



K A T H R Y N
L I N D S K O O G

Fakes Frauds & Other Malarkey



301

*Amazing Stories
and How Not
to be Fooled*

***Fakes, Frauds
&
Other Malarkey***

Also by Kathryn Lindskoog

Creative Writing for People Who Can't Not Write

How To Grow a Young Reader

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The Gift of Dreams

Loving Touches

Up from Eden

The Lion of Judah in Never-Never Land

Fakes, Frauds & Other Malarkey

301 Amazing Stories
&
How Not To Be Fooled

Kathryn Lindskoog

Illustrations by
Patrick Wynne

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*To the memory of C. S. Lewis,
undeceived and undeceiver*

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*The figure of Fraud came close and pulled his head and body,
but not his tail, onto the ledge.*

*His face was the face of an honest man, absolutely benign in
appearance; but the rest of him was a serpent.*

Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*, Canto 17

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—Kathryn Lindskoog

PART I:
PLAY—THE PERSISTENT URGE

CHAPTER 1

CHILDHOOD'S SURPRISE DELIGHTS

Illusion is the first of all pleasures.

—Voltaire



Childhood is a time of delicious delusion, when the boundaries between appearance, reality, and make-believe aren't always clear. Memory takes a quick romp through the world of peekaboo and pretend, tooth fairies and tall tales. All our roots are there. The fruits that come later, of course, may be either good or evil.

NOW YOU SEE IT, NOW YOU DON'T

The child, whose credulous first hours burn at the heart of living . . .

—David McCord

A baby is born believing. The hazy new world appears and disappears and appears again, over and over. Faces come and go, warm milk comes and goes, great hands come and go and come again. We all bobbed along for weeks on an ocean of shifting comforts and hurts, lights and shadows. Warm and cool, wet and dry, full and empty. A baby believes without reservation the felt facts of the moment.

Gradually we started noticing details, and then we got curious. We discovered the pleasure of exploration and surprise, and some of our surprises became wonderful games. One of the earliest of these games was shaking the rattle. The wonder of cause-and-effect gradually grew in our brains. We were busy taking in the world, learning enough so that we could start to be taken in by the world's illusions, for good and for ill. The more we know, the more ways we can be fooled.

Peekaboo is the first and sweetest game of trickery. It is an early form of hide-and-seek. A big person ceases to exist, then magically bursts forth again, exclaiming, "Peekaboo!" The effect is stunning to babies, who never tire of this wonderful trick. Eventually they are apt to figure out how to work it themselves by hiding their faces. Later, they make toys disappear a million times by dropping them on the floor and demanding them back again.

A favorite peekaboo trick for toddlers is the nose-stealing game. Grandpa pulls off the little nose with a light tweak, shows the toddler the tip of his thumb projecting between the second and third finger of his fist, then puts the nose back on again. "Do it again!" the toddler usually insists, relishing the drama and its happy ending. We are born believing, and we love to learn about disbelief in these happy ways.

CHILDHOOD'S SURPRISE DELIGHTS

Playful deception sharpens perception. Children gradually get wiser. "Simon says," the childhood trickery game, increases alertness. The leader calls out an order to each player in turn, such as "Simon says, 'Take four giant steps forward,'" "Simon says, 'Take ten baby steps forward,'" or "Take three scissor steps forward." The trick is that it's against the rules to take any steps at all unless the leader begins with "Simon says," and the leader slyly leaves it out much of the time. The young players have to learn to be on guard, which isn't always easy—as countless adult investors realize, after losing all their savings.

Most people love to let their guard down, whether they realize it or not, for that is part of being a healthy human. Hearts are made to trust with, as lovers know. But crooks know it also. When trust gets mushy, it turns into gullibility. Eve found that out early on, the hard way. (Genesis 3 tells how Eve, the first woman, trusted the cunning serpent in the Garden of Eden and thus brought sin and death to the human race.)

Eve's children no doubt played "Let's pretend," because children have never had a better game. Pretending, like trusting, is exactly what young children should do. But this gift of creative make-believe can turn into lying. The purpose of make-believe is to teach and delight, but the purpose of a lie is to deceive.

Everything human is apt to go awry, including creative make-believe. That's the human condition, ever since Eve's big mistake.

INNOCENT IMPOSTURES

A little credulity helps one along through life very smoothly.

—Elizabeth Gaskell

Is there always an “ill” in “illusion”? Perhaps some illusions are good because they make life healthier and happier.

Gift-givers are often benevolently tricky, resorting to elaborate schemes to conceal their plans and stash away secrets. Gifts can be wrapped in ways that disguise the contents, and the element of surprise is sometimes enjoyed more than the gift itself. The tricked and the trickster enjoy the final culmination of the trick together, which is the easiest way to tell that a trick was a good idea.

Deception adds zest to benevolence. It is such fun to try to do good without getting caught that certain organizations capitalize on this and institutionalize it. They assign everyone a temporary “secret pal” to mystify with friendly gifts and messages.

There is another kind of kindhearted deception. Most people believe in protecting the very young and the very old from too much bad news. All good parents want to provide a sense of security for their little children. During the Second World War, Norman Rockwell painted a picture of a weary father holding a newspaper with terrible headlines, looking tenderly at his two children nestled snugly in bed. He withholds frightening information from them and pretends for their sake that the world is better and safer than it really is. (Children often return the favor as they grow up, and pretend for their parents that their behavior away from home is better and safer than it really is.)

Parents tend to “kiss a hurt to make it well,” knowing that this tried-and-true folk medicine will probably ease the pain, or at least the crying. That kind of kiss is a bit like the magic feather that Walt Disney gave to Dumbo the baby elephant, enabling him to fly so long as he thought it would work. There is benevolent deception in magic