

International bestselling author of *Sometimes I Lie*

ALICE FEENEY

If there are two sides to every story,
someone is always lying.

HIS AND HERS



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a run for its money’
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‘Devoured it in almost one go... a twisty, gripping, clever, brilliant read’
Karen Hamilton

‘Twisty and gripping’
Jane Fallon

ALICE FEENEY is a writer and journalist. She spent fifteen years at the BBC, where she worked as a reporter, news editor, arts and entertainment producer and *One O'Clock News* producer.

Her debut novel, *Sometimes I Lie*, was a *New York Times* and international bestseller. It has been translated into over twenty languages and is being made into a TV series by Ellen DeGeneres and Warner Bros. starring Sarah Michelle Geller.

Alice has lived in London and Sydney and has now settled in the Surrey countryside, where she lives with her husband and dog. *His & Hers* is her third novel.

Also by Alice Feeney

*Sometimes I Lie
I Know Who You Are*

His & Hers

Alice Feeney



ONE PLACE. MANY STORIES

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For Them.

Contents

[Cover](#)

[Praise](#)

[About the Author](#)

[Also by Alice Feeney](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Note to Readers](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Her](#)

[Him](#)

[Her](#)

Him

Her

Six Months Later

Him

Her

Him

Her

Acknowledgements

[Reading Group Questions](#)

[Extract](#)

[About the Publisher](#)

It wasn't love at first sight.

I can admit that now. But by the end, I loved her more than I thought it was possible to love another human being. I cared about her far more than I ever cared about myself. That's why I did it. Why I had to. I think it's important that people know that, when they find out what I've done. If they do. Perhaps then they might understand that I did it for her.

There is a difference between being and feeling alone, and it is possible to miss someone and be with them at the same time. There have been plenty of people in my life: family, friends, colleagues, lovers. A full cast of the usual suspects that make a person's social circle, but mine has always felt a little bent out of shape. None of the relationships I have ever formed with another human being feel real to me. More like a series of missed connections.

People might recognise my face, they may even know my name, but they'll never know the real me. Nobody does. I've always been selfish with the true thoughts and feelings inside my head; I don't share them with anyone. Because I can't. There is a version of me I can only ever be with myself. I sometimes think the secret to success is the ability to adapt. Life rarely stays the same, and I've frequently had to reinvent myself in order to keep up. I learned how to change my looks, my life... even my voice.

I also learned how to fit in, but constantly trying to do so is more than just uncomfortable now, it hurts. Because I don't. Fit. I fold my jagged edges inside myself, and smooth over the most obvious differences between us, but I am not the same as you. There are over seven billion people on the planet, and yet I have somehow managed to spend a lifetime feeling alone.

I'm losing my mind and not for the first time, but sanity can often be lost and found. People will say that I snapped, lost the plot, came unhinged. But when the time came it was – without doubt – the right thing to do. I felt good about myself afterwards. I wanted to do it again.

There are at least two sides to every story:

Yours and mine.

Ours and theirs.

His and hers.

Which means someone is always lying.

Lies told often enough can start to sound true, and we all sometimes hear a voice inside our heads, saying something so shocking, we pretend it is not our own. I know exactly what I heard that night, while I waited at the station for her to come home for the last time. At first, the train sounded just like any other in the distance. I closed my eyes and it was like listening to music, the rhythmic song of the carriages on the tracks getting louder and louder:

Clickety-click. Clickety-click. Clickety-click.

But then the sound started to change, translating into words inside my head, repeating themselves over and over, until it was impossible not to hear:

Kill them all. Kill them all. Kill them all.

Her

*Anna Andrews
Monday 06:00*

Mondays have always been my favourite day.

The chance to start again.

A clean enough slate with just the dust of your own past mistakes still visible, almost, but not quite wiped away.

