

## The Not Deer

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## The Not Deer

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

### Summary

**[GRIAN]**

Statement of False Symmetry, regarding... changes in her roommate's behavior?

**[FALSE]**

I suppose you could call it that.

**[GRIAN]**

Yeah, I just have to say something that sounds academic for the tape. Statement taken direct from subject, today, May 17th, 2022. Statement begins.

### Notes

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**Statement:**



[Click]

**[GRIAN]**

Statement of False Symmetry, regarding... changes in her roommate's behavior?

**[FALSE]**

I suppose you could call it that.

**[GRIAN]**

Yeah, I just have to say something that sounds academic for the tape. Statement taken direct from subject, today, May 17th, 2022. Statement begins.

**[FALSE]**

Right, so, my roommate Gem and I are both outdoorsy sorts. We used to go hiking and camping pretty often; she liked the scenery, I liked the exercise. We've lived together for awhile- she actually helped me out of a jam when she first moved in, because my old roommate had bounced on me, and I was really just desperate to find somebody to cover her rent. But as it turned out, we got along really well.

She was always really into nature. We share an apartment, so there's not really any garden space, but she got a bunch of little flowerpots and succulents to put out on the balcony. Took religious care of them. I always thought it was really nice- livened up the place, you know? When you live in the middle of London, it's nice to have something like that.

Gem was... I think before anything else I would just describe her as *nice*. Gem was nice. A sweetheart, you know? Real soft about animals. She'd foster kittens in our apartment sometimes. She always seemed to me like she didn't belong in the middle of the city, really. Like she should be living somewhere sunnier, with a big native garden and a dozen rescue pets.

This was... summer, just before the start of fall. She had a hiking trip she'd been looking forward to for a long time; I'd been planning on going with her at first, but work stuff got in the way and I couldn't, so she wound up going alone.

I don't know exactly what happened while she was gone. She texted me for a while as she was on the bus heading out, and then eventually she lost coverage and went radio silent. But that was normal, and, you know, she's an adult, and a more competent outdoorsman than me in a lot of ways. I wasn't worried, at least not then.

Her trip was supposed to last four days, Friday to Monday. She was supposed to be back Monday night.

And, well. She wasn't.

I tried calling her, when she wasn't back on time, but it went to voicemail. Called her brother next, because he's usually the one most in touch with her, but he hadn't heard from her either.

I told myself I'd give it twenty-four hours, and then I'd start making calls. Maybe I should have done that right away, but... I don't think I'd wanted to believe things could have gone so wrong the one time I wasn't with her. I just wanted her to be alright. I was... (*sighs*) I was just really, *really* hoping my phone would ring, and it would turn out that her bus home had just broken down and she'd been stranded out of signal range for a few hours, or something. Anything.

Twenty-four hours later, I called up the ranger station for the area where she should have been, and that's... when I heard about the fire.

So far as I know, they still don't know how it started. Last I heard, they figured it had just been some idiot leaving their campfire unattended. It doesn't really matter, anyways. It was dry and hot. There were whole acres of forest burning within the day.

I was... I felt sick. I pulled up the map of the trails she'd been meaning to hike, made the ranger tell me right where all the edges of the fire were. It was... there was no way around it. There was *no way* she hadn't been caught in the blaze. I thought... I mean, at that point I was trying to script

out in my head how I was going to tell her brother that his sister was dead.

And then there was a knock on the front door.

Gonna be honest, I was *not* in the mood to deal with solicitors right then. I was ready to give whoever was out there a good smack when I opened the door, and then- it was her.

Or. It looked like her. I'm still not sure...

I'm still not sure.

Her hair was a mess. Her eyes were... dark. They've always been a pretty normal green, and I guess it could have been the lighting, but I would swear they were so dark they were almost black, that night. And... she had flowers in her hair.

**[GRIAN]**

Flowers?

**[FALSE]**

They were blue. Bright blue. It's the thing I remember most, because it seemed so incongruous. How could anyone possibly escape a forest fire and come away with flowers in her hair? Before anything else I was happy to see her, obviously, I pulled her into a hug right away, but... it put me on edge. I think I could tell right away something was wrong.

She didn't seem... upset. That was the other thing that bothered me. She'd been *missing*. I'd been sitting there shredding myself with guilt and anxiety over what might have happened to her for *hours*, and there she was with a smile on her face, happy as ever, flowers in her hair. It felt *wrong*. It felt like I was talking to a... a ghost, or something, I don't know.

