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Rosie Storey
Dandelion
is Dead

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PART ONE: THE LIE

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1. Saturday, 5th April

Poppy

“Hey, lovely lady,” the man in the car called through his window. For a minute, maybe longer, he’d been crawling next to Poppy as she walked home.

Perhaps, if it had been dark, or if she hadn’t been on a road with such fancy houses and coiffed front gardens, Poppy would have presumed she was about to get abducted. Bundled into a boot and kept forever in a cellar on a dirty mattress, listening to a dripping tap. But it was two in the afternoon, and the houses on either side of the street probably had studies where mummies were in meetings talking about Content, or Wellness. And above them, four bedrooms where children called Arlo and Margot dreamed sweetly every night.

Besides, Poppy was naturally fearful – she’d been born a shade dweller, sprouting in the shadow of her raucous sister. She’d grown in the gaps where Dandelion was lacking, and where Dandelion flourished, Poppy had stayed, quite happily, small. But now she was sisterless and she needed to be braver. So she stopped walking and turned to the car.

Everything about the man in the driver's seat was grey and middling, including his suit, which had a subtle sheen. Poppy stepped off the curb and was about to say *Hello*, or something totally normal, but as she bent down – she saw his open fly.

Poppy dropped her phone and it smashed on the tarmac. She looked down at her phone, then she glanced at the man's penis, then up at a small teddy bear that was hanging from the rearview mirror. The teddy had its tongue out and was holding a faded heart with pink stitching that spelled *HUGME!* The two words forced together, conjoined into one.

If Dandelion had been there, she would have lurched her whole body through the open window and ripped the man's head off – Poppy could see her sister doing it – blood gushing up and out of him like a flock of birds in flight. Dandelion would have pointed and gargled a throatful of ridicule. Dandelion would have screamed, scratched, spat. Set his car alight.

Next to Poppy's face, the man was muttering. He maybe said *suck* and he definitely said *dick*.

"No," Poppy said very quietly, her eyes still on the teddy, then because she was gutless, she added, "But thanks."

The man floored the accelerator and drove off in a wheel spin with his penis freely lolling. Poppy crouched down to the road and turned over her phone – the screen had splintered into slithers and rainbowed like spilled petrol. It was beyond resuscitation; the buttons didn't work. She straightened then and squinted at the North London houses all painted perfect like a stage set, with wisteria winding over windows and clematis creeping around doors. The world was gross and could be glorious – but Poppy wasn't in it. Every day was just a circle, a loop she had to fall through. It had been two hundred and thirty-one days since Dandelion died and, somehow, it was spring again.

Poppy longed to feel the sun.

2. Sunday, 6th April

“Aloha?” Poppy called to the empty hallway of her sister’s flat.

Standing in the kitchen, she unwrapped magenta tulips she’d picked up from the florist on Newington Green, filled a glass jug with water, and nudged the stems around until their configuration pleased her.

“You’re welcome. I thought you’d like them,” she said, carrying the jug to Dandelion’s bedroom and unlocking it. She’d put the lock on so she could rent the flat out as a one bed and leave this room untouched, only the renting still hadn’t happened; she couldn’t bring herself to do it and, besides, she liked to be able to drop in, hang out, and, if need be, hide.

Often she brought flowers, the kind she knew her big sister would coo at: fat-headed dahlias, fleshy peonies, tulips in different pinks. Sometimes she put music on, pulling an unknown record from Dandelion’s vast collection. Or she’d sit with a drink and sink quietly through thought. Twice, both times in the last month, Poppy had stayed the night, sleeping in Dandelion’s bed, trying to dream not only that she was with her sister – but that she was her sister – stretching her own soul into Dandelion’s skin.

“I’ve just come for your phone.” Poppy placed the jug of tulips in the centre of the dressing table. Through the petals, she could see her reflection in the mirror, slithers of her sister too. “I dropped mine. Exactly, because of that man’s dick.”

From under the bed, she pulled out the box where Dandelion kept her old devices and nests of tangled cables. Her most recent phone was at the top; Poppy had put it there herself after she’d finished the death admin. The closing of bank accounts and resetting of passwords. Putting an *out of office* on Gmail – writing and rewriting the wording – composing what was, essentially, Dandelion’s *out of life*.

That whole phase had consumed the previous autumn, and at the time, Poppy hadn’t had the inclination to peruse her sister’s apps, the notes, her messages. She’d been in and out of the phone efficiently, tied up tight with shock. But now Poppy’s grief was a starvation, and so she sat on her sister’s Berber rug and scrolled back in time through the photo gallery, desperate to consume. She marvelled at the smiling faces, the dogs, the pubs, the birthdays, the dark blurs of dance floors, the artfully composed plates of food shot from above. There were so many pictures of Poppy, obviously. Their mother, nearly always in her Levi’s. Their dad – back when he could smile. There were photos, too, of Dandelion topless and looking alluring, pictures for her lovers.

“Sorry!” Poppy said, having found herself in an album full of nudes. She glanced up at the door as if Dandelion was already flying towards her, screaming, *Poppet! What the actual fuck?*

On the home screen, Poppy clicked into some of the apps: BBC Sounds, Instagram, Net-A-Porter. There was an app for tracking periods, another for tracking investments, and in the middle of them all an icon Poppy wasn’t sure about – a large black *H* in a stark white square. She lingered her thumb over it, then pressed down to find Dandelion in her sequined harlequin jumpsuit, halfway

through a cartwheel. She was at Glastonbury Festival, by The Park stage; Poppy recognised it immediately. She'd been there with her sister that year. In the background was the big colourful ribbon tower, a balding hill, some happily billowing flags. So this, Poppy realised, was Hinge – her sister's dating app. And here, the digital version of Dandelion was still alive, being cheeky. Securing likes.

