

First Place, Prose, Grades 10-12, Jonathan Cohen

The Lies I Tell My Mother on the Car Ride Home From School

“Did you have a good day at school?”

I hate that she always starts with that question. Every time, that’s the first thing she says. So every time, the first thing I say is a lie.

“Yes”

I climb into the car, nudging my backpack into the small space in front of me. I kick my boots outside the car, careful to get all the snow off. I close the door, adjust the seat, click the seatbelt, and we’re off.

“What did you do today?”

The interrogation begins. I don’t know why I expected her to give me a break today. A certain line of questioning apparently must be gone through on the drive home. I guess she wouldn’t really be my mother if she didn’t.

“Nothing much”

On the way from civics to biology I got into an argument with a school prefect. I was let out of civics early, but the guy said I couldn’t be walking in the halls without a pass until the bell rang. I replied saying I was dismissed, that’s not fair. A lengthy, passionate, and very loud conversation ensued. It only ended when the bell did ring, and as other students flooded the halls, there wasn’t a reason to continue arguing.

“Oh come on! Nothing?”

I also spilled water on a computer by accident. Just typing, working on an essay, the idiot on the other side of the table jerks it forward for god knows what reason, my water bottle which I thought was closed but that I now know was certainly open tips over, and suddenly I’m racing

around trying to find paper towels. The computer was fine, and I finished my essay. And now I plan to keep my water bottle on the floor.

“Yep. Nothing.”

She rolls her eyes. Of course, she knows that’s physically impossible. But she has also learned by now that the second “nothing” means it’s not worth the effort to get anything out of me. She’s learned that rule but still tries anyways. She knows I don’t answer her questions, but she asks them all the same. If she can stop after the second “nothing” why can’t she just stop altogether?

“Getting good grades?”

I failed a biology test last week. I’m really behind in that class. In fact, the reason I left civics a bit early was to get some extra studying time in the biology lab. I’ve been talking with the teacher, we’ve got a plan for me to catch up. But it’s hard. Really hard.

“Yes Ma’am”

Maybe she thinks it’ll change one day. Maybe one day something strange and new will happen at school, and on the car ride home I’ll open the floodgates. Who knows, maybe one day I will.

“How are your friends?”

Eric isn’t talking to me anymore. I have no clue why. I’ve asked around, no one else does either. It started three weeks ago. One day we were chatting away at lunch. The next, he started sitting on the opposite side of the cafeteria. I’ve tried to connect with him, to see what was wrong, but he just won’t respond. Michelle has slowly been hanging out with me less and less. Nothing malicious, just shifting hobbies and ever-changing social cliques. Soon enough, I’ll have to call her more of an acquaintance than a friend. And then Jack. His mom has been really sick. We’ve all been trying to comfort him, but it’s really taking a toll on him. He hasn’t come to school the last few days, and I’m too scared to think about why.

“Same as always”

I’m not quite sure why I don’t answer her questions truthfully. I just, well, don’t. I think most times it’s just a conversation I don’t want to have. Friends, grades, I’m not keen on talking about that with my parents. Other times I’m really tired, and just can’t be bothered. She’s always the one trying to initiate. I can’t remember the last time I got in the car and asked her something. I just don’t, it’s not something I do. I guess she’s accepted that. And I guess while I always have the right to silence, I can’t force her to stop asking her questions. I’m worried that she knows that I’m constantly lying to her. If she does, she might think that it’s because there are things I don’t want her to know. I want her to know everything about me. But the conversations are tedious, the dialogue is a pain. I wish I could just plant the information directly into her brain. Or even worse, maybe she thinks it’s because I don’t like her. Which is honestly, a very reasonable thing to think in this situation. But that would be wrong. Still, lying is the only way for me to get out of those annoying talks. Maybe I’ll figure out another way, and avoid it in a more compassionate and loving manner. We pull into the driveway. I start to get out, but before I lift myself from my seat, my mother turns to tell me something.

“I have to run some errands, so I’m just dropping you off.”

I pause for a second and carry on.

“Got it”

I stand, grab my backpack, and shut the door. I walk around the front of the car and towards the back gate. I hear my mother roll her window down, so I turn around. She’s looking at me with a very somber look, but her eyes are as cheerful and optimistic as ever.

“Love you!”

For a second I just stand there. But then I let a small grin wash over my face, as I reply with the truest thing I've said all day.

"Love you too."