

Excerpted from "Good Girls Lie"

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Good Girls Lie

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Praise for J.T. Ellison

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“Outstanding... Ellison is at the top of her game.”

—**Publishers Weekly (starred review) on Tear Me Apart**

“A compelling story with a moving message.”

—**Booklist on Tear Me Apart**

“Well-paced and creative... An inventive thriller with a horrifying reveal and a happy ending.”

—**Kirkus Reviews on Tear Me Apart**

“Exceptional... Ellison’s best work to date.”

—**Publishers Weekly (starred review) on Lie to Me**

“Comparisons to *Gone Girl* due to the initial story structure are expected, but Ellison has crafted a much better story that will still echo long after the final page is turned.”

—**Associated Press on Lie to Me**

“Fans of Paula Hawkins, A.S.A. Harrison, Mary Kubica, and Karin Slaughter will want to add this to their reading list.”

—**Library Journal on Lie to Me**

“The domestic noir subgenre focuses on the truly horrible things people sometimes do to those they love, and J.T. Ellison’s latest, *Lie to Me*, is one of the best...an absolute must-read.”

—**Mystery Scene Magazine**

“Wonderful... A one-more-chapter, don't-eat-dinner, stay-up-late sensation.”

—**Lee Child, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author, on *Lie to Me*”**



# GOOD GIRLS LIE

An Excerpt From the Novel

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J.T. ELLISON





## **Goode girls don't lie...**

Perched atop a hill in the tiny town of Marchburg, Virginia, The Goode School is a prestigious prep school known as a Silent Ivy. The boarding school of choice for daughters of the rich and influential, it accepts only the best and the brightest. Its elite status, long-held traditions and honor code are ideal for preparing exceptional young women for brilliant futures at Ivy League universities and beyond. But a stranger has come to Goode, and this ivy has turned poisonous.

In a world where appearances are everything, as long as students pretend to follow the rules, no one questions the cruelties of the secret societies or the dubious behavior of the privileged young women who expect to get away with murder. But when a popular student is found dead, the truth cannot be ignored. Rumors suggest she was struggling with a secret that drove her to suicide.

But look closely...because there are truths and there are lies, and then there is everything that really happened.

J.T. ELLISON's pulse-pounding new novel examines the tenuous bonds of friendship, the power of lies and the desperate lengths people will go to to protect their secrets.





“And now I’m going to tell you about a scorpion. This scorpion wanted to cross a river, so he asked the frog to carry him. ‘No,’ said the frog, ‘no thank you. If I let you on my back, you may sting me and the sting of the scorpion is death.’ ‘Now, where,’ asked the scorpion, ‘is the logic in that? For scorpions always try to be logical. If I sting you, you will die. I will drown.’ So the frog was convinced and allowed the scorpion on his back. But just in the middle of the river, he felt a terrible pain and realized that, after all, the scorpion had stung him. ‘Logic!’ cried the dying frog as he started under, bearing the scorpion down with him. ‘There is no logic in this!’ ‘I know,’ said the scorpion, ‘but I can’t help it—it’s my character.’”

—Orson Welles, Mr. Arkadin”



## ONE

### The Hanging

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THE GIRL'S BODY DANGLES FROM THE TALL, IRON GATES guarding the school's entrance. A closer examination shows the ends of a red silk tie peeking out like a cardinal on a winter branch, forcing her neck into a brutal angle. She wears her graduation robe and multicolored stole as if knowing she'll never see the achievement. The last tendrils of dawn's fog laze about her legs, which are five feet from the ground. It rained overnight and the thin robe clings to her body, dew sparkling on the edges.

There is no breeze, no birds singing or squirrels industriously gathering for the long winter ahead, no cars passing along the street, only the cool, misty morning air and the gentle metallic creaking of the gates under the weight of the dead girl. She is suspended in midair, her back to the street, her face hidden behind a curtain of dirty, wet hair, dark from the rains.

Because of the damage to her face, it will take them some time to officially identify her. In the beginning, it isn't even clear she attends the school, despite wearing The Goode School robes.

But she does.

The fingerprints will prove it.

Of course, there are a few people who know exactly who is hanging from the school's gates. Know who, and know why.

But they will never tell.

As word spreads of the apparent suicide, The Goode School's all-female student body begin to gather, paying silent, terrified homage to their fallen compatriot. The gates are closed and locked — as they always are overnight — buttressed on either side by an ivy-covered, ten-foot-high, redbrick wall, but it tapers off into a knee-wall near the back entrance to the school parking lot, and so is escapable by foot. The girls of Goode silently filter out from the dorms, around the end of Old West Hall and Old East Hall to Front Street — the main street of Marchburg, the small Virginia town housing the elite prep school — and take up their positions in front of the gate in a wedge of crying, scared, worried young women who glance over shoulders looking for the one who is missing from their ranks. To reassure themselves this isn't their friend, their sister, their roommate.

