

# CAUGHT OUT

we asked four writers to share the greatest fibs they've told (or heard).

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By  
Michael  
Sun –

I don't remember how it started now, but I do remember this: it was 2005, and I was harbouring a secret so shameful I could hardly confess it to the priest at my Catholic primary school, even under threat of eternal damnation. Maybe I'd been bored one day, waiting for the computer to load as I furiously googled things like "Neopets hack how" and "Eminem lyrics" (don't ask). Or maybe I'd scoffed too many packets of string cheese at nauseating speed, and was forced out of our apartment for air.

Was that when I spotted it for the first time? A downstairs neighbour's welcome mat, plain and unassuming. It had become the target of my obsession, and I suddenly found myself – aged seven – with a crazed addiction for petty thievery. Sometimes, when the afternoon light hit just right – and often when it didn't – I would be compelled with a force so divine, a courage so brazen, that I had no choice but to yank the mat away from its doorstep.

But the thrill, as any amateur pilferer will tell you, wasn't in the possession. It was in the taking itself. Having claimed my prize, I'd sprint down three flights of

stairs, mat hoisted above my head, and immediately lob it on top of the bushes outside our complex.

In the beginning, it might have been dismissed as a supernatural quirk. A ghost was haunting the building, and by haunting, I mean moving a welcome mat from one spot to another. Soon, though, the thrill wore off, and I had to get bolder: each time I saw the mat returned to its place, I'd devise new schemes. I'd throw it in a different hedge. I'd knock on the neighbour's door, then run off, mat in hand. I'd sneak out after bedtime, doing the deed in the dead of night.

Things escalated. An emergency strata meeting was called and each apartment was interrogated. They turned on each other. Then my parents turned on me: was it *you*??? No, I lied, smiling unconvincingly. No, I lied again, tight-lipped this time. I wasn't sure they believed it, though it was enough to curb my kleptomania – for a while.

There I was again, some months later: just a boy, standing in front of a door, pining for its welcome mat. I thought I'd rid myself of the habit. But something about that mat – in all its brown, sodden glory – was reeling me back in. I crept towards it, tugged it gently. It was almost in reach, before: ding!

An alert on the other side of the entryway interrupted my light-fingered fantasia. Something was wrong; the mat was stuck. I pulled harder. Ding! Ding!

I dropped it and scurried upstairs, but it was too late: the door opened, and my neighbour made it in a few galloping leaps to catch me in action. It had been a sting operation all along. My neighbour, who I was now face to face with for the first time, was a guy named Jeff – and also a former police officer, convinced that some villainous perp was exacting their long, twisted revenge. Please come for dinner, my parents told him. We'll make sure our terrible son apologises for this.

So we had dinner, my parents and Jeff and I, and afterwards my parents led me to my bedroom. My repentance, they revealed, was to play piano for Jeff – a punishment as devious as my schemes. A punishment for both performer and listener. My parents made their exit, and suddenly, Jeff and I were alone, in purgatory together, locked in muted and mutual resentment as I thumped out ugly chords to an all-consuming silence, all the while hating this man who had tied a bell on one end of his welcome mat, then sat for weeks, unmoving, at his couch every afternoon in case, one fateful afternoon, it rang.

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## By Caro Cooper –

*Never let the truth get in the way of a good story.* My grandpa used to tell me this; it was sort of his motto. It was his way of warning us that pretty much everything he said was embellished. Shame on us if we believed that he drove the Queen around Australia in a limousine. I had to respect his honesty about, well, his dishonesty. Most people just lie without admitting to it – I’ve done it. You’ve got shifty eyes, so I reckon you do it all the time, too.

Some people are chronic liars. Like the waitress I used to work with who claimed she had been an astronaut-in-training but decided it wasn’t really her vibe. Or the guy who told me he graduated from high school at 12 and took time off to travel before uni, which was why he was my age in first year. That’s serious lying, maybe self-delusion. It’s the kind of lying that keeps people wondering – but not in a good way.

