

## The Truth About Why I Lie (excerpt unpublished)

By Rebekkah Adams  
rebekkahadams.com

Julia Marie, my eldest sister, served two years less a day, for the deli stabbing.

"So you'll pick me up then?" she asked in her last phone call.

"Of course." And on Monday the 25th, her 729<sup>th</sup> day, I did.

She insisted that I not pick her up right out front. Wanted to walk down the street. Feel her shoes on the pavement; to be able to turn her neck and look back at it as she walked away. She wouldn't be shuttled into some car as though she were escaping the paparazzi. Hell no, she wanted them all to watch her big ass as she walked no wait! sauntered, on her own power, down the road. Away, away, from the stench and the staleness and the apathy that had grown on her skin. To shed herself, shed what had oozed from the walls themselves, from the other ladies, and the butches and the bulldykes too. Fuckers.

Julia Marie waddled towards the car. I watched her in the rear view mirror. Christ, if it was me, I woulda ran. Outweighed me by one hundred and fifty pounds or so though, so I figured the saunter was her best bet to retain her dignity.

"Hey." She leaned in the passenger side window, breathing hard. Her eyes were glassy. "I'm ah, I'm looking for a ride into the city?"

"Get in Jules."

She frowned. "Come on Brina, can't you lighten up a bit?"

"Get in the fucking car Jules, let's go. I've been waiting for what, two years?"

She grunted and yanked on the handle.

"Kinda figured you'd want to get the hell out of here as quickly as you could."

Sighing, Julia lowered herself heavily into the seat. "Fine. Fine. Let's just go."

I pulled away from the curb. Hoisting her torso as far out the window as she could, Julia flung her arms out above her head and waved with

both hands back at Vanier Detention. "Kiss my fat ass goodbye! Wooh hoo!"

Without glass clouding her face, she was pale; white and pasty complexioned; cream of wheat. When I visited her in prison, the Plexiglas division between free and incarcerated was smeared with the breath of those who waited; to get out, to touch, to kiss. I saw lovers kiss, press their lips on either side of the glass, place their hands, palm on palm, divided by transparent borders, sigh with the frustration of the exercise, but take what they could get. Anything is something

after all. I saw lovers press breasts and organs against the glass and the desperate eyes of sexuality watch from behind, the hands rub smooth surfaces where they should have been caressing shapes. The kids, they banged on the glass, palms smacking hard against the invisible wall; "Mommmmy, mommmmy!" shrieking and eventually led away, an aunt or father or grandmother, tugging with new authority on their tiny arms, "hush up, we're going!" and the faces that turned back, tears, protruding bottom lips, confused eyes, "Nooooo!" they wailed "Mommy mommmmy mommy" and from the foyer I head the slap, skin on skin, and the change in the tone of the cries, unheard from behind the glass. Mommy is escorted back down the narrow row of benches, back through the door

which locks behind her with metallic acknowledgment; back inside to finger her photographs.

I visited Jules on Wednesdays. Prison conversation starters don't come any easier than death bed condolences or cocktail party chit chat.

"You look like a garbage man. You look like shit on orange"

And sad and thirsty and hopeless.

"I thought you came to cheer me up. Words of wisdom, you know, words to persevere."

I shrugged. "From me? Christ, I'm not the optimist. You are. I guess we're really screwed then, eh?" "I guess."

"Don't you worry about who's talked on this phone before?"

"Come again?"

"The last person. The person before them. All breathing on these receivers. God only knows what they have."

Julia just stared at me. Round brown critical eyes. "That's it?"

"What?"

"That's all you can come up with?"

I sighed. What could I say? I couldn't press my lips, my breasts against the glass. I couldn't give her anything. Beside me, a six year old was blowing kisses. "Wuvvv yoooo" she gurgled. "Wuvvvv you!" "Fine." I said. "What do you want to play?"

"I don't know what you mean."

Was she embarrassed? I knew the calls were monitored; that big sister listened, so what?

"I'm only doing this for you, Jules, you know, so if you're gonna be all coy, I'm just going to split. You know how much I hate games."

This was a big sacrifice. I abhorred her games, her songs, her spontaneous trivia. "You sure you're up to it?"

I never was. But hey, two years deserved something after all. "Name your game, Jules."

"I spy."

"Okay. You go."

"No you go."

"Fine." I surveyed my options. Centered my thoughts on the six year old. "I spy, with my little eye, something that is, brown."

I wuvvv you.

"Brown?"

"Are you deaf?"

"Okay. Brown. Brown. Give me a minute here."

