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Faking It

Written by Lotte Daley

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Faking It

LOTTE DALEY



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To Ger, for making my dreams come true,
and to Ellen and Freddie – I love you

Chapter 1

'He broke up with you in a text message?!' my best friend Danielle shrieks down the phone at me. London traffic whizzes past her in the background.

'Are you being serious with me here, like, swear on his life serious?' she says, her voice going an octave higher with each word spoken.

'I'm being deadly serious,' I sniff, unable to control my tears. 'Jack . . . broke up . . . with . . . me!' I cry.

'When?' she says.

'Early this morning,' I sob.

There's a stunned silence from Danielle's end of the phone, aside from the sound of her lighting up a cigarette. I light one up too. I hear her puff before she continues to talk. 'Oh my God, Katie, that is totally un-cool of him, I can't believe anyone would do such a thing, in a text!'

I grab a tissue and blow my nose into it. 'I know, he's just, so . . . so mean!'

'Spineless!' Danielle replies.

'Horrible, nasty, cowardly!' I cry.

'Have you, like, got a decent explanation out of him?' Danielle queries.

'No, no I haven't. I've been repeatedly calling him all morning. He won't pick up. All I got was this pathetic text,' I cough and clear my throat. 'It said, "It's not you, it's me, I'm sorry, Katie".'

'That's it?'

'That's it,' I sob, 'nothing else! Does he think that I don't know what those words really, actually mean?' I pause, letting the words between us sink in.

Danielle waits expectantly for further shoutage on my part.

'We ALL know what "It's not you, it's me" means!' I sob. 'It means it IS you!' I begin to cry some more. 'It's meeeee!' I wail, almost choking myself with snot and tears.

'Shit . . .' Danielle says slowly, before adding, 'after everything you've done for him as well . . .'

With no clue as to why Jack had dumped me, my hysterical mind had begun to conjure up favourable reasons of absence to explain why he had left. I tore round the bedroom opening now half-empty drawers of our things and slinging back coat hangers in the wardrobe, searching for his clothes, and groaned aloud with each empty space that met me as further proof he'd gone. To keep myself momentarily sane, I wistfully imagined things that didn't involve me at all, which for a brief moment made me feel better. At least with an external disaster, he wouldn't have had a choice in the matter of leaving me. Aside from being abducted by aliens, a sudden death was the optimistic reason for explaining his departure.

I paced up and down my living room going over and over the time we last spent together, searching for clues whilst furiously speed-dialling his number. He must have had at least fifty missed calls. By 9am, two hours after the text, I was frantic. My calling had so far remained fruitless, as I was going straight through to his voicemail. His answerphone led me to stupidly hope against all odds

that this whole break-up text could actually be a hoax, and not him ignoring me, and that Jack could have been tumbled into the back of a van with a bin bag over his head on his way to work, bound and gagged, and his kidnapper was simply getting a sadistic kick out of hurting his poor girlfriend. I had visions of a man in a balaclava wielding a knife, ordering him to text me, to break my heart or have his bits chopped off and made into a soup. He'd be begging for mercy, 'Please no, don't do this to her, do anything you like to me, but not her . . .' whilst the kidnapping, murdering, female-hating man would bellow, 'Text or you die!' and then laugh in an evil way. Jack, of course, would have put up resistance to his heinous request and quite happily risked death by henchman. On second thoughts, he would never allow anything to go near his ridiculously good-looking face, or his £1,000 designer jacket. He'd willingly sacrifice me though, I thought, based upon this morning's efforts. I gave a heavy sigh and peeked out of the window. The street was filled with large vans and men wearing fashionable scarves and carrying cameras. Perhaps someone famous had moved into Lauriston Gardens? After all, the East End was always being touted as 'trendy' and 'up and coming' – which bits of it, I was still unclear, because to me personally, it made no sense. Last time I checked, I still had to dodge weird-looking men calling me 'darrrrling' with elongated Rs, asking for dates at the bus stop in broad daylight, when clearly, all they really wanted was a shag and to make a copy of my Visa. Not much different to Jack, then . . . sex and my Visa debit. I quickly drew the curtains to match my mood. In the reality of daylight, my whimsical fantasies of abduction and the like

became painfully embarrassing, but with the curtains closed and the lights dimmed, I could keep up the pretence, at least, until anyone called round. Thank God I hadn't told anyone what was really in my head – they'd be slinging me into the loony bin within a blink of an eye. Jack's phone was now ringing out . . . a painful stab of rage grappled with my heart, as I knew that this meant his earlier phone issues were a mixture of cowardice and lack of signal. He had probably emerged from the Tube by now and was not dead after all. In reality, I would hazard a guess that he was probably sitting at work, a shot of espresso in his hand, phone on silent, reading *The Times* and scratching his balls, without a care in the world.

