

Chapter One

What was the first lie you ever told? The moment you started to lie? Do you remember when you started to keep secrets?

I'm not talking about secrets between you and your best friend, silly little things like, who's your crush? Or who was your first kiss? No. I'm talking about the big secrets, the huge secrets, ones you are better off keeping to yourself. At least, that's what you're led to believe, anyway.

Secrets can either tear you apart or they can bring everyone closer together. But is it a good thing or a bad thing to keep secrets and tell lies? What about when it might save the people you love from the burden of your deepest, darkest secret?

Imagine for a moment you're twelve and nothing truly horrible has happened because after all you're twelve, and you haven't really had a chance to live your own life, make your own decisions, make your own mistakes. Normally your parents make most of your decisions for you so it doesn't really leave room for mistakes, but then just like that something horrible does happen to you. Something so horrible that it changes you, something so horrible that it just starts a chain of events, one horrible thing after another like a cycle. You start lying, really lying. You start keeping secrets, the big, huge secrets, because you think it's better if you keep this horrible thing to yourself. You're convinced that you're better off keeping it to yourself. You think keeping this secret is in the best interest of everyone you

love, so that's exactly what you do, you keep it to yourself letting the secret eat away at you, letting it consume you. And because you've kept this secret to yourself for so long you no longer feel like you can tell anyone; you feel it's too late to bring it up. It's too late to tell anyone and all you can think is if I tell someone...

Will they believe me?

Will they blame me?

Will they be angry at me for lying for so long?

Will they be angry at me for keeping it a secret for so long?

Maybe they will think you're lying. Maybe they will believe the only other person who knows your secret... the reason for your secret, your lies. And after it's all said and done, you move on with your life which includes cutting off the people who mean the most to you, just to keep your secret. But now you're so much better at lying and keeping secrets that you no longer tell anyone anything, because you're just so used to keeping things to yourself.

This is my story, how my whole world changed in the blink of an eye, not just once, but twice.

I've always been the happy, clumsy, average girl with the crooked smile, pale white skin as if I hadn't spent more than ten seconds in the sun. The girl with the long chestnut brown hair and amber eyes that get a nice deep brown tinge when the sun shines on them, average height not too tall, not too short and slim.

I'm the girl who would rather be at home on a Friday night studying or sitting under a blanket with a good book instead of out partying with the rest of my classmates. The one who trusts too easily, the one who falls in love too easily, who loves too much and gives second chances, third even fourth chances. For me, keeping secrets started when I was twelve. This was the moment when I started keeping those big secrets. It was also the

moment I started to lie. Not little white lies. No, actual lying, because along with keeping secrets, lying just became second nature for me, but it was what I had to do to keep my secrets from being exposed.

My name is Lexie Fox and for you to fully understand my story, I have to start at the beginning. I need to start with the moment I started lying and keeping secrets. Starting with the summer between sixth and seventh grade, the last one I spent at my father's house, seems like the best place to start.

Chapter Two

It was summer, May 31 2010, and I was spending my summer break with my father, an hour, and forty-five minutes outside San Francisco. There existed a small town called Berxley Falls. It was eight years ago that my mother had left this town. It was April 21st when she left my father in the middle of the afternoon with just a letter and nothing more; she left the town with me and my older brother while my father was still at work. I guess she left because she fell out of love with my father, or maybe she didn't want to spend the rest of her life in the small town anymore, or maybe it was just that she needed a new start, but she never talked about her reasons for leaving and she never moved on.

My father, on the other hand, met Amelia. It had been six years since my mother left my father. They had met at the local diner, the one we went to for dinner on the first day of our stay. Every single stay, my father had taken my brother and I out to dinner.

Amelia was looking for her daughter Naomi, who had ran off after fighting with her older brother, Jason. Amelia was worried and sick to her stomach at the thought of never seeing Naomi again. Naomi was only seven and I think my father could see how scared she was, so we stopped eating and started to help her look for Naomi. She hadn't gone far, sitting at the end of the boardwalk crying.

Crying because she couldn't see her mum and crying because of Jason. I found her and sat with her until my father found us.

Maybe a week or so after, my father asked Amelia out on a date. She was nice and two months after they started dating, they got married on November 13th. They had an amazing beach wedding. Amelia looked so beautiful and my father looked so happy when he saw her walk down the aisle. She moved into the house shortly after that, the house my father used to share with my mother.

