

AMAZON ORIGINAL STORIES

# BAD DATE

*a short  
story*

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE CLUB*

ELLERY LLOYD

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# Contents

[Start Reading](#)

[Poppy](#)

[Ollie](#)

[Fay](#)

[Poppy](#)

[Ollie](#)

[Poppy](#)

[Poppy](#)

[Fay](#)

[Poppy](#)

[Fay](#)

[Poppy](#)

[Ollie](#)

[Fay](#)

[About the Author](#)

**Fay:** Hello and welcome to *Ride or Die*, with me, Fay Roper.

**Poppy:** And me, Poppy Blake, Fay's personal assistant and best friend forever . . .

**Fay:** I think we need a different term for what you are, you know. Wingwoman. Sister from another mister. We've been partners in crime since we were in nappies, and we're both thirty-five now, so that's a pretty long time.

**Poppy:** Same nursery, same class at school. Not that you came to school that much, Fay. You were always too busy filming something for TV or posing for the cover of *Just Seventeen* . . .

**Fay:** The only bridesmaid at my wedding . . . Holding my hand at the birth of my son . . . I just can't shake you, can I, Poppy? Even when I moved from London to Hollywood, you tagged along.

**Poppy:** *You* made me your personal assistant and booked my flight without asking! I would never have got on that plane if I'd known you can't drink in California until the age of twenty-one. An absolute *nightmare* for a British eighteen-year-old. Not that you cared, because you got pregnant pretty much on your wedding night!

**Fay:** Anyway, as regular *Ride or Die* fans will know, this is the podcast where two basic besties talk about life, love, and our laughably terrible choices. I should warn listeners that this episode contains strong language and adult themes, but if you lot didn't love it, then there wouldn't be seven million of you tuning in every week. Today, we'll be talking about online dating . . .

**Poppy:** But first, can we just discuss what you're wearing, Fay? You're looking a bit glam for an audio recording. Going somewhere nice? Does this slinky little number mean you've made a match and you're off for dinner after?

**Fay:** For those of you who haven't listened to us bang on about it before on this podcast—and if not, where have you even *been*—I joined a new dating app called Raya a few weeks ago. Posted a few



artfully out-of-focus photos, using a fake name of course, in case you're thinking of looking me up for a laugh. Don't want the *Daily Mail* publishing my pouting profile pics, do I?

**Poppy:** This isn't just any app either. Raya is a fancy dating app for rich, beautiful people, and they sure as hell make you prove your rizz. You need to know two hotties already on there who will refer you for membership, then the global committee stalks your socials to see if you're enough of a snack to make the cut.

**Fay:** That makes me sound terrible.

**Poppy:** Not terrible, Fay, *sensible*. You're properly, globally famous—you can't just set up a Tinder profile and flirt with randoms. People recognise *me* in the street just because I'm your best mate, and I find that awkward enough. Creeps have been staring at *you* ever since you were the beautiful kid in the soap advert. Total strangers have been asking you out since you started acting on TV at what, eleven years old? Remember when we skived off school for the afternoon and that weird guy with his arm in a cast followed us down Oxford Street, demanding you write your phone number on it? At least Raya does some of the hard work for you, sorts the maybes from the absolutely-bloody-nots.

**Fay:** God, I'd forgotten about him. We hid in a McDonald's toilet to get away, didn't we?

**Poppy:** For *two whole hours*.

**Fay:** Look, I just thought I'd give Raya a go, as everyone I know is already signed up. It's meant to be for cool, creative types, but so far all I've seen are bankers, which is not my bag at all. If you're waving a Rolex around or standing next to a matte-black Tesla in your profile shot, I'm hitting nope. You know my type. I want a soulful scruff, in touch with his feminine side—a little bit of stubble, Prada T-shirt, pair of Vejas. Green eyes too, if I'm being picky. But back to my evening dress . . . sorry to disappoint, Pops,



not even I would do a first date in a floor-length gown. This slinky getup is for the National Television Awards, which I'm rushing off to the minute we wrap here.

**Poppy:** I should know that, given I RSVP'd on your behalf. Didn't get to be your plus-one, though, did I? *Rude*. Listeners, you'll see what I'm talking about when tonight's paparazzi shots hit the morning papers, but Fay looks knockout. How can this utter bae still be single?

**Fay:** I know, *right*? It's not very feminist to admit I want a man, but those tabloid headlines about me being FAY-mously unlucky in love aren't wrong, are they? I know I'm playing my tiny violin here, but it's really hard being the single mum of a fourteen-year-old and trying to have a love life. You try sexting while you're meant to be helping with GCSE history homework. And don't get me started on bringing a new guy home . . .

**Poppy:** Sneak them in a different door, Fay. You've got a massive mansion; there must be a tradesman's entrance . . .

**Fay:** You make a good point. But it's not just that. You know I prefer a civilian . . .

**Poppy:** You've got a kink for a nonfamous guy. What have the last few boyfriends been? I remember the tree surgeon. There was a chef. Personal trainer? The cycle courier! Vet . . .

**Fay:** The problem is, the type of men I like aren't interested in celebrity, so I get ghosted pretty quick. What normal guy wants the threat of getting papped in a restaurant? Who would be cool with being harassed while out shopping by people who don't think *any* boyfriend is good enough for me? The poor vet nearly lost his business because a fan posted hundreds of one-star Google reviews about his made-up dead dog.

**Poppy:** Don't say fans, Fay. That makes them sound cuddly. *Stalkers*. You mean stalkers . . .

# Poppy

Yeeesh. Hot work, talking nonsense for an hour,” Fay says as she swings the mic arm away and stands up, fanning at her armpits. The windowless room we’ve been recording in is barely the size of a broom cupboard and has no air-conditioning. There is a bigger one, our usual studio, but Lily Allen has it booked out for the entire week.

Fay turns around and examines herself in the mirror on the back of the door. “Shit, I didn’t realise this dress would crease so badly. Are you *sure* it isn’t too much? I mean backless is fine, but perhaps you could have borrowed one with a bit more *front*?”

As she leans forward to inspect her cleavage, Fay’s left breast pops out of the flimsy cowl neck, and I have to stop myself from rugby tackling it back into the red satin. It’s what I *do*, what I’ve always done for Fay: instinctively stepping in to salvage the situation—offering a steadying arm when a stiletto snaps, smoothing down a stray hair for the camera, or subtly drawing her attention, with the dart of an eye, to a nipple staging an escape from her low-cut dress.

We may be only months apart in age, but Fay has always felt like my little sister (despite not looking remotely like one—she’s brown eyed, chestnut haired, and could fit in my pocket, I’m a blue-eyed blonde and an easy foot taller).

The current unfortunate situation has taken a little more salvaging than anything else I’ve ever handled, though, requiring a carefully laid multimedia, cross-platform breadcrumb trail. A record of Fay’s habits and whereabouts in newspapers, on TikTok and Instagram posts, and on our podcast. A series of cast-iron alibis just in case the police *do* decide to investigate.

There’s no point in panicking and making a mistake, that’s what I keep telling Fay—the judge who declared her bankrupt took pity on her, setting an