity as real or unreal? What gave you that impression?

10. A short story by Aimee Bender, “End of the Line,” inspired “The Bigger Man.” Though they begin in the same way, if you have read the original story, you will know that the plot and the tone of Leah Browning’s story are dramatically different. Which story did you like better and why? How do the two stories explore ideas of kindness and cruelty toward others?

11. A series of three stories (“Severance,” “Souvenirs from Another Life,” and “The Lawnmower”) do not include any of the same characters, but they all discuss physical and emotional damage. At some point, everyone experiences pain and loss in life. Could you relate to these or other characters who were at a crossroads?

12. The short story mentioned in “Wax” is “Kneller’s Happy Campers” by Etgar Keret, translated from the Hebrew by Miriam Shlesinger. (It was included in *The Bus Driver Who Wanted to Be God*, a book reissued in English

by Riverhead Books in 2015.) In “Wax,” the main character reads a short story “about a man who had killed himself and gone to some unnamed afterlife where he got a job and went grocery shopping and spent his evenings in bars, drinking and shooting pool.” The main character is filled with horror and dread at the thought of a next life filled with the same mundane tasks of this one. “Could this be, she thought—continuous worlds that we walk through like a shotgun apartment or a series of train cars, one leading inexorably to the next?” Does this vision appeal to or repel you? How do you see the afterlife?

13. There are several stories in this collection that depict complicated topics such as drug use (“Skin” and “Dark Horse”), violence (“Jeopardy” and “My One and Only”), and mental health issues such as depression or suicidal ideation. Do you think that it helps to read about these things? Are there ways in which it could increase awareness or compassion, either about yourself or others?

14. How do you think that money and class affect the characters in these and other stories in the collection?

15. “Hope for the Future” describes a city with various dystopian elements. (The water that slid past was “hostile, torpid, discolored by chemicals, lying in wait, threatening with every storm to rage past its oily banks.”) Yet the story ends on a positive or hopeful note. Or is that open to interpretation? How did you perceive the incoming phone call?

16. In “The Costume Wedding,” Jennifer forces herself to have an awkward conversation with a coworker. Is she hurting the younger doctor, or helping her? What are the power dynamics in this type of workplace? How are they affected by gender, age, and experience? Have you ever been in a similar situation, and if so, how did you handle it?

17. In the first of two linked stories, “Savior,” Gavin has messy relationships with both of his parents and then with Chrissy. Who needs to be saved, and who is doing the saving?

18. At the end of “Fugitive,” what do you think Gavin says to his mother?

19. The last two stories in this collection, “Four-in-Hand” and “Around Her Neck,” which are also linked, echo many of the threads in the collection as a whole. (For example, they feature parents, children, and a pivotal accident.) What other themes did you see in these stories that applied to the collection more generally?

20. Did you find the ending of the book satisfying? Why or why not?

21. Now that you have finished it, would you recommend this story collection to someone? What kind of reader do you think would most enjoy this book?

22. If you were going to recommend one story in the collection to a friend, which story would it be and to which friend?

23. Did any part of this book make you feel emotional? If so, did it relate to an experience you have had in your own life?

24. Were there any quotes or passages that stood out to you? If you would like, please share them.

25. Which stories, from this or other collections, are most memorable for you personally? Why do you think that is? Do they stand out to you because you relate to them, because they are describing something outside your realm of experience, or for another reason? Which type of story appeals to you more and why?