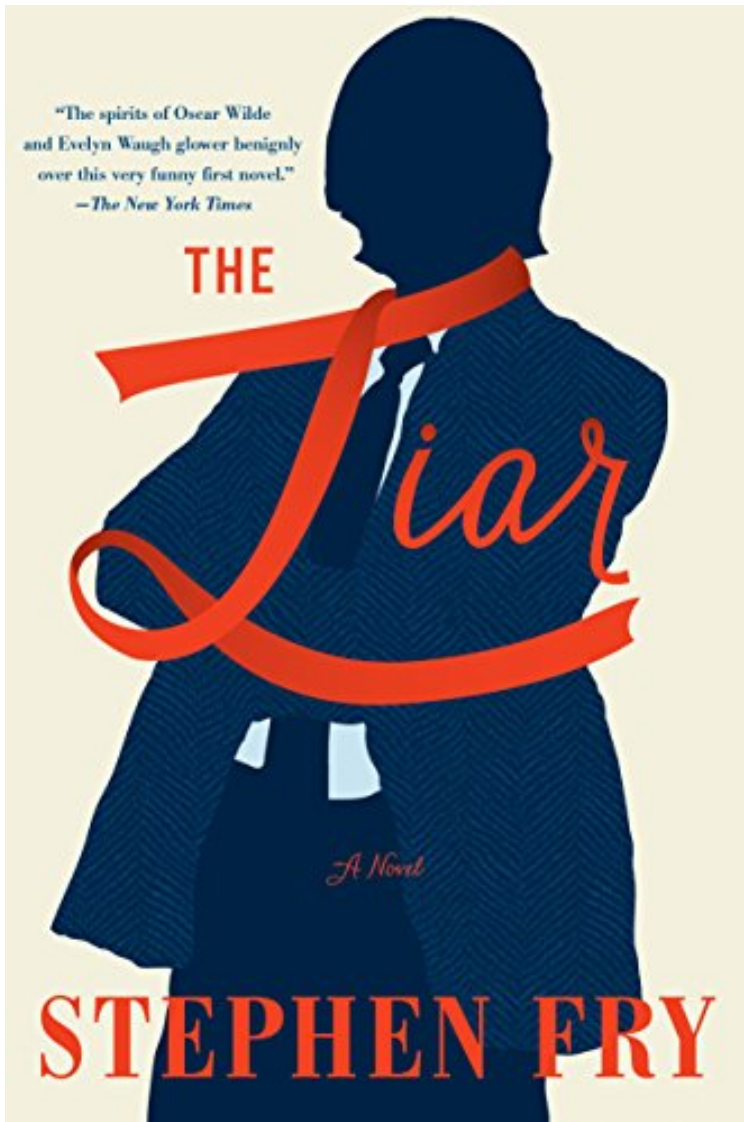


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# The Liar



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**Description :** Description du produitA chronic liar with few friends meets Professor Trefusis -- academic, broadcaster, polyglot and admirer of Elvis Costello -- and is led through an adventure that takes in Piccadilly rent-boys, a lost pornographic Dickens novel, international espionage and disgraceful scenes on a cricket field.

Prsentation de l'diteurStephen Fry's breathtakingly outrageous debut novel is by turns eccentric, shocking, brilliantly comic and achingly romantic.Adrian Healey loves to lie. He does it all the time. Every minute, every moment. And worse, he does it wonderfully, imaginatively, brilliantly. He lies to buck the system, to express his contempt for convention, but mostly because he just plain likes to. Its fun; its high camp. He invents a lost pornographic novel by Charles Dickens, and for himself a career as a Piccadilly rent boy hireable by the hour. But Adrians lies eventually bring realworld danger, as he finds himself caught up in the

machinations of a shadowy network that puts his own life at risk. A dazzling, outrageous first novel that has delighted liars everywhere. From the Trade Paperback edition.

