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Beth Bednarz
College of DuPage

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The Silent Lie

by Beth Bednarz

(English 101)

The Assignment: The students were asked to write a narrative essay defending or refuting the following quote: "The cruelest lies are often told in silence."

– Robert Louis Stevenson

The lie starts off small. It is really no big deal, I tell myself. So I am fat. So maybe the reason I don't fit in with the rest of the world, is because I am fat.... I'm fat? I am 5'5", 113 pounds, and everybody tells me that I am perfect. But I know that isn't the way it really is. If that's the way it was, I would have friends coming out of the woodwork. If that's the way it was, that guy who I adored so much would have asked me out by now. And surely, if that's the way it was, I would be happy. I should at least be happy, I think. But I am not, so I lie. I tell myself that I am fat and ugly. I tell myself that if I change, then everything will be okay. I am in control of my life, and I can make it better. I am starting a diet, I decide.

The lie gets bigger somewhere along the way. I cut back a little bit, you know, with chips and cookies and stuff like that. Actually, I just don't eat them. I look at myself in the mirror every morning to see if I look any fatter. I have to be aware of these things. Fat can creep up on you like a murderer in the night.

I go down to breakfast. The smell of toast and orange juice is pouring out of the kitchen. It makes my stomach growl. I guess skipping dinner last night is taking its toll on me. I sit at the table and watch my mom as she prepares breakfast. She reminds me of a skilled scientist, pouring things here and there, and randomly stirring the contents inside the pans. She picks up an egg and cracks it over the pan. I watch its crisp white shell break into tiny pieces, and I can't help but shudder. I think of the life that was once inside the egg being sucked out into this cruel world. The yolk sizzles on the surface of the pan. I want to throw up; I am jealous of that chicken that never made it. I wish I never made it, sometimes. "I'm not hungry," I say. "You didn't eat dinner last night, are you sick?" my mom asks. I get up and leave. "No, I'm not sick."

The lie is starting to take over now. I will only eat one meal a day, I decide. Who really needs more than that? It's like 550 calories for a full meal. That's more than enough. I am excited, because I can see my bones starting to become prominent underneath my skin. When I wake up in the morning, I count my ribs. I can only see three right now, but it's a start.

I have to dress in baggy sweaters when I am around my mom. She wonders what is wrong with me. She keeps saying things to me like: "You are looking too thin. Are you eating?" and "I am worried about you." I don't understand why she can't be happy for me. I am finally starting to look good, and she can't even be encouraging. I bet she is just jealous. I hate her for it.

The lie is my only friend. Really, now that I am happy with myself, I don't need anybody else. I only eat a rice cake and a half per day, and sometimes I drink some tea. I keep track of my calories in a little blue notebook I bought from the store. Everything I write in there is very precise. I have to make sure that I study my calorie intake. I look for things that I can cut out of my diet all together, there really isn't much left.

The lie is hard to hide. I am so scared because I have been feeling very dizzy lately. Yet, I don't want to tell anybody. When I was walking through the halls at school today, everything started to go black. I ran into the bathroom and hid in a stall. I leaned against the yellow tiled wall all third period, recovering. I wanted to go to the nurse, but I was scared she'd call my mom. My mom is way too nosy, and she'd probably take me to the doctor because she thought I was sick. That's all she ever talks about

nowadays.

When I get home that afternoon I am very cold. The walk home was only a few blocks from my bus stop, but it has chilled me to the bone. I never used to get cold this easily. I wonder if the popular girls at school who are so amazingly beautiful feel like this too. I run upstairs to the bathroom. I want a warm shower so bad. When I am there I undress. I take off the layers and put them in a crumpled ball next to the toilet. The feeling of blackness covering my eyes comes back. I sit down on the closed toilet seat lid. I look in the full length mirror next to me. I can see five of my ribs, I think, right before I pass out.

That day my mom found out about my lie. She came home from work and found me lying there beside the toilet. She saw the bones that had surfaced against my fragile skin, and she saw all five of my ribs there on my naked body. She screamed, and called 911. She dressed me, though her hands were shaking so badly that she could hardly move. The ambulance took me to the hospital. The doctors could not get me to wake up. They shoved feeding tubes down my throat, they said it was one of the worst cases of anorexia that they had ever seen. They didn't think I would make it. My mom cried, and sat there next to me, holding my fading hand.

Two years and a hundred therapists later, I am back to normal. I look at myself in the mirror now, and I feel okay. I don't feel great yet, just all right. I guess great will take time. But I now know the difference between "fat" and "healthy". I know that looks aren't everything, and I have become content inside my own skin. I also know how powerful a lie can be. I often regret the battle I faced with anorexia. What makes me so mad is knowing that I brought all of that suffering upon myself. Scottish Novelist Robert Louis Stevenson once said, "The cruelest lies are often told in silence." And I realize now that no statement could be more true.