I guess he didn't want to lose Amelia, the way he had lost my mother so things between them moved pretty fast and she was always nice to me and I liked her because she made my father happy and I liked to see him like that even if it was not with my mother.

When she moved into the house, her two kids came with her too. Naomi was only three years younger than me and we get along pretty well. I don't really know Jason that well because I didn't really have much to do with him. He was six years older than me at 18; the same age as my brother Nate, so they were like best friends. They were all lovely people and nice to us, but I guess they had to be, because we were Declan's kids.

It was a late summer's afternoon. The sun was just starting to go down and it was warm. It was one week into my stay with my father and they were having a party, a celebration for my father's promotion.

My father was a police officer, but he had just been promoted to chief of police; something he'd been wanting for so long. My mother said he'd been waiting to be promoted since he was twenty-one. He enjoyed his job, but now he was the guy who looked after the people in this small little town.

I was sitting out the front with Nolan on the front stairs, watching the sun as it was setting. The sky looked so beautiful, light, pale blue almost white with bits of purple and orange throughout. There was a warm summer breeze, not too hot and not too cold. It was just perfect. Nolan had his arm rested over my shoulders.

‘What are you thinking about?’ he asked, causing me to look at him.

Nolan’s parents, Erica and Simon, have been friends with my parents since their very first day of grade six.

My mother told me they had all gone to different schools up until grade six when their parents decided to send them to the same school. Before they went to Bexley middle school, they had all been in different schools in San Francisco; they were the new kids at Bexley, so they decided they would be friends forever and they had been.

My mother still talked to Nolan’s parents. They remained friends throughout high school. Nolan’s parents started dating in grade eight and my parents grade seven, so Nolan and I had been best friends for as long as I could remember. Our birthdays are only one month apart which is a little crazy.

Nolan is taller than average with nice, sweet olive skin, these amazing bright green eyes and his attractive smile that could change your whole mood. Every time he smiled at me, it made me want to melt. It made me want to show my own smile. His hair was short shaggy and a deep brown but when the sunlight hit it just right, it reflected a deep auburn tone to it. He was sweet and had always been there for me through everything.

‘I was just thinking,’ I said with a smile.

‘About?’ he asked.

‘Uh, I was just thinking maybe I should move here,’ I replied.

He was silent for a moment and I felt like the silence was just lingering over us forever before he finally said something.

‘Really?’ he asked with excitement in his voice. I smiled, running my fingers through my hair, letting it fall onto my shoulders.

‘Yeah it... uh it would be great to get out of the big city, spend some more time with my dad,’ I replied.

A smile appeared on his face.

‘Would you actually leave New York?’ he asked. I nodded.

‘I want to... I think,’ I replied, mumbling the last bit to myself.

I wanted to, but also I didn’t want to leave my mum behind. I didn’t want her to be alone because if I left then it would just be her in that big house and I didn’t want her to think I loved my father more than her. Nolan stood up and started to leave. I frowned as I watched him.

‘Where are you going?’ I asked. He turned and looked at me with that smile still on his face.

‘The swing,’ he said.

I smiled as I stood up and followed him over to the big tree in the front yard that had the swing attached to it. My father attached the swing when my mother was pregnant with my brother, or so my mother tells me. When I was little, my father would spend hours outside with me just pushing me on the swing.

It didn’t matter if he was tired, because if I asked him to swing me then he would stay there until I got sick of it. Those memories made me smile. They made me feel happy. He had never taken the swing off the tree, even as we got older and it was now rarely used.

‘Push me?’ I asked as I sat on the swing.

Nolan nodded as he slightly pushed me. It felt nice hanging out with him alone, and I felt a little flutter of something in my heart. Maybe there was something there between us, maybe he was the reason I felt I wanted to move here. Maybe I wanted to be closer to him and spend more time with him. I bit down on my bottom lip as I thought about life here, life with Nolan.

I thought maybe we could make it, the two of us against the world. I wanted it so much; I was curious to see where it would go.

I felt the swing stop causing me to snap out of my thoughts. I turned on the swing looking at Nolan; he had a smile on his face. It was dark now but not too dark as the sun had fully set but it was replaced by the moon, full and shining so bright. The stars were twinkling just as bright, sparkling. The sky looked amazing.