As for me – I was inconsolable and it wasn't even lunchtime.

'Fucking men,' Danielle continues, between puffs of smoke. I could hear her heels clip-clopping down the street. 'What a loser with a capital L! Listen, I'm on Brick Lane about to get a bagel. Want one?'

'I can't eat, I'm stricken,' I moan. 'But bring me a soft cheese one with pastrami, just in case . . .'

'OK, I'll grab the food and then I am so on my way over, I'll bring the choc– OH MY GOD!!' she screams down the line, nearly deafening me.

'What? What is it?' I squeal back at her. 'Are you being mugged? Are there celebrities in Starbucks again? Is it Jack? Can you see Jack?'

There's nothing but silence for a few moments before a sharp intake of breath. 'Give me that!' she hisses to someone. 'I'm serious, it's a matter of urgency!' she shouts. I hear her whip something from the unknown person. A

few seconds pass before she says, 'I'm not being mugged, a credible celebrity hasn't been seen in Starbucks since forever and yes, Katie, my God, I've seen Jack all right!'

'Well, what's he doing?' I query. 'Who is he with, does he look OK, is he dead?'

'Oh my . . .' she says tepidly. I hear her rustling. 'Katie, he's not dead . . . what on earth . . . just please don't go anywhere until I get there, OK? Sorry, here's a tenner, keep the change. Just wait until I get there and I'll explain.' I hear her rushing out of the bagel shop and into the street.

'Why?' I question, losing my patience. 'It's like you totally know something I don't about Jack!' I had to know, I mean this was serious!

'TAXI!' she yells and I hear her getting into a cab. 'Can you take me to Lauriston Gardens please, number eight,' she says, 'and step on it!'

'Whoah, Danielle, I thought they only said that in films?' I attempt a laugh, but I'm still pretty freaked out by Danielle's emergency action.

'I'll be there as soon as I can, don't go anywhere!' she repeats breathlessly, and hangs up on me.

Puzzled, I stared at the phone for a few moments before laying it on the coffee table. Could Jack have left me for someone else? Is that what Danielle saw, him draped across the body of another woman on Brick Lane? I mean, he's hot for this little café down there that serves macrobiotic food and holds Bikram yoga classes on Wednesday evenings . . . but it was our haunt, he wouldn't dare take another girl to a place we go to together . . . no, that's just insane, especially as it's only been a couple of hours since we broke up.

If Jack was having an affair, I totally hadn't noticed. I sat on my sofa, in my house, which was now empty of any man-stuff and surveyed the room for clues. Everything Jack owned, which wasn't much aside from the designer clothes I bought him, appeared to be gone, and I wasn't even sure exactly when he'd moved out. As an up-and-coming actor, Jack Hunter was always on the go, schmoozing and boozing, living the dream, whilst I filed my life away in an office. I worked flat-out as an administrator in a PR company to fund his lifestyle, which meant he could take acting jobs which were largely low paid or unpaid. Jack was a man of extreme leisure, he moved at a slow pace, everything was 'chilled, man', and would be done 'in a minute'. He was hardly ever seen without his trademark Wayfarer shades on and if he tried to lie to me, his ears, which stuck out slightly, went bright red. Now I come to think about it, bits of his stuff had been missing over the past fortnight, just the little things, like his electric mouth-moulding, gentle-vibrate toothbrush that I liked to use when he wasn't looking, his Liberty hand cream that made my hands feel super smooth and his Louis Vuitton vanity case that I hoped he'd tire of because, to the outside world, the dial was hovering on the wrong side of the sexuality gay-o-meter. Jack was effeminate. He even wore light make-up to casting calls. He began to take his new man-bag that he begged me to buy him, made of real distressed leather, to work with him. He took it with him most mornings, instead of leaving his essentials lying around my bathroom, much to my annoyance. His stuff was way better than mine.

