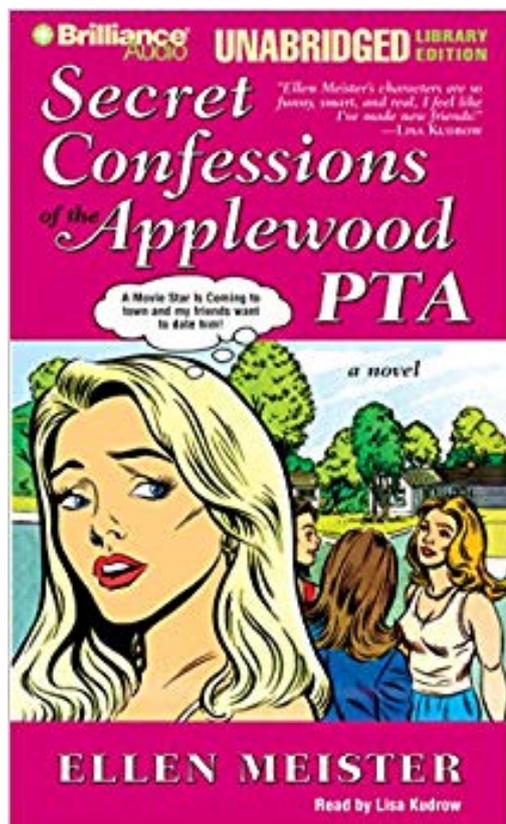


Secret Confessions of the Applewood PTA *by* Lisa Kudrow, Ellen Meister



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When a Hollywood location scout comes to Applewood, Long Island, and announces that the local elementary school might make the perfect backdrop for an upcoming George Clooney movie, the PTA's decorum crumbles like a cookie from last week's bake sale.

Enter Maddie, Ruth, and Lisa, three women who become the glue that holds the project together...and wind up forging a bond of friendship stronger than anyone could imagine.

A good thing, too, because each one of them is about to come apart. Maddie Schein, an ex-lawyer trying hard to fit in and save her marriage, gets knocked off balance by Jack Rose, an old college friend hell-bent on seducing her. Ruth Moss—rich, sexy, and outspoken—has more to give and less to enjoy than most people think. Indeed, since her husband's stroke left him embarrassingly uninhibited yet completely impotent, she's more of a caretaker than a wife. And modest Lisa Slotnick, a loving parent who wants nothing more than to fade into the scenery as she tends to her children, must deal with the humiliation of being thrust into the spotlight by her scandalous, alcoholic mother.

When these three get together, a powerful alliance is formed. But is it strong enough to overcome the obstacles to getting the movie made in their town? And will their friendship be enough to mend their hearts and homes? Join them as they reach for the stars...and try to pull off a Hollywood ending of their own.



Reviews of the **Secret Confessions of the Applewood PTA** by Lisa Kudrow, Ellen Meister

Mr_Mole

I really wanted to like this book. I kept reading, trying to like the characters better and hoping that somewhere along the way it would get better. It has a few amusing points here and there, but for the most part it's really not that great. I agree with the other two star reviews. It's full of (for the most part) pretty shallow plot lines, and vulgar characters. I don't mind some language in books I read, provided it doesn't seem to be stuck in just for the fun of it, and this one at least doesn't do that. I don't mind sex in books, provided it's not slapped into the book in what seems like a vulgar, crude fashion. It doesn't have to be flowery. But I'd prefer that it doesn't make me cringe with the way it's done either. And unfortunately, the sex (and references to it) are done that way in this book. Put that together with the somewhat cheesy, shallow plots and the really hard to like characters and I just don't care for this one.

It's possible that I may give away more than you might like with my review. So be warned on that. I'm going to try and be vague, but it still could be more than some might like.

The three main characters are (for the most part) rather hard to enjoy. Maddie spends the majority of the book freaking out about her husband and whether or not he's cheating, and debating whether or not she should cheat herself. I'm sure there are real people like this. But it'd be nice if she'd at least try and talk to her husband. And he, frankly, isn't any more likeable than her, what with his stomping around and not trying to talk to her either. The man Maddie is pondering her affair with just doesn't seem to honestly care for her, despite what he keeps telling her, and it's really hard to like him or care what's going on with him. Ruth, despite the hardships in her life and how she's dealing with them pretty well, is even harder to like a lot of the time. She spends pretty much the entire book lusting after another guy. Hey, I've never been in her situation. But at the same time, she makes an utter fool out of herself, and the way she mocks this guy (who, admittedly, needs some help himself) both out loud and in her head does not make her look any better. Yet despite his apparent issues, and the problems she clearly sees, she still desperately wants him. Her songwriting abilities leave a bit to be desired as well, at least in text. With music, it's possible that they might be better since there's plenty of songs out there with ridiculous lyrics that sound great, but reading them in this book just made me cringe.