Another girl joins them, but no one notices she comes from the opposite direction, from town. She was not behind the redbrick wall.

Whispers rise in the morning air, nothing loud enough to be overheard but forming a single question.

*Who is it? Who?*

A solitary siren pierces the morning air, the sound bleeding upward from the bottom of the hill, a rising crescendo. Someone has called the sheriff.

Goode perches like a gargyle above the city's small downtown, huddles behind its ivy-covered brick wall. The campus is flanked by two blocks of restaurants, bars, and necessary shops. The buildings are tied together with trolleys — enclosed glass-and-wood bridges that make it easy for the girls to move from

building to building in climate-controlled comfort. It is quiet, dignified, isolated. As are the girls who attend the school; serious, studious. Good. Goode girls are always good. They go on to great things.

The headmistress, or dean, as she prefers to call herself, Ford Julianne Westhaven, great-granddaughter several times removed from the founder of The Goode School, arrives in a flurry, her driver, Rumi, braking the family Bentley with a screech one hundred feet away from the gates. The crowd in the street blocks the car, and for a moment, the sight of the dangling girl. No one stops to think about why the dean might be off campus this early in the morning. Not yet, anyway.

Dean Westhaven rushes out of the back of the dove-gray car and runs to the crowd, her face white, lips pressed firmly together, eyes roving. It is a look all the girls at Goode recognize and shrink from.

The dean's irritability is legendary, outweighed only by her kindness. It is said she alone approves every application to the school, that she chooses the Goode girls by hand for their intelligence, their character. Her say is final. Absolute. But for all her goodness, her compassion, her kindness, Dean Westhaven has a temper.

She begins to gather the girls into groups, small knots of natural blondes and brunettes and redheads, no fantastical dye allowed. Some shiver in oversize school sweatshirts and running shorts, some are still in their pajamas. The dean is looking for the chick missing from her f lock. She casts occasional glances over her shoulder at the grim scene behind her. She too is unsure of the identity of the body, or so it seems. Perhaps she simply doesn't want to acknowledge the truth.

The siren grows to an carsplitting shriek and dies midrange, a soprano newly castrated. The deputies from the sheriff 's office have arrived, the sheriff hot on their heels. Within moments, they cordon off the gates, move the students

back, away, away. One approaches the body, cataloging, another begins taking discreet photographs, a macabre paparazzi.

They speak to Dean Westhaven, who quietly, breathlessly, admits she hasn't approached the body and has no idea who it might be.

She is lying, though. She knows. Of course, she knows. It was inevitable.

The sheriff, six sturdy feet of muscle and sinew, approaches the gate and takes a few shots with his iPhone. He reaches for the foot of the dead girl and slowly, slowly turns her around.

The eerie morning silence is broken by the words, soft and gasping, murmurs moving sinuously through the crowd of girls, their feet shuffling in the morning chill, the fog's tendrils disappearing from around the posts.

They say her name, an unbroken chain of accusation and misery.

Ash.

Ash.

Ash.

## TWO

### The Lies

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THERE ARE TRUTHS, AND THERE ARE LIES, AND THEN THERE IS everything that really happened, which is where you and I will meet. My truth is your lie, and my lie is your truth, and there is a vast expanse between them.

Take, for example, Ash Carlisle.

Six feet tall, glowing skin, a sheaf of blond hair in a ponytail. She wears black jeans with rips in the knees and a loose green-and-white plaid button-down with white ADIDAS Stan Smith's; casual, efficient travel clothes. A waiter delivers a fresh cup of tea to her nest in the British Airways first-class lounge, and when she smiles her thanks, he nearly drops his tray — so pure and happy is that smile. The smile of an innocent.

Or not so innocent? You'll have to decide that for yourself. Soon.

She's perfected that smile, by the way. Practiced it. Stood in the dingy bathroom of the flat on Broad Street and watched herself in the mirror, lips pulling back from her teeth over and over and over again until it becomes natural, until her eyes sparkle and deep dimples appear in her cheeks. It is a full-toothed smile, her teeth straight and blindingly white, and

when combined with the china blue eyes and naturally streaked blond hair, it is devastating.

Isn't this what a sociopath does? Work on their camouflage? What better disguise is there than an open, thankful, gracious smile? It's an exceptionally dangerous tool, in the right hands.

