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How To Tell A Lie

Karrington Tabor

You'll need to know what a lie is first. A lie starts as something people tell others in order to cover up the truth; a deceitful act to hide their vulnerability. You'll tell your first lie by age four. You'll run to your mom after your brother refuses to play with you and lie that he hit you. Then once he's in trouble, he will sit for three hours and play Barbies with you. Later, it's the same big brother, Donovan, who will teach you one of the most important lies- how to lie to yourself.

In order to complete a lie, you'll need a secret. The first secret you earn is something unasked for, something completely out of your control. You'll be nine years old and stand completely confused as a dozen officers line your home to escort your father from your arms. You two were just playing a game, you guys were just singing. He didn't do anything wrong. You didn't understand. Fear sets in. A lie is necessary in situations like these. No one can know what happened that night before bed; No one can know you watched your father being forced into the backseat of a cop car; No one can know you stood there, balling uncontrollably, as your mother clawed towards the barred windows. A lie is what your mom tells you when you cry to her out of confusion. She won't be able to focus on you or your older brother. The officers are apologizing profusely when they watch your brother rock back in forth with you thrashing in his arms. When she can finally bear to look at you two, she says she'll be right back. A lie. She won't come home until the next morning, a complete wreck. Her hair will be ratted, eyes dark and cold. She will only have enough time to kiss your head before she's hollering at the top of her lungs on the house phone. Lies are uncovered from those calls, lies you don't want to know. Your older brother, only thirteen at the time, will hold you close all night and tell you the best lie of all: it will all be okay. You have to believe this lie. So, you repeat it. Repetition is essential when telling a lie.

So, you have your first secret. From the secret, you'll need to know why a lie is necessary in order to tell the lie and do it justice. You won't go to school for the next two weeks. Your big brother can't handle school right

now, mom tells you, you'll have to go stay with Donovan's friends while she takes care of things. Confusion grows in your chest. You don't understand why you aren't allowed to call your best friend and tell her you're scared. You don't understand why Dad won't be home tonight. You don't understand why you can't talk to anyone until you arrive at the new house, the house that's not yours. This family will share sympathetic looks between you, your mom, and Donovan. Every family member takes their turn to give you sappy looks and big hugs. These hugs are a type of lies. These hugs want to deceive you into believing that these people understand. They don't. This is when you realize that in order to tell a lie, you'll need to understand why the lie is important. You never wanted to feel so pathetic again. You never wanted to feel so small again. So, you form the lie on your lips when your mom looks at you to see if she can leave, "I'm fine. Besides, it's just a sleepover."

A lie changes as you grow closer to it. A lie is not only hiding the truth, but it can also be expanding on it. You'll learn how to discern an overexaggerated lie from a basic one when you go back to school. It's been weeks, but no one asks you where you've been. Donovan will watch you on the playground that day, he won't move. He's scared, but he doesn't tell you that. He lies instead, telling you that he just misses you, that he doesn't want to leave you, that's all. You believe him. But then those girls in your fourth-grade class walk up to you. They said they can't talk to you anymore, that they can't be friends with a criminal. The disgust exuding from their words and the contortion of their face's shocks you. You don't get it. They say their parents told them that your dad was disgusting and so awful he had to be escorted with thirty cops from your house as if he was some murderer. Confusion morphs into anger. You'll yell at their lies. You'll even tell your own, that nothing happened. Anger will morph into rage. But, then they laugh. Now, that sinking feeling will set in. You'll say it again as they walk away. Nothing happened. Then, Donovan will tell you it's all okay. This lie is starting to become your favorite.

In order to pull off a perfect lie, you'll have to believe it. So, you'll use that repetition method again. You'll be okay. Dad is okay. Mom is okay. You aren't helpless. Live by the idea that you'll have to repeat it to believe it. You create a mantra within a week: You're okay, dad's okay, you have Donovan, you don't need anyone anyway. Anger etches its way between the lines of this mantra. You won't tell your mom that you can't look at yourself in the mirror from feeling so puny. You won't tell your dad every night at six that things at school are terrible. You'll repeat the same story: You're okay. You know dad's okay. Donovan has you. Mom is fine. It's just merely lying. Something you're beginning to be very good at. After all, you know all the layers of how to get away with a lie.

