

The Truth and Other Lies: A Novel

By Sascha Arango

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***NEW YORK TIMES* NOTABLE BOOK**

A literary crime thriller with “a clever plot that always surprises, told with dark humor and dry wit” (*The New York Times Book Review*, Editor’s Choice), this brilliant debut follows a famous author whose wife—the brains behind his success—meets an untimely death, leaving him to deal with the consequences.

Henry Hayden seems like someone you might admire, or even come to think of as a friend. A famous bestselling author. A loving and devoted husband. A generous and considerate neighbor. But Henry Hayden is a construction, a mask. His past is a secret, his methods more so. Only he and his wife know that she is the actual writer of the novels that made him famous.

When his hidden-in-plain-sight mistress becomes pregnant, it seems his carefully conceived façade is about to crumble. And on a rain-soaked night at the edge of a dangerous cliff, his permanent solution becomes his most terrible mistake.

Now not only are the police after Henry but his past—which he has painstakingly kept hidden—threatens to catch up with him as well. Henry is an ingenious man, and he works out an ingenious plan, weaving lies, truths, and half-truths into a story that might help him survive. Still, the noose tightens.

Smart, sardonic, and compulsively readable, this is the story of a man whose cunning allows him to evade the consequences of his every action, even when he’s standing on the edge of the abyss.

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Editorial Review

Review
“A **wickedly good** first novel about a sociopathic drifter who becomes famous by selling the manuscripts he finds under a female pickup's bed." (Chicago Tribune)

“Sasha Arango's THE TRUTH AND OTHER LIES is **like no other book** you will read this summer.” (Huffington Post)

“[A] wittily wicked psychological mystery.” (Psychology Today)

"**Exceptional**...a **highly entertaining** thriller.... [w]ry humor punctuates this insightful look at a soulless man." (Publishers Weekly (starred review))

"A cross between James M. Cain and Patricia Highsmith, with a wide streak of sardonic humor, this is one wicked tale. You keep waiting for the author to slip, plot-wise, but, as with his protagonist, you wait in vain. German screenwriter Arango's first novel is superior pulp, with schemers all around and plenty to say about fame, identity, and mortality." (Kirkus Reviews (starred review))

“Arango uses dark humor to probe the depths of human depravity in Henry’s borderline psychotic profile. Fans of psychological thrillers will be eager to see whether Henry’s increasingly detailed spin job will protect him or if the chaos he has created will blow his own cover.” (Booklist)

"Witty, elegant, lethal: these describe equally well *The Truth and Other Lies* and its irresistible protagonist, Henry Hayden. Evil has never been so much fun." (Joseph Kanon, New York Times bestselling author of Leaving Berlin)

"Engrossing." (Bustle Magazine)

*“Arango has constructed **a clever plot that always surprises, told with dark humor and dry wit** and bustling with apercus that show no sign of jet lag from Imogen Taylor’s clean translation.”* (New York Times Book Review (Editor's Choice))

“*The Truth and Other Lies* moves from vivid, immersive scene to vivid, immersive scene, including several tour de force set-pieces (including a scene with a marten which will make your skin crawl every time you remember it), featuring, at its core, a well-developed enigma of a focal character…compelling summer reading." (Toronto Star)

“It's a sheer pleasure to read such a clever book….dark, funny, captivating… [with a] villain in the vein of Patricia Highsmith's Tom Ripley, a book you won't soon forget.” (The Sydney Morning Herald)

"Bears comparison to Patricia Highsmith – the book fairly twangs with paranoia, sardonic humour and razor-sharp observation." (The Guardian)

"A house of mirrors of intrigue that ends with a delicious twist. The finest crime novel I have read this year." (Daily Mail)

“[An] excellent psychological thriller. . . . Arango maintainsthe perfect pace to keep you hooked in this riveting, bleakly existentialnovel.” --*Playboy* (Playboy)

“What Arango throwsat the reader is not the expected…Five stars out of five (I’d give six if Icould.),” (Daily Republic (CA))