I must admit, I had noticed Jack was a lot quieter than usual, but I simply put it down to stress, after all, it's tough

trying to break into an industry that bases your entire worth on the symmetry of your face. I was, however, used to occasionally not being able to immediately get hold of him. His phone would sometimes be on silent or off altogether for castings and very important meetings with other semi-successful actors. It was rude, you see, to have it on, and apparently even ruder to take five measely minutes out to pacify your fretting girlfriend. As an actor, Jack was deep, he was brooding, and sometimes, if he didn't get a job he really wanted, he went into his metaphorical 'cave' (round to his mother's) and was impossible to talk to. Sometimes he'd stay there for days, with his phone off or on silent, and I would be left wondering if it was something I'd done wrong that prevented him from sending a simple 'hello, I'm fine!' text back to me.

After around six months of sitting on his backside in my house, learning how to throw his voice, he decided to make a bit of money for himself that didn't come from the Department of Work and Pensions. He took a part-time barista job in one of those organic patisseries in Primrose Hill. I told him to keep the small wage he took, otherwise he'd never begin to make a proper life for himself. He did this job for the flexibility it gave him to attend auditions for commercials and the fact that he didn't have to tire himself out working beyond sixteen hours, thus not affecting his benefits.

He had a part in the Hollywood bonkbuster *Cowgirls* with primadonna diva Jessica Hilson, star of numerous cheesy rom-coms, that was set for release this summer. It was, as far as I knew, a small part, but he hoped that this would be his big break. As a result of his experiences

rubbing shoulders with minor celebs on set for the past three months, he had developed a very noticeable swagger. He yearned to get closer to the A-list actors, especially Jessica Hilson, whom he idolized. He had the entire collection of *My Fabulous Life*, a fly-on-the-wall show which followed Jessica and her mega rich, gorgeous Italian boyfriend Fabio Matravers around the world with zillions of cameras, as they swanned about sunbathing on yachts, or schmoozing with celebrities at Cannes. They often jetted off to Mimi Sparkles beach hut in Honolulu. Mimi Sparkles is the name of Jessica Hilson's pet tiger who lives in her own personal mini jungle garden, with monkey helpers to cater to her needs. I was forever reading about Jessica and Fabio in *Sizzle Stars*, and then, when I reached for my gossip magazine's television guide, it would be missing. A hunt would ensue and I would find it either wedged down between the wall and my bed (Jack's side) or next to the toilet. Heaven knows what he was doing with it. Jack was desperate to get close to Jessica or any other A-lister, but failed because they always had an entire security system circulating them at all times on set and, as such, it was impossible to catch a glimpse of a manicured fingernail, let alone get close enough to introduce himself. I didn't really blame him for obsessing over various blonde starlets because when I did complain about it, he very rightly pointed out that if there was a slight chance of my coming into contact with Gerard Butler or Hugh Jackman in the stationery cupboard at work, I would probably faint on the spot and/or attempt some manhandling of said celebrity hunks into the nearest hotel room. Perhaps . . . I could dream, right?

Jack's cute dimples, his cheeky grin and his to-die-for skin tone caught the eye of at least a dozen older actresses who were partial to his effervescent charms. These actresses worked on neighbouring sets as the mothers of lithe young beauties in teen soaps. Jack never stepped out with the younger actresses – if he did, he'd find himself missing certain bits of his anatomy, because even I had my limits. Despite his protestations that those skinny minnies could open doors for him, I had my suspicions that the only doors that opened would be the ones to their bedrooms. I mean, I'm all for career progression, as long as it's kept in public view and with clothes firmly on bodies. Jack sniffed around the Cougars, the older ones who actually, in all fairness, could help him. They hadn't always worked on Z-list soaps, some of them had trodden the boards of the West End, some of them had even been in *Dynasty* and knew Joan Collins and everything! For those women, he would happily forsake lazy weekend mornings in bed with me to eat crumpets with them on Primrose Hill. He would laugh at their jokes and make them fall in love with him; he would compliment them to death whilst they fawned and simpered over him, flicking their Barbara Cartland curls and always footing the bill.

