

# Liar, Liar

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He heard "Ronnie Stemp, report to the Principal's office," and he slumped down in his chair. All the kids stared at him, and Miss Edith, standing at the blackboard, pointed to him, wordlessly. He just wanted to crawl out of there and hide.

He sat, cooling his heels in Mr. Piquette's office, wondering what he got caught for this time.

Sam Wolson, the Principal's assistant stared at Ronnie, and made him nervous and mad – mad for getting caught for something that he didn't even do, probably. "Why are you always accusing me of something," Ronnie blurted out. "There're other kids here, I'm not the only one."

Sam raised his left eyebrow and went back to his keyboard. "Young man, you get in trouble because you're a troublemaker and a liar. The Principal will see you in a few minutes."

Ronnie wished he'd stopped at the restroom on his way here, and as soon as he thought about it, he felt the urge to pee, and it wouldn't go away. "Please, Mr. Wolson, I have to go to the bathroom."

Sam didn't bother to respond – he knew that everything Ronnie said was a lie, and he wouldn't be duped again – he remembered the last time that he'd given in, and Ronnie had disappeared from school for a whole day, causing great commotion, and finally resulting in the police being involved in a search.

The intercom beeped and a deep voice said "Send Ronnie Stemp in."

Now Ronnie really felt like going to the bathroom. "Please, Mr. Wolson, I won't be bad. Please let me go to the bathroom."

Sam pointed to the Principal's door and made a stern face. Ronnie grabbed the door handle and let himself in.

Mr. Piquette was sitting in the position that Ronnie knew oh so well. A gray-haired man with a small moustache was standing by the Principal. Ronnie was really scared now. "I didn't do it," he blurted out. "I didn't do anything!"

"Have a seat, Ronnie."

"Really! I didn't do anything!"

The older gentleman exchanged glances with the Principal and said "Yes, he'll do just fine."

Ronnie peed his pants, and then sat down.

"Ronnie, this is Mr. Mortara. He'd like to talk to you for a minute. It's about your lying all the time."

Ronnie sat stone-still, and the blood rushed from his head to his feet, and then back up. "I didn't lie. Judy's lying, not me. She's always lying!"

Mr. Mortara said "Ronnie, this isn't about Judy, it's about you. We need your help. You're a good liar, and that's just what we need. Do you think you can lie for us?"

Ronnie flushed again and said "What do you mean? I'm not a liar. Judy's the liar. I didn't shove her, she tripped."

"Yes, Ronnie, that's fine. You're not in trouble for pushing Judy, at least not right now. Listen to me, young man, I'll tell you how you can help your country by just being yourself. Do you want to hear?"

"Sure, but Judy's the one...she tripped."

"Ronnie, I work for the government. Even though you're in the 7th grade, you've heard about our agency – we gather intelligence and act on it. Do you understand about intelligence?"

Ronnie bobbed his head.

"Okay. There are some very bad people who are going to try to invade our planet and destroy us. We don't think that we can win, if they start a war. So we need to convince them that our forces are so superior to theirs that they will decide not to attack us. Do you understand?"

Ronnie bobbed his head, but he really didn't understand at all.

"Good, Ronnie, I see how you lie, and it is very subtle, but very profound. You are a believable liar, and that's what we need. I'd like to get permission from your parents to use you in our Project X-13."

Ronnie just sat there, wondering what just happened.

A few weeks of training, and then Ronnie was sent to a windowless building in West Virginia. Down, down, down into the bedrock of a great mountain, he was added to a pool of a dozen young and old men and women – all extremely professional liars.

They all introduced themselves, and Ronnie was surprised to hear their stories about where they were from, and what they'd accomplished...until Mr. Mortara went to the front of the room and spoke up.

"Okay, ladies and gentlemen, now you know what each of you are NOT, I'll tell what you are: liars."

An angry buzz passed around the room.

"But it's okay, because that's what we need – we need liars. We're about to be invaded by a powerful alien race from the stars, and they're scoping us out now. We have satellites that we know they've tapped into. They're scanning our technology, and they will invade soon. What we need you to do is talk to each other about some of our classified weapons programs. You'll use radios and computers, and talk about exactly what we tell you to talk about. We're going to spoof the aliens, and when we get done, they'll be sorry they chose Earth as a target. Can you do that for us?"

The room cheered. Ronnie was still confused – didn't his mother, his father, his Principal, and just about everyone tell him that it was wrong to lie? He was always sorry when he did it, but he always had a reason to justify it. Could it be that it was really okay to lie – if the government told you to do it?

Well over the next 8 weeks, Top Secret information flowed amongst the X-13 members, who were all located all over the country. They added lie after lie to the highly-spoofed-up weapons programs that the government supposedly had available.

The aliens finally left orbit – they knew darn well that they'd be outgunned and destroyed if they attacked.

And, one November day, Ronnie grew up to be President.