Adrian checked the orchid at his buttonhole, inspected the spats at his feet, gave the lavender gloves a twitch, smoothed down his waistcoat, tucked the ebony Malacca-cane under his arm, swallowed twice and pushed wide the changing-room door. Ah, my dears, he cried. Congratulations! Congratulations to you all! A triumph, an absolute triumph! Well, what the fucks he wearing now? they snorted from the steamy end of the room. You're an arse and an idiot, Healey. Burkiss threw a flannel onto the shiny top hat. Adrian reached up and took it between forefinger and thumb. If there is the slightest possibility, Burkiss, that this flannel has absorbed any of the juices that leak from within you, that it has mopped up a single droplet of your revolting pubescent greases, that it has tickled and frothed even one of the hideously mired corners of your disgusting body then I shall have a spasm. I'm sorry but I shall. In spite of himself, Cartwright smiled. He moved further along the bench and turned his back, but he smiled. Now, girls, continued Healey, you're very high-spirited and that's as it should be but I won't have you getting out of hand. I just looked in to applaud a simply marvellous show and to tell you that you are certainly the loveliest chorus in town and that I intend to stand you all dinner at the Embassy one by one over the course of what I know will be a long and successful run. I mean, what kind of coat is that? It is called an astrakhan and I am sure you agree that it is absolutely the ratherest thing. You will observe it fits my sumptuous frame as snugly as if it were made for me . . . just as you do, you delicious Hopkinson. Oh shut up. Your whole body goes quite pink when you are flattered, like a small pig, it is utterly, utterly fetching. Adrian saw Cartwright turn away and face his locker, a locker to which Adrian had the key. The boy seemed now to be concentrating on pulling on his socks. Adrian took half a second to take a mental snapshot of the scrummy toes and heavenly ankle being sheathed by those lucky, lucky socks, a snapshot he could develop and pore over later with all the others that he had pasted into the private album of his memory. Cartwright wondered why Healey sometimes stared at him like that. He could sense it when he did, even when he couldn't see, he could feel those cool eyes surveying him with pity and contempt for a younger boy who didn't have so sharp a tongue, so acid a wit as almighty Healey. But there were others dumber than he was, why should Healey single him out for special treatment? Setting a spatted foot on the bench that ran down the middle of the changing room with elegant disdain, Adrian began to flip through a pile of Y-fronts and rigger shorts with his cane. I was particularly taken, he said, with that number in the first act when you and the girls from Marlborough stood in a line and jumped up at that funny leather ball. It was too utterly utter for words. Lord how I laughed when you let the Marlborough chorus run off with it . . . dear me, this belongs to someone who doesn't appear to know how to wipe his bottom. Is there a name tape? Madison, you really should pay more attention to your personal hygiene, you know. Two sheets of lavatory paper is all it takes. One to wipe and one to polish. Oh, how you skipped after that Marlborough pack, you blissful creatures! But they wouldn't give you the ball, would they? They kept banging it on the ground and kicking it over your lovely goalpost. It was the referee, said Gooderson. He had it in for us. Well whatever, Gooderson darling, the fact is that after this wonderful matinee performance there is no doubt that you are all going to become simply the toast of the town. Certain unscrupulous men may call upon you here in your dressingroom. They will lavish you with flowers, with compliments, with phials of Hungary water and methuselahs of the costliest champagne. You must be wary of such men, my hearts, they are not to be trusted. What, what will they do to us? They will take the tender flower of your innocence, Jarvis, and they will bruise it. Will it hurt? Not if it is prepared beforehand. If you come to my study this evening I will ready you for the process with a soothing unguent of my own invention. Wear something green, you should always wear green, Jarvis. Ooh, can I come too? said Rundell, who was by way of being the Tart of the House. And me! squeaked Harman. All are welcome. The voice of Robert Bennett-Jones bellowed from the showers. Just shut up and get bloody dressed. You're invited too, R.B.-J., didn't I make that clear? Bennett-Jones, hairy and squat, came out of the shower and stumped up to Adrian. Cartwright dropped his rigger shirt into the laundry bin and left the changing room, trailing his duffle bag along the ground. As the doors flapped behind him he heard Bennett-Jones's harsh baritone. You are disgusting, Healey, you know that? He should stay to hear Healey's magnificent put-down, but what was the point? They said that when Healey arrived he had got the highest ever marks in a scholarship entrance. Once, in his first term, Cartwright had been bold enough to ask him why he was so clever, what exercises he did to keep his brain fit. Healey had laughed. It's memory, Cartwright, old dear. Memory, the mother of the Muses . . . at least that's what thingummy said. Who? You know, what's his name, Greek poet chap. Wrote the Theogony . . . what was he called? Begins with an H.' Homer? No, dear. Not Homer, the other one. No, its gone.

