

*Kiss Myself Goodbye* by Ferdinand Mount starts as a biography about his Aunt Betty. She was more often referred to as Munca, with Uncle Grieg being called Unca, supposedly after the *Tale of the Two Bad Mice* by Beatrix Potter. However, like a lot about Aunt Betty's life, the names didn't fit; one of the mice is called Hunca Munca while the other is Tom Thumb. *Kiss Myself Goodbye* is written in the historical present, which heightens the feeling of discovery that Ferdinand Mount conveys in his researches and reads much like a detective story. The style of writing is almost conversational.

There is a lot of name-dropping in the first few pages, but the book soon starts to concentrate on what Mount finds out about his aunt. As a child, he enjoyed going to stay with the two of them, but it becomes apparent that there are inconsistencies in what she tells him about herself and what he discovers from other sources. This leads him to more detailed research and the realisation that she told lies about a great deal of her life. Her obvious wealth and social contacts gave the impression that she came from the 'upper echelons' of society, but much of that came from good luck, most notably from money left to her by the industrialist Walter Forrest. Betty had been born into poverty in Brightside, Sheffield but, like many girls at the time, had gone into service. She became pregnant at the age of 15 but, in later years, was able to pass her son, Buster, off as her brother. Both of them lived unconventional lives, Betty going through several bigamous marriages, while Buster also treated marriage as a temporary arrangement. It turns out that Betty was Walter Forrest's daughter from his affair with her mother, which explains his generosity to them.

Betty and Grieg adopted a child, Georgie, whom they passed off as their own. They also briefly adopted another child, Celeste, who, for no apparent reason, was returned to her birth mother. Georgie became a very beautiful woman with no shortage of admirers. However, Betty maintained an iron grip on her, forcing her to call off emotional attachments and engagements. As a final insult, Georgie did not inherit their estate but only granted an income from it. Betty clearly lacked her father's generosity.

Some members of the group felt uncomfortable with the way details of the lives of people who are still living were described. Mount gave the impression that, by being thwarted in love, Georgie lived an unhappy life, but this was contradicted in a separate source written by her godson who remembered her as being cheerful and wonderfully generous. What seems to be clear is that Ferdinand Mount's researches into his Aunt Munca have unearthed details of a woman whose life was a tissue of lies, perhaps started by a desire to hide her true background, but subsequently becoming a habit. Hence the title of the book, which is based on a popular song.