He always went to these breakfasts without me. Most girls I knew wouldn't let their boyfriends have as much free rein as I allowed Jack. But there was a very good reason why I did. He told me that his ex-girlfriend, Megan Vodianova, a Russian-born, feline-looking girl, was a total diva who ruined their relationship with her possessive, bunny-boiling behaviour. There was no way I would lose Jack Hunter, love of my life, for anything or anyone. Megan

was slender and beyond beautiful and worked as a fashion model. She had a small dog that she carried everywhere in her little handbag. She walked with a wiggle and had the most annoying laugh he said he'd ever heard. To me she sounded perfect, flawless, amazing. But he said she was an attention-seeking control freak who had to know where he was at all times or she would cry and scream in public and cut up his clothes. He couldn't even break wind without permission, and she always had to be on top. This led him into my arms . . . the girl who was happy to take a back seat, who would give him a knee-lift up on to his shiny pedestal and who would let him fart to his heart's content. I would hold his mirror up for him so he could check his hair wasn't out of place, I carried his vanity case for him on his weekend casting calls and I organized his life with practical precision. But most of all, after Jack had almost shed a tear recounting the trials and tribulations of his awful life with Megan one day, I had decided there and then that I would be the opposite of Megan Vodianova in every single way.

This wasn't hard, as Megan Vodianova flaunted a size eight perma-tanned body with two giant stuck-on boobs, and nails that looked like teeth veneers growing from her fingertips. Her hair was so white it was blinding to look at. I was more mouse-blonde, wore a 34B bra and went red in the sun before peeling. Bah, I was her opposite. In terms of what I could do for Jack that was different to Megan, I was the better option by far. For one thing, I would support him and never ever question his whereabouts. I would be an ultra-modern girlfriend, and that

would make him love me more, right? After all, I wasn't clipping his wings to keep him with me. Since meeting in the staff canteen where I work two and a half years ago – he had taken a casual job washing pots – I, unlike Megan, had displayed wondrous perfect-girlfriend traits, such as the ability to be ultra understanding of his obsessions with female megastars such as Jessica Hilson, Sharon Stone, Madonna and the lesser known female cast of *Hollyoaks*. I was incredibly loyal, faithful, great in bed and paid for everything so he didn't have to do that grotty job after about a nanosecond of our second date. I was mesmerized by his energy, his big ideas and his dreams. I fell in love harder than I ever thought possible, and Jack swore he felt the same way too. Within a month, he had moved into my house in Bethnal Green and we'd bought our cat, Grum.

The only thing that bugged me about Jack was that he was a bit thick. I couldn't have a joke with him without explaining the punchline, in great detail. Also, as he spent the only free time I had to spend with him, without me, out gallivanting with other women on the weekends, and frequenting underground West End bars where he had no signal on his mobile to reply to my texts – where did that leave me? I sat happily at home revelling in my supporting role, comfortable and relaxed, eating biscuits and watching *EastEnders*. Now you could easily forgive a girl for getting fed up with never seeing her boyfriend, but when he reappeared in the early hours of the morning gently singing my favourite songs, 'our songs', I would melt and passionately snog him until his lips fell off. Then we'd have sex and it would be oh so worth it.

In general, I didn't mind paying for his nights out or for his new expensive boots with the slight heel to give him extra height, if it helped him secure his dream of becoming a household name. I had faith in him, and he promised to repay me when he hit the big time. Besides, he did other things for me which more than made up for my giant credit card bills. For example, it was thanks to him that I not only got to see Orlando Bloom in the flesh, but also got his autograph on a coffee cup. Orlando popped into Jack's work for a drink incognito, or so he thought. Jack immediately texted a picture of him sipping his drink in the corner with his cap pulled firmly down and I hopped on the Tube from work to catch him in action. The location of Jack's work in Primrose Hill meant that lots of cool celebrities chose his café to sip their coffees and read their books, which meant I'd seen plenty of famous folk I admired so much they'd made me giddy. So, Jack staying out late and acting erratic was not unusual for him. Anyway, he couldn't possibly be having an affair, we were still having sex. And he still laughed at my jokes, made me cups of tea and thoughtfully recorded Jeremy Kyle for me when I was at work. Any signs or distant behaviour I may have worried about were quickly wiped out by a longing glance over dinner or a cuddle before bed on the nights he wasn't out partying. Sometimes, I would joke that he was having it off with his agent, a shifty-looking cockney geezer named Joel Farthing, who, in my opinion, was a bad influence on Jack, leading him into Soho peep shows and the like. I hadn't seen his ears go red since I asked him if he liked my mother after their first meeting. He said he simply adored her, but his ears told a totally different