It was even more amazing just being with Nolan. He stood there just staring at me with those amazing deep green eyes of his. I touched my face as I stared back at him.

‘Have I got something on my face?’ I asked, with curiosity in my voice.

He placed his hand on my face still staring at me, not taking his eyes off me and the smile never left his face.

‘No... you’re perfect,’ he whispered.

I looked down, feeling my cheeks warm up. He placed his hand under my chin, making me look at him again as he leant in and placed his lips on mine. His lips were so soft and warm against mine.

I stood up, placing my hands on his back and he pulled me closer to him. The kiss made me feel everything, butterflies in my stomach, my heart was beating so fast it felt like it was going to explode and break right through my chest. I felt like fireworks were going off everywhere and for a moment it seemed to be just us, like we were the only two people in the whole world.

Then we heard the creak of the front door opening, which caused Nolan to pull away from the kiss. We looked over towards the house and my father was standing there in the doorway. He looked mad or concerned. I couldn’t tell. He stood with his arms crossed over his chest and raised one of his eyebrows. My overprotective father who was tall with short wavy chestnut brown hair, amber eyes, just like me only his didn’t get the brown tinge to them like mine, light brown skin, and a moustache above his lip that he had had since he was eighteen, or so my mother

tells me.

‘Lexie... inside, now!’ he shouted. I rolled my eyes. He wanted to protect his little girl, but I didn’t need protecting, not from Nolan, anyway. I stared at Nolan for a moment. I didn’t want to leave him, not right now. I wrapped my arms around him, hugging him tightly. I felt him wrap his arms around me just as tight.

‘See you tomorrow,’ I said as we stood in the front yard, hugging. I could feel eyes on us, but I didn’t care. He felt so warm, and I never wanted this moment to end. All that mattered was Nolan and me and how we felt about each other. Right now, in this moment, I felt so safe in his arms.

‘Lexie!’ Declan shouted from the front door.

‘See you tomorrow, baby girl,’ Nolan whispered as I pulled away from the hug.

I walked over to the house, waving at Nolan as I did. I knew my father would never go inside unless I did too, and he would just stand in the doorway staring at us until I was in the house.

‘Go home, Nolan,’ Declan said as I reached the top step.

I guess seeing me kissing Nolan was a bit of a shock. He didn’t want to see his little girl kissing a boy he’d known since he was a baby. I walked past my father into the house, ignoring the concern on his face. He sighed.

‘What was that?’ he asked as he closed the front door. I smiled, hugging my father, not wanting anything to ruin the moment I’d just had.

‘It was just a kiss,’ I said with a laugh, playing it off as if it were nothing. I pulled away from the hug. My father’s eyebrows were furrowed.

‘Lexie, you’re twelve. You shouldn’t be kissing anyone like that,’ he said.

‘Dad, didn’t you and Mum start dating when you both were twelve?’ I asked. He frowned, but nodded.

‘I wish your mother had never told you that,’ he said. I chuckled.

‘Well, she did. I’m going to my room.’ I walked up the stairs before he had the chance to say anything else. I knew he just wanted to protect me like a father should, but he had to know at some point I needed to make decisions for myself. I wanted to decide things for my own life, I wanted to be able to make mistakes.

I walked down the hallway and into my bedroom, closing the door behind me. A huge smile appeared on my face as I went over and fell onto my bed. I couldn’t seem to get the smile off my face. It was dark, but I stared up at the ceiling with my hand rested on my forehead; the kiss I shared with Nolan played in my mind over and over as I lay there under the covers staring at the glow in the dark stars on the ceiling that had been in my room since I was two. It felt like nothing at all could ruin this moment. I really loved Nolan. I guess when you spend so much time with someone, you start to feel something for them without even realising it.

But then, just like that, it happened. The moment was ruined by the sound of my bedroom door creaking as it opened slowly. It snapped me out of my thoughts. The light from the hallway shone in on my face, but then a second later the door closed, and my bedroom light came on. I saw him standing there by the door.

‘Jason?’ I sat up in my bed. I hugged my legs to my chest as he walked over, sitting on the end of my bed. He was wobbly on his own feet. I frowned as he sat there staring at me.