Lisa is the only one of the three I liked much of anything about. She has issues from her childhood, what with her alcoholic and verbally abusive mother, but seems to be doing pretty well. She's pretty introverted, especially compared to just about any other character in this book, but I can relate to

that being a huge introvert myself. I agree with the reviewer who said a book about her would have been interesting - certainly more interesting than this book, at least in my opinion. But it's possible I think that just because she's really the only character I cared much about and who was all that likeable.

The "villains" in this book aren't any more likeable, but they're not supposed to be either. Of course, they aren't really fleshed out enough for me to necessarily find them horrible, they just seem to be there because apparently the story needed the stereotypical villain wealthy suburban "mom" (Suzanne) who tries to rule everything with her supposed power and minions ("friends"). And I found her supposed sexual escapades to be unnecessary and seemed like an attempt to try and make Ruth (and her escapades) look better, which didn't work for me.

You could argue that there are people in real life who act this way and that these characters are "real." But honestly? I can't say I've encountered people quite like this, in that these seem like extreme representations. It's great these parents want to do something for their kids by building a stadium. But the constant mooning over George Clooney and the constant bickering and fighting over the whole thing seemed ridiculous. Over all, almost everything and everyone seemed like caricatures. No, characters shouldn't be perfect, but then I shouldn't be spending almost all of the book rolling my eyes and biting my tongue either. And the constant sticking in of something sexual just to have it there (or so it seemed to me) just contributed to the overall bleh of this book. This struck me as being a book version of some of the really bad "reality" shows out there, or at least what the commercials and articles on them make them look like. (Seeing as how I've never actually watched those sorts of "reality" shows.)

I'm glad there are people who liked it. Maybe if you're into those housewife and "reality" shows that claim to follow the real lives of various stars or other people, you might enjoy this one. But it just wasn't for me.

Qulcelat

What you notice first and foremost about Ellen Meister's debut novel is how humane she is as a writer. The women she writes about are real--they are not caricatures, they are not stereotypes. Instead they fall down, they embarrass themselves, they lose control. They lust, they fight, they envy, they are jealous. They are passionate, they are smart, they love. Basically, they are human.

And in that, we love them and we root for them. And when the book is at its end, we have a hard time letting them go.

Hard for me to say which of the three main characters is my favorite: is it the brilliant Maddie, who loses some of her self-esteem over the years when she believes that her marriage is broken beyond repair? Or is it quiet and unassuming Lisa, who seethes beneath the surface after a lifetime of taking care of her selfish mother? Or is it Ruth, who lost not only her husband but also the better part of herself after his stroke?

The truth is, they are all my favorites.

I cheered when Maddie realized that her marriage was only wounded from a bit of overuse, and when Lisa realized that she is her own best mother, and when Ruth regained the love of herself and all of the glories she has to offer the world. I cheered because I felt genuine affection for all of these women. I cherished their success and felt comforted by their friendship.

But don't let the serious tone of this reader fool you. What you should know is that this book is also funny. Indeed, there are times when you will laugh out loud and shake your head in wonder at Meister's impeccable sense of timing (not to mention her eye for physical humor).

In short, the book's a gem. And no less a gem is the audio companion--Lisa Kudrow reads with an exceptional ear for character, comedy, and good storytelling. In fact, I can't think of a better reader for the book. My favorite characterization of hers would have to be when she took on Ruth. The voice was exactly as I had heard Ruth in my head.

And so the bringing together of Meister's words and Kudrow's reading means some classic entertainment. You won't want to miss out.

Buy the book, buy the audio. Let yourself be wooed and wowed.

Gravelblade

This is a perfect example of a work of fiction where I didn't like the characters but I loved the book. Good writing, a funny plot bordering on the absurd, and colorful, fully fleshed out character development, make the farcical and morally ambiguous ladies of the Applewood PTA surprisingly believable. The time spent reading these pages was for me, pure, self-indulgent entertainment. It was like watching Bravo television shows about The Real Housewives--or like watching the catfights between the Carrington wives back in the old days of Dynasty. Aside from juicy, gossipy `grown-up' sorority spats, this romp has a little of everything: Medical dramas, tennis matches, infidelities, ménage a trios, alcoholism, learning disabilities, fires . . . just about every kind of suburban drama known to a generation raised on a soap opera diet.

Meanwhile, if the actor George Clooney has ever entered your fantasies, or if you've ever spent time on a PTA committee and recognize the circle of self-important hags running the show like it's work as important as the UN, and if you don't mind a few predictable and contrived plot twists, pick up this book and give yourself a dose of literary masturbation. I don't ever want to meet these women, or serve on any committees with them, but reading about them was a hoot. Well done.

Michele Cozzens is the author of It's Not Your Mother's Bridge Club

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