

The Secrets of Flight

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Introduction

This captivating, breakout novel—told in alternating viewpoints—brings readers from the skies of World War II to the present day, where a woman is prepared to tell her secrets at last.



Estranged from her family since just after World War II, Mary Browning has spent her entire adult life hiding from her past. Now eighty-seven years old and a widow, she is still haunted by secrets and fading memories of the family she left behind. Her one outlet is the writing group she's presided over for a decade, though she's never written a word herself. When a new member walks in—a fifteen-year-old girl who reminds her so much of her beloved sister Sarah—Mary is certain fate delivered Elyse Strickler to her for a reason.

Mary hires the serious-eyed teenager to type her story about a daring female pilot who, during World War II, left home for the sky and gambled everything for her dreams—including her own identity.

As they begin to unravel the web of Mary's past, Mary and Elyse form an unlikely friendship. Together they discover it's never too late for second chances and that sometimes forgiveness is all it takes for life to take flight in the most unexpected ways.

Questions for Discussion

1. Did you know about the Women Airforce Service Pilots program before reading this novel? What do you think it must have been like to be one of these women? Would you have applied at that time?
2. Mary and Elyse form an unexpected bond. What does each bring to the other? In what ways are their coming-of-age stories different and in what ways are they similar?
3. Miri and Elyse both get “makeovers” to fit in with those around them. Is this a positive change? What are the possible repercussions when you change your appearance for the approval of others?
4. Do you think Mary was justified in hiding her heritage? Why or why not? Would you ever change who you are to achieve your dreams or help someone else achieve theirs?

5. Jane seems to epitomize the woman who “has it all” until everything falls apart. Is this a possibility for women or is it a myth? How do you think Jane would view it?
6. Why is Miri so drawn to flying? What does it represent for her? Is she rushing toward or away from something? Do you think she succeeded?
7. During one of her last flights, Miri thinks that the only role for her in the sky after the war would be as a flight attendant. What do you think it was like for women who had taken on unexpected roles during wartime? In what ways do you think that shaped where we are today?
8. Elyse dreams of becoming a writer, following in a family tradition that she’s not completely aware of. Are there talents or desires that are intrinsic in some people’s DNA? Have you ever experienced this?
9. How does Elyse help her mother and aunt accept Margot’s death? How does Mary finally come to terms with the death of her son?