‘I’ve been watching you tonight,’ he said, slurring his words as he spoke. The happiness I felt disappeared in an instant as a bad feeling washed over my whole body. I felt the hair on the back of my neck stand up.

‘Well... uh, that’s a little creepy,’ I replied. The bad feeling

didn't disappear as he sat there staring at me.

'I saw the way you were looking at me.' The slurring was getting worse as he was barely able to get the words out. I frowned. I was confused because I had spent most of the day, the night, outside with Nolan.

'Uh... um, I don't know what you mean. I don't know what you're talking about,' I replied, confused.

He moved closer to me, placing his hand on the back of my head. He smelt of cheap cologne. The smell of alcohol hit me in the face, almost as if he had soaked in a tub of beer. I pushed him away. Getting out of my bed, I stood with my arms crossed over my chest. I felt annoyed now, even though the bad feeling hadn't disappeared.

'You're drunk,' I said.

He stood up, coming near he placed his hands on my lower back, pulling me close to him.

'Oh, come on, baby girl. You know you want this,' he said as he started to lean in again.

I slapped him across the face, scratching him at the same time. I felt scared, really afraid. I knew once he called me baby girl that he had been watching Nolan and me, listening to our conversation. Nolan was the only one I let call me baby girl. He's called me that for as long as I can remember. Jason pushed me to the ground.

'You stupid bitch,' he yelled as he kicked me in the side. I screamed.

'Get out,' I screamed.

I tried to scream loudly, loud enough for someone to hear me but the music downstairs was drowning out my screams, that it was impossible for anyone to hear.

I guess that's why he came in here; he knew no one would hear

me. He looked mad as he climbed on top of me, holding me down on the ground. I could see how mad he was, I could see it in his eyes.

‘Don’t worry, this will be over before you know it,’ he said with a sinister grin.

I tried to push him off me. He pulled my pants off, chucking them on the ground. I tried to crawl away, but he grabbed me by my hair. Pushing me down on the ground, he turned me over, so I was lying on my back. He held me down and I tried to scream, hoping someone, anyone, would hear me.

Maybe someone was walking past my bedroom and they would come to help. I screamed again, but he covered my mouth, muffling my screams. Before I could do anything else, he’d inserted himself into me. I screamed again, but no one could hear me with his hand over my mouth. No one could hear me with the loud music playing downstairs. The pain was unreal as he forced himself into me. It felt like he was breaking me. It felt as if my skin was ripping as he sunk into me, inching further and further in. I wanted to get away. I wanted this to be nothing but a nightmare, but he was bigger and stronger than me. After a while, I stopped screaming.

I stopped trying to get away because now I knew it wasn’t helping.

There was no way out of this.

I stopped fighting him and my whole body went numb, frozen as I lay there, staring at the ceiling and my glow in the dark stars.

I waited for him to finish and every moment he inserted himself into me, I felt myself die a little on the inside. I felt my innocence being taken away with every thrust. I felt like it was never going to end, but then it did. He finished on my stomach and stood up. I guess he could see the tears on my face as he put his pants back on. I couldn’t move.

‘Don’t act like you didn’t want this,’ he hissed at me.

I felt like I couldn’t speak as I lay on the ground covered in his sperm and I just stared at the ceiling with tears still running down my face.

‘If you tell anyone about this, you know they will blame you. You know they will believe me over you. If you tell anyone about this, I will tell them that you wanted this,’ he hissed again.

More tears rolled down my face as I watched him sneak out of my bedroom, closing the door behind him. Still on the floor, I curled up in a ball. I raised my hand to my mouth, muffling my sobs. I couldn’t stop the tears from running down my face and I cried uncontrollably. Everything hurt and even though I felt paralysed, I could still feel everything. I wanted to die. Had I died already on the inside? I felt like crawling into a hole and never coming out of it. I slowly stood, my legs like jelly, as I walked into my bathroom, closing the door behind me. I turned the light on and felt something run down my legs. There was so much blood. I locked the bathroom door as blood continued to flow and I just wanted to die right now. I wanted to just forget what happened, but I knew I never would. I knew this moment, this day would follow me around for the rest of my life.

