

“A darkly intriguing  
mystery that pulls you in  
deep and doesn’t let go.”

—MEG GARDINER,  
Edgar Award-winning author

LITTLE  
BLACK  
A NOVEL  
LIES

SANDRA BLOCK

# LITTLE BLACK LIES



Sandra Block



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# READING GROUP GUIDE

Dear Reader,

Walking up the stairs one night, I saw the reflection of the moon on the tile of my laundry room floor. This seems an innocuous-enough image, mundane even. But somehow the way the light was bent and scattered, it looked almost like blood spatter. (Yes, as a rabid mystery reader, I find my imagination tends toward the gory at times.) A line came into my mind: “Moonlight spattered on the floor.”

What was this then? A poem? An image to file away? Over the next few days, the vision wouldn’t leave me alone. Instead, it grew. There was a girl hiding there, in a room lit only by the moonlight. What was she doing? From whom was she hiding?

By inches, the girl started to fill in. She was injured by whatever she saw, changed. She was flawed and insecure, brilliant and a little nutty all at the same time. Therefore

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she had to be a psychiatrist. Thus Dr. Zoe Goldman was born.

Now all good protagonists need a quest. And as her boyfriend Jean Luc says, “We are all looking for our mothers, no?” Of course, there is Freudian play in this, but taken to another level. Zoe is not only subconsciously but literally looking for her mother: her “real” or birth mother. And at the same time, she is also searching for her adoptive mother, who is disappearing behind the veil of early onset Alzheimer’s disease.

The mother quest turns out to be quite a challenge. Many would-be mothers pop up in the book, including the mother of the imposter Beth and the woman in the picture, Zoe’s fading adoptive mother, and the ghost of Sofia’s mother.

In another nod to Freud, the very answer to Zoe’s search is locked deep within her own subconscious memory, tantalizing but unreachable. She stabs at it through hypnosis and dream analysis but to no avail. And all the while, the answer is staring her right in the face—but Zoe’s conscious mind refuses to see it. Puzzles are laid out through the book (see if you can find them all) that her conscious mind struggles to solve, but they are grasped only by her subconscious.

Ultimately, however, *Little Black Lies* is more than just a Freudian nightmare. It is about family, the constant mutation, strain, and repair of the bonds that connect us. Zoe does find her mother in the end, both mothers. She fills in the missing piece, the hole punctured in herself on that moonlit night, with the discovery of her own empathy. Zoe gains em-

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pathy for her patients, as well as her family, for her mothers, her brothers, herself—and yes, even Sofia.

I hope the story will stay with you long after you've read the last page.

All my best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sandra Block". The signature is written in a light, greyish color.

SANDRA BLOCK

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Could you relate to Zoe? Did you get a sense of how exhausting it is sometimes to be in her head? Do you ever feel like that yourself?
2. Do you have any friends or relatives with ADHD? Do you feel reading this book helped you understand them better?
3. Zoe often seems uncomfortable in her own skin. Why do you think this is? Her height? Her ADHD? Her age? Do you recall feeling that way in your life?
4. What do you think of Zoe's relationship with her brother Scotty? Do you like Scotty? Can you see how living with Zoe all these years may have been difficult for him at times?
5. Do you relate to Zoe's desire to connect with her birth mother? Why do you think she felt the need to do this after all these years?
6. Do you think her adoptive mother remembered the truth

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at this point? Do you think she was still lying? Why didn't she tell Zoe the truth in the first place?

7. Do you blame Zoe's adoptive mother for keeping the truth from her? What would you have done in her situation?
8. During her residency, Zoe and her resident friends (Jason and Dr. A, for instance) are in constant contact with a stream of patients. Did their attitudes surprise you at all? Did this behind-the-scenes look at Zoe's residency interest you?
9. Zoe has her share of romantic troubles. Could you understand her attraction to Jean Luc? Do you think he was right for her?
10. How are Mike and Jean Luc different? Which one do you think Zoe should end up with?
11. Did you guess, before Sofia's revelation, the answer to Zoe's quest for her mother? Looking back, can you find the clues that lead us there?
12. Many puzzles are scattered throughout the book. Can you identify some of them? Why do you think this is? What does the puzzle represent here?
13. Why do you think Sofia killed her mother? Is it because she "wanted to"? Was she just "God's mistake," as her brother, Jack, wonders? Do you think she was sexually abused by her father?
14. Do you think Zoe will maintain a relationship with Jack? Would you?
15. Forgiveness is one of the themes in the book. Who should be forgiven? Should Zoe forgive Sofia? Should she

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forgive her adoptive mother for lying? Should she forgive her birth father for leaving them? Does Zoe herself deserve forgiveness? If so, what for?

16. Another theme throughout the book is the idea of a continuum of “craziness.” Who gets to define *crazy*? Do you agree that everyone is a “little crazy”?
17. The book relies heavily on Freudian theories of the conscious and subconscious, probably part of Zoe’s training. Do you subscribe to these theories? Are you aware of decisions or actions in your own life that have seemed more due to your subconscious than to your conscious mind?



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sandra Block graduated from college at Harvard, then returned to her native land of Buffalo, New York, for medical training and never left. She is a practicing neurologist and proud Sabres fan and lives at home with her family and Delilah, her impetuous yellow lab. She has been published in both medical and poetry journals. *Little Black Lies* is her first novel.