"An edgy nail-biter." (New Mexico Review of Books)

“A devastatingly clever novel…This is my pick for the must-read thriller for 2015." (The Novel Pursuit)

“In the theme of Patricia Highsmith, from dark sardonic humor, to a disturbing psychological suspense mystery, a total fun fun, riot of a tale—highlighted by stark, startling prose and an intriguing plot." (JC Must Read Books)

“Delightfully chilling and psychologically intriguing. Definitely a thrilling read,” (DreBattles)

Bookseller Praise

"BRILLIANT -pure evil genius! Don't let the length of this book dissuade you.Arango's characters are deliciously developed. Just when you think you'veseen how low someone will go, Arango surprises you with new depths ofdepravity. Too bad Hitchcock isn't around to make this film!"

--Julie Slavinsky,

Director of Events and Community Relations, Warwick's

Julie told me how much you loved "the truth & other lies" so I snagged a copy.

Started it yesterday morningand finished it last night after work.

Wow--what a great read!

Not one of the characters islikeable, yet you can't stop reading. Each one is so

focused on their ownself-preservation that they become complicit in the overall deception,

eventual murder& cover-up.

A brilliant examination of the darkness that inhabits us all!

--Adrian, bookseller, Warwick’s

I read the advanced readers edition of this book, excellent story, gripping, mysterious, Henry's secret past. This book had it all-- secrets, mystery, murder, adultery, regrets, lies, arson, love and loneliness. Loved it and would recommend toothers. Thank you for sending them out.

--Sarita Goodman

Books-n-Things,Norway Me

About the Author
Born in Berlin in 1959, Sascha Arango is a renowned screenwriter and has won several of Germany's most prestigious screen awards. He lives near Potsdam. The Truth and Other Lies, a notable bestseller in Germany, is his first novel.

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The Truth and Other Lies

1

No getting away from it. A quick glance at the image was enough to give shape to the dim suspicions of the past months. The embryo lay curled up like an amphibian, one eye looking straight at him. Was that a leg or a tentacle above the dragon’s tail?

Moments of absolute certainty in life are few and far between. But in this instant Henry saw into the future. The amphibian would grow into a person. It would have rights and claims, it would ask questions, and at some point it would experience everything it takes to become a human being.

The ultrasound image was about the size of a postcard. On it, to the right of the embryo, a spectrum of grays could be made out; to the left were letters; at the top were the date, the mother’s name, and the doctor’s name. There wasn’t the slightest doubt in Henry’s mind that it was real.

Betty sat beside him at the steering wheel, smoking, and saw tears in his eyes. She laid her hand on his cheek; she thought they were tears of joy. But he was thinking of his wife Martha. Why couldn’t she have a child with him? Why did he have to be sitting here in the car with this other woman?

He despised himself, he felt shame, he was genuinely sorry. His motto had always been that life gives you everything—but never everything at once.

It was afternoon. The monotonous rumble of the surf rose from the cliffs; the wind flattened the grasses and pressed against the side windows of the green Subaru. Henry had only to start the engine and put his foot on the accelerator and the car would shoot over the cliffs and plunge into the surf. In five seconds it would all be over; the impact would kill all three of them. But first he’d have to get out of the passenger seat to change places with Betty. Much too complicated.

“Say something, Henry!”

What should he say? The whole business was bad enough as it was; this thing in her womb was no doubt already moving, and if Henry had learned anything, it was to reveal nothing that’s best left unsaid.

Betty had only ever seen him cry once—when he was awarded an honorary doctorate at Smith College in Massachusetts. Until then she had thought he never cried. Henry had sat quietly in the front row, thinking of his wife.

Betty leaned over the gearshift and hugged him. They listened in silence to one another's breathing, then Henry opened the passenger door and threw up in the grass. He saw the lasagna he'd made Martha for lunch. It looked like an embryo compote of flesh-colored lumps of dough. At the sight of it, he choked and began to cough uncontrollably.

Betty slipped off her shoes, jumped out of the car, pulled Henry up from his seat, locked her arms round his rib cage, and squeezed energetically until lasagna streamed out of his nostrils. Phenomenal, the way she did the right thing without thinking about it. The two of them stood there in the grass next to the Subaru while sea spray whipped about them in the wind.

"Tell me. What should we do?"

The right answer would have been: My love, this is not going to end well. But that kind of answer has consequences. It changes things or makes them disappear altogether. Regrets are of no more use then. And who wants to change anything that's good and convenient?

"I'll drive home and tell my wife everything."

"Really?"

Henry saw the astonishment on Betty's face; he was surprised himself. Why had he said that? Henry wasn't given to exaggeration; it hadn't been necessary to say he'd tell Martha everything.

"What do you mean, 'everything'?"

"Everything. I shall quite simply tell her everything. No more lies."

"And what if she forgives you?"

"How could she?"

"And the baby?"

"I hope it's a girl."

Betty hugged Henry and kissed him on the mouth. "Henry, you can be a great man."

Yes, he could be a great man. He would drive home and put truth in place of falsehood. Reveal everything at last, all the nasty details, well maybe not quite all, but the essentials. It would mean cutting deep into healthy flesh. Tears would flow and it would hurt dreadfully, himself included. It would be the end of all trust and harmony between Martha and him—but it would also be an act of liberation. He would no longer be an unprincipled bastard, no longer have to be so ashamed of himself. It had to be done. Truth before beauty—the rest would sort itself out.

He put his arms around Betty's slender waist. A stone was lying in the grass, big enough and heavy enough to inflict a lethal blow. He had only to bend down to pick it up.

"Come on, get in."

He sat behind the steering wheel and started the engine. Instead of shooting forward over the cliffs, he put the car into reverse and let the Subaru roll backward. A great mistake, he would later decide.

———

Barely visible, the narrow road of perforated concrete slabs wound its way through a dense pine grove from the cliffs to the forest track where his car was parked, concealed by low-hanging branches. Betty lowered the window, lit herself another menthol cigarette, and inhaled deeply.

“She won’t do herself any harm, will she?”

“I certainly hope not.”

“How will she react? Will you tell her it’s me?”

That what is you? Henry wanted to ask.

Instead he said, “I’ll tell her if she asks me.”

Of course Martha would ask. Anyone who discovers he or she has been systematically cheated on wants to know why and for how long and with whom. It’s normal. Betrayal is a riddle we want to solve.

Betty laid her hand with the lit cigarette on Henry’s thigh. “Darling, we were careful. I mean, neither of us wanted a child, did we?”

Henry could not have agreed more wholeheartedly. No, he had not wanted a child, least of all with Betty. She was his lover, she’d never make a good mother; she was far too hard-hearted, too wrapped up in herself for that. Having his child would give her power over him; she would destroy his cover and put pressure on him, until everything reached its logical conclusion. For a time he had toyed with the idea of a vasectomy, but some vague impulse had held him back—maybe his desire to have a child with Martha after all.

“It looks as if it wants to exist,” he said.

Betty smiled; her lips were trembling. Henry had pitched it just right.

“I think it’ll be a girl.”

They got out. Betty sat behind the steering wheel again and pulled on a shoe. Without thinking, she put her foot down on the clutch and moved the gearshift back and forth.

He’s not pleased, she thought. But wasn’t that asking a bit much of a man who had just decided to change his life and end his marriage? Although their affair had been going on for years, Betty knew very little about Henry, but this much she did know—Henry was not a family man.

She can’t wait, he thought. She can’t wait for me to give everything up for her. He did not, however, intend to exchange his quiet, carefree existence for a family life he wasn’t cut out for. After the grand confession to his wife, he’d have to see about a new identity. It would be hard work, thinking up another Henry, a Henry just for Betty. The mere thought made him feel tired.

