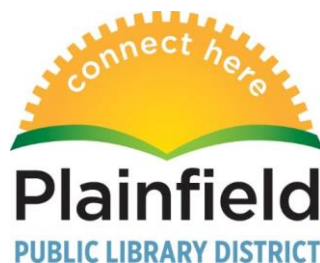


Discussion Questions

All the Beautiful Lies

By Peter Swanson

1. The story is built around four main characters, and shifts between a contemporary 'now' and a 'then' of about twenty years ago. Did this make it easier to follow the story, or more difficult?
2. How does the novel's location - Kennewick, Maine - influence the atmosphere of the story?
3. How does the past influence each of the characters - Alice, Jake, Bill, and Harry? What relationship does it have to the present?
4. After his father's death, why does Harry feel so strongly the need to take care of Alice?
5. Relationship dynamics play a major role in the unfolding of the story. Discuss the dynamics between Harry and Alice; Alice and Jake; Alice and Bill.
6. What is Grace's connection to both Bill and Harry?
7. Were you surprised at the conclusion?
8. How does this title compare to other psychological thrillers you may have read?

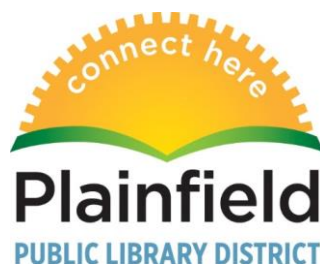


Peter Swanson



Peter Swanson is the author of five novels: *THE GIRL WITH A CLOCK FOR A HEART*, an *LA Times* Book Award finalist; *THE KIND WORTH KILLING*, winner of the New England Society Book Award, and finalist for the CWA Ian Fleming Steel Dagger; *HER EVERY FEAR*, named a Best Book of 2017 by NPR; and his most recent, *BEFORE SHE KNEW HIM*. His books have been translated into 30 languages, and his stories, poetry and features have appeared in *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Measure*, *The Guardian*, *The Strand Magazine* and *Yankee Magazine*.

A graduate of Trinity College, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and Emerson College, he lives in Somerville, Massachusetts with his wife and cat.



An Interview with Peter Swanson

Source: <https://booktrib.com/2018/04/interview-peter-swanson-beautiful-lies/>

There are good psychological thrillers, and then there are *great* psychological thrillers – the ones that leave your heart pounding, and your breathing just a touch too fast. While sometimes it can be hard to sort between the two, now you don't have to: Peter Swanson, author of *Her Every Fear* has just come out with his latest contribution to the genre. [All the Beautiful Lies](#) is a twisted tale, equally as beautiful as it is thrilling.

Taking place on the coast of Maine, Harry Ackerson returns home just days before his graduation from college when his stepmother Alice calls to tell him that his father has died and the police think it's suicide. There, he promises himself that he will discover the truth of what really happened. But Harry soon finds himself caught, mesmerized by both a new arrival to town, Grace, and his own stepmother. The closer he gets to both women, the more isolated and disoriented he becomes, stuck in the middle of a spider web, and unable to realize the danger he's in until it's too late.

We talked with Peter Swanson about plot inspiration, writing a great thriller, and that one book every fan should read.

BookTrib: You are an expert at mind games. I have to ask, how do you come up with your plots? Each chapter is just filled with these intricate layers that add so much to the story.

Peter Swanson: I start with a premise and with the characters and then I slowly build the plot as I progress. That's a fancy way of saying I make it up as I go along, which is essentially what I do. But as I'm writing I'm always plotting, thinking ahead, wondering what might happen next and how will it happen, and can I get away with it. And I'm always thinking about the end, about where I want the story to wind up.

BookTrib: *All the Beautiful Lies* is set in coastal Maine, and you really bring the area and culture to life so vibrantly. How did you go about researching the area?

PS: Some of the research happens naturally, just because the coast of Maine is only an hour drive away from where I live and I visit a lot. But I do take specific research trips, driving up by myself. They don't involve much more than me parking the car, taking a long walk through varying neighborhoods, soaking up the atmosphere, and then finding an interesting looking bar. I know it doesn't sound like work, but really, it is. I promise.

BookTrib: Psychological thrillers are all the rage, but I feel like you bring something new to the table – they're such a wonderful thrill, and impossible to put down. Was this always a genre that you were drawn to writing about?

PS: I love to hear that readers can't put one of my books down. It's the best compliment there is. In terms of my favorite genre, I love all sorts of fiction, and that includes all sorts of mystery fiction but I do think the psychological thriller is my absolute favorite. Whodunits are great but with so many of them they just become this guessing game. I don't mind knowing who the criminals are up front, then the story becomes more of an exploration of aberrant behavior, which is always fascinating.

BookTrib: I want to talk about Alice for a second – she is a brilliant, unique character. Can you tell us a little bit about how you created her?

PS: She did not come easy, but at some point I suddenly realized the key to her that unlocked her basic character: She is a villain who doesn't know she's a villain. And once I figured that out everything else fell into place. I also think of her as tragic, but then again, I think of all my villains as tragic. Maybe I just find it hard to hate the characters that I've created.

BookTrib: Harry, as well, is such a dynamic character – was he someone who you knew how he fit into the narrative from start to finish, or did he change as you continued to write the book?

*PS: He didn't change so much from the way I first envisioned him. I wanted him to be a little bit lost, like the main character in *The Graduate*. He's finished college but now he's totally ungrounded. Of course, it doesn't help that his father—really his last living relative—has died. He's at sea, and a lot of the story happens through his eyes.*

BookTrib: Is there anything you wanted to add to the book, but took out because you couldn't make it fit, or you wanted to save it for a different book?

*PS: Interesting question. I never save anything from one book for another, at least I can't remember doing that. I did have a lot more backstory on both Harry and Alice that I cut from *All the Beautiful Lies*. For Harry there was a lot about his time in college, and for Alice, there was a whole section about her life in her twenties. But neither of these sections really moved the story along at all so I cut them.*

BookTrib: Finally, is there one book that you think everyone should read?

PS: I suspect there are a lot of newly converted fans of psychological thrillers out there because of [Gone Girl](#) and [Girl on the Train](#) and all the great domestic suspense that's been published of late. I would say that if you haven't read it, read [Rebecca](#) by Daphne Du Maurier; it's the greatest of all the "girl" books.

