

A Lie for a Lie: An @Revenge Story

Jane Buckingham

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A high achiever risks all that she's ever cherished in the hope of realizing a dissipating dream in the exciting thriller A Lie for a Lie.

In Jane Buckingham's psychological thriller *A Lie for a Lie*, a star student forges a twisted secondary path toward fulfilling her goals.

Since she was young, Sabrina's whole life has been planned out. She'd study hard, load up on extracurricular activities, be accepted to Harvard via early admissions, and then proceed onward to medical school and Doctors without Borders. She'd have the whole world at her feet.

When early acceptance day arrives and Sabrina is deferred while her best friend Emily is accepted, her certainty crumbles. On a whim and feeling "sparkly inside" about his interest in her, Sabrina accepts an invitation to attend a drunken party with Jake, an alluring basketball player. After drinking away her feelings, though, Sabrina wakes up to a new reality: someone utilized a social media revenge account to compromise Emily's acceptance. Sabrina, though she remembers little, has a sneaking suspicion that she's responsible. Her fast realization that revenge is not often sweet is accompanied by the horrible probability that the cost of her deceit will be higher than just a lost friend: those who utilize the vengeance account never do so for free.

Despite some anachronistic references, this is a novel that speaks to contemporary—and often perennial—teenage concerns with clarity. The revenge account operator has a familiar axe to grind, and they express this in a mix of clichéd and of-the-moment language: "Bad behavior, toxic masculinity—it's learned at home. When a seedling is rotting, all you have to do is look at the tree from which it came. Chances are, there's rot there, too." And though the book's characterizations are somewhat based on teenage archetypes, they're also refreshed by the cast's sympathetic individuality. These teenagers contend with challenges including poverty, loss, divorce, and betrayal in their own evocative ways. And Sabrina and Emily, the novel's wavering heroines, are high achievers who face the pressures and temptations of being on the social outskirts; though they feel alone in their struggles, they're relatable for most of the book. Together, they dance along to social media videos and perfect their profiles with college admissions boards in mind; they video chat and wonder about whether the popular boys like them. Later, they learn hard lessons about the lasting nature of internet whims.

Sabrina is a direct and consistent narrator whose voice conveys her running anxiety about family, school, friendships, and relationships throughout. She's empathetic enough to deliver rounded pictures of those in her immediate circle too. And as she gets to know Jake better, her once dimensionless ideas of the popular students are also fleshed out.

Still, the worldbuilding is somewhat limited by Sabrina's laser focus on getting ahead. As her plans are challenged and change, dimensionality is better achieved. However, the revelation of the personality behind the revenge account strains credulity and upends previous understandings of who they are; it's a melodramatic moment in a text that is otherwise compelling. Further, the novel's final instances of comeuppance are meted out in an uneven manner,

impeding genuine satisfaction.

A once confident student modifies her plans for the future following a disappointment, risking her closest relationships to do so, in the cautionary psychological thriller *A Lie for a Lie*.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (June 15, 2024)

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