

The Truth About Lies: Why we love a liar.

ALEX CLARK: Welcome to The Big Book Weekend. I'm Alex Clark and I am delighted to welcome you to the first of our events. Where you are going to get the chance this weekend to hear from over 30 authors. We've already had a wonderful moment. That was very dramatic, Ian!

IAN RANKIN: The door went!

ALEX: We're going to be talking about lies, lies, and more lies this morning. And I've got three writers with me who have tremendous form in this kind of stuff. They are the novelists Adele Parks and Ian Rankin, and the barrister and writer, Alexandra Wilson. And we are going to be talking about why we tell lies, why we shouldn't, and how to root them out. The speakers have great, great form. Adele Parks's novels *Lies Lies Lies* and *Just My Luck*; Ian Rankin has of course created the world-famous detective, Rebus, and Alexandra Wilson is a criminal barrister whose book *In Black and White* gives the inside story of exactly how the criminal justice system works. So, this is a great pleasure. It's a great pleasure to talk to all of you. I'm very, very thrilled for both you, Ian and Adele, your books have just been shortlisted, *A Song For Dark Times* and *Just My Luck* for the British Book Awards, how are you feeling this morning?

ADELE PARKS: Awesome! You know, why wouldn't you? It's lovely as ever to be on an award list, I think. Ask Ian. He's got lots of experience in award lists!

IAN: Yes, it is interesting. I think when you're a young writer, it's very important, because it's somebody telling you that what you're doing is valid and valuable, and good. It was very important to me in my early years when I wasn't maybe - I'm not going to say being taken seriously by my publisher - but not pushed as much as I thought I could be. And when you get shortlisted for an award they think you "oh, Ian knows what he's doing, maybe we can help him a little bit."

ALEX: Alexandra, you have all of this to come to you as *In Black and White* is your first book. Now you and I have a very similar issue that has faced us through our lives, we only actually get called Alexandra when we're in trouble and you say that right at the beginning of your book, don't you? So, what shall I call you, shall I call you Alex?

ALEXANDRA WILSON: Yeah, Alex is what everyone calls me.

ALEX: Okay we are just going to assume that everyone is talking to criminal barrister Alex, and not me, Alex. Alex, I just want you to if you can - the other two speakers are novelists of course - your extraordinary book tells us exactly why you decided to become a criminal barrister, and what happens throughout the process. Can you just tell us a bit about why you wanted to write it?

ALEXANDRA: Yeah, absolutely. I felt that there were kind of two things: the first being that I didn't see many people that looked like me when I came to the profession. The Bar more generally, so, you know, our entire profession, but also the judiciary and the legal profession still isn't very good at representing women or ethnic minorities, particularly Black people, and so my experience of, and I talk about it in my book, Alex, as you say, and I went through some trauma when I was quite young - one of my friends was murdered. I could see people who looked like me kind of on the wrong side of the criminal justice system all the time, being harassed by the police, going through the court system, but no-one on the other side. And so, kind of when I got into this profession, I was like there are people there, there are people like me there, not yet enough, but some of us are there, and it's really important that our voices told, and our perspective is given, so that it can hopefully better educate other people about that real power imbalance, particularly in relation to race and class. And so, I really wanted to do, so for the profession, for the wider public, and then of course the other reason is just to kind of inspire other young people, and I'm always really touched that a lot of young people read my book - people at university, and kind of young adults, and older adults, people on Instagram saying "you made me want to become a barrister now, and I'm in my fifties" and I'm like "that's brilliant!"

ALEX: I felt exactly the same. It's an amazing book. But I have to say, I think it is probably a bit too late for a career change for me! But as you say, never say never, before you joined us, Adele and Ian, we were hoping that you would turn up in the wig, and I have to say, you've let us down slightly. You're probably not allowed to, are you?

ALEXANDRA: The rules are you are not meant to bring any kind of disrepute to the profession is I think how the ethics put it. But, I mean, you can of course take photos in it and I think it is quite powerful to do so, to really kind of get people realising there are normal people who wear in odd attire, but I think probably going on to a Zoom for BBC Book Weekend might be stretching it a bit far, might be thinking I'm using it as fancy dress.