I asked her what had happened, obviously. She told me she couldn't remember. I couldn't tell if she was telling the truth or not. She didn't *seem* like she was lying, not really, she didn't seem nervous or anything. But there was something about the way she spoke... her eyes went sort of... far away.

It worried me. And then I got angry at myself for being worried, because she was there, and she was fine, and alive, and that should be enough, right? That should have been enough.

She was obviously tired, even though she insisted she wasn't, so I told her to get some sleep, and... then I went and sat down and had a bit of a cry, because even though things felt so off, I really was just so relieved she was alive. And I hoped that would be it.

I think I knew on some level that it wouldn't be, though. It couldn't be.

Everything seemed okay at first. Things were still a little strange. Sometimes it would be like she didn't know what I was talking about when I mentioned perfectly normal things, or... no, it was more like I'd mention something, like needing to take my car in for maintenance, and it would be like she knew what that *was*, but didn't get why I thought it was important? It wasn't a big thing, but it was definitely odd.

The first big thing was the plants.

I went out onto the balcony maybe a week after she got back, just to do some reading, and I noticed right away that all the little plants she kept out there weren't... right. They all looked... bigger, for one thing, but more than that, they looked... sort of twisted? Like their shapes and colors had gone all wrong, all... blue and yellow and black and red. Like bruises. They didn't look *unhealthy*, they looked bigger than they ever had, but they just... frightened me, if I'm being honest. They looked

sort of... mutated, or something.

I asked Gem if they were sick or something, but she said no, and that they seemed fine to her. I wasn't sure what to make of it. And then... a few days later, I found her phone.

It was on the table in the bathroom, sort of buried under some towels. I figured she'd just forgotten it there and I'd give it to her, but when I picked it up it was dead, so I plugged it in first.

The screen lit up, after a couple seconds, and it was just... days and days and *days* worth of missed call notifications, voicemails, unanswered texts. From her job, from her friends, from her brother. It was like she'd just been ignoring all of them.

It didn't make sense. I mean, for a lot of reasons. She loved her friends and family. I couldn't imagine her just all of a sudden cutting them all off. And she'd *been* leaving the apartment, so if she hadn't been going to work or to see people, what had she been doing?

That one I didn't confront her about. I knew at that point something was really, really wrong. With *her*. Something was wrong with her. And I wanted to figure it out. I wanted to know what was *wearing her face*.

So one day, when she was out, I snuck into her room, just to see if I could find anything. I could tell her computer hadn't been touched. In her wastebasket, though- that's where the hair was. Big, bloody clumps of it. I didn't want to touch it. I- there was *skin* on them. It almost looked like they'd been ripped out of her head. Like she'd done it herself.

I got out of there really quick, and then that night, when she was home, I snuck up and eased her door open. She was sitting in there, on her bed, and she was... it was hard to tell what she was doing, the angle was bad, but it looked like she was... *pulling* something out of her head. Whatever it was it was... big and sharp and it made these horrible sort of cracking noises, and obviously that doesn't... how can you...

I don't know how anybody could *do* that and *live*.

I must have made a sound, or something. A gasp, maybe. Her head *shot* up all of a sudden, faster than you would think a neck could move without breaking, and she was just staring at me through the crack in the door, and like that, I could see- the thing in her head. It was big and forked, like an antler, except it looked all... twisted, sort of, like wood. It looked heavy, and it was... *dripping* with blood. As I watched, there was blood dripping down onto her sheets and down the side of her face, but she didn't even seem to notice.

I couldn't move. I've never been the sort of person to run when I'm scared- and I *was* scared. Whatever was looking at me through her eyes, it made me feel... small. Insignificant. Like it could just blink, and I'd be dead. I had this feeling- I don't know if this is true, but I felt like if I turned to run, it would kill me.

So instead I took a breath, and I pulled the door the rest of the way open, so we could look at each other properly.

Her eyes... cleared, a little bit, or at least I thought they did. Maybe that was wishful thinking. But she said, 'False, you know it's rude to eavesdrop!' She sounded just like always. Same voice as ever, same inflections, same everything.

I said I was sorry, and that I was just worried about her. Because I *was*, I was *so* worried about her, I just- I just wanted her back! I wanted her to be okay! She was... (*sighs*) she was one of the nicest

people I knew. Whatever happened to her, she didn't deserve it.