I don’t lie like that. One time I lied to protect a friend. We were just kids and my friend accidentally hit me in the eye with a hockey stick. I ended up with a giant black eye and a hefty blood clot for months. She was mortified and terrified. I lied and told my parents a player on the other team had hit me. About six months later they learnt the truth (not from me).

My lying is not an entirely selfish act (OK, maybe it is a bit selfish). I want the people I’m talking with to enjoy the experience. Time is precious; life is short. No one wants to hear about the mundane events of a remote worker with no social life. But if you add a little spice, things can get fun. I just take the truth and add colour. Does that make me a liar? Maybe, but I like to think of myself as a rhinestone –

an embellishment on an otherwise underwhelming outfit.

Sometimes I lie out of embarrassment. Small white lies. Harmless! In fact, not lying would be the harmful option. Harmful to *me*, anyway. I tell lies when someone asks me what I have planned for the weekend or what I’ve been up to lately. The true answer is a very beige and conversation-ending “Trying to work out what my dog is thinking.” But you can take nothing and add a little razzle-dazzle to make it “Something weird happened... when I was doing nothing.” It’s a *layer*, not a lie. It’s about making myself look less boring and earning back the money I spent on all those creative-writing subjects at uni.

That’s another reason I lie: fear of boredom, or more accurately, fear of silence. I’m fine with relaxed nothingness, but groups of people sitting in awkward silence (or groups of heads floating in silence on Zoom) make me itchy and anxious. Why so dull? I get it – sometimes there are group dynamics and politics at play, especially in work groups. But that just makes it the perfect time to crack out a humiliating, ridiculous story that may or may not have happened. There’s no better way to bond and disarm a group than to humiliate yourself in front of them. Yes, you’re right, I’m not management material.

My lies are never big enough to warrant feeling weird about. It’s OK to lie to get a laugh, to embellish a story to make it worth telling. The far greater sin, in my opinion, is to be dull. Better a lying miscreant than a bore.

My grandpa had a second, almost complementary motto: *believe half of what you see and nothing of what you hear.* Maybe now, more than ever, we would all do well to heed his advice. But first, let me tell you about this really wild thing that just happened to me...

## By Serena Coady –

Young girls don’t have many weapons at their disposal. I know from personal experience that it’s seriously difficult to be seen as a legitimate threat when your main occupation is narrating homemade films on Windows Movie Maker and gliding around on a Razor scooter. But if you weathered Y2K and came of age between the mid-’90s and mid-’00s, you would know that there was one way to get real results: you could faint.

During those years, Hollywood birthed a league of oxygen-deprived damsels. In *The Notebook*, Rachel McAdams passes out in her wedding dress. Christina Ricci topples over when see-through softboi Casper says hi. Keira Knightley faints and falls into the sea in the first *Pirates of the Caribbean* film. It didn’t matter that they all collapsed due to reasons well out of my realm of possibility – Ryan Gosling, a young ghoul, Georgian corsetry – these examples of performative femininity left their mark.

When I was 13, Mum took me out for a mother-daughter night at the local theatre. Don’t ask me what we saw. Whether it was an unauthorised Andrew Lloyd Webber production or a street-funk dance troupe giving everything to Will Smith’s “Switch”, the show couldn’t compare to what was coming. On the drive back, Mum said I couldn’t continue my almost entirely shopping centre-based relationship with a chap she called Larry Lowpants (he was in a touring B-boy ensemble with his brother), which marked the first deception of the night: the mother-daughter theatre outing was subterfuge.

I cried all the way down the Monaro Highway. When Mum stopped at her friend’s house and went inside to retrieve my sisters, I stepped out into the rainy Canberra night.

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Somewhere between the wheelie bins and car bonnet, I breathed my last breath, and fainted. And then I breathed another breath, because I was fully conscious.