ADELE: I would tell no lies, if you came on in your full gear. I would have been a little bit more, no, I'm a bit - yes ... [Laughter].

ALEX: I'm going to ask you this Adele and Ian, because it wasn't in my plan to ask you this, in our much more philosophical discussion about lying, and about the representation of lying in fiction, have you ever stood there and sworn an oath? Have you been in court?

ADELE: I've never been in in court. I'm actually - so my 101, like biggest fear, is being arrested, and the worst of it is I know I would have been arrested for something I hadn't done because I always do the right thing. So, I think, there are two levels there, you know! You've been arrested for something you haven't done, which is - and so I'm a nervous wreck in things like, I don't know, going through airports. Don't travel with me. Lockdown was a godsend for my husband because he didn't have to go through airports with me sweating buckets saying, "They're going to arrest me, somebody's planted something on me!" I don't know why it is my real fear. Which is why if Alex had turned up in full garb, I would have felt ill, I would have had to leave.

ALEX: This is absolutely fascinating insight into the psychology of a writer who writes about darkness and right and wrong! Ian, are you the same? Or are you very blasé? You think I would just swan through that experience?

IAN: No, I was - well, I wasn't nearly arrested, but I was put in a police database when writing the first Inspector Rebus novel, because I went to a police station to ask some questions and it turned out the plot of that book was similar to a real crime that had happened in Edinburgh. And so, they put me on the database as a possible suspect. After that, I learned not to go near the police because I might get in more trouble. It's only when police officers became fans of the books that I then began to get the help I needed to make the books a bit more realistic. But anyone who has read my books would know that they do end before the trial takes place, because I don't have much of an idea what happens inside a courtroom, despite which I was actually a juror on a trial at the Old Bailey back in the day when I lived in London, and was picked for a jury, and got to see just how shambolic - sorry, Alexandra! - the English criminal justice system can be.

ALEXANDRA: I mean I agree with you, Ian. It is fine. It is really interesting what Adele was saying about how she sweats and really panics going through security, because given the theme is lies, I think that one of the things in our job we try to do is call people out for lies all the time, and I think people often say how can you tell when someone is lying, but often it's really similar to people who are just nervous. The way that your body kind of shows you're lying, or can be similar to when you're just nervous, and good people, I say good people, but people who are not lying, often have exactly the same physical reactions, because they're just nervous, so it is really interesting what Adele was saying about that.

ADELE: It's funny that you said - the other Alex - that getting some insight into my mind because I do try so hard to be good. You know, I think most people do. I think - you read the news, and you think the whole world has gone to pot but it hasn't, actually. Most people try pretty hard most of the time to behave themselves, for whatever reasons. It could be because they believe in that, and they believe society will be built in a stronger way, or it could be that we don't want to get caught out. In my books, my character is the exact opposite. They are really dark and do some dreadful things, and the plots are very complex, so I do quite often put my mind into somebody who is doing something quite criminal, and certainly things that are very immoral they might not always be illegal, but they nearly are always immoral, and I can do that really comfortably, and I can go quite far working out what you could do if you didn't want to follow the system. And I think that is quite interesting, because, as a novelist, we are basically paid to be professional liars. We're making stuff up, that is what I do. I make it up. In fact, when people said to me, "I have a story for you, you should write it," I think no, I won't do that, thanks. That is your story. The whole point of what I do is I make it up. I like to ground it in what could happen, but it's all made up.

ALEX: You often have good people who are sort of put under duress by various circumstances, and you see the point to which they are taken. Ian, what about you? Do you, when you construct your plots, are you also thinking about putting people under strain and

thinking what is the point in which they will step they will step outside of what we accept to be generally moral and ethically correct behaviour?

IAN: It's a good question but a complicated answer. Because I've dealt mostly with professional police officers as my characters, they arrive after the deed has been done. They only become involved in it, and everything has been pretty messy up until that point, and they're trying to make sense of it. And to that extent, the police officer, the detective stands in for the novelist who is trying to make sense of the world. The reason I write these books is to try to make sense of the world around me and maybe answer some questions to my own satisfaction about the way the around the world. And my characters stand in for me in that process, so the character of the detective is very like the character of the novelist, but at the same time I am also someone who is telling lies like Adele said. So, we are these Jekyll and Hyde characters who can encompass both. We are the Jekyll - the light - and we are the Hyde - the dark. And I think we are all very much like that, I don't think anyone can stand up and say I've never told a lie.

