

Book Review: A Lovely Lie
By Jaime Lynn Hendricks

Thanks to Scarlet, an imprint of Penzler Publishers, for an advance reader's copy, in exchange for an honest review. "A Lovely Lie" is scheduled for publication on May 28, 2024.

This one is a real soap opera. Try to keep up.

It's 1999, the night of the high school Senior Picnic, and Scarlett Kane and Pepper Wilson, BFFs since middle school, are leaving the scene of a car accident where two students, Julian and Chloe, have been killed.

"You know why we left them there," Pepper says. To which Scarlett replies, "I can't believe you didn't let me call the cops."

Fast-forward to present day, and Scarlett – now Scarlett Russo, having married Vince Russo, Pepper's high school sweetheart, and with whom she has a 17-year-old son, Luke – is wrapping up a day's work at the Gulf Sands and Suites hotel when a young woman enters and introduces herself as Zoey Wilson, Pepper's 21-year-old daughter. She has found a letter that her mother – who disappeared after the night of the Senior Picnic with everyone assuming she moved to New York City to pursue her interest in acting – wrote to Scarlett but never mailed. Zoey wants to know who her father is – it seems Pepper was pregnant the night of the Senior Picnic – and what's the big secret her mother mentions in the letter.

Oh, and Zoey informs Scarlett that her mother recently died in a car accident.

All of this, of course, turns Scarlett's world upside down. And when she tells her husband Vince – who runs a pool service company with his best friend of thirty years,

Chris – of the visit from Zoey, twenty-two years of lies and buried memories bubble to the surface.

And perhaps just as important, it's clear to Scarlett that her husband Vince – who she has stayed with despite his numerous dalliances – has never stopped loving Pepper.

Zoey is convinced Vince is her father, and a paternity test is quickly scheduled. No spoilers here, but suffice to say the test results provide more questions than answers. Little by little, the lies that have festered for twenty-two years are coming home to roost. And I say "lies" plural, because everyone in this story has lied, or is currently lying. The book should more appropriately have been titled *The Lovely Lies*.

But I digress.

I won't give away any of the plot twists and turns that occur almost immediately, and there are many. And they come at you rapid fire, the narrative moving at lightning speed making for an addictive read.

The only drawback for me was the ending. In a story built lie upon lie, it's easy to despise almost every character. As such, I was waiting for karma to triumph, but was disappointed to find that not everyone got what I felt they deserved. I suppose that mirrors life, where sometimes the evil scum win.

But overall, "A Lovely Lie" is a lively read that will keep you guessing right to the very end. I give it 4 out of 5 stars.