Novel and play 15

Learning to lie

In 2 or 3 sentences, write down 2 unusual, startling, or amusing things you did or that happened to you. One thing must be true, the other must be a lie.

Objective: to show that you are a good storyteller

(example: Jolin wrote me a two-sentence letter after I sent her a poem I’d written about her and a picture of my sister in a bikini.)

Dialogue

1. What about using phonetic spelling to suggest the character or the background of the person?
2. What do the fragments suggest about the individual speakers?

A: My mama dead. She die screaming and cussing.

A: I won’t keep you. You must get a job for yourself.

B: But, sure, it’s worse whenever he gets a job; he drinks it all.

A: Copy our sister-in-law. Make life unbearable for the second wife, and she’ll leave. He’ll have to build her a second house.

B: I wouldn’t mind if she stays. She can comb my hair and keep house. She can wash dishes and serve our meals.

1. Do not forget the dramatic action:

What happens when characters are planning their honeymoon?

1. Gesture:

Maria: I’m giving up, Jim. I’m done, finished. No more doctors, no more tests. The end.

Jim: Maria, I think we should keep trying. You know the doctors say there’s still a chance.

Maria: They might say that, but I know there isn’t. My body just doesn’t want to have a baby.

Jim: God, Maria, you know I hate it when you talk like this, when you put yourself down. It’s beneath you.

1. In a room there are A, B, and C. Once any two join forces, we have the traditional direct between two parties. (The judge hands down a verdict. The girl chooses her beau. . . .) How are we to use the pairing more creatively?

(dialogue from Mamet’s *American Buffalo*)

Don: So?

(Pause)

So what, Bob?

(Pause)

Bob: I’m sorry, Donny.

(Pause)

Don: All right.

Bob: I’m sorry, Donny.

(Pause)

Don: Yeah.

Bob: Maybe he’s still in there.

Don: If you think that, Bob, how come you’re here?

Bob: I came in.

(Pause)

Don: You don’t come in, Bob. You don’t come in until you do a thing.

Bob: He didn’t come out.

Don: What do I care, Bob, if he came out or not? You’re s’posed to watch the guy, you watch him. Am I wrong?

Bob: I just went to the back.

Don: Why?

(Pause)

Why did you do that?

Bob: ‘Cause he wasn’t coming out the front.

Don: Well, Bob, I’m sorry, but this isn’t good enough. If you want to do business. . . if we got a business deal, it isn’t good enough. I want you to remember this.

Bob: I do.

Don: Yeah, now. . . but later, what?

Exposition and chunking

Sandra: Hey, what’s wrong? How come you came upstairs?

Melanie: It’s just so crowded down there, and most of those people didn’t even know Daddy. They just came to watch us and see if we’d cry.

Sandra: You sound bitter.

Melanie: I shouldn’t have come home. I always get crazy when I came back.

Sandra: Maybe if you’d stayed around long enough you’d have seen it wasn’t so bad. You come home knowing everything will be bad, so it is. Once you got out you never came back just to observe the situation. And off you’d go again.

Melanie: Sandy, that’s just not fair. You know it’s hard for me to be here. I remember all the times Mom and Dad fought. Sometimes I can still hear them screaming. It never got any better. Sandy, I hate coming here. There have been times, though, when I’ve wondered if I should have stayed so you could have left.

↔

Sandra: I figured I’d find you here.

Melanie: I’ve always liked this room.

Sandra: You found Jelly Bean.

Melanie: I don’t believe they kept him all these years.

(Pause)

Sandra: Crowded downstairs, huh?

Melanie: Most of them didn’t even know Daddy.

Sandra: They’re just trying to be nice. They want to make sure we’re okay.

Melanie: They want to watch us grieve.

Sandra: Mellie.

Melanie: It’s true. They just want to see tears.

Sandra: Well, they wouldn’t see any from you.

Melanie: Meaning?

Sandra: Nothing.

Melanie: I cared.

Sandra: Did you?

Melanie: I shouldn’t have come home.

Sandra: For the funeral? I don’t believe you said that.

Melanie I always get crazy when I come back.

Clichés

Amy: You know, Cassie, I get so depressed when I think of this summer. I don’t know if I can last without Brian. Sometimes I wish I had never met him, and other times I don’t know if I can live without him.

Cassie: Wait a minute, Amy. Weren’t you just recently telling me that you had had it with Brian and that you were ready to see someone else?

↔

Amy: Well, yeah. I mean, sometimes I wish I’d never met him, but other times he’s so. . .

Cassie: Divine?

Amy: No. He’s so. . .

Cassie: Heavenly?

Amy: No. Neat!

Cassie: Oh.

Temperament directors:

George (forcefully): Don’t’ go in there!

Three-character conflict

By Mary Kerr

NIBBLES

THE SETTING is a living room. There is a couch center, facing the audience. A small portable TV sits on a low table down center in front of the couch. MIKE and DREW sit on opposite ends of the couch watching TV. Both men are about 20. STEPHANE, about the same age, ENTERS carrying a bowl of chocolate chip cookies. She sits between the two men.

STEPHANE

I made some cookies to eat while we watch the game. They’re still hot.

MIKE

Alright!

(He grabs a handful of cookies out of the bowl and begins eating.)

STEPHANE

(Offering bowl.)

Drew?

DREW

Oh, no thanks.

STEPHANE

You’re sure?

DREW

Yeah. Thanks anyway.

STEPHANE

Come on. They’re real good.

DREW

I don’t want any, Steph, really,

STEPHANIE

Here I go to all this trouble, and you’re not going to eat any?

MIKE

Drew’s on a diet.

STEPHANE

What? Drew, is that true?

DREW

Yeah.

STEPHANE

But that’s silly. You’re not fat.

DREW

I’d like to drop about five pounds.

STEPHANE

That’s crazy. You look fine. Come on, have a cookie.

MIKE

He doesn’t want one.

STEPHANE

One cookie won’t hurt him, Michael.

MIKE

Look, Steph, just leave him alone, Okay?

(MIKE takes four more cookies from the bowl.)

STEPHANE

Don’t eat ’em all. Save some for Drew.

DREW

I really don’t want any.

STEPHANE

But you aren’t fat!

MIKE

Jeez, the guy is a little overweight and he’s trying to do something about it, and you won’t leave him alone.

DREW

Hey, yesterday you said you didn’t think I needed to lose any weight.

MIKE

Well. . . ah. . . I just meant that you thought you were overweight. I don’t think you’re overweight.

STEPHANIE

Neither do I, Drew. So have a cookie.

DREW

Don’t tempt me, Steph. I really don’t want one.

MIKE

Good! That’s more for me.

(He reaches into the bowl for more cookies.)

STEPHANE

Mike, you could afford to forego a few cookies yourself.

MIKE

Oh, really?