Anyway. Memory, that's the key. Cartwright went into the House library and took down the first volume of the Chambers Encyclopaedia. He had still only got as far as Bismarck. In the changing room, Bennett-Jones snarled into Adrian's face. Just plain fucking disgusting. The others, some of whom had been peacocking about the room, stroking their towels round their napes like boas, staggered to guilty halts. You're a fucking queer and you're turning the whole House into fucking queers. Queer am I? said Adrian. They called Oscar Wilde a queer, they called Michelangelo a queer, they called Tchaikovsky a . . . And they were queers, said Sargent, another prefect. Well, yes, there is that, conceded Adrian, my argument rather falls down there I grant you, but what I say is this, my door is always open to you, R.B.-J., and to you as well, Sargent, naturally, and if either of you has any problems in coming to terms with your sexuality you mustn't hesitate to visit me and talk about it. Oh for God's sake We can thrash it out together. Personally I think it's your habit of dressing up in shorts and prancing about on a field and this bizarre obsession with putting your arms round the other members of the scrum and forcing your head between the bottoms of the back row that is at the root of this insane fixation. The lady doth protest too much, methinks. Let's fucking throw him out, said Sargent, advancing. Now I warn you, said Adrian, if either of you touches me . . . Yes? sneered Bennett-Jones. What'll you do? I shall sustain a massive erection, that's what, and I shan't be answerable for the consequences. Some kind of ejaculation is almost bound to ensue and if either of you were to become pregnant I should never forgive myself. This was just enough to bring the others down onto his side and have the prefects laughed into retreat. Well, my lovelies, I shall have to leave you now. I am promised to the Princess Despina this evening. A little baccarat after supper is my guess. She means to win back the Kurzenauer Emeralds. Jarvis, you have a stiffy, this is most unpleasant, someone throw some cold water over him. Goonight, Lou. Goonight, May. Goonight. Ta ta. Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night. English boarding schools have much to recommend them. If boys are going to be adolescent, and science has failed to come up with a way of stopping them, then much better to herd them together and let them get on with it in private. Six hundred suits of skin oozing with pustules, six hundred scalps weeping oil, twelve hundred armpits shooting out hair, twelve hundred inner thighs exploding with fungus and six hundred minds filling themselves with suicidal drivel: the world is best protected from this. For the good of society, therefore, Adrian Healey, like many Healeys before him, had been sent to a prep school at the age of seven, had proceeded to his public school at twelve and now, fifteen years old, he stood trembling with pubertal confusion on the brink of life. There was little to admire. The ravages of puberty had attacked his mind more than his skin, which was some kind of a blessing. From time to time a large, yellow-crowned spot would pop from his forehead, or a blackhead worm its way from the sweaty shelter of the side of his nose, but generally the complexion was good enough not to betray the hormonal crisis and mental havoc that boiled within and the eyes were wide and sensual enough for him to be thought attractive. Too smart at exam passing to be kept out of the Sixth Form, too disrespectful and dishonourable to be a prefect, he had read and absorbed more than he could understand, so he lived by pastiche and pretence. His constipation, furred tongue and foul-smelling feet were no more than conventional school attributes, passed down from generation to generation, like slang and sadism. Adrian might have been unorthodox, but he was not so blind to the proper decencies as to cultivate smooth-flowing bowels or healthy feet. His good nature prevented him from discovering the pleasures of bullying and his cowardice allowed him to ignore it in others. The great advantage of English public school life lies of course in the quality of tutelage it provides. Adrian had received a decent and broad English education in the area of his loins. Not all the credit for this could go to his schoolmasters, although a few of them had not been afraid to give practical guidance and instruction of a kind which would gladden the heart of those who believe that the modern teacher is slipshod in his approach to the Whole Boy. Mostly he had been given space to make his own way and learn his own lessons of the flesh. He had quickly happened upon the truth which many lonely contemporaries would never discover, the truth that everybody, simply everybody, was panting for it and could, with patience, be shown that they were panting for it. So Adrian grabbed what was to hand and had the time of his life genitally focusing exclusively on his own gender of course, for this was 1973 and girls had not yet been invented. His love life, however, was less happy. Earlier that afternoon he had worshipped at his altar in a private welter of misery that his public swagger never hinted at. It had been upstairs, in the Long Dorm. The room was empty, the floorboards squeaking more faintly than usual beneath his tread. Cartwright's cubicle had its curtain drawn. The distant moan of whistles and cheers on the Upper Games Field and the nearer bang of a downstairs door slamming shut had unsettled him. They were over-familiar, with a bogus, echoing quality, a staginess that put him on his guard. The whole school knew he was here. They knew he liked to