story. He knows now that he can't lie to me and get away with it.

I was still racking my brain as to why he'd walked out on me, and also why Danielle shot out of the bagel shop, down the street and into the taxi faster than the day we went to see Michael Jackson live – God rest his soul – and had to race to the front to catch backstage passes. I decided to go and make a cup of tea, as that normally solved most things. En route to the kitchen I flicked the TV on and whistled the theme tune to the news as I opened a packet of biscuits.

The presenter's chirrupy voice was drowned out by the sing-song of my old-style, boil-on-the-hob kettle. I tapped my foot impatiently on the kitchen floor as I waited for Danielle to appear at the door with details of her mysterious sighting of the elusive Jack Hunter. I poured the milk into my mug and accidently dropped my spoon on the floor. I bent over to get it and as I resumed a standing position, I glanced over at the telly and received the biggest shock of my life . . .

Large as you like, there he was, his tousled dark hair falling slightly over one eye, winking at the camera. There was no mistaking the sight of Jack's face grinning back at me, in full Technicolor widescreen. He was plastered all over my 52-inch plasma man-telly that he begged me to buy, right alongside a picture of mega famous A-list actress Jessica Hilson! The two pictures next to one another looked like glamorous mugshots. A flashing caption read: LOVE SHOCKER! JESSICA HILSON CAUGHT CANOODLING WITH MYSTERY MAN!

'That's my mystery man!' I managed to squeak. According to last week's *Sizzle Stars*, Jessica was still with her

billion-dollar boyfriend, Italian shipping heir Fabio Matravers! Swoon! He was the epitome of suave glamour. What was she thinking?

In slow motion, my mouth agape, I dropped the teacup in horror. Grum sprinted out of the way of the shards of china bouncing in all directions off the kitchen floor. The milk splashed all over the counter top, spilling down the sides like a milky waterfall coming to rest in a puddle by my feet. I stood absolutely gobsmacked with a teaspoon in my hand. I strained to hear what the presenter was saying.

A slinky yet serious-looking blonde sits next to a man with a beard in a bright suit jacket on a sofa with this morning's newspapers fanned out on the table in front of them. She stares vacantly ahead as she appears to process information being sent into her earpiece. Pictures of Jack's face, hand up at the camera, Jessica Hilson's head under his armpit in an attempt to duck for cover from baying paparazzi, were clearly visible on at least two front pages. So he finally got his chance, then, I screamed inwardly.

'We've just had news in right this second that Jessica Hilson's mystery guy is an actor.'

'Actor?' I squealed at the television. 'If you count one line in *Emmerdale* and multiple walk-on parts in crappy movies that went straight to DVD,' I fumed.

The presenter continued: 'His name is Jack Hunter . . . worked with her on *Cowgirls*, which is set to smash the box office in July.'

The words became blurred in my head as the two presenters effectively joked about the scandal that is my boyfriend leaving me for an impossibly thin blonde actress with supermodel looks who carries designer bags that are

worth more than anything I have ever owned! It's the stuff of nightmares! I hear the words 'his girlfriend', 'wouldn't want to be in her shoes' and 'affair' before I almost lose the will to live. I could have died right there and then on my kitchen floor had I not needed to gather absolutely every single shred of information about this, this betrayal! As if I didn't have content for at least five nightmares already this week, this has to happen.