I realise it's an unpopular opinion – to be fond of the first day of the week – but I'm full of those. My view of the world tends to be a little tilted. When you grow up sitting in life's cheap seats, it's too easy to see behind the puppets dancing on its stage. Once you've seen the strings, and who pulls them, it can be hard to enjoy the rest of the show. I can afford to sit where I want now, choose any view I like, but those fancy-looking theatre boxes are only good for looking down on other people. I'll never do that. Just because I don't like to look back doesn't mean I don't remember where I came from. I've worked hard for my ticket and the cheap seats still suit me fine.

I don't spend a lot of time getting ready in the mornings – there is no point putting on make-up, just for someone else to take it off and start again when I get to work – and I don't eat breakfast. I don't eat much at all, but I do enjoy cooking for others. Apparently, I'm a feeder.

I stop briefly in the kitchen to pick up my Tupperware carrier, filled with homemade cupcakes for the team. I barely remember making them. It was late, definitely after my third glass of something dry and white. I prefer red but it leaves a tell-tale stain on my lips, so I save it for weekends only. I open the fridge and notice that I didn't finish last night's wine, so I drink what is left straight from the bottle, before taking it with me as I leave the

house. Monday is also when my rubbish gets collected. The recycling bin is surprisingly full for someone who lives alone. Mostly glass.

I like to walk to work. The streets are pretty empty at this time of day, and I find it calming. I cross Waterloo Bridge and weave my way through Soho towards Oxford Circus, while listening to the *Today* programme. I'd prefer to listen to music, a little Ludovico perhaps or Taylor Swift depending on my mood – there are two very different sides to my personality – but instead I endure the dulcet tones of middle-class Britain, telling me what they think I should know. Their voices still feel foreign to my ears, despite sounding like my own. But then I didn't always speak this way. I've been presenting the BBC *One O'Clock News* bulletin for almost two years, and I still feel like a fraud.

I stop by the flattened cardboard box that has been bothering me the most recently. I can see a strand of blonde hair poking out the top, so I know she's still there. I don't know who she is, only that I might have been her had life unfolded differently. I left home when I was sixteen because it felt like I had to. I don't do what I'm about to do now out of kindness; I do it because of a misplaced moral compass. Just like the soup kitchen I volunteered at last Christmas. We rarely deserve the lives we lead. We pay for them however we can, be it with money, guilt, or regret.

I open the plastic carry case and put one of my carefully constructed cupcakes down on the pavement, between her cardboard box and the wall, so that she'll see it when she wakes. Then, worried she might not like or appreciate my chocolate frosting – for all I know she could be diabetic – I take a twenty-pound note from my purse and slide it underneath. I don't mind if she spends my money on alcohol; I do.

Radio 4 continues to irritate me, so I switch off the latest politician lying in my ears. Their over-rehearsed dishonesty doesn't fit with this image of real people with real problems. Not that I'd ever say that out loud or on-air during an interview. I'm paid to be impartial regardless of how I feel.

Maybe I'm a liar too. I chose this career because I wanted to tell the truth. I wanted to tell the stories that mattered most, the ones that I thought people needed to hear. Stories that I hoped might change the world and make it a better place. But I was naïve. People working in the media today have more power than politicians, but what good is trying to tell the truth about the world when I can't bear to be honest about my own story: who I am, where I came from, what I've done.

I bury the thoughts like I always do. Lock them in a secure secret box inside my head, push them to the darkest corner right at the back, and hope they won't escape again any time soon.

I walk the final few streets to Broadcasting House, then search inside my handbag for my ever-elusive security pass. My fingers find one of my little tins of mints instead. It rattles in protest as I flip it open and pop a tiny white triangle inside my mouth, as though it were a pill. Wine on my breath before the morning meeting is best avoided. I locate my pass and step inside the glass revolving doors, feeling several sets of eyes turn my way. That's OK. I'm pretty good at being the version of myself I think people want me to be. At least on the outside.

