

## The Lying Life of Adults

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In *The Lying Life of Adults*<sup>1</sup>, Elena Ferrante (pseudonymous) explores the pains of adolescence and the discovery that truth is variable.

At 12 years of age, Giovanna stumbles upon a revelation: She's getting ugly like Vittoria<sup>2</sup>, an estranged aunt erased from her history. The words overheard from her adored father mark an instant of seeing, "unveiling a truth other than the one veiled by the fantasy."<sup>3</sup> They crack her image and constitute an enigma. Beauty turns to ugliness— "*those words remained fixed. But I slipped away.*"<sup>4</sup> Her parents try to explain, but no appeal to facts undoes the value of truth she draws from them— "*something somewhere in my body broke, maybe that's where I should locate the end of my childhood. Now, whether that was true or not, it was my first experience of privation.*"<sup>5</sup>

Giovanna's reality fills with a sense of strangeness, with effects on her body. Calling knowledge into question she turns to Vittoria. The aunt's world introduces her to the *forbidden* Neapolitan dialect, the untamed language of the unconscious. The girl is bewildered as Vittoria urges her to look closely at her parents, to see how they *really* are. Surprised by her ambivalence, she realizes that to become an adult one must learn to lie. She also finds the enjoyment of lying to shape reality, sometimes easing her pains, sometimes creating new ones— "*I perfected my method of lying by telling the truth.*"<sup>6</sup>

Traversing Naples from its intellectual heights to its vulgar margins, Giovanna moves between knowledge and jouissance, between truth's inconsistency and the experience of her body-in-the-making.<sup>7</sup> Identifications, acting-out, falling in and out of love...her movements trace the transformations of puberty and its symptomatic responses, echoing the metamorphosis of truth in analysis— "*I feel ugly like I'm a bad person, and yet I'd like to be loved.*"<sup>8</sup>

Ferrante's novel locates the *hole in truth* in a bracelet. This stolen gift embodies the misunderstandings in sexuality and leads to the unveiling of a family secret and an encounter with the sexual non-rapport— "*the bracelet, however you look at it, in whatever type of story you inserted it [...] showed only that our body, agitated by the life that writhes within, consuming it, does stupid things that it shouldn't do.*"<sup>9</sup> By accepting to lose this object and its fictions, Giovanna consents to the lying truth in the world of adults and her own.

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<sup>1</sup> Ferrante, E., *The Lying Life of Adults*, trans. A. Goldstein, New York: Europa Editions, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11-16.

<sup>3</sup> Hakobyan, R.. *Tearing of the Veil; Revelation, Emergence*, NLS 2026 Blog. Available at <https://nlscongress2026.amp-nls.org/en/tearing-of-the-veil-revelation-emergence/tearing-of-the-veil-revelation-emergence/>

<sup>4</sup> Ferrante, E., *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

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<sup>7</sup> Stevens, A., *Making a Body in Adolescence*. Cien Digital, 20, Oct 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Ferrante, E., *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>9</sup> Ferrante, E., *op. cit.*, p. 135.