

“The First Lie”

Written by Dino Kong

In the quiet town of Verdads, nestled in a valley isolated away from all others, not a single lie had ever been told. Its people lived in the town without any suspicion. Promises were made and forever kept. Contracts didn't require signatures, marriages never ended, and parents never had to wonder whether their kids lied about their grades; they always knew the truth because it was all that could be given.

It wasn't that the people of Verdads didn't know what a lie *was* or how to do one, but simply that nobody *could* lie. The moment someone would try, their voice failed and faded away. Their mouth froze. Words curled up like wilted, scrolled up paper on their tongues.

For as long as anybody could remember, it had been this way. Residents would say that the town's truth telling had resulted from their founder, an old philosopher who believed honesty the only way to achieve peace, justice, unity and harmony. Somehow, either by force or by miracle, that same philosopher had created a place in the world where the truth ruled and existed absolutely. And so, Verdads came to be, and flourished.

Until on a cloudy, Tuesday afternoon, things began to shift.

It started with a boy.

Thomas was 14, with hair too messy and thoughts too many. He was the kind of student who acted up to the teacher, asked too many questions, stayed up too late, and sometimes stared at his reflection as if daring it to blink. He had always hated the rules of Verdads, the limits of it, of constantly telling the truth. He desired to know what the world looked like when its truths bent, not when it was forced to exist permanently.

That fateful Tuesday, Thomas came home from school with a scuffed knee and a burning ambition.

His mother glanced at him from the kitchen and exclaimed, “What happened?”

Inside Thomas' head, something stirred: a rebellion, a whisper, an action, or simply a thought? Initially, he couldn't tell.

“I tripped,” Thomas said. His words came out clean, smooth, and effortless. He hadn't tripped. Not even close. Yet what he said was nowhere near the truth. In truth, he had been dared by his best friends to ride a skateboard down the stairs of the old chapel. He had taken on the dare, laughing, until he hit the bottom and flew off his skateboard.

As his mother stood there processing his words, Thomas' heart thundered in his ears. He waited for his voice to seize up, his throat to choke, his word to curl up. But nothing of the sort happened.

How had he just told a lie, he marveled. Perhaps the fear of being shouted at from his mother gave him a new strength to the lie. Perhaps his desire to challenge the rules of Verdads had given him a deep strength. Perhaps Thomas just had a natural talent to stretch the truth like taffy, a talent no one before him had ever had.

No matter its cause, his mother nodded, pacified. "Be more careful next time."

And just like that, the first lie ever told in Verdads fluttered through the air, triumphant. At first, Thomas treated it humbly so people wouldn't notice. He tried the same, small lies the next day to experiment with his abilities.

"I like broccoli," Thomas lied to his mom.

"I finished my homework," Thomas lied to his dad.

"I didn't take your charger," Thomas lied to his sister.

Each time he lied, the action became easier and came out of his mouth smoother. The truth, which once felt sacred and compulsory, now felt, instead, *optional*.

Eventually, Thomas went to tell his best friend Lila. Not because he wanted to start a revolution, or to brag about the power, or to strengthen his abilities. No, nothing of the sort. He was, he had to admit, tired of being alone in this.

For days, the secret sat on his chest like a stone. Every time he lied and no one noticed, it made the town feel colder, emptier, and in some ways, less real, like he walked through a play that only he knew to be fake. Lila had always supported Thomas, no matter how absurd or dangerous his requests, or indeed, regardless of the stakes. If anybody could accept and understand Thomas' ability to lie, it would be her.

After school, as the pair sat on the swings behind the gym, Thomas said quietly but casually, "The principal canceled homework today."

Lila blinked. "What? No, she didn't—she literally said we had to finish the chapter."

Thomas only smiled. Lila stared at him, finally realizing what he had said and what he had done. She examined Thomas for the common symptoms of lying, and found herself entirely dumbfounded by the fact that they did not display themselves. His voice hadn't cracked. His mouth hadn't seized. The words hadn't curled up. He said the falsity with calm precision and an expression of contentment and skill, which Lila had thought only appeared in fiction.

"Say it again," she demanded.

"There's no homework," he repeated.

"No—say something else. Something false."

He paused, considered his thoughts, and then a cheeky grin rose on his mouth. "I *love* spinach."

