

Little Bitty Lies

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mary kay
andrews
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"Little white lies have never been so risky—or so much fun!"
—Orlando Sentinel



By Mary Kay Andrews
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Introduction

Mary Bliss McGowan refers to Fair Oaks, the affluent Atlanta neighborhood where she lives, as "Split City" because of the high number of marriages on the rocks. A school teacher who prides herself on being the perfect wife and mother -- and on her home-grown tomatoes -- Mary Bliss thinks her own marriage is just fine. That is, until the night in early June when she returns home and finds a note from her husband telling her he's gone. Not only has Parker McGowan walked out on Mary Bliss and their daughter, Erin, he has absconded with all their money, mortgaged the house, and even made off with Mary Bliss's engagement ring.

As the summer unfolds, Mary Bliss's carefully structured life comes apart at the seams. Her mother-in-law, ensconced at the local nursing home, is a cantankerous old woman who clearly knows more than she's telling about her son's disappearance. Mary Bliss's teenage daughter, Erin, has become secretive, and in the rare instances that she's home they end up fighting. Her best friend, Katharine, is confronting marital woes of her own. And to top it all off, the bills are piling up around her.

Armed with only her wits and a large dose of determination, Mary Bliss needs to make some cash in a hurry. She polishes her Frances I sterling silver flatware set and hocks it at a pawn shop, and she even takes a job as a product demonstration hostess hawking food samples at Bargain Bonanza Club. But none of this is enough. In danger of losing her house, Mary Bliss does what any smart, self-respecting woman would do in her situation. With Katharine's help, she hatches a plan to stage Parker's death and put in a claim for the insurance money. After a quick trip to Mexico and a boating accident, Mary Bliss has a death certificate in hand and is playing the grieving widow at her husband's funeral...and that's just the beginning.

By summer's end, Mary Bliss has learned some important lessons -- serving up revenge is not nearly as appetizing as dishing out her chicken salad; a best friend's help is essential when faking your husband's demise; and things are not always what they seem, especially when it comes to attractive men who make your heart beat faster.

Discussion Questions

1. Mary Bliss and Katherine have been friends for more than a decade, and the saying "opposites attract" seems to describe their friendship. Are Katharine and Mary Bliss really as different as they seem? What makes their friendship so strong? What do they have in common?
2. Mary Bliss encourages Katherine to reconcile with Charlie, who cheated on Katharine and was living with another woman. In one instance Mary Bliss says to her, "Honestly, sweetie, he's too good a man to just throw away like this." Why does she think Katharine should take Charlie back when she makes it very clear that she will not give Parker a second chance?
3. Mary Bliss thinks her life is perfect, or at least perfectly well ordered, until Parker leaves. Do you think she was happy in her marriage? Did she miss any signs that her marriage was not as perfect as she thought? When Mary Bliss finally has the chance to confront Parker, he puts the blame on her for his leaving. What do you think about this?
4. Parker's leaving is the catalyst Mary Bliss needs to make changes in her life -- and to change herself. "Maybe there was a smidgen of rebel beaten down inside her. Maybe Parker's leaving had unlocked this side of her." Describe Mary Bliss as she appears at the beginning of the novel. How has she changed by the end of the story?
5. Mary Bliss visits Eula regularly at the nursing home, cooks her favorite foods, and brings her flowers. Even after Parker leaves, Mary Bliss continues to visit Eula. Why is Eula so hostile to Mary Bliss? Why does Mary Bliss feel such a sense of responsibility for Eula? Did Eula's decision about her estate surprise you?
6. There are references throughout the story to Mary Bliss's childhood. "Her own daddy, James Clewitt, had abandoned his family. Had told her mama he was going to Florida to look for work.. Drove away in a 1968 green Ford Falcon. And that was that. Never to return." How have the circumstances of Mary Bliss's childhood affected her as an adult? She sees Parker's behavior as worse than her father's because "Parker had not only abandoned them, he'd stolen their future." Do you agree with Mary Bliss on this?
7. Discuss the relationships Mary Bliss has with the women in her life -- Katharine, Erin, Eula -- and how each one is important to her.
8. Katharine plays an integral role in the plan to fake Parker's death. Why does she do this? Is it merely because she's Mary Bliss's best friend, or are there other reasons?
9. Mary Bliss and Matt Hayslip meet under unusual circumstances, and she does not particularly like him at their first meeting. What changes her mind about him? Mary Bliss and Matt's relationship is clouded by lies and deception. In one instance he says to her, "What about you? Are you capable of telling the truth?." As she says about their relationship, "they had done everything backward." Why, ultimately, does their relationship work?
10. The title of the book, *Little Bitty Lies*, is an understatement. What do you think of the lies that abound in the book? Is there any character who does not resort to lies and deception? During a conversation with Charlie, Mary Bliss feels bad for deceiving him but has "already made an uneasy peace with her conscience, telling herself the ends justified the means." In Mary Bliss's case, do you think the ends justified the means?