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Lies

by Maureen Marsh

Studies have revealed that we are lied to between 10 and 200 times a day and tell a lie on average 1 to 2 times in the same period. Of course, we may tell more lies than that but because it is likely that we lied in the study, we will never know how much we lie.

She had finished tidying the house and was settling down with a glass of wine, waiting for the chicken to fully cook and for his key in the lock. 6.45pm, an established routine that took root several years ago. She took a sip of wine. She remembered how handsome he was when they first met and his first words to her 'You are very tall aren't you?....I like that' she laughed to herself at the memory

They had brought 2 children up together, now grown. Alice at University studying medicine and Charlie in Indonesia on his gap year. Good, functional young people. Everyone would agree on that. She took another sip of wine and checked the oven, glancing up at the clock, she noted that it was now 7.00. She paused. 'He's late' she reflected 'He's never late' . She recalled their wedding. The chaotic preparation, the feeling that her life was finally about to start. Staring at him with cheeks flushed, heart pounding and being calmed by his calmness.

She looked up at the clock. Another 20 minutes had passed. No need to panic. she would just keep everything warm in the oven and use this as an opportunity to get another bottle of wine out from the fridge. He would need a drink after a long day at work. She called his mobile. Voicemail. She recalled their marriage. All those years together. There were times when he seemed so mysterious and contained that it was like 2 separate universes in outer space, but it was a great marriage. Really it was. She was sure of that.

The clock ticked, the wine was poured. She sat. She drank. She waited. Glancing up at the clock, an hour had passed, it was nearly 8 and she had nearly finished the 2nd bottle. Now she was panicking. What should she do. She rang his mobile again, left another message. She began to pace the kitchen. She wondered whether she should call the police. The panic began to rise and her heart thumped loudly in her chest. The smell of cooked chicken suddenly made her nauseous. And then she heard the key....

Stumbling down the hallway she called out 'Geoff, where have you been' and flinging her arms around him, she inexplicably began to sob. She looked up and in shock, realised it wasn't Geoff at all. It was her son Charlie. 'Charlie, why are you here?'

Charlie took her arms away from him.

'how much have you drunk Mum?' he said

"Where is Geoff?"

"mum, listen to me. You've been drinking. Dad passed away 20 years ago. Don't you remember?"

She paused. She looked at Charlie. His face lined, grey specks appearing in his hair. He wasn't that 19 year old boy, enthusiastically embarking on a gap year. He was a grown man with children of his own. She remembered now.

'Oh yes, sorry" she stumbled into the living room and collapsed into the sofa.

It had been this way for the last year at least. She was confused and frail and when she drank, it became worse. Fact and fiction blending in toxic mix. He knew that it was not enough to visit, that she would need more permanent care.

He took a coffee to her, inwardly realising that she could no longer be trusted to live alone, but he was reluctant to have that conversation. The great marriage had been a cold affair from his eyes and family life had been tense. A distant father and a needy mother. So many lies or unspoken truths. Both good people in their own ways but together a disaster.

She had fallen asleep so he placed the coffee on the table. A sadness overwhelmed him. So many lies, he thought and looking at his mother, he reflected 'Sometimes people need to lie to themselves most of all'