ADELE: I don't think anyone could.

ALEX: We often tell ourselves that we are doing it for a greater good, don't we? I wonder, Alex, if you came across that when there are people who you are talking about their stories, when you're talking of building a case with a solicitor and a defendant, whether people believe they are lying sometimes for the proper good. You're very interesting in your book about how much a barrister is and isn't allowed to know and the fact that you have to represent truthfully to the court.

ALEXENDRA: Yeah exactly, there is a very fine line we have to toe - despite the way it looks on TV - we cannot construct a story for our clients. We know realistically that our clients inevitably will just tell us half-truths, or tell us lies, and just not tell us the truth, because we act on our client's instructions, that is the way it is. If they tell us the entire truth, that actually binds us. You know, we can't then mislead the court. So, it affects how we can then cross-examine witnesses. If someone says, "I did kill this person, but I don't want you to tell anyone", we have confidentiality, so we can't tell anyone, but then we also cannot say to the court they did not kill or elicit that evidence that they did not kill that person knowing full well they told us they did. So, it's a strange relationship where yes, they have the protection of client confidentiality and privilege, but also if they tell us too much, it restricts what we can do, you know, ethically and professionally. So, inevitably, when you explain those ethical rules that we are under to your client, that is kind of a signal that maybe they're going to then lie to you, because they know that if they do tell you the truth, you're bound. I've always thought that this is, yeah it is the real conflict, because are you saying to your client essentially, you know, if you tell me the truth, you've got to not got as good a chance? It is a difficult one.

ALEX: It is difficult, isn't it? Because like Ian, I did jury service many years ago, and I arrived in court absolutely convinced, because I'd seen the telly, that what the barrister did was basically tell you a story, and then you decided whether it was convincing or not, and, yes, there would be obviously evidence, and there might be forensics, and all the rest of it, but

instead you were listening to them telling a story and it is not like that at all. It's sort of disjointed, and it is all about putting these specks of information kind of under the microscope. And I suppose that comes into what you are saying. You are really trying to expose the flaws in a prosecution or defence case, aren't you?

ALEXANDRA: Exactly. Everyone does have a right to a fair trial. I think one of the questions that I always get asked is how do you feel about representing someone who you know is guilty. And I always say that it ties into what I was saying, often, they don't tell me. It's not as though people sit there say "I'm guilty, now can you represent me?" I wouldn't necessarily know, and hunches, or feelings, they just don't come into it. It is a very professional job. You're there to represent that client to the best of your ability, and exactly as you said Alex, to find holes in the prosecution case. If the prosecution evidence isn't strong enough to make the jury sure of your client's guilt, then that client should not be convicted, regardless of whether or not they did it. That is not the point. The point is that we have a fair system where that high standard - and it is a very high standard of making a jury sure - has to be met in every single case, so, for me, the kind of principles of justice are so much more important than the truth or lies behind it.

ADELE: Wow!

ALEX: It's really fascinating. Coming on to you, Adele and Ian, that idea of pulling the wool over our eyes, that idea that Alex was alluding to there of actually not just telling lies, but leaving out, omitting key bits of information. You're doing that with us poor readers all the time, aren't you? You are misdirecting us and making us look somewhere else while you weave your magic all the time.

