

# READING GROUP GUIDE

"Julie Clark has done it again, taking you straight into the collision course of two dynamic, complicated women." —LAURA DAVE

# THE LIES I TELL

*A Novel*

From the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Last Flight*

# JULIE CLARK

# A NOTE FROM JULIE CLARK



**Dear Reader,**

One of the reasons why I love reading so much is I get to escape into someone else's life, to inhabit their mind, their world, their hopes and fears. I love to experience things I'd NEVER have the courage to do myself, which is why I had so much fun writing *The Lies I Tell*.

This is a book about Meg Williams, a female con artist bent on seeking revenge. She travels the country under assumed names, infiltrates her targets' lives, presses on their weaknesses, and then convinces them to give her what she wants. Often, she's in and out before they've even realized what she's done. I did a lot of research into con artists, trying to profile Meg and what might make her mind work. However, Meg isn't a sociopath... She's got a conscience, she's got a moral code, and she has very specific types of people who are her targets.

Investigative reporter Kat Roberts was collateral damage in one of Meg's cons ten years prior, derailing her career and her life. Kat has waited ten years for Meg to return, and now that she's back, Kat has her own plans for Meg.

As a writer, I don't like to portray women on the page who are sociopathic or unreliable. I feel that women in today's world already have to overcome lower pay, and their opinions and ideas are often overlooked. However, I used many of society's biases about women—that we're too emotional, that we aren't as clever or capable as men—and allowed Meg to exploit them.

I like to write books about smart women who often make bad choices but who are doing the best with what they've got in that moment. Both Meg and Kat have something important to say—about a woman's role in society, about how much easier it is for women's careers to be derailed as opposed to their male counterparts, and about how important it is for women's voices to be heard and valued. Meg is unapologetically honest about who she is and what she wants...and while I don't suggest anyone take their own personal tragedies and turn them into a life of crime, I hope we can all find that inner Meg who won't be sidelined, who won't accept second best, and who won't allow anyone to take advantage of her.

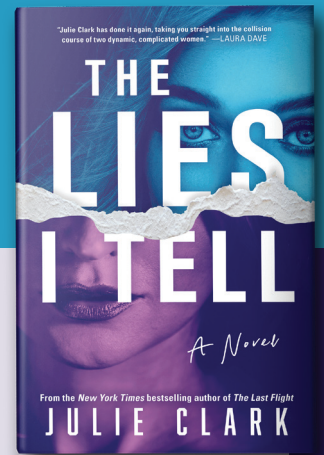
Thank you so much for reading *The Lies I Tell* and for taking both Meg and Kat into your hearts.

*—Julie Clark*



# BOOK CLUB

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. One of the most powerful tools in Meg's arsenal is a familiarity with social media. What do you think she could learn about you from your online presence?
2. Since they both know the other woman is lying about her identity, Meg and Kat also know they shouldn't trust each other. How does their friendship grow despite this?
3. Discuss the role of ego in Meg's cons. How do her targets create openings for her with their own bad behavior?
4. At first, Kat blames Meg for what happened with Nate. When do you think she stopped feeling that way?
5. The greatest downside of Meg's career is the loneliness. Do you think she could have kept in touch with her friends when she started scamming Cory? How would you feel in her position, moving cross-country every few years and not making any permanent connections?
6. Meg believes that scamming Phillip to return Celia's cottage was a turning point in her career. How was that job different than the others she had run?
7. Why does it take Kat so long to recognize that Scott has relapsed? Where would you draw the line between supporting a partner who is trying to overcome an addiction and protecting yourself?
8. Kat doesn't trust that Scott will be investigated by his colleagues. Is there incentive for police departments to investigate their officers and detectives? What motivations do they have to sweep corruption and violence under the rug?
9. Meg posits, "The difference between justice and revenge comes down to who's telling the story." What does she mean, and do you agree with her?
10. What's next for Kat and Meg? Do you think Kat will succeed in her new quest? Will Meg really retire from cons?

# AN INTERVIEW WITH JULIE CLARK



## **What inspired you to write *The Lies I Tell*?**

I'm obsessed with true crime podcasts, and a few years ago, I came across one about a con artist who went to elaborate lengths to lure in his victims, gain their trust, and then steal everything they owned. That particular con artist was a man, but I remember thinking, *What about female con artists? Would people be more inclined to trust them?* From there, my imagination took over.

Like with *The Last Flight*, I didn't want to write a female character who was a true sociopath, so I spent a lot of time trying to figure out a way to write a female con artist with a conscience. A woman who used her intellect and wits to do some good in a world where women often get the short end of the stick.

## **Meg and Kat don't trust each other, even as they get closer and closer. What was the most challenging part of writing their relationship?**

The most challenging part was making sure the relationship evolved naturally, while also keeping the timeline relatively short. Kat has the heavy load of her own trauma that keeps her from seeing Meg clearly at first, and I needed her to slowly begin to embrace Meg, despite who she believed Meg to be. The other challenging part was making sure Meg was simmering with her own pent-up rage, while at the same time keeping her sympathetic to the reader. A lot of plates to keep balanced!