I turned the water on and stared at it as it ran. There were still tears running down my face. I wiped them away. Taking my top off, I chucked it on the ground and stepped under the water. Sitting on the ground, I cried as it flowed over me. I hugged my legs to my chest, resting my head on my knees as more tears built up in my eyes. I held my hand over my mouth, muffling my sobs, and Jason’s words ran through my head, playing over and over like a broken record. I felt dead... I felt disgusting... gross... horrible... dirty. Maybe he was right. If I told anyone what happened, would they believe me?

Would they blame me?

Would they think I asked for it?

Would they believe him over me?

After I scrubbed myself three times, I reached up, turning the water off, but I didn't get out. I didn't feel like I could. I just wanted to die, end my life so I wouldn't have to live with this for the rest of my days. I held my hands over my mouth as I started sobbing again. I slowly stood up with my legs still feeling like jelly as I wrapped a towel around my body. I slowly walked into my bedroom and locked the bedroom door, wiping the fresh tears from my face.

I dried off, changing into shorts and a long sleeve shirt, too long for my arms. I lay on my bed and curled my legs up to my chest, wishing that what just happened to me was nothing but a horrible nightmare. I held my phone in my hand staring at the screen for a moment before I dialed my mother's number. It rang only once before she answered.

'Lexie?' she asked, her voice heavy with sleep.

'Did I wake you?'

'Uh... yeah but it's okay, are you okay?'

I sighed. I couldn't really answer that with the truth. I didn't know if I could answer that at all, because I didn't know if I was okay.

'I want to come home,' I replied, ignoring her question. She was silent for a moment. I knew she was still there though because I could hear her breathing.

'Why? What happened?' she asked.

'Uh... nothing I'm just... I don't want to be here anymore,' I replied, lying.

It was the first time I had really lied. The first time I told an *actual, real* lie, the kind that matter. It was a lie to cover up the secret I knew I would have to keep from everyone.

'Why?' she asked. I wiped away my tears with the sleeve of my

shirt only for new ones to run down my face.

‘Can you just book me a ticket for tomorrow? The earlier the better,’ I replied as I wiped the fresh tears from my face.

‘Okay,’ she replied.

I felt relieved knowing the ticket would be one less thing for me to worry about because worrying about lying to my father was going to be hard. Worrying about lying to my mother for the rest of my life was going to be hard.

‘Thank you, just send me the ticket when you buy it, please,’ I said then I hung the phone up before she had the chance to ask me anymore questions, but I knew once I got back home, she would ask them, questions I would have to ignore, or I would have to lie to her.

Lying has never really been my strong point. I’ve never really been good at it but I knew I would have to try my best. I would have to try to make my lies sound believable. I got out of my bed looking around the room. My pants were still on the ground, I picked them up off the ground and held them in my hand for a moment before I chucked them into the bin, then I walked into the bathroom, picking up my favourite shirt. I stared at it as I walked back into my room, I chucked it in the bin with my pants. I couldn’t even look at those clothes anymore, not without thinking about what happened. When I looked at those clothes now, I didn’t see the kiss I shared with Nolan... not anymore. I just saw Jason on top of me.

I ran my fingers through my hair as I went to my closet, got my suitcase out of the cupboard and packed all my things into it. Once I had everything packed, I walked over to my window seat and sat down. I stared out the window, watching as the rain started to sprinkle lightly. There was lightning in the night sky, lighting up my now dark bedroom. I hugged my legs to my chest, resting my head on my knees. I couldn’t believe how quickly my life had exploded. It’d been impossible for me to even stop it.

He was bigger and stronger than me, and I guess he was right. Who would believe the twelve year old girl over the eighteen year old guy? I was the perfect victim, because I wouldn't tell anyone. I was so afraid of what would happen if I told anyone. One minute everything was great and the next my whole life changed.

It was getting bright outside now and the rain was really starting to come down. I looked at my phone, checking the time. I felt drained. Five-thirty was displayed on the screen. I wanted to get out of here before anyone woke up. I would leave a note or text my father or even hope that my mother had told him I was leaving. My mother had sent me the plane ticket about two hours ago. I couldn't bring myself to fall asleep because I was afraid that I would dream of him, dream of Jason and what he did to me. I sighed as I dialled the number for a cab.