And she gave me this look that was so... *sad*. Like she was... like she was looking at me and seeing something horribly tragic, even though I was perfectly fine. She said I didn't have anything to worry about.

She got off the bed and started walking towards me, and I took a few steps back. I had... again, it was just a feeling, but I had this sense, this really pressing sort of feeling that I couldn't let her touch me. Whatever was in her, I *didn't* want it touching me. And she kept giving me that look, like she was looking at me and seeing something dead.

I keep a switchblade on me. It just helps me feel safer, since I'm out after dark in the city a lot. She backed me up to the center of the living room before I was able to pull it out of my pocket and flip it open and put it to her neck, and she stopped midstep. The apartment was dark, at this point, but the light from outside reflected in her eyes.

I told her to get out.

She frowned at me, and looked... almost disappointed? But she said, 'Well, if that's what you want. Don't blame me later.'

I keep thinking about that. It keeps me up at night, to be honest. The whole thing does, but especially those last four words. *Don't blame me later*.

And she just left. She just... left. I stayed standing there for a long time. I forgot I still had my knife in my hand until my knuckles started to hurt from how tight I was holding onto it.

I haven't seen her since. I've been looking, but... I don't have high hopes. I'm sure she's still out there, but I don't think I'll find her unless she wants to be found. That night was... a test of some sort, I think, and she's got her answers from me.

I just don't know whether I passed or failed.

[Click]

[Click]

**[GRIAN]**

Well, Gem Tay's disappearance is definitely real. False even provided me with newspaper clippings about her supposed death, which state she died in a sudden forest fire last summer. Everything after that is False's word only, since according to her account Gem, or whatever entity was pretending to be her, didn't interact with anyone else who knew her after returning from her trip.

False also brought in this... plant, which... *urgh*, does match her descriptions of what happened to the garden out on her balcony. I don't really want to touch it. I think I'm going to leave it on Mumbo's desk and see what happens.

**[IMPULSE]**

I'm *sure* I've seen her name somewhere before.

**[GRIAN]**

What? Who?

**[IMPULSE]**

The lady who just left. False? I know I've seen her name in a different statement before when I've been leafing through them, but I can't remember which... I can have a look, though. It can't be too buried.

**[GRIAN]**

That... would be appreciated, yeah. Weird.

[Click]

## Supplemental:

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

[Click]

**[GRIAN]**

*(Nature documentary voice)* And here we see a wild Mumbo Jumbo in his natural habitat, looking both puzzled and alarmed. This is not a cause for concern; in fact it is natural behavior for the Mumbo Jumbo when approaching even a familiar-

**[PEARL]**

*(Muffled giggling)*

**[GRIAN]**

Yes, quite. Watch him as he surveys his territory, and- Ah! He has noticed the anomalous object. He is squinting at it, tilting his head. Watch how he taps his mustache: that is the thinking posture of a Mumbo Jumbo. Oh, he's nodding! That means he's made a decision.

**[PEARL]**

*(Facetiously)* Does it?

**[GRIAN]**

Certainly. Observe how he extends his arm to prod at the strange obstruction on his desk. It does not react, so he grabs it to toss it out in the kitchen, and does not notice the sickly brown tint creeping up his- *Mumbo! Stop touching the evil plant!*

*(Clattering sounds.)*

**[PEARL]**

*(Slightly nervous giggling)*

**[MUMBO]**

*(Outraged)* Pearl! Grian!

**[PEARL]**

Hey, don't blame me! This was all Grian, I just tagged along.

**[MUMBO]**

You've just turned me into a- a *plant!* Or something. Again! My arm's all brown! *Again!* *(Pause)* Hold on a moment, are you *recording?*

**[GRIAN]**

Oh, don't worry, I'm sure you'll be *fine*. Look, it's already fading-

**[MUMBO]**

*(Slightly overlapping)* Turn that thing off-

[Click]



## Chapter End Notes

All supplementals by Cowriter Zeph

### End Notes

honestly very proud of this one. can you guess what it's meant to be themed after? it might be a bit less clear than some of the other statements i've done!

this is also another case of me snagging sibling relationships from empires for the sake of building out the world. gem's brother mentioned here is fwhip! god knows where sausage is at. probably doing unwise things with the dark, or possibly the flesh.

obviously, not the last we'll see of false. as for gem... we'll see! there are actually two future statements i'm hoping to get to that are set up here. :)

comment?? i'll love you

### Works inspired by this one

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