

Soren Soroush

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Prof. Paul Alexander

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Deceit Never Pays Off

We all know someone that deceives and manipulates others to get what they want: they disregard the wants or needs of others in favor of their own, they use underhanded tactics to satisfy their desires, and are generally difficult to tolerate. In Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and "Why I Live At The P.O." by Eudora Welty, characters such as the grandmother and Stella-Ronda fits the aforementioned paradigm of deceitful and manipulative people. However, selfishly deceiving others is always eventually met with repercussions.

The most blatant example of repercussions brought on by deceit and manipulation in these short stories would be the grandmother. Despite being the eldest and supposedly the most mature and patient, the grandmother could never stand to sacrifice her wants for those of others. So instead of being considerate and compromising between these different wants (or even entirely forsaking her own), she took the selfish alternative: do whatever it takes to assert her desires onto others. The most consequential instance of this is when she wants to visit a house from her youth; the grandmother lies about a secret panel in the house to get the children in the car excited, knowing they would throw a fit if they didn't get to see it. Manipulating Bailey the driver by deceiving the obnoxious grandchildren, the grandmother gets what she wants and has

the whole family driving down an unused dirt road that leads the family to the middle of nowhere. This eventually results in a crash and an encounter with the Misfit; and even in the case where the house really was in Georgia and they made it there safely, the family would be very upset to find out there was no secret panel and realize they had wasted as much time as they did. The grandmother deceives, and so the repercussions were what she and her entire family receives. Also, she is so morally corrupt that she is completely unable to keep from deceiving even herself; when face to face with death (the Misfit), the grandmother hypocritically offered advice she couldn't uphold herself. She told the Misfit that "You could be honest too if you'd only try...", and told him that he should pray despite not being able to form a coherent prayer herself.

Stella-Ronda is also a morally corrupt individual who turned to manipulation and deceived her family against an opposing individual. She had clearly done something contemptible, coming home unannounced without her husband and with a two-year-old child that was clearly her own, and yet all of her family members accept a half-assed excuse wholeheartedly; except for Sister. And it is exactly because of this skepticism that Stella-Ronda turns the whole family against Sister. She lies to all of them to get them against Sister, and when Sister was fed up with all of the garbage she didn't deserve she leaves. What did the family lose as a result of Stella-Ronda's deceit? They lost by far the most providing and responsible person in the house, apparent through her cooking and the wide variety of appliances she reclaimed on her way out. Stella-Ronda's family are the type of people to never admit it, but they will come to realize how much they have lost not knowing it was because of Stella-Ronda's deceit.

Although the grandmother's family and Stella-Ronda's family are all victims to the deceit of their respective manipulators, the biggest victim of deceit is perhaps the most unexpected: the Misfit. Despite being an man who told no lies even in scene we see him, he had been lied to and made a criminal for a crime he knows for a fact he did not commit; but because "they had papers on him", he had no choice but accept punishment and be buried alive for it. With these circumstances, it is somewhat understandable that he had to embrace this role of a criminal forced onto him and live on the run from the police; he is forced to commit crimes to fend for himself, with no faith in the justice system that has so heavily wronged him. It can be said, then, that the deception brought on by this very justice system has resulted in an enormous repercussion: a murderous criminal on the loose by the name of The Misfit.

Selfish deception never pays off. This is because the moment the deceived and/or victims of the deceived realize they are being manipulated they will conflict with the deceiver even worse than they had before the lies were told. And in the case where the deceiver is not found out, they will be positively reinforced by this deception, more likely to do in again in the future. In order to avoid this cycle of conflict and manipulation, one is to embrace reality as-is and communicate this exact reality to others openly while empathizing with those of others. Unfortunately, the grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and Stella-Ronda in "Why I Live At The P.O.", along with many other people, are unable to do this; so they are trapped yet indulgent in their own web of lies, devoid of reality-acceptance. They are, as The Misfit's daddy put it: "...some that can live their whole life out without asking about it...". And this is sad because if you were to ask them about their lives, being unable to be truthful to themselves, they wouldn't be able to tell you honestly.