

Lie is the daughter of Legal. Upright is the cousin of Lie. Legal is the sister of Justice.

Legal is a short woman. Her nose, like her limbs, like her words, are direct and to the point. Sentences end where they ought. Promptly tied up at full stops. She loves Lie. Even if, now and then, love can be eclipsed by efficiency. Because her work is complex, she keeps her emotions simple. For Legal, simplicity is rooted in habit and repetition. Every morning she announces: I love Lie. I love Justice. I love Upright. Each love a separate truth, marked in speech as they are marked in her head. Discreet, uncomplicated, portions of devotion.

Lie is slightly taller than her mother. Her features softer, her skin absorbent. Indiscriminately it soaks up oils, dirt, dust, moisture. Her religious application of cleansing gels does little to reverse the voracious sucking of her pores. Lie's thoughts are like the sea, vast and disorienting. After hours spent floating in monotonous blue, she remedies the indistinguishable with creatures she has no names for.

To her mother's questions, she answers. Adopting Legal's vernacular so as to avoid confusion. When rarely they argue, Lie drags Legal from her certain shores, her habits churned by waves scrubbed clean of repetition. Though the beach remains in sight, the shallows confuse Legal, the unpredictable currents, the sand that rushes with the tide. Lie cherishes these moments of instability shared with her

mother. She imagines her birth was another such moment. Perhaps their first. Lie too new to know anything, Legal too old to know this newness.

Since the truth of her birth, Lie has watched Legal build fables. A convincing blend of untruth and convenient fact roll from Legal's tongue. A genetic tendency expressed in false language, words taken on a stroll down the garden path and a gentle reminder that the difference between apples and oranges was a line drawn in the sand by somebody, at some point. She underlines this lesson with the ambiguous statement 'it's easier to tell a bad apple than a bad orange and *we* are oranges.' Legal's speech appears to be of this world, appears real, appears, therefore, if incorrect, still, true. When Lie speaks, mimicking her mother, mimicking her phrase, pitch and gesture, borrowed words hit the table, solid and improbable, so unlikely as to barely retain language's sacred heart: meaning. These false fables fool no one, listeners look at Lie as they would a stunned sheep; timid, innocent and senseless, bleating repetitive mono-syllables without reason. Legal keeps faith. Sure the family craft lies dormant between the ocean of words and the nameless, sub-marine life forms. *She knows* that *I don't know* lines Lie's small intestine, seven and a half metres of uncertainty. *She knows* that so as to hide her *don't know*, to cover up, to climb over, to get off the hook, to ease or to better her own situation, Lie will eventually find her way to false.

Lie's failure is not for lack of trying. At

school, as a young child, she set about persuading her classmates that Lie was the diminutive form of Lightning. Convinced their belief would nudge the false claim closer to fact. A world in which she could decide *what was* and *what was not*, seemed fitting, fair, just. Lie never asked: Why Lightning? Why not Liability? Or Lifestyle? She simply persisted with a particularly fervent vein of certainty that stems solely from the unknown. No one believed her. She pressed on. Adding to this first false, another. Her new name was followed by the construction of a complex familial history, whereby impervious judicial structures were replaced by something much more poetic. Lie insisted on re-baptising her cousin, aunt and mother. Upright, Justice and Legal became Storm, Wind and Rain. Having disbelieved her at Lightning, the other children had long since wandered off. Lie unaware, cut ties with the outside world, speaking and floating in her own open ocean. To Lie's ears Lie's lips spouted coherent sense, to everyone else she spoke only two distinct phonemes, B and A, run together, endlessly, in an animal a-tonal drone. Eventually, and as gently as possible, someone told Lie to shut up.

Legal believes her family tree stretches in both temporal directions, snaking parallel to, undergirded by, fiction and falses. Mostly, she discards fiction or lets it to others, she does not concern herself with grand narratives, sweeping statements. Focusing instead on the now-at-hand, she redistributes truth, modelling specific falses for specific application.

At moments Legal softens, a thought-drift she recognises all too well in Lie's abundant, teeming, sea. She stays afloat by weighing up the difference between rot (that rapid process of organic decomposition) and growth (the curious flourishing of transformation). She redraws the line that tells them apart, a wrinkle in the dirt more often than not rubbed away. The bacterial army overwhelming her inner most pip preoccupies her, robs useful hours, moulds useless days. Despite everything, despite failure, despite fiction, despite rot, despite open oceans, she remains true to family, to the *ideal* of family, to her daughter, sister, niece; to names, genes and the repetition of love. She rejects questions as threats, undesirable challengers of certainty. She makes distinctions, this way or that. Protected from inquiries, from prying eyes on dirty laundry, Legal reinforces the tree, dedicated, her distinctions fertilise its fruit.

For years following her early failure, Lie has moved her tongue around her empty mouth. Where words fail she choses to place faith in her body. Rather than conjuring false language, she imagines the bifurcation of the tongue itself. Though she lacks religious education, the notion that serpentine speech and deceit belong together has lodged itself in all the organs that count: heart, mind, stomach. A long muscular curve hangs from a dark green tree in some recess of her imagination. Wished into existence a split tongue would double her words, a back-stabbing, Janus-faced, ophidian mouthpiece. She imagines the doors

opened by these falses, created not in her mind but in her mouth. Falsing as natural as stepping or sitting or lying down. Lie longs to false this way, to escape her open ocean, to find meaning, firm ground, to find intent and to follow it through at the cost of truth.

At moments when Legal is fed up up to here with Lie's day dreams, she accuses her daughter of taking the easy way out. Chastising her for giving up, for seeking redemption in her imagination. All this wondering about what might be *if*. It wasn't, and wouldn't, and that was that. Legal does not discount redemption, seeing it as the ground upon which one can live free and easy. She simply wishes that Lie would find redemption in the real world of words, rules and structures that cement the way things are. She knows all too well the wrath of wonder. She says, there is a difference between encouraging a child's natural disposition and letting things get out of hand. To be redeemed, one must carve a place for oneself, true or false, out in the open. The public body, that writhing mass of differing opinion, must be subdued, consenting to one's innocence, else, redemption is nowhere to be found. Legal rounds out this lesson with a distinction, 'there is a difference between reflections that shrivel in puddles and glow in glass.' A difference so obvious, she assumes, anyone with half a brain could seek out the right type of reflection.

Washing around in the shallows of her thoughts for weeks at a time, her daughter, her only child, is silent. Though currents,

waves, foam and weed cobble together an inner life, Lie's refusal to speak, false or otherwise, casts a dark cloud of shame over Legal and her family. To withdraw from words that buttress the way things are is to practically ensure the cement crumbles. Between scolding and faith, hope and certainty, Legal finds the wherewithal to push Lie to speak, to false. She cannot let the cement crumble just one generation down the line. She asks questions stained with desperation. As always, as it should be, Lie responds. A seemingly random assortment of yeses and noes follow Legal's forceful interrogation points. Answers that could be read this way or that, this way, or that.

On her deathbed they argue, silence bandied around in anger, regret and the repetition of love. To put an end to hostilities, she says, '91 good years.' Lie does not offer up yeses or noes. For the first time in a long time her daughter responds, 'not enough'. Legal is shocked by Lie's words, Lie by her tongue and the split forming at its tip. They each attempt, in their own way, to understand the phrase: not enough. They look for truth, for false, for any indication of intent. Lie looks at Legal, eyes tired and dirty from the day before and the day before and the day before that. Legal remembers a truth stumbled upon many years earlier. At this end, facing some unknown false, still, Lie too new to know anything, Legal too old to know this newness.

Rosie Isaac

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This work was developed and performed on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I wish to acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.