After organising my ride, I stood up and grabbing my suitcase by the handle; I quietly carried it downstairs, placing it by the front door. Then I sat on the stairs and waited. I didn't want to wait outside. I knew what I had to do now, and that it was going to hurt a lot of people, but I had to do this to keep those I love from getting hurt in the crossfire. I mean, you're always better off with a really good lie rather than telling the truth and hurting people who mean the most to you, right?

I felt gross still. I felt every possible way that made me feel bad, that made me feel sick to my stomach.

'Lexie,' Declan said, startling me. I turned and looked at him. Maybe he could tell I had been crying.

'What are you doing up so early kiddo?' he asked, oblivious to my tears. I guess he couldn't see past his happiness, and I hated myself for what I was going to do, what I had to do. All I could hear were Jason's words in my head playing over and over like a broken record.

'I'm going home,' I said, with no emotion.

I saw the happiness disappear from his face and from his eyes

in that moment. He walked down the stairs, sitting down next to me, but I moved away from him. I couldn't sit next to him. I couldn't let him get that close to me after last night.

'Kiddo, you still have two more weeks here,' he said.

My father has called me kiddo for as long as I can remember. I don't care for it, but I guess it's just stuck now because it's about the only thing he calls me. I took in a deep breath, holding in the tears that were forming in the back of my eyes. I didn't want him to see me crying right now, because then he would ask questions.

'I know... but I just, I don't want to be here anymore,' I replied. He placed his hand on my shoulder.

'Why?' he asked. I stood up, looking away from him as the tears I was trying so hard to hold back finally ran down my face. I wiped them away quickly with the sleeve of my shirt so he wouldn't see them. So he wouldn't see me crying.

'I just... does there need to be a reason?' I asked as I looked at him. I could see the hurt in his eyes.

'Kiddo... please, if you're bored you and I can do something together today, just you and me,' he said. I could hear the hurt in his voice, but I shook my head, looking away from him again.

'No, I just, I want to go home,' I said.

'Fine, I'll take you later if you really want to go,' he replied.

I felt frustrated and annoyed. I felt like he wasn't listening to me, that he wasn't hearing me.

'No, I've already called a cab to take me to the airport,' I said, frowning.

'Lexie... it's 5.45 in the morning,' he replied.

'I know and I'll wait at the airport until my flight,' I said as I turned and looked at him. He stared at me for a moment.

'Tell me what's going on,' he said. I took in a deep breath, letting out a sigh. I looked down, wiping tears from my face.

‘There’s nothing going on. I just don’t want to be here,’ I replied. I felt my phone buzz in my hand, so I looked at the screen.

‘That’s my cab,’ I whispered.

I didn’t feel like I could hug him. I didn’t feel like I could have people touching me, being near me.

‘I’m sorry... I love you, Dad,’ I whispered as I walked out the front door with my suitcase. I left the house without looking back as the tears were streaming down my face.

When I think about that day, I no longer think about the amazing time I had with Nolan, the amazing kiss I shared with him. No, I can’t think about that anymore because Jason ruined that for me. He took that away. All I can think about is him on top of me, sweating and enjoying himself while I cried, while I told him no, and he took my ‘no’ as a ‘yes’.

But maybe I didn’t really say no. I just screamed and tried to get away from him, so I didn’t use the word ‘no’. I was twelve and he took advantage of me. He convinced me that if I told anyone that they would blame me. He convinced me that it was all my fault and I believed him, so I left. I left that place and never looked back, even though it killed me to go, to cut everyone off because of something that was completely out of my control.

So people lie, people keep secrets, but who doesn’t lie?

Who doesn’t keep secrets? For some people they don’t have any other choice but to lie and keep secrets and to move on with their life, lying and keeping secrets is like second nature for people, it’s a way for people to protect the people they love from learning the truth. I lie and I keep secrets now that it’s just become second nature for me, and it’s because of him. Because of Jason, because of that night, the night he raped me, I keep secrets. It’s the reason I lie. But, if I could go back to that night, if I could do that night over again, then I would. I would have changed what happened. I would’ve locked my bedroom door. I would’ve tried harder to call for help the moment he pushed me on the ground. I would’ve

tried harder to get away from him.

But here's the thing, I can't change it, no one can change the past. I can't do my past over again, just have to learn to live with it. I have to try to move on, even though I know it will always haunt me. It will always follow me around, no matter how hard I try to forget it.