## **Kat's relationship with Scott is heavily influenced by his gambling addiction. What did you want readers to take from this conflict?**

I want readers to see the complexity and heartache of loving an addict. That they are more than the worst thing they've done. I also want readers to remember that our instincts are almost always right. When something seems off, we don't need to know why; we only need to trust the feeling.

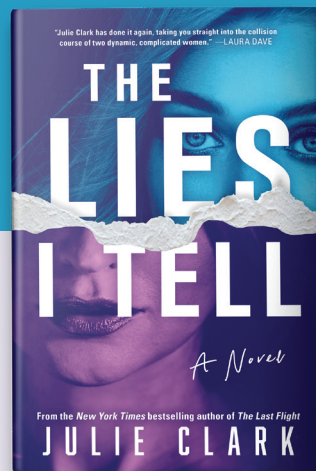
## **Meg's philosophy evolves throughout the book from punishment to restoration. Why was it important for you to show this growth?**

All characters need growth, even con artists! I don't really believe that real-world con artists are anything like Meg; however, I don't really view Meg as a true con artist. She's a vigilante, exacting her own brand of justice in a world where too many people have the ability to evade it. It's that quality, I think, that allows us to root for her.

## **Meg's greatest disappointment is the transience of her friendships. How do you think you would handle a nomadic and secretive life like hers?**

I'm a homebody at heart, so moving every couple years would be really difficult for me. I like my structures and routines, though I admit a part of it might be thrilling—to relocate and completely reinvent yourself, however many times it takes to get it right. I'd be terrible at the secret-keeping though. I'm pretty sure, very early on, I'd let something slip and the game would be over.

# THE PLAYLISTS



When I started looking for music to listen to as I was drafting *The Lies I Tell*, I came across a really great cover rendition of “Under Pressure,” first performed by Queen and David Bowie in 1981. This new version, by Ben Harper, had all the elements of the original but put a different twist on the song, and I soon grew obsessed. It got me thinking about cover songs in general and how performers love to take the work of other artists and either recreate them or reinvent them into something that sounds and feels completely new (See: Lenny Kravitz with “American Woman” or Red Hot Chili Peppers with “Higher Ground”). Then I started thinking about my main character, Meg, a woman who tries on identities that aren’t hers, tricking people into believing she’s exactly who she says she is. Soon I had an entire playlist of cover songs for Meg, songs I thought she’d love and appreciate, not just for their skillful manipulation but for the fact that while they might sound original in their own right, they’re not. Much like Meg, herself.

From there, I created a playlist for Kat, Meg’s antagonist. But Kat’s songs tell a different story. One about a woman with her own doubts and fears simmering beneath a sharp desire for revenge. I hope you enjoy listening as much as I enjoyed putting these lists together.

—Julie Clark

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MEG'S  
PLAYLIST

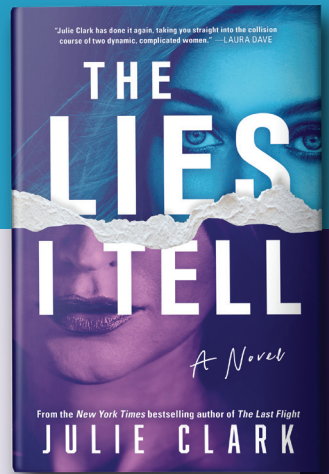


KAT'S  
PLAYLIST





# TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF CON ARTISTS, REAL AND FICTIONAL



1. This literary villainess (or heroine, depending on your perspective) conned everyone, including her husband, into believing she was missing—or dead.
2. Eugenia Smith told the world, via the pages of *Life* magazine, that she was this infamous royal. The only problem? Another woman, Franziska Schanzkowska, also claimed to be the supposed missing royal—and even went so far as to have that name etched on her tombstone.
3. Frank Abagnale’s many cons included him pretending to be a doctor and a pilot. (He really did learn how to fly a plane though.) He went on to write a book about his history of long cons—but later admitted he exaggerated some of his stories. Despite that, this heartthrob played him in the movie adaptation of his life.
4. This man conned multiple women out of hundreds of thousands of dollars after meeting them on dating apps and tricking them into falling in love with him.
5. This man’s crimes are so notorious, he inspired the phrase we now use to describe the structure of predatory MLM (multilevel marketing) businesses.
6. One of the most infamous villains in literary history, this Patricia Highsmith character is not only a con man but a murderer too.
7. This notorious New Yorker claimed to be a German heiress and scammed her friends out of nearly \$300,000.
8. This start-up founder drew her style inspiration from Steve Jobs—but instead of launching a multibillion dollar business, she ended up bleeding investors dry with an idea that never quite worked.

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## ANSWER KEY:

1. Amy Dunne 2. Anastasia Romanov 3. Leonardo DiCaprio 4. Simon Levey, the Tinder Swindler 5. Charles Ponzi  
6. Tom Ripley 7. Anna Sorokin 8. Elizabeth Holmes