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Opening extract from

Dandelion Clocks

Written by

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Three Months After

I sometimes think about the box buried deep at the back of my wardrobe and wonder if I'll ever open it up again. I wonder if her soul is in there, desperate to get out and be free. I wonder what she'd say to me if she could see how I've become – but I don't think about this for too long because I think I know what she'd say and I don't agree with her. To laugh, to enjoy, to live is to forget – and I will never forgive myself if I allow that to happen. And actually, she left me so she doesn't get a chance to have an opinion. If she wanted to have a say in how I live my life then she should have stayed, shouldn't she? She shouldn't have left me alone with a box of old, rubbish diaries that are no use to me at all.

She shouldn't have gone.

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Thirteen Weeks Before

If it were possible to actually die of embarrassment, then right now, I would be officially *dead*. There should be some sort of Charter, or human rights Act, that stops every mum from behaving as if she is the first person in the world to become a mother. It's like my mum has no idea that women the world over have been parenting forever and have not felt the need to interfere in every teeny little detail of a child's life. People grow up every day, even without their interfering mothers and their totally unwanted help and 'advice'.

I so nearly got away with it as well. I've been planning for ages and saving my allowance so that I didn't have to ask Mum or Dad for extra – I knew they'd go mental if they thought that I'd gone against their wishes *and* got them to pay for it into the bargain.

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I'd done all my research – which wasn't that hard as the only place in this miserable town that you can get your ears pierced is Hair & Things, a totally lame girly shop that sells jewellery and hairbands and lots and lots of pots of nail varnish in neon colours – and Alice called for me this morning as we'd agreed.

When we got to the shop there was a queue. I started to feel a bit nervous and wished I'd brought my camera. Taking photos always clears my mind of everything else and the girl waiting in front of me had this amazing purple and pink hair that would have made a brilliant photograph. Alice told me that it wouldn't hurt any more than the time I was stung by a bee at Sports Day – which wasn't actually reassuring cos that was agony. Anyway, it came to my turn and I sat on the stool in the window.

I've never been sure why they put the stool in the window – but I know now. It's so that when your nosy, bossy mother happens to walk past on her way to the supermarket and sees you sitting there about to 'violate your beautiful body', she can push her way into the shop, yelling at the top of her voice and demanding that the, frankly terrified, shop assistant explain herself 'this very instant, young lady'.

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She then went on to ask, in a piercing voice that carried all the way to the back of the shop (where I definitely saw some girls from school lurking and sniggering), how a reputable shop could allow a young girl to disfigure herself. The shop manager had bustled over by this time and started telling Mum that I'd said I was over sixteen, but Mum burst out laughing in a not-very-amused way and asked the manager to take a good look at me and did I *look* like I could possibly be over sixteen? The manager said that no, now that she thought about it, I looked nowhere near sixteen and could she offer Mum a £5 gift voucher to make up for the mistake?

I have no idea what Mum said in response as I was too busy dealing with shrinking into the floor.

By now the girls from school were openly listening to every comment and nudging each other and laughing. Alice, star that she is, stayed by my side but had turned a particularly unflattering shade of pink.

Mum, having made mincemeat of the manager and vowing never to darken the door of Hair & Things again as long as she lived, turned and stormed back out on to the street.

It was obvious that she expected me and Alice

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to follow her, which we did. Mum was waiting for us outside and without saying a single word, walked us to the car. The whole way back to Alice's nobody said a thing. Alice and I kept looking at each other – I half wanted to laugh but every time I thought about what had just happened, and how it would have spread round Facebook like wildfire by the time I went to school on Monday morning, I lost my sense of humour. Alice just looked petrified – my mum can be pretty scary when she wants to be.

We dropped Alice off at her house, Mum still not speaking. Alice gave my hand a squeeze and mouthed 'Good luck' at me. We both knew that I was really going to need it.

Mum drove off but then she stopped the car round the corner. I braced myself. The thing about my mum is that she talks. And talks. I reckon the armed forces have missed a trick when it comes to fighting terrorism and defending the free world – they should send Mum in and let her lecture the enemy into surrendering. A couple of hours with her and they'd be begging to be released with eternal promises of good behaviour and a firm understanding of the consequences if they stepped out of line . . .

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This time, though, she surprised me. I thought she'd be furious that I'd gone behind her and Dad's back – not that Dad has much of an opinion on the subject. He refuses to talk about it – says as he's not a girl that he doesn't understand what all the fuss is about. So typical – he always backs Mum in any argument. We've had endless conversations about me getting my ears pierced, and she always says I have to wait until I'm thirteen and it'll be a good, appropriate way to mark my teenage years. I always say that it's not a big deal; all my mates have got funkier parents who let them have stuff done and being eleven is virtually the same as being thirteen anyway, so what's the difference?

She didn't even mention the deceit, though. Instead, she started talking to me about the risk that I'd taken and did I understand what could happen if piercings went wrong? Did I actually understand about infections and scarring? I think the words 'ugly disfigurement' were used but I wasn't really listening. I was too busy wondering what she was going to dream up for me as a punishment – sorry, a consequence.

Mum prides herself on making the 'consequence' fit the crime and I was trying to figure out how she

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could possibly do that this time. By making me pierce my own ears with a needle and an ice cube? By writing a letter to all Hair & Things shops asking them to display my photo in the window and issue me with a lifetime ban? I didn't actually hear her when she said it the first time, so she had to repeat herself (and she hates doing that).

'Olivia – are you actually listening to me? I said, I'll find a decent place that knows what they're doing, and we'll go together and get your ears pierced. If it matters that much to you then fine, but I don't want you sneaking off without telling me.'

Wow. Didn't see that one coming. I'm actually going to have my ears pierced! I will no longer be the only girl in my year with boring, plain ears (I mean, there's probably a *few* other people who haven't got their ears pierced, but I'm not interested in them). Already I'm planning what sort of earrings I'll buy. I reckon I'll look fantastic. I've seen a pair of bright, wooden parrots that I could wear in a jokey, not serious way – that'd be hilarious! And for school I'll get some tiny, silver flowers – maybe daisies. We're meant to wear plain studs but nobody does.

I can't believe my mum is actually agreeing to

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this! I love her *so much*! But I'm also still mad at her and Monday morning is going to be a nightmare. Everyone will know about what just happened in town. Maybe I will actually die of humiliation over the weekend – and then she'll be sorry as she sheds endless tears of regret over my cold, sad, unpierced body. She is so utterly annoying and embarrassing. She seriously doesn't have a clue about what it's like to be eleven. And I bet she doesn't get around to taking me to have my ears pierced until I am actually thirteen anyway.

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