“Can I do anything?”

Henry nodded. “Stop smoking.”

Betty took a drag on her cigarette, then flicked it away. “It’ll be awful.”

“Yes, it’ll be awful. I’ll give you a ring when it’s over.”

She put the car in gear. “How are you getting on with the novel?”

“Not much more to go.”

He bent down to her through the open door. “Have you told anybody about us?”

“Not a soul,” she replied.

“It is my child, isn’t it? I mean, it really is there, it is going to happen?”

“Yes, it’s yours. It’s going to happen.”

She offered him her slightly parted lips for a kiss. Reluctantly he stooped down to her; her tongue penetrated his mouth like a fat, threadless screw. Henry closed the driver’s door of the Subaru. She drove down the forest track in the direction of the main road. He watched her until she disappeared. Then he stamped out her half-smoked cigarette that lay smoldering in the grass. He believed her. Betty wouldn’t lie to him; she had far too little imagination for that. She was young and sporty, and much more elegant than Martha. She was beautiful and not as bright, but extremely practical. And now she was pregnant with his child—a paternity test was hardly necessary.

Betty’s cool pragmatism had impressed Henry from the first time they’d met. If she liked something, she took it. She had wit, she had slender feet, she had freckled breasts as round as oranges, green eyes, and curly blond hair. The first time he saw her she was wearing a dress with a print of endangered species.

Their affair had begun the moment they met. Henry hadn’t had to make an effort or put on an act or court her. As happened so often, he hadn’t had to do anything, because she thought he was a genius. For that reason it didn’t bother her in the slightest that he was married and didn’t want children. On the contrary, it was all a question of time. She had waited a long time for a man like him—she was quite frank about that. In her opinion most men lacked greatness. What she meant by that, she didn’t say.

Now Betty was editor in chief at Moreany Publishing House. She’d started out as a temp in the marketing department, although she’d considered herself overqualified because she had a degree in literature. Most of the seminars had been boring and she regretted not having taken her parents’ advice and studied law. In spite of her qualifications, the prospects of promotion at the publishing house were limited. On her lunch break she would sneak into the editors’ offices to browse. One day, out of sheer boredom, she pulled Henry’s typewritten text out of the slush pile and took it with her to read in the staff kitchen. Henry had sent the manuscript without an accompanying note, so as to save on postage. Until then he’d always been strapped for cash.

Betty read about thirty pages, leaving her food untouched. Then she rushed up to the fourth floor, into the office of Claus Moreany, the founder of the publishing house, and put an abrupt end to his afternoon nap.

Four hours later the man himself was on the phone to Henry.

“Good afternoon, this is Claus Moreany.”

“Really? Gosh!”

“You have written something marvelous. Something truly marvelous. Have you sold the rights yet?”

He hadn’t. Frank Ellis sold ten million copies worldwide. A thriller, as they’re so wonderfully called, with a great deal of violence and little of a cheering nature. It was the story of an autistic man who becomes a police officer in order to find his sister’s killer. The first hundred thousand copies sold out in only a month and were no doubt read cover to cover. The profits saved Moreany Publishing House from bankruptcy. Today, eight years later, Henry was a bestselling author, his work translated into twenty languages around the world, a winner of countless prizes and God knows what else. Five bestselling novels had now been published by Moreany; all of them had been made into films or adapted for the stage, and Frank Ellis was already being used as a required text in schools. Almost a classic. And Henry was still married to Martha.

Apart from Henry, only Martha knew that he hadn’t written a single word of the novels himself.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Bobby Townsend:

As people who live in often the modest era should be update about what going on or information even knowledge to make all of them keep up with the era which is always change and move ahead. Some of you maybe will update themselves by studying books. It is a good choice for yourself but the problems coming to anyone is you don't know which one you should start with. This The Truth and Other Lies: A Novel is our recommendation so you keep up with the world. Why, as this book serves what you want and want in this era.

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Jackie Thompson:

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