Dandelion had shown Poppy some profiles of potential suitors before (mainly the funny ones), but Poppy had never seen her sister's actual profile, how she marketed herself. It was titled with three sentences that Poppy read a few times, her brain glitching on the facts that were now redundant: *Dandelion. 39. Does Not Want Kids.*

As well as the Glastonbury photo, there was a close-up of Dandelion in bed looking sleepy, her skin prickling pink like it did when she was just out of a hot bath. In the next one, she was in her neon seersucker swimsuit in a deck chair somewhere exotic, a (probable) Negroni in her hand. In the last picture, Poppy saw herself. It was from a recent-ish Halloween party; the two of them and their friend Jetta had dressed up in vintage Adidas and tucked all their hair up into short, curly wigs. They'd been characters from the film *The Royal Tenenbaums*; Dandelion was the dad (Ben Stiller), and Poppy and Jetta had been his two matching red-tracksuited little kids.

In Hinge's inbox, Dandelion had one hundred and seventy-three matches and countless messages. Poppy tapped on a few at random. First, a girl (too young) called Chloe, a dancer. Dandelion had never answered her Sup? To an electrician called Gerald, Dandelion had gone in with Gezza, tell me a joke. He'd come back with one about an Englishman an Irishman and a Scotsman, to which Dandelion had replied immediately: I no like, byebye!

As Poppy scrolled, it became apparent that her sister lied a lot, which was no enormous surprise. She told people she was an exotic

dancer and a firefighter and trilingual and super into roller blading – which caused Poppy to huff an appreciative laugh. She gave Hinge’s inbox one final, long swipe so that the names of tiny digital people careered past, like the bounty of a slot machine, before slowing and slowing and coming to rest on Jake.

JAKE –

14 March, 2024. 8:24pm:

Dandelion, (good name)

It’s weird but

I can feel

9:03pm:

Sorry.

my son woke up

He had a nightmare.

But was going to say –

I can feel your heat.

9:17pm:

(my son is three.

Split custody. No biggy)

The messages had been hanging, unanswered, for a year. Poppy liked the sound of Jake; she liked that he’d felt her sister’s heat.

It seemed highly possible that Jake’s main photo was a covert selfie, that he’d extended his arm and looked the other way as he’d taken the picture, pretending not to pose. In it, his hair was buzzed short and his eyes were closed, which maybe was the point, because it showed his eyelashes, top and bottom together, unusually thick

and pretty in his square-jawed face. In another picture, he was wearing a faded cap pushed back, his dark hair curled behind his ears. He had dimples, or maybe just the one dimple eddying into his right cheek. His profile said he was forty, but he dressed boyish; sweatshirts, worn-out jeans and trainers.

Mainly, the other men Poppy had seen on Hinge were topless in a toilet taking unsmiling selfies, or Lycra-clad and bulging, unsmiling on a bike. But Jake was playing Jenga with his son (captioned *My Little Bud*), and grinning wide and silly. In the cap picture, he was sitting with friends, holding craft beers in colourful cans on the crest of a hill, and the last shot wasn't even him, but a handsome sky at dusk.

From a nearby garden the gnawing of an engine started: a lawnmower or a chain saw. Poppy stood, and in front of the long mirror, she looked at herself and frowned. Throughout their whole lives, people had found the sisters to be confusingly similar. And, yes, Poppy knew their eyes (hair, complexion, voice, laugh) and, probably, skeletons, were ostensibly interchangeable, but she'd always felt the comparison to her sister to be overly generous, like comparing a Tuesday morning to a Friday night. Two and a half years older, Dandelion had been more attractive and more confident. More mischievous (nefarious, lightly evil). Later, more successful, pretty much running a hedge fund by the age of thirty-five. Consequently, Dandelion had been considerably more wealthy – bought her gorgeous flat with cash. Mainly, though, and ironically as it turned out, compared to Poppy and to anyone Poppy had ever met – Dandelion seemed more vital. She'd been filled with much more life.

Poppy smoothed her hair into a ponytail and stepped closer to her reflection. “Yes, thanks, I know I look like shit. I couldn't sleep, so I ran here.” She thought of her boyfriend then, waking on a Sunday morning to find her gone; he'd be brewing coffee and, quite

possibly, a sulk. “Anyway, better go. Thanks for the phone,” she said, through an inhale. Around her the room got bigger, gaped large and painful like an open wound.

In the hallway, Poppy locked the bedroom door and reread Jake’s messages. *I can feel your beat* kept catching like a splinter, though it didn’t hurt. It was more that the world hurt and this one line felt soothing. It was so true – Dandelion had been a wildfire. She’d ripped through life. She’d frazzled. Poppy closed her eyes and, next to her, she felt her sister scorching. She felt her sister nudging. Daring. “I guess I could . . .” Poppy whispered, and then she was typing through the trembles and they were back together – stealing lip gloss from Woolworths as teenagers. Smoking on the beach, leaning up against red rocks. They were stripping to their knickers and cliff jumping at sunset, falling, flailing, holding hands, catching a few seconds of HOLY FUCK airtime, before smacking hard through black.

DANDELION –

6th April, 2025. 8:26am:

Jake!

I’m sorry I’ve not messaged you

I was kind of busy

with, you know,

Life.

But now I’m here

I’m back.