And how does a young sociopath end up flying first class, you might ask? You'll be assuming her family comes from money, naturally, but let me assure you, this isn't the case. Not at all.

Not really. Not anymore.

No, the dean of the school sent the ticket.

Why?

Because Ash Carlisle leads a charmed life, and somehow managed to hoodwink the dean into not only paying her way but paying for her studies this first term, as well. A full scholarship, based on her exemplary intellect, progeny piano playing, and sudden, extraordinary need. Such a shame she lost her parents so unexpectedly.

Yes, Ash is smart. Smart and beautiful and talented, and capable of murder. Don't think for a moment she's not. Don't let her fool you.

Sipping the tea, she types and thinks, stops to chew on a nail, then reads it again. The essay she is obsessing over gained her access to the prestigious, elite school she is shipping off to. The challenges ahead — transferring to a new school, especially one as impossible to get into as The Goode School — frighten her, excite her, make her more determined than ever to get away from Oxford, from her past.

A new life. A new beginning. A new chapter for Ash.

But can you ever escape your past?

Ash sets down the tea, and I can tell she is worrying again about fitting in. Marchburg, Virginia — population five hundred on a normal summer day, which expands to seven hundred once the students arrive for term — is a long way



from Oxford, England. She worries about fitting in with the daughters of the DC elite — daughters of senators and congressmen and ambassadors and reporters and the just plain filthy rich. She can rely on her looks — she knows how pretty she is, isn't vain about it, exactly, but knows she's more than acceptable on the looks scale — and on her intelligence, her exceptional smarts. Some would say cunning, but I think this is a disservice to her. She's both book smart and street-smart, the rarest of combinations. Despite her concerns, if she sticks to the story, she will fit in with no issues.

The only strike against her, of course, is me, but no one knows about me.

No one can ever know about me.

## THREE

### The School

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"IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE A PRETTIER PLACE, ISN'T IT?"

The driver, who has been trying to engage me in conversation for fifty miles now, isn't wrong. The farther west we drive into Virginia, out 66, the more beautiful the scenery becomes. Wineries, horse farms, stone walls, and charming cottages dot the landscape. The ridgeback of mountains ahead looks like an ancient dragon curled up and went to sleep and the trees grew over its skeleton. I can see each bump of its spine, the ribs curving gently in the air, moss growing over the sharp tips and the roots of the trees sprouting from its heart inside.

It is a far cry from the noise and dirt of the DC airport, and even further from the world I've left behind. *Good riddance.*

"Mmm-hmm. Pretty."

The car turns south, moving along the Blue Ridge, down I-81, and the scenery is breathtaking. I glance at the map stowed in my purse, a detailed topographical imaging of the area surrounding Goode, which is situated near Wintergreen. Another hour to go, at least.

"Where'd you say you were from?"

I drag my attention back to the driver. He's decent looking,

dark hair and skin tanned from a summer outdoors, hazel eyes. He'd said his name when he opened the door for me, Rudy or Ruly, something like that, I didn't pay attention, why should I? He's just the driver, a stranger I'm sharing a fleeting moment with. I'll never see him again after today. Don't get into the car with strangers, we're taught. Don't talk to strangers online. Stranger danger. Now, it's as much a part of life as breathing.

And who's to say I'm not the stranger to be worried about?

"I didn't. England."

"Thought so, from your accent. Ever met the Queen?"

Hardly. We don't exactly run in the same circles.

But I'm embarking on a new life. Perhaps it's time for a bit of embellishment.

"We go to the same church in the countryside. Have you ever heard of Sandringham? There's a beautiful little stone church there, with a graveyard that dates back to the 1300s. They — the Queen and her husband, I mean — spend much of their time in the country, especially now they've been handing over duties to the younger members of the royal family. We saw them only last week."

"I know exactly where you're talking about. That's the place they filmed part of *Game of Thrones*, didn't they?"

"The very one."

The best lies are based in fact. The stone church at Sandringham exists. It's called St. Mary Magdalene, and it's a bit more than a stone cottage, but I have no idea what it's really like. I've never been there. I've never met the Queen. I have exactly zero idea where *Game of Thrones* was filmed, but I assume it wasn't on the royal estate.

The driver has no knowledge of what I'm talking about but doesn't want to seem stupid, so he is more than happy to pretend. He grins at me in the rearview, and I smile in turn. We're connected now, over this lie. We both know it. Accept it. These are the social niceties of a modern civilization.

