

Mind your own Feathers

Melisa Rocío Fernández*

An enthusiastic youngster is given a precious gift for his sixth birthday: a canary, a bird species that is mostly characterized for its amber-colored feathers. What an original and amusing idea that is honoring life by giving away another living being as a present! Now imagine the amazement and incredulity in the boy's face when three months later he wakes up to find that his beloved creature has experienced a drastic overnight change. He blinks once, twice; he even pinches himself while checking his face on the mirror, not only to guarantee that he is not asleep, but also to check that the pinching process is actually taking place. However, the boy is as awake as a midnight owl, and what his beady eyes inform him is real: the feathers are no longer yellowish but navy blue. The surprise augments his alacrity when some weeks later, ironically out of the blue, the plumage seems to bleach into an eggshell white. Spellbound as well as ecstatic, he ensures that each of his friends is told about the extraordinary story over and over again, making weekly appointments to guide a group of flabbergasted visitors around the exotic and yet familiar natural habitat of this unique creature: his living-room. His mother not being pleased about these peculiar tours around her very own natural habitat, sits and stares, lurking in the background during each visit, controlling her hideous impulses and refusing to accept that such abstract concepts as karma, which are so trendy nowadays, are applicable to the woebegone lives of helpless mothers. Years later the woman will reveal a hope-shattering truth: it was not the feathers that changed, but the birds.

What is a white lie but a lie nonetheless? People seem to cherish this ridiculous belief that white lies should not weight on your conscience as they are a righteous and noble way of protecting someone from the bitter truths of the world. Unfortunately, this is a myth and a transgression of moral laws which, together with the memory of that time you ate the last piece of cake, will surely make Saint Peter reconsider your way up to heaven. It is funny when beginner parents try to facilitate their children's maturation by surrounding them with folding screens featuring pictures of fluffy puppies and starry nights and still fail to understand the reason why their seventeen-year-old son still believes Santa Claus is real. Nowadays, most children are treated like birds, tucked into their comfy nests every night, safe in the knowledge that there is no such thing as evil in the word, and that hamburgers are made of the meat of cows that died of old age and in no way suffered any pain during this process. It should be noted that these children are kept from 'changing' their own feathers because these white lies play the controversial role of preventing them from understanding vital facts of life, even if most of them are not half as adorable as a fluffy puppy, and thus forestalling them from becoming adults.

The expert white liar always has an arsenal of deceitful excuses at hand, the most popular being 'it was not me', 'I totally love the new shirt you got

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me', 'when you are older, you will understand' and, my personal favorite: 'I am fine'. Of course it is quite straightforward to explain how the lifelong family pet met a stunning Spaniel at the vet and, after months of secret planning, they both eloped to a small cottage in the countryside, instead of telling a kid that his dog actually passed away. This almost imperceptible distortion of reality might seem to be the best option for an instantaneous solution. The kid will be spared the mournful grief of heartbreak and will luckily forget the matter in a couple of days. What you cannot keep the child from experiencing is the disillusionment and letdown of discovering the truth. This is inevitable and will destroy youngsters' innocence in the blink of an eye. Children who have spent their whole lives yearning to become of age in order to understand all those things their parents had numbered throughout the years will be frustrated at the sudden realization that understanding does not come with age, but with experiences and education like the ones they were prevented from conceiving with certainty.

There is, nonetheless, a positive outcome of this apparently dreadful habit of 'protecting' this little birds from the real world. It is when one faces these lies and dares to go further and discovers the legitimate facts for oneself that the process of becoming an adult begins. Detecting white lies and searching for a valid explanation to account for them is growing up. Yes, it will be hard to fathom the fact that Fido would have known much better than that pathetic rendezvous, but authenticity will at least make one feel content. As regards the question of age, it is obvious that some 'when-you-are-older' matters are never fully comprehended, not even when one reaches the last stages of the arduous process of life.

White lies should therefore be avoided so as to provide a reassuring view of reality, but still play an important role in shaping one's personality and experiences. On the one hand, youngsters that age in a reasonably honest environment will have a tougher childhood, but this fortitude will prove to be necessary. On the other hand, kids who are wise enough to find the right answers for their questions will fearlessly learn to mind their own feathers, without needing their parents to make the world seem nicer for them. White lies are everywhere. Have you ever wondered how much of what you take for granted is actually true?