ADELE: Yes, but very differently to Alex's case, because Alex is literally - I was fascinated by that because Alex is definitely doing the exact opposite to what I feel. I certainly am doing - and Ian can speak for himself - but I work on hunches all the time. I love your job, and I think it is so fascinating, But I think now you've said it, I think I would be useless at it, because I would just be convinced - in my mind, I'm not working with you you're guilty, I'm working with you, you're innocent - I would be making judgments. But yes, you're right, I could probably do the weaving, and the leaving out and the turning a blind eye to, I guess. I'm putting words in your mouth there Alex. It's not that you're turning a blind eye, but only being able to filter a certain amount of information. But yes, In my novels, people quite often talk there are twists. I don't know if it is twists, definitely rug-pulls and reveals, and I think there is a level of satisfaction as a reader if (a) you've guessed some of those as they come, people don't want them all to be a surprise, if you're a good reader, and you read a lot, you want to go, "yeah I knew that was coming", but I like to be in a situation where they don't know everything is coming and my readers will walk away saying, "Gosh, I didn't see that" but looking back it completely makes sense. I can't bear a kind of twist or a rug-pull, or whatever you want to call it, where it is suddenly then they found a trust fund hidden under their bed and it turns out they're multi-millionaires. No-one does that! We all know if we're multi-millionaires. It has to be something where you look back, of course, why didn't I know that was coming? So yes, whilst I'm doing a little bit of sleight of hand and a bit of "look over here", I do have unreliable narrators, I do have - I do put very ordinary, very nice people

under extreme situations so they might have to go further than they would like to go. And I think ordinary people quite like seeing that and going on that journey and thinking would I do that? And that's very much part of reading a book: would I do that? I'm guessing, if you're in court, you don't want to think "Would I do that?"

ALEX: You're thinking "I absolutely wouldn't!" Ian, tell us about, you describe your books as what the police does after a crime has been committed, and what your protagonist does and how he begins to figure out a sort of, essentially a web of mystery and lies and actions. Does that put you in a kind of compromising place where you're trying to sort of imagine the worst that could happen, as it were?

IAN: Well, what I have to deal with specifically is the fact that the police come to an inquiry full of prejudices, and fixed ideas of their own, and that is certainly true of Rebus. Often in the Rebus novels, I'm having an argument with my character. He's got a certain way of looking at the world, which is very much good and evil - you're either bad or you're not. I say well there are gradations here, there are areas of grey, there are reasons why people do things, etc etc. So I'm often having an argument with him, but the police will come to a crime scene and some will quickly have knee-jerk responses to what is going on here, and the fun for the author is then saying "aha you don't know what is going on here, Mr or Mrs police officer, let's take you on a journey," and they will go through the book talking to suspects, witnesses, whatever, almost none of whom will be able to give them an absolutely factual account of what happened, and the reader then has to pick apart what is then going on. The whodunnit is an interesting form, because, you know, the readers are often wanting to play that game, and they feel cheated, a little bit cheated if they work out too early on what is going on. I don't like that aspect of the whodunnit. It doesn't bother me if they work it out on page 1, or whatever the crime happens to be. Are you enjoying the rest of the story? Because what is important to me is almost a political dimension of this, it is what crime tells us about ourselves as a society. Do we get the crimes of crime that a capitalist Western society would expect to get? Can you ever have a crime-free society, and what would that society look like? Why do people do bad things specifically to each other? It is a very simple question that is at the heart of all good crime fiction.

ALEX: Yes, those whodunnits, you're more I suppose we might say of the Columbo variety – we reveal the crime at the beginning?

IAN: No, no, no, Columbo is fascinating, because he tells you right at the start, here is who did it, and we will show you how they did it, and then the shambolic detective will arrive who represents the working class, I think, and the killers are most often members of high society in the USA - white, upper class rich people who think they will get away with it because of who they are, and in comes this shambolic anarchic figure who eventually proves that their whole world is made of sand and brings it crumbling down around them. I think it's a unique TV show, but it's not like any crime fiction I've really read, and it tells you exactly what happened from the get-go.

ALEX: You're absolutely right to say there is always this sort of political dimension to the stories that we tell. I mean, obviously, there is the criminal justice system in itself. We make

assumptions when we think whether somebody is lying or not, don't we, and often those are class-based and more than we think of someone as a respectable person to start with, often under the cloak in your novels of that kind of look of respectability, people get away with all sorts of things. And Alex, that is obviously one of the things that drew you to your career. You thought okay too many people are making assumptions about who tells lies, who does bad stuff. How do you root that out?