creep about the House alone. They were watching, he was convinced of it. The background shouts of rugger and hockey werent real, they were part of a taped soundtrack played to deceive him. He was walking into a trap. It had always been a trap. No one had ever believed in him. They signed him off games and let him think that he had the House to himself. But they knew, they had always known. Tom, Bullock, Heydon-Bayley, even Cartwright. Especially Cartwright. They watched and they waited. They all knew and they all bided their time until the moment they had chosen for his exposure and disgrace. Let them watch, let them know. Here was Cartwrights bed and under the pillow, here, yes, here the pyjamas. Soft brushed cotton, like Cartwrights soft brushed hair and a smell, a smell that was Cartwright to the last molecule. There was even a single gold hair shining on the collar, and there, just down there, a new aroma, an aroma, an essence that rippled outwards from the centre of the whole Cartwrightness of Cartwright. For Adrian other people did not exist except as extras, as bitplayers in the film of his life. No one but he had noted the splendour and agony of existence, no one else was truly or fully alive. He alone gasped at dew trapped in cobwebs, at spring buds squeaking into life. Afternoon light bouncing like a yo-yo in a stream of spittle dropping from a cows lips, the slum-wallpaper peel of bark on birches, the mash of wet leaves pulped into pavements, they grew and burst only in him. Only he knew what it was to love. Haaaaaaah . . . if they really were watching then now was the time to pull back the curtain and jeer, now was the time to howl contempt. But nothing. No yells, no sneers, no sound at all to burst the swollen calm of the afternoon. Adrian trembled as he stood and did himself up. It was an illusion. Of course it was an illusion. No one watched, no one judged, no one pointed or whispered. Who were they, after all? Lowbrowed, scarlet-naped rugger-buggers with no more grace andvision than a jockstrap. Sighing, he had moved to his own cubicle and laid out the astrakhan coat and top hat. If you cant join them, he thought, beat them. From Publishers Weekly Fry is a British polymath--actor, journalist, playwright--who is currently on view here as the eponymous hero of the Kenneth Branagh movie Peter's Friends . This book, his first novel, was a huge critical and popular success in Britain in both cloth and paperback, and it is surprising that the book has taken almost two years to make its way across the Atlantic. Perhaps part of the reason is its obsession with such arcanelly British things as public school life, Cambridge academia and cricket. But it is coruscatingly funny, often quite shocking and profoundly irreverent. Its hero is Adrian Healey, who assumes a wildly gay persona (and is one of the few Wilde imitators who can verbally live up to the original) but whose besetting problem is a lack of contact with reality. Everything he does and says is a sly concoction, from his outre behavior at school and college to his period as a male prostitute ("rent-boy") in London to his schoolteaching days and his eventual involvement, with his college tutor, in a bizarre espionage caper involving a Hungarian "truth machine." The plot is in fact deliberately confusing and quite inconsequential. The book is enjoyable for its verbal dexterity, its often filthy but usually hilarious jokes and its reckless high spirits. Some readers may flinch from its callousness; many more will find themselves helpless with laughter. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc.