ForeWord Reviews

MYSTERY

The Lie
Petra Hammesfahr
Mike Mitchell, translator
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In this twist on the traditional doppelganger tale, a downtrodden woman is given the opportunity of a lifetime—a frightening encounter with her other self. Unhappy and struggling, Susanne has never known a world of opportunity, privilege, or money. One day she meets Nadia, a rich, overindulged look-alike. Astute, yet deceitful in her ways, this wealthy woman knows a life of ease, but she and her educated husband Michael do not get along. She hires Susanne as a stand-in, so Michael won't detect when Nadia is away with her lover.

What seems like the perfect opportunity for Susanne to earn money she desperately needs turns into a complicated, soul-searching ordeal that undermines her very existence rather than giving her the freedom from stress that she craves. Unthinkable passion and revealing frustration give her a glimpse of the man Nadia has forsaken and allow Susanne to see a startling dark side to her mysterious double. In a piece-by-piece scenario with more than a few shocking discoveries, hidden motivations emerge, while consequences of past mistakes threaten to destroy life itself.

In *The Lie*, what starts as a frivolous adult diversion turns into a serious, high-stakes dramatic intrigue. The players are more than pawns on a game board. These skillfully drawn characters exhibit depth and personality, a realistic contrast of good and bad traits. Though the story is somewhat trite—mirror-image protagonist takes on the other's foreign world—Hammesfahr pulls it off with creative flair. Her style is intense and entertaining, her plot full of unexpected spins. Critics inclined to knock the plausibility of this implausible literary staple should recall the number of identical character classics promoted as literature in college classrooms today. An underlying, coarse Cinderella element adds gritty interest to this bizarre situational setup.

Petra Hammesfahr is Germany's contemporary version of Agatha Christie, with over twenty crime and suspense novels to her credit as well as television and film scripts. Her bestseller, *The Quiet Mr. Genardy*, was made into a movie. *The Sinner*, a psychological

suspense novel, and her first novel translated into English (Bitter Lemon Press), garnered worldwide acclaim. Born in 1951, Hammesfahr was published by age seventeen and now lives near Cologne. She's a recipient of the Crime Prize of Wiesbaden and the Rhineland Literary Prize.

The Lie has long-established crime genre appeal, but also a sophisticated slant that will attract mainstream readers. Hammesfahr's fans will not be disappointed with her latest release, a meticulous page-turner.

Julia Ann Charpentier