ALEXANDRA: It is one of the things I battle with most on a daily basis, it's trying to change people's assumptions. I think that is, as a barrister, I think that's one of the hardest jobs is really trying to - particularly in a Crown Court trial - trying to get the jury to focus on the evidence in front of them, rather than on their assumptions like you say, Alex. Everyone naturally has the image that people have of certain people, and, actually, that was unfair of me to say even particularly with the jury, because the same applies with judges, and magistrates. And sometimes one of the arguments - one of the strongest arguments for a jury, actually, is that you've got 12 independent people who are not seeing the same thing every day, you know? These are people from all walks of life, and you can end up with a really good representative group of people who might have a more - might have a fairer outlook and may have less assumptions than perhaps the judges and magistrates that are sitting there every single day. But it is a task that I think the reason I automatically went to say it particularly in the jury is because it's something when you're giving a jury speech as a defence barrister, you're constantly trying to remind the jury that you must put those assumptions, those judgments that you may have come to court with to the side. You know whatever you think about when you see - it might be a young Black boy in the dock, in a tracksuit, who speaks slang, even when he's giving evidence - put the judgments you have about that aside. Put the judgments that you have about these people that you're seeing in front of you completely aside, and just look at the evidence that you have in front of you. It's such a difficult task. I always recognise that. It is a really difficult task, because naturally, as human beings, we, as Adele said, people go on hunches, they do. "I think he probably did do it", but that is not the test. You have to be sure. It's not have a feeling. If he looks kind of like that, that is not the test. It's really reminding people of that.

ALEX: If we think about lies in that kind of bigger social and political context, we are in a very frightening place right now, where we are seeing truth, as it is often said, evaporate in front of us, so you see stories taking hold that, once they're fact-checked begin to crumble; you see people contesting things that you believed to be absolutely scientifically rationally true, and you see the highest echelons of society not treating truth with the respect that we think it deserves. Ian, I mean, you were alluding to this political dimension. It is a pretty tough thing to take on board right now, isn't it, the apparent evaporation of the importance of truth?

IAN: Yes, I mean everywhere we look, there's an attack on truth; there is an attack on the factual; there is an attack on scientific proven fact. When you've got the heads of EU government saying "oh, we don't think the AstraZeneca should be given to our people," but all the scientists are saying "it's fine" and the scientists are saying "if you don't do it, people are going to die." It seems to be one of the dominoes. There are a whole lot of dominoes that have been stood up for, you know, a couple of decades now, that are being sort of

knocked over, and they all bump into each other, and knock each other down, and we end up with a potential for [interruption] Linda, that's my wife! We end up with a potential for anything to make sense, because I think it was George Steiner, the philosopher who said that when people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing, they believe in anything. And there is that sense that, if we stopped believing in the factual evidence of our eyes, our ears, our rational minds and the scientific process, then people can throw anything at us, and we are potentially going to be up for grabs. And It's a very worrying time.

ADELE: It's a laziness as well not checking the facts. It's, you know, it's everybody kind of, "It's not my responsibility, somebody else has told me this" and we all ought to be a bit more responsible.

IAN: It's a comfort thing Adele. I've got a simple answer for you: people want simple answers to a complicated question. The responses are often not answers at all.

ADELE: I'm really cross about this new thing that has come into this lexicon "my truth". Ergh! Let's not have my truth. Let's have my truth and I might remember it incorrectly, or vague about it, but I'm opening up to that, or let's have facts checked, or let's ... I'm actually now going I'm giving up on hunches - I'm going to follow Alex's approach to life - and I want everything down in evidence because we can't all going round saying "I think it started with Donald Trump". So I could be so wrong about that, and here is me saying "I could be wrong about that", and he said early on "it's my truth". I don't think that's a good thing to latch on, because when Donald Trump said he had a truth, let's all have a truth. I think we should still make an effort to find out what are the facts, because facts are true. Anything else is how you feel about something, how you think about something. That is allowed. This is what I feel, this is what I think, but it's not "my truth". I think it's a very special word, truth. And you need to know when you're lying, and you need to know when you're telling the truth, and, unless you have some kind of genuine mental illness, or disability, where you might not know what the truth is, I think let's just make an effort to go "yeah I owned up, I lied, I made it up because it was convenient to me." I think that would be so refreshing right now.

IAN: How do we know people that Adele is telling the truth? She could be lying to you [Laughter].

ALEX: And I don't think this is a spoiler to that book but I'm not sure actually anybody tells the truth.