But then a lie changes again. You're older now and you're starting to *know* lying as if the lies spewing from your mouth are your only friends. No

longer is a lie hiding truth, or an over-exaggeration. A lie becomes helping others feel better. You lie the most on those phone calls you receive every night at six for a year and a half. You lie when you purposely forget to tell your dad that people taped his mugshot to your brother's locker. That hours before he called you saw your big brother break for the first time. That after school he cried so hard in the car that by the time you reached home his throat was bleeding from the wailing. That mom couldn't talk to dad right away because she's on her cell with the lawyer, trying desperately to get that picture off of Google. You lie again when you don't mention that there's an anti-criminal club against you in your class. And again when you tell him everyone acts the same, and that you aren't forced to stay inside during recess. You lie when the fact that teachers take turns picking you up and bringing you to school on the weekends stays completely unheard of. You'll lie and say you understand that God is on Dad's side. You lie a lot now.

Lying isn't for everyone. Lying is not for your mother. She tried to use every form of lying before being forced to tell the truth. She held you nightly now, the shaking being harder and harder to calm. She will get up one night when dad is eligible to come home. It will be him sleeping with a gun next to the bed instead of Donovan this time. She can't stop throwing up. Her skin is sweaty and cold. Her eyes sunken in. She hasn't eaten in weeks, but somehow her body looks breakable now. Mom won't stop crying when she can't make it to the bathroom. Mom doesn't cry. Dad is scared. He's frantic. Dad will lie to you now, demanding in a shaky voice to stay here, don't wake up your brother, just watch some Tv, Sissy. You do as your told. He's the one who wakes Donovan before they leave. The lanky fourteen-year old will be shaking, as he rocks softly beside you in the bed. His eyes never close that night and his hands never leave that phone. Mom can't lie to you about being okay when you go see her the next morning in the hospital. She can't lie to you and tell you she doesn't have cancer. She can't lie to you and say she has a fighting chance, instead she promises. She promises that this T4 tumor won't take her away from you. Who needs a colon anyway? She'll say fuck cancer and laugh. Her laugh is the only lie she tells you that day. You'll lie to yourself in that moment, and you'll believe that laugh that promises you things won't change. You hold onto that laugh. After all, it's the only sign of hope you have left.

A lie is not easily accomplished. A lie pushes you beyond the point of breaking. You can only break so many times until you're just shattered fragments like the jagged edges of an unlucky, demolished mirror. Sometimes you lie, like when you thank those people who had shunned your family for the food they begin to provide now that mom's sick. Sometimes you lie a little harder, like when you look at the stranger who lives with you now and tell him you appreciate his help. Sometimes all that comes out of your mouth is lies: no, I'm not scared; yes, you'd be super grateful for a ride to the hospital;

no pastor, I don't need special help; yes Donovan, I can look at myself in a mirror. The lies always change, but now they change you. You will begin to see yourself as these lies- hidden and too big.

To tell a lie, you'll have to understand why lying comes to you so naturally. To tell someone a lie, you'll hide a part of yourself, the part you've hidden for years. And one day, you'll go to tell a lie to your now ex-boyfriend. You'll go to tell him that it was fine when everything went down those years ago. That you love hanging with your mom and you could never resent your dad for what happened. He won't speak; a silence thick and deafening. Then you'll cry. Each tear falls from you eye like a different lie falls from your lips. To tell a lie, you'll have to understand what a lie means to you. It is not strength, it is not okay, it is toxic. You live by the truth now. You'll realize that those secrets come out through your eyes, through your body movements, or through the weighing silence. You'll realize that some lies hurt you in the long run. You'll realize lies aren't hiding the truth, obscuring the facts, or even saving someone. Are the benefits of lying worth it if the benefits gluttonously eat away at your heart? Lying only shows through in your true colors.

In order to know how to tell a lie, you'll have to know this one thing: don't.