I know everyone by name, including the cleaners still sweeping the floor. It costs almost nothing to be kind and I have a very efficient memory, despite the drink. Once past security – a little more thorough than it used to be, thanks to the state of the world we have curated for ourselves – I stare down at the newsroom and it feels like home. Cocooned inside the basement of the BBC building, but visible from every floor, the newsroom resembles a brightly lit red-and-white open-plan warren. Almost every available space is filled with screens and tightly packed desks, with an eclectic collection of journalists sitting behind each one.

These people aren't just my colleagues, they're like a dysfunctional surrogate family. I'm almost forty years old, but I don't have anyone else. No children. No husband. Not anymore. I've worked here for almost twenty years but, unlike those with friends or family connections, I started right at the bottom. I took a few detours along the way, and the stepping-stones to success were sometimes quite slippery, but I got where I wanted to be, eventually.

Patience is the answer to so many of life's questions.

Serendipity smiled at me when the previous presenter of the programme left. She went into labour a month early, and five minutes before the lunchtime bulletin. Her waters broke and I got my lucky break. I'd just come back from maternity leave myself – earlier than planned – and was the only correspondent in the newsroom with any presenting experience. All of which was overtime and overnight – the shifts nobody else wanted – I was that desperate for any opportunity that might help my career. Presenting a network bulletin was something I had been dreaming of my whole life.

There was no time for a trip to hair and make-up that day. They rushed me on set and did what they could, powdering my face at the same time as they miked me up. I practised reading the headlines on the autocue, and the director was calm and kind in my earpiece. His voice steadied me. I don't remember much about that first half-hour programme, but I do recall the congratulations afterwards. From newsroom nobody to network presenter in less than an hour.

My boss is called The Thin Controller behind his slightly hunched back. He's a small man trapped inside a tall man's body. He also has a speech impediment. It prevents him from pronouncing his *Rs*, and the rest of the newsroom from taking him seriously. He has never been good at filling gaps on rotas so, after my successful debut, he decided to let me fill in until the end of that week. Then the next. A three-month contract as a presenter – instead of my staff position – swelled into six, after that it was extended to the end of the year accompanied by a nice little pay rise. Viewing figures went up when I started presenting the programme, so I was allowed to stay. My predecessor never returned; she got pregnant again while on maternity leave and hasn't been seen since. Almost two years later, I'm still here and expect my latest contract to be renewed any day.

I take my seat between the editor and the lead producer, then clean my desk and keyboard with an antibacterial wipe. There is no telling who might have been sitting here overnight. The newsroom never sleeps, and sadly not everyone in it adheres to my preferred level of hygiene. I open up the running order and smile; it still gives me a little thrill to see my name at the top:

Newsreader: Anna Andrews.

I start writing the intros for each story. Despite popular opinion, presenters don't just *read* the news, we write it. Or at least *I* do. Newsreaders, like normal human beings, come in all shapes and sizes. There are several who have crawled so far up their own arses I'm amazed they can still sit down, let alone read an autocue. The nation would be appalled if they knew how some of their so-called national treasures behaved behind the scenes. But I won't tell. Journalism is a game with more snakes than ladders. Getting to the top takes a long time, and one wrong move can land you right back down at the bottom. Nobody is bigger than the machine.

The morning breezes by just like any other: a constantly evolving running order, conversations with correspondents in the field, discussions with the director about graphics and screens. There is an almost permanent queue of reporters and producers waiting to talk to the editor beside me. More often than not, to request a longer duration for their package or two-way.

Everyone always wants just a little more time.

I don't miss those days at all: begging to get on-air, constantly fretting when I didn't. There simply isn't time to tell every story.

The rest of the team are unusually quiet. I take a quick look to my left, and notice that the producer has the latest rota up on her screen. She closes it down as soon as she sees me looking. Rotas are second only to breaking news when it comes to increasing stress levels in the newsroom. They come out late and rarely go down well, with the distribution of the most unpopular shifts – lates, weekends, overnights – always cause for contention. I work Monday to Friday now, and haven't requested any leave for over six months, so, unlike my poor colleagues, there is nothing rota-shaped for me to worry about.