ADELE: It's interesting actually because, I was going to say it is not a legal situation, but it does end up in prison, so it kind of is. It's actually starts off in very much a domestic situation, and it is lies that are told between husband and wife. And without - this isn't spoilers, this happens in the first chapter - there is a couple, they've been together 15 years, they've gone through quite a lot, he's a functioning alcoholic, she's been desperate to have a baby, it took them ten years, they've had this baby, we meet them when the baby is five years old. The husband wants a second child. He goes off for a test to get her interested in having a second child because she doesn't seem interested in having a second child, and he is told there is no way on earth you ever physically fathered a child. So, he goes home

knowing that little girl has been bringing up for five years is not his biological child and that his wife has been lying to him for five years. And of course, besides what is the truth, there is the why did she lie to him? And then because that is literally the first chapter, there are the consequences of that, and, as I say, it does end up in prison! So, it starts off very domestic lie, but it grows and grows and grows, because I think that is the other thing that I can have fun with as a novelist, but Alex would have significantly less fun with in a court, lies can grow, and do grow, and one is usually used to cover the next, and so on, and so forth.

ALEX: This is an interesting thing isn't it, because we talk - we've been talking about the kind of global lies, the sort of lies that get perpetuated throughout society, and are really pernicious. We've been talking about the lies that get told in a court of law like "Did you kill someone?" "Yes, I did." "No I didn't." Domestic lies are a whole other ball game aren't they? Now I have to say I have a very, an anecdote-prone partner. And he's not bad at telling a good story - in fact, he's very good, he does it for a living - but if I interrupt him and say "it didn't happen like that," he says, "Does that help the story or does that not help the story?" No there are times when we love a liar, am I right?

ADELE: I think they can be entertaining. I think it can be entertaining, but I think lying is a barrier to intimacy. Personally. I don't mind knowing my husband's exaggerating the story at the dinner party because that's funny, although let me be honest, that would be me, not him! I don't mind him knowing I'm exaggerating the story to entertain people, and I don't mind him when we go to bed that night him going, "That gets bigger every time you tell it," and it kind of takes me down again. "Yeah, it kind of does. Shall I put it back now?" But I need him to know the truth.

ALEX: You need someone to know the truth. Ian, are you similar? Are you forgiving a kind of domestic white lie, or would you root it out ruthlessly, like I do and spoil the story?

IAN: No, I think I would want the truth. He said blindly, don't want to think about that too hard. Because you want a quiet life, and a quiet life often, a white lie can give you a much quieter life than facing up to something that can have a knock-on effect. In fiction, we are professional liars, as Adele has said, and people seem to enjoy that. They seem to enjoy listening to the lies that we are telling them. But I think it's a way of us reaching for a truth. I think fiction can sometimes lead towards a truth that maybe non-fiction can't. There are stories that we can tell that will explain the world to people in a way that the true story maybe fails to tell the truth to them.

ALEX: I mean, yes, this is again one of the issues where things get a bit blurry isn't it - that issue between facts and truth, and the different kinds of truth. Of course, that has no place in a sense in the court of law, does it, Alex? You know, it is facts that you're after. Have you ever come across a really fantastical kind of egregious liar that you have had an admiration for when it comes down to it?

ALEXANDRA: There are so many. I'm trying to think of a good example. In my book, I talk about a client who for our entire conference, prior to going into court, spoke to me, and in court, spoken in a completely different accent to the accent that he had, so he spoke to me

in a Scottish accent the entire conference, and throughout court, he spoke to the judge in a Scottish accent, and then when we left, he was, "Yeah, all right, miss, fanks for that." I was like, "sorry?" He had a completely different accent. He said, "Oh, yeah" and just sort of laughed it off, and, again, in the court, he said he didn't have a mobile phone. When we came outside, out he pulled his phone out of his pocket. It's really odd sort of, I guess white lies, the lies that we are talking about. They had no real reason to lie, this is not under cross-examination where you see people lie because they don't want to be found out for a crime, these are kind of irrelevant lies.

ALEX: I'm so intrigued, and I think we all are, and I think our viewers would be: was the Scottishness - did it bring him any advantage whatsoever? Why was he doing it?