I lay on the driveway for 80 minutes, because Mum has never been able to resist a chinwag. As the rain flattened my dutifully crimped hair, I listened to my sisters laughing about my new missing-person status while Mum called my name. It was like when a movie character attends their own funeral and sees what the world is like without them. At only 13 years of age, I had achieved a kind of prescience that was not available to the living. And all I had to do was faint. It was really that easy. More importantly, I had achieved what I set out to do, and that was to make Mum regret keeping me from my dream guy (a guy who had eight secret girlfriends).

As luck would have it, the driveway had recently been paved, so I could have comfortably stayed there all night, pushing Mum to confront her sins. But she eventually started the car to go look for me. To preserve my supple little organs, I finally rolled out from under the Honda. Nobody was surprised – nor were they relieved.

I wasn't the only tween to fabricate this kind of drama. One of my high-school friends 'fainted' nearly every week. In the line for the canteen. In the science lab. At the top of a staircase. Until that rainy night, I thought I was above fake fainting. But I suppose I hadn't known true despair until then.

As far as little white lies go, pretending to pass out is on the milder side. I could've adopted far worse behaviours from cinema. I could've brought all kinds of thunder, but I didn't. If you think this brings me comfort, you're way off. The fainting incident has followed me deep into my 20s – my mum and her friends still refer to me as "bin girl". I guess I'll take it.

## By Fraser Harvey –

There are all sorts of lies that can be told for myriad different reasons. But basically, most lies can be distilled down to two basic categories: bad or funny. I know 'bad' is a very broad term and 'funny' is reasonably specific, but that's pretty much the breakdown. Over my life, I have lied and been lied to – the latter is the part that you learn from. Childhood and adolescence are basically a crash course in working out what is true and what is not, to varying degrees of success. In retrospect, a lot of these experiences can seem quite funny, no matter how painful the lesson was at the time.

As I kid, I learnt many hard truths via the lies of my older sister, who was, and remarkably still is, six years older than me. These days we have a great relationship and are very close, despite living halfway around the world from each other, but as children we were sworn enemies. She hated me when I came along, as it meant far less attention spent on her. I hated her because she was the only other person I knew apart from Mum and Dad, and because she hated me.

Sara\* (\*a pseudonym, as Sarah didn't want me to use her real name) wasted no time in teaching me some memorable lessons. There was the time one boring Saturday when we were standing barefoot in the front yard when suddenly a bee landed on the ground in front of us. "Stand on it!" my sister said eagerly, "You can actually stand on bees and not get stung, but I can't, so you have to do it." Now you have to understand that my mum had on several occasions told me I was special, so obviously I had

no reason to doubt this new and exciting fact I'd learnt about myself. I set out immediately to prove my sister right.

Once the initial pain subsided and I came to terms with the fact that I was somehow stung by a bee, I had to face the fact that I'd been lied to, and more shockingly, that I – a noted special boy – was easily and callously misled. It's a sobering feeling we all experience throughout our lives, but the first time is always the most shocking. From then on, I vowed to never believe a word my sister said to me: a promise I would come to forget not even 24 hours later, when she told me that Egyptian people walk like the figures in hieroglyphics, or somewhat more famously, like the "Walk Like an Egyptian" video clip by The Bangles. She would then go on to sell me many more similar untruths over the course of my childhood, and frankly that was on me. I needed to learn to be less gullible.

However, this cruel streak exhibited by my sister instilled in me a similar courage I still make use of today. It's incredibly fun to pass off an absurd non-fact as truth to someone. I once told a friend that the reason Mickey Rourke's face is so weird is because he dipped it straight into acid for a film role. This was meant to be a throwaway joke, but it was met with a look of total disbelief from my friend, who seemed to think I was being serious. Naturally, I didn't bother correcting him and then moved on and forgot about it. But of course, like me, my friend needed to learn the lessons I had so painfully learnt. So imagine my delight a few months later, when at a party I overheard him earnestly sharing this newly acquired fact with a group of movie buffs, who then had to set the record straight. Perfect. Chef's kiss. ❀