'OH MY GOD!' I screamed, as the next picture showed the familiar window box in front of my house! My house was on bloody national television. Christ, I was in my house, shit, could anyone see in? My heart racing, I quickly looked either side of me, and thanked God that my curtains were still drawn. This meant the whole of the UK thankfully couldn't see me, humiliated Katie Lewis who was heartbroken, bedraggled and with no make-up on to speak of, aside from faint mascara trails that lay upon my cheeks. I was now hideously aware of my unfashionable tartan pyjamas that my nan had bought me last Christmas. I quickly moved towards the kitchen window and pulled the blind down before running upstairs and doing the same in my bedroom and bathroom. Fuck, what on earth is going on? Why is he with Jessica Hilson? I raced downstairs and continued to gawp at the screen but the images of my house, his face and her highness had been replaced with the weather. I moved into the hallway and sat down with the cat in my arms and my back against the front door and tried to process what was going on. I could hear people talking outside on the pavement.

'Yes, dear, the lad lived in there with Katie, lovely girl . . . why do you ask?' I could clearly hear Mrs Bellamy

from next door shimmy along on her electric wheelchair to whoever was asking her the questions, presumably a reporter. Now I understood why those vans were parked on my road, they were news teams reporting back to BBC-bloody-Breakfast about my stupid boyfriend and this ridiculous charade! It's one thing for your boyfriend to leave you, but another thing altogether if your neighbours are getting a first-hand, warts-and-all, blow-by-blow account of it. My street hadn't seen this much dramatic action since the Blitz. All of a sudden, there was a knock on the door and the sound of someone crouching down to my level on the other side.

'Katie Lewis?' a woman's voice said authoritatively through my letterbox. 'My name's Pippa Strong from *London Lowdown*. I'm looking for your comments regarding the relationship between Jack Hunter and Hollywood hot property, Jessica Hilson?' I shirked backwards and attempted to flatten myself against the wall so she couldn't see me. My heart was racing like the clappers. Relationship? So it's true, really, actually true? No, it simply can't be, the papers make stuff up all the time, especially the tabloids – secrets, lies and Paris Hilton sex tapes. No, this was just some hideous mistake. Not my Jack! The bed was barely cold, the sheets still had his stray pubes lying in them, and his organic water-activating, mineral-particles facecloth was still in my bathroom. He'd never up sticks without that.

'Shove it, bozo,' a familiar voice said, as the reporter with her big nose shoved firmly in my letterbox went flying.

'I'll have you for assault!' Pippa squealed. I opened the door gingerly to Danielle, wearing my giant comedy pink

heart-shaped shades I'd found underneath the radiator whilst sitting on the floor. Jessica Hilson wasn't the only one who could do glamour! The glasses did a good job of almost obscuring most of my features. 'This is harassment and I'm a lawyer!' Danielle screamed, with such velocity that Pippa, who had now come forwards again to get a glimpse of me, jerked her head right back as though she was a tortoise retreating into her shell. She said nothing as Mrs Bellamy and other assorted neighbours of pension-drawing age and a couple of mumsy types who had no doubt spied their houses on TV gathered before my gate as though they were witnessing a macabre accident.

'Nothing to see here OK, so beat it!' Danielle continued to bark at them all, as I stood aside to let her in. Closing the door, double-locking it and sticking on the chain that I only use when I'm on my own overnight, I sank to the floor and cried big, fat, salty tears.

'Shh,' Danielle soothed. 'It's OK,' and she took me into her arms for a much-needed hug.

'I was hoping I would get here before that lot,' Danielle said sullenly, as she gestured towards the window.

My mouth was still hanging slightly open as I tried to process this morning's insanity. Last night, Jack was here, in my house, eating spaghetti bolognaise and watching *Antiques Roadshow* whilst I sat next to him on the sofa, polishing off a bottle of red. He left around 9pm to go and nurse his sick mother who had a cold that wouldn't budge. He was worried that she had pneumonia and therefore would need to take a rather large bag for an extended stay. *Did I mind?* he asked, chivalrously. *No, darling.* How could I refuse that beautiful face?

'I need a biscuit,' was all I could say, as I realized now exactly when Jack had left me. Coward that he is couldn't even tell me about Jessica Hilson, had to let the world tell me. On the inside, a zillion and one questions were pummelling my weary head from every direction.

'OK,' Danielle said to me, opening the chocolate digestives. She handed them to me, staring at my face, looking for clues as to how I felt.

'I have to know everything,' I said quietly.