ALEXANDRA: I don't think it brought him any advantage. As much as I love Scottish people, I don't think it would bring necessarily any advantage in a court as to an English accent!

ADELE: But you see going back to my hunches, I always think Scottish people are really intelligent. I'm only saying that because you're here, Ian. I genuinely think, I always think well they are clever, and I just immediately zone in, and maybe it was that. Maybe he was - I don't know. I'm terrible in court. Never get me picked on jury service!

IAN: There was research done a few years ago that said the Scots voice was believable. You know they use Scots a lot for telesales and such like, because people found it a very pleasant voice to listen to and also believed what they are being told.

ALEX: He was trying to establish a trustworthiness in some kind of way, yet we know from Ian, he makes things up, so we know it's not true!

ALEXANDRA: Yes, I still can't explain why he did - there are odd ones. There was a client who pretended to be badly injured, and then when the client was granted bail, kind of danced out of court. And was totally fine, which was mortifying, because I'm standing like the barrister, like oh my god does this reflect badly on me. I've made all these submissions that this person is really injured and then off they go dancing out of court. I think within judges and often barristers, or solicitors, they were either bar officers or solicitors before, so I think everyone has a real understanding of the nature of the job.

ALEX: You don't get that moment, do you, once court's over, you don't get the moment to run after him and say, "Excuse me? What is going on?" I mean it's done then, right?

ALEXANDRA: You just sit on the train home thinking oh my goodness! Have I breached the ethical code? I didn't know. It can be really difficult. There has to be a point where you draw a line, and that is kind of what is good about having different cases every day, or every week. It's a good opportunity to just switch off and think you know what I've been duped by my client, but tomorrow is another day, we will start again. It's funny what we were saying about wanting the truth, I think in my professional life, I've kind of just accepted that often I'm not going to get the truth, but I work with what I've got. But then that is very different from personal Alex who actually if someone tells me a white lie, I get really, really irritated.

If someone close to me, a sibling, my partner, my mum, tells me something just, "Why would you lie about that?" It's really interesting that at work I can deal with it, and I don't take it personally, it's not at all. You know, I don't even get wound up by it, unless it is, they're changing their story, but in my personal life, it's much more ...

ALEX: You can't bear it?

ALEXANDRA: I can't bear it.

ADELE: It's that thing about intimacy. You see, you're not expecting intimacy at work. It's just work - well, not just work, work is crucially important - but at home, it feels like a different level. It's funny as well because we teach our children, don't we, it's still one of the foundations that we teach our children: tell me the truth. I've literally done the whole "you won't get into trouble no matter what you tell me", thinking "you might!" So I'm lying to him because I'm telling him he's not going to get into trouble if he tells me. But there might be a few consequences. But what can you do? Because you need to - I remember - oh, I was going to tell a Father Christmas story, which is actually super harmless but it might not be because you never know who is watching this!

ALEX: That's the problem where our versions of the usefulness and importance of truth according to ...

ADELE: Which is my point.

ALEX: We can say loosely that Father Christmas is an arena in which we might say that the truth is sometimes worth withholding. I'm really interested by that idea, just sparked by the story of the man who skipped out of court. Of course, sometimes, people do tell lies for very deeply psychological reasons. I don't suppose he did, but when we think about, for example, people who feign illness, imposters of various kinds, there are sometimes very acute psychological malaises and reasons, aren't there? It has to do with not being able to live with the truth ourselves.

IAN: Yeah, I've been thinking about that. We've been talking today about the small lies, white lies, and everything else, but in fiction, you've got these extraordinary almost psychopathic, if not psychopathic, or sociopathic figures like Tom Ripley, Patricia Highsmith's, whose whole life is built on a lie, and they are comfortable living these sequences of lies, and they profit from the lies, and they seldom if ever get caught or punished, and they see the world as their play thing. Years and years and years ago, I did a TV series on evil for Channel 4, and we talked - I talked to one, I'm going to forget now, I think it was a psychotherapist, or a psycho analyst, who said the very factors that would make you a really good psychopath would also make you a good CEO of a business which is just you bend people to your will. You don't see them as being anything other than ants you can play with that you can get rid of. You can sack a thousand workers with a stroke of a pen and go home and sleep comfortably at night. There are lots of people out there who done that. There are people who worked in the death camps during world war 2 and would go home listen to Mozart, put their kids to bed and have a brandy. People can live the most

extraordinary lives, deceptive lives, and we find those figures in history, and in fiction, absolutely fascinating.