She knew he hated spinach. She had seen him gag on it at lunch many times before. Yet the words slid out from his mouth like butter. Lila stepped back, as if cold wind had passed through her.

"You can lie," she whispered. "How?"

"I don't know," Thomas said truthfully. "I just can."

Lila tried. "I hate apples." She expected her throat to squeeze, her lips to immobilize, his sentence to die halfway up her tongue. She could already imagine what would happen next; she would look significantly sick and pale, coughing and clutching her chest. But the words came out smoothly and casually, like sliding on ice. Lila and Thomas stood there, collected and normal after telling their untruths. That's when Lila knew: the rules had broken. And Thomas was the first crack.

Within days, the story spread throughout Verdads, quiet at first but growing gradually like the fierce rustle of wind through dry leaves in autumn. *Someone in Verdads can lie. Have you heard? There's a liar here!*

The entire town shuddered from the claim. Parents told their children to ignore the rumor. The mayor made a speech imploring the person who could lie to stand out and acknowledge themselves, citing truth as the spine and foundation of human society and the city itself.

No one came forward and the rumor grew. Schools even locked philosophy and fiction sections of their library for "maintenance".

One morning, Thomas awoke to find a note under his door. *"We need to talk. —Lila."* She waited for him in the orchard behind Thomas' house, pacing nervously.

"They know, Thomas. They're going to test people in the town, one by one, with questions and logic traps. They're scared that the person will destroy the social structure of the city."

Thomas shrugged. "Let them be."

Lila grabbed his wrist. "You don't get it. This place runs on trust. If people realize the

truth can be twisted, it all falls apart.”

“Maybe it should.” Thomas’ voice had an air of fatigue, and his insides shivered a little bit, though Lila didn’t notice. “Maybe truth without choice isn’t truth at all. Maybe people should choose to be honest, not be forced into it. Maybe that’s what makes the truth valuable.”

Lila stepped back, eyes hard, staring at Thomas strangely. “What do you want to do?”

Thomas didn’t answer. Because the truth was, he didn’t know. He had broken something sacred, and now he felt both free and utterly alone.

That night, the town held an emergency gathering in the square. Torches flickered. Shadows danced across worried faces. The mayor, old and pale, stepped forward.

“One among us has shattered the boundary. We must find the breach.”

People murmured with fright and fear on their faces. Thomas stood at the edge of the crowd. Silent. Watching.

Part of him wanted to bury the ability deep within himself, to pretend it had never happened. That part whispered safety and warned him not to disrupt the fragile peace of Verdads. It told him that lying, even if possible, was dangerous, a fire that could burn everything down. It told him to stay small, silent, and let the world spin as it always had. But another part, louder, sharper, and hungrier inside his heart, wanted more. It wanted to peel down the town’s silence and see what lay beneath the truth. That part of him wondered why truth had to be law instead of choice. It wanted to speak freely, to question everything Verdads stood for, to see if honesty still meant anything when no one had the option to reject it. That part of him wanted to change something.

“I’m the one,” Thomas said nervously. Dozens of eyes turned. Thomas stepped forward. “It’s true,” he said. “I can lie.”

Gasps and cries rose inside the crowd.

He continued. “But I didn’t steal. I didn’t hurt. I just simply tried the ability. I wanted to know what it meant to speak without the chains of the truth.”

“Chains?” the mayor spat. “You call truth chains?”

“No,” Thomas said. “I call compulsory and forced truths chains. What’s the worth of honesty if we never had the choice to be dishonest?” The resultant silence of his friends, of his family and of his peers, weighed heavier than any lie Thomas had told.

And then after a few minutes of silence, someone clapped. Lila. One clap. Then two.

Then three. Eventually, all the citizens loosened their boundaries and stubbornness of the truth.

“Indeed, why should telling what is right always be necessary?” People asked themselves. “If the truth was only spoken because it had to be spoken, did it still mean anything?” And in that thought, something shifted. A boundary loosened. A wall cracked.

And from that day on, the people of Verdads could lie. Most didn't. The habit of truth was hard to break. And somehow, even the truth felt different though it had been all they had known. Because now, when someone told the truth, it actually meant something. It was a choice. And the free will to make these choices, after all, was what made the people of Verdads, and people everywhere, human.