I resume my outdoor viewing, pretending I didn't enjoy the tiny frisson of excitement I got from the dopamine rush of telling a lie.

Why did I do it? I swore to myself I wasn't going to lie anymore. All part of turning over a new leaf, as my mum would say.

And I have no business lying to this stranger, one who knows where I'll be for the next few years.

*But it is so easy. And what will it harm? He's practically a child himself.*

I've never understood my compulsive desire to lie. I've read so many articles I've become my own sociology experiment. Everyone lies. To themselves, to each other. It's a way to belong, to be included. To look important.

In the past, it was much, much easier to get away with these transactional lies. Purveyors of falsehoods were con men, flimflam artists. Now, everyone is a grifter. With the advent of social media, allowing the masses to peer in through the open windows and doors to your home, to your mind, your body, your soul, the only way to lie properly is to curate your life for the masses to behold, carefully, carefully. Stage. Filter. Design. My very existence is so much better than yours. Hurrah!

I have no online accounts. I don't tweet or book or gram or snap or tok. I've never been interested in living out loud, and now, it's working in my favor. It's much, much too dangerous for me to have a past. I'm forward-looking, *marching* ahead. My life, my new life, waits for me on top of the mountain, in a town appropriately called Marchburg. The Goode School doesn't allow the students to have mobile phones. There's a solid chance I can get away with not having the accounts for the next few years. There's luck, already going my way.

In the modern age, with the ubiquitous connections available, not allowing personal mobile phones on campus is believed to be an archaic approach to education. I've seen the

reviews, the message boards; the students hate it, hate leaving behind their screens. Even some of the mothers and fathers think this is a ridiculous rule, too; often sneaking one into the luggage for a midnight texting session with their little darlings.

We top another rise and finally, I can see the city of Marchburg ahead. It looks like an Italian hill town, accessible only through winding switchbacks, a fortress behind a red brick wall.

Lies have kept me safe, kept me protected, my whole life. But here, in this new place, in this new world, I don't need them anymore. I will be safe on the mountain. Protected.

"Starting over is always hard," Mum told me, "but you can do it. Go far, far away from here, daughter mine. Reinvent yourself."

This is exactly what I intend to do.

## FOUR

### The Arrival

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THE DRIVE UP THE HILL MAKES ME SLIGHTLY QUEASY, ALL THE switchbacks, the steep drop-offs, but soon enough we are on even ground again. The little town of Marchburg, its streets forming an X, surrounds the school which sits in the middle, at the crossroads. I ignore the stores and restaurants and their quaint, New World names, focusing on the behemoth ahead. A castle, for that is what it looks like, an overly large country house, like those of my homeland, spreading across the glossy green acreage like a stone gargoye, but with red brick instead of gray stone.

The original building was damaged by fire in 1890, and the phoenix rebuilt in the traditional Jacobean style using the famous Virginia bricks known as Chilhowie, the name stamped across the face. "Chilhowies have been found as far away as Paris, France," says the literature. A bell tower rises above the entrance, perfectly centered on the main building, which is five stories high. Similar Jacobean-style buildings wing each side of the main hall — their signs denote they're creatively named Old East and Old West — but these were added later, and aren't the same exact color as their mother. They are three

stories each, with white wooden balconies that jut out from their top floors. Taken in one shot, the school is monstrous in its austere beauty.

The massive, black, wrought iron gates to the school stand open in greeting for orientation day. Term starts tomorrow, Thursday, so Tuesday and Wednesday are set aside for students to get settled in the dorms, buy their books, sign up for activities and sports teams, hand over their phones, and otherwise run amok on campus, reuniting with their friends and making new.

What must be freshmen stand in bewildered clumps under the oak trees bordering the wall. Parents stumble around with furniture and boxes in hand. It is a bright, sunny late summer day, the skies so blue it is hard to look away.

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## About the Author

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J.T. Ellison began her career as a presidential appointee in the White House, where a nuclear physicist taught her how to obsess over travel itineraries and make a seriously good pot of Earl Grey, spawning both her love of loose leaf and a desire for control of her own destiny. Jaded by the political climate in D.C., she made her way back to her first love, creative writing. More than 20 novels later, she is an award-winning *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author with millions of books in print, and is published in 28 countries and 16 languages. She is also the EMMY-award winning cohost of A WORD ON WORDS, a literary interview television show, and co-wrote the “A Brit in the FBI” series with #1 *New York Times* bestseller Catherine Coulter. She lives in Nashville with her husband and two small gray minions, known as cats in some cultures. She thinks they’re furry aliens.

[www.jtellison.com](http://www.jtellison.com)





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