ALEX: We really do, don't we? We are drawn to this idea of lying. I wonder if it is to do with that idea that we can all live multiple lives, that we do all have multiple selves? We've got our best self and we've got the self that does things, Adele, that we're not awfully proud of.

ADELE: Yes, I think we do have that - you know, this thing about we do have the ability to be different things to different people. I mean you just are. If you're, I don't know, a parent to one person, a partner to another person, an employee to another person, and an employer to another person, you know, you have to behave in different ways to all four of those people, because otherwise you'll be a bit of a psychopath, to use Ian's idea. If you treated your children in exactly the same way as you treat adult colleagues, for example, it would - it isn't quite the same process. So, we are actually part of our socialisation is we are taught to be multi-faceted, and some people function very, very well in the world are multifaceted, but it doesn't mean it has to be the sacrifice of truth. I think one of the nicest compliments you receive is when you throw a party and you get your mates together, and they have all the same stories about you, or they all sort of think the same kind of thing, and your friends can mix. I always am suspicious of people who don't let their friends mix, because I think why? What have you said to that friend that that friend can't hear? Because it is going back to Alex's point of how you sort of root out the truth, I think that is one of the reasons you know somebody is lying to you: if they don't let you meet other people in their world, or way back when you're dating, if they don't let you meet their family, they've told you this about their family but don't let you meet them, but if you've told me, and it turns out to be true, that's fine. If you told me that it turns out to be something very different, it's a different story. So, I think it is a process we're people, and we are imperfect. We are just so imperfect, but that is how we are glorious, because we do keep trying. I think that is what is glorious about us, because, again, you know, it is very different if you're working in courts, I'm sure, but in my world, I see a lot of people trying very hard to be their best selves. And often failing.

ALEX: Yes. The lies we tell ourselves are perhaps the most pernicious of all. We are coming to a close now. I just wonder if I can ask each of you in your different, from your different positions of experience to tell our audience and indeed me, what your greatest way of sussing out a liar is. What is the best tell of a liar is? What do we think? Alex? You have this professionally every day.

ALEXANDRA: I was going to say we do this on a daily basis. For me, it's inconsistencies. Yes, I think, one of the good things about the criminal justice system is, you know, people have often written multiple statements, and one of the things I like to do is go through those and find all the inconsistencies, and you know, presenting someone with those inconsistencies, and often when there were a lot, someone just cracks. You know people do often then just crack and you find out that there is a lie there.

ALEX: If you're going to tell a story, you've got to make sure you don't deviate from it. What do you think, Ian?

IAN: I'm very bad at this. I once knew a congenital liar, and if the lie they told you accepted, they went for a bigger one next time and bigger one and a bigger one, until they're watching you accept the story they were giving you which was a complete tissue issue of howling lies. I just stumbled on the truth almost by accident. It took me months. I was completely taken in.

ALEX: So, you're no good! Adele, what about you?

ADELE: I was going to say exactly what Alex said. I think it's inconsistencies. You listen carefully, and you start to think, they said it was six months, and now they're saying it's three. It's things like that, or they said they travelled to Turkey, and they said they didn't have a holiday last year. People are inconsistent because if you tell the truth it is actually easier to remember because you lived through it. So that comes, that comes to you. But if you're making it up - especially if you're my age you can't remember what you did five minutes ago - so if you're making it up I literally can't, so if I'm making it up, I really am in trouble, but if it is true, I think I did do that, remember putting the kettle on.

ALEX: What we haven't discussed are people who are extremely gullible, and as someone who once played an entire game of pool believing as they had been told they had been given the left-handed cue, I feel I have absolutely nothing useful to add to this discussion. You have been so, so brilliant, Adele Parks, Ian Rankin, and Alex Wilson. Thank you so much for joining us this morning. It's been a brilliant start to the Big Book Weekend. Many thanks, all of you!