An hour before the programme, I visit make-up. It's a nice place to escape to, relatively peaceful and quiet compared with the constant noise of the newsroom. My hair is blow-dried into an obedient chestnut bob, and my face is covered with HD-grade foundation. I wear more make-up for work than I did for my wedding. The thought forces me to retreat inside myself for a moment, and I feel the ridge of indentation on my finger, where my ring used to be.

The programme goes mostly according to plan, despite a few last-minute changes while we are on-air: some breaking news, a delayed TV package, a camera with a mind of its own in the studio, and a dodgy feed from Washington. I'm forced to wrap up an over-enthusiastic political correspondent in Downing Street, one who regularly takes up more than their allotted time. Some people like the sound of their own voices a little too much.

The debrief begins while I'm still on set, waiting to say goodbye to viewers after the weather segment. Nobody wants to hang around any longer than absolutely necessary after the programme, so they always start without me. It's a gathering of correspondents and producers who worked

on the show, but is also attended by representatives of other departments: home news, foreign news, editing, graphics, as well as The Thin Controller.

I swing by my desk to collect my Tupperware carrier before joining everyone, keen to share my latest culinary creations with the team. I haven't told anyone that it's my birthday today yet, but I might.

I make my way across the newsroom towards them, and stop briefly when I see a woman I don't recognise. She has her back to me, with two small children dressed in matching outfits by her side. I notice the cute cupcakes my colleagues are already eating. Not homemade – like mine – but shop-bought and expensive-looking. Then I return my attention to the woman handing them out. I stare at her bright red hair, framing her pretty face with a bob so sharp it could have been cut with a laser. When she turns and smiles in my direction it feels like a slap.

Someone passes me a glass of warm prosecco, and I see the drinks trolley that management always orders from catering whenever a member of staff leaves. It happens a lot in this business. The Thin Controller taps his glass with an overgrown fingernail, then he starts to speak, strange-sounding words tumbling out of his crumb-covered lips.

‘We can't wait to welcome you back...’

It's the only sentence my ears manage to translate. I stare at Cat Jones, the woman who presented the programme before I did, standing there with her beautiful little girls and trademark red hair. I feel sick.

‘... and our thanks to Anna of course, for taking the helm while you were away.’

Eyes are turned and glasses are raised in my direction. My hands start to tremble, and I hope my face is doing a better job of hiding my feelings.

‘It was on the rota, I'm so sorry, we all thought you knew.’

The producer standing next to me whispers the words but I'm unable to form a reply.

Afterwards, the Thin Controller also apologises. He sits in his office, while I stand, and stares at his hands while he speaks, as though the words he is struggling to find might be written on his sweaty fingers. He thanks me, and tells me that I've done a great job filling in for the last...

‘Two years,’ I say, when he doesn't appear to know or understand how long it has been.

He shrugs as though it were nothing.

‘It is *her* job, I’m afraid. She has a contract. We can’t sack people for having a baby, not even when they have two!’

He laughs.

I don’t.

‘When does she come back?’ I ask.

A frown folds itself onto the vast space that is his forehead.

‘She comes back tomorrow. It’s all on the...’ I watch as he tries and fails to find a substitute for the word *rota*, like anything beginning with the letter *R*. ‘... it’s all on the *wota*, has been for some time. You’re back on the correspondent desk, but don’t worry, you can still fill in for her, and present the programme during school holidays, Christmas and Easter, that sort of thing. We all think you did a terrific job. Here’s your new contract.’

I stare down at the crisp white sheets of A4 paper, covered in carefully constructed words from a faceless HR employee. My eyes only seem able to focus on one line:

News Correspondent: Anna Andrews.

As I step out of his office, I see her again: my replacement. Although I suppose the truth is that I was only ever hers. It’s a terrible thing to admit, even to myself, but as I look at Cat Jones with her perfect hair and perfect children, standing there chatting and laughing with *my* team, I wish she was dead.