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Down on Eglinton Avenue there used to be a Druxy's Deli. Corner of Yonge Street. Yonge and Eligible everyone called the intersection since

the encroaching high rises bled out post university preppies searching for their weekly love affair. Druxy's slept at the bottom of a power tower of banks and chartered accountants and chiropractors. It had roaches and stale bread. It had a black and white checkerboard floor.

I know this from the news clips. They showed close ups of the black and white, spattered with red. I could see the face of the videographer, all smug, how fucking technically accurate, how forensic, how shock tv. They zoomed in on her too, handcuffed, crying. Mascara running. Perfect lipstick. Julia hadn't bitten into her sandwich. Never tasted the stale bread. Lipstick still perfect, intact, smudge proof. Revlon Blood Red. Her shirt was stained though; not mustard; blood across her chemise; power shirt; black skirt, black nylon and pumps, two inch heels.

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"So, where to?"

Julia played with the car's automatic door lock. Flip. Flip. Lock. Unlock. I had no idea where parolees wanted to go first. Strippers? McDonalds?

"Want to get a sandwich?" she asked and laughed, a low down belly laugh, the kind that's acquired.

To hell with her and her sarcasm. "Druxy's?" I mumbled.

"Tuna on brown. Hold the mayo, extra onion."

Cut in half with a big goddamn butcher knife too. Christ. Just shut up. "I thought they'd rehabilitated you."

"Was I chronic?"

"You were something."

"Humm." Twists her hair around her finger. Abandons that. Lock, unlock.

I needed to know that she had thought about it. That she had analyzed it. Replayed it. Reenacted it. Never happen again. No way. I thought I'd ask her straight up.

"So, are you okay now?"

"I was okay before."

"Like hell. You can't just stab people." I spoke to her as I would a preschooler.

Her idle fiddling stopped. Unlock. "Yes, Brina, you can. I can, you can, we all CAN."

"Holy Jules, that's not the point." I sighed. "Are you going to?"

She reacted as I had expected. Slow.

"All's I know is -

"I had to interject. "All's you know is? Where the fuck did you learn to talk like that, ya hick!"

"Up yours."

"Up yours."

"Fine."

But I had to persist. We needed to get this oddity into the open, take it from the corner of the small filthy Druxys and acknowledge its existence. She'd stabbed him. Without premeditation. Without forethought.

"Julia" She knew where I was headed.

"Yoose just can't let it go, can you?"

"Yoose?" I was more horrified now by her farmer grammar than her past actions. "Christ, Jules. Thank god you got sprung."

She smiled. Sort of. Sly, evil, shallow. "Look who thinks they are the main cow now?" She smirked.

"Sprung? Well, that's one term for it. Dude."

I glared at her. "Just drive, Brina. You always were a great driver."

There was a deep silence for ten, maybe fifteen minutes.

"Wanna play?" she asked.

I consented. It was a long drive.

I spy, with my little eye, something that is Clear

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When should I have intervened? The plants were the first to go, but naturally I thought nothing of that. I forget mine. They die. I throw them off the balcony. Then the pictures in small frames which sat on the bookshelf; then the books; then the bookshelf. She threw out her china cows, her painted duck and wicker baskets. The sofas were set out at the curb. They disappeared by dawn, carried off into the night before the rain spoiled them. Goodwill sold her braided rug, the floor to ceiling lamp, the typewriter, beanbag chair, and coffee table. When do you intervene? When the furniture is all gone, except the occasional wooden spindle chair and a bed? When the redecorating no longer seems to be the reality. When the walls are bare? The floors? When you realize one day there is not one single item which isn't functional. No art. No living accessory. A stranger, an Avon lady, a Girl Guide, wandering in off the street, they might have pinpointed it sooner than I. For months I was the recipient of her unwanted; hoarding greedily what otherwise would have ended up at the curb or on the mantel of an unknown tenant. It took months of her cleansing before I saw. Saw what was missing besides everything. Do you intervene? How? Who do you call? When a life has become, well, clear.

When there is not one colour? Not one coloured thing? Black and white and partially occupied space and nothing else. Should I have noticed the extent to which she embodied decorating sterility? The cleansing? Purgings? Noticed the nothing? Colourless depression? I suppose. We can't play, Jules. There are no colours. Making the confrontation then, what would she have done? Avoided Druxys and the red on black on white? Avoided the videographer? (Make sure you zoom in and get a real good shot of her face and that mascara. Great stuff.) Confronting her with the emptiness.

"Are you okay?"

"What do you mean?"

"Come on Jules, what's going on?"

Fleeting, flustered hand motions and then dismissal. "Let's sing a song Brina."

"What do you want to sing?"