

❧ *Prelude* ❧

You know that feeling when you meet someone and you just click right away? When you're comfortable being quiet with them right there, with that safe feeling you get from hearing their voice, hearing them breathe, just being near them? That feeling that they're the one, they're the piece that was missing that you didn't even realise was missing until it's right there in front of you?

There's all these people in the world – billions of them – so finding that one person is rather hard. Sometimes you feel you've got the right one, but it's never quite right. It works – you love them, laugh with them, have a good connection with them – but it's just not enough. There's a... spark missing, that little bit of life, something extra that you know you should have and try hard to bring it to what you have but it is always just out of grasp.

Well, that's my life. It's full but not; it's amazing yet missing something. Until I met him. We met almost eight years ago now, spent time talking on the phone, video calling and really getting to know each other over a few years. We weren't even geographically close until I took a leap of faith, went to visit and never left.

We have been together since and every day, even the bad ones, is a good day. We clicked. I found that piece that was missing. He is everything I dreamed of but never dared to dream all at once...

Let me take you back to the beginning.

Chapter 1

My name is Marie. I've been working the same job for the same company for more years than I care to remember. My life is rather routine: work, home, work, shopping, work and so on. One night, while off on holidays, I decide to set up a dating profile, but why only look at local people? I open it up to the world. I don't really think too much about it at the time. I look at it once in while but nothing really happens and I forget about it, going back to my routines.

About two months or so after opening it, I receive a notification – reading, 'You have a message' – from the dating app. I ignore it at first. I was busy and thought it was just telling me I had been inactive. When I get home that night, I'm scrolling my notifications on my phone, which spends most of the day on 'do not disturb', when I see the reminder. I click it. There is a message there, alright. My heart races.

Hello, my name is Mike. I saw your picture and thought you were beautiful. I hope you reply. I would like to get to know you.

I stare at my phone, completely dumbfounded for a good ten minutes, when I finally work up the nerve to click his profile. It's as if I thought he could see me – I want to face-palm my forehead! As soon as I see his eyes my heart skips a beat. So much in those eyes. I can't help myself; I spend the next thirty minutes reading his profile and looking at the few pictures he had there. I decide I have nothing to lose and send him a message back.

Hi, Mike, my name is Marie. Thank you for your lovely compliment. I would like to get to know you as well.

I click send and place my phone on the coffee table. My hand is shaking; I need a drink and a cigarette. What am I thinking? Some random person sends me a message on a dating site and I answer! Another face-palm moment, Marie, well done! I absently pick my phone up as I walk outside to have my cigarette. *Ding*. The sound makes my heart leap into my chest! I look down at my phone and there's a message from the dating app. My jaw drops slightly. I open the app to see a message from Mike.

Hola, Marie! I am so glad you messaged back. I didn't think you would. I've had this app for so long and have never messaged anyone before. But as soon as I saw your picture, I just couldn't scroll past it. To be honest, it took me three days just to work the nerve up to send the short message to say hello. I didn't in my wildest dreams think I would get a response. Oh, I'm rambling, sorry! Thank you for making my day a little brighter. Mike.

I must read that message ten times before I place my phone on my outside table as far as I can get it without throwing it on the floor. My cigarette has burnt away to nothing, and I haven't had more than one or two drags. I roll another one as I contemplate what I had re-read so many times. I feel a little thrill run through my body. This random man thinks I'm beautiful. It has been years since I've heard that, let alone read that. I pick my phone up again and read the message. Should I reply? Should I just leave it? I am intrigued to say the least. I start writing a message back.

Hiya, Mike. I had a look at your profile and noticed you have a dog. He/she is beautiful, what breed? What do you do for work? I'm an administrative officer in a hospital. Mind-numbing! But I've been there for years. I like the work and the people aren't so bad. By the way, you have amazing eyes, the type a person could get lost in for days given half a chance. I found myself staring at them for a long while... now look who's rambling. Lol. Marie x

Oh lord! Did I just send an 'x'? I sent a kiss to a guy I've sent two messages to! I must be losing it. I close my phone and throw it on the couch as I walk back inside. Three face-palm moments in one night, you're on a roll, Marie. I walk into the kitchen and pour a drink. It's still early, seven p.m. I need to clear my head and take a deep breath.

Ding. I almost drop my glass. I eye my phone like it's going to bite me. *Ding.* Two messages! I walk over to the couch and pick the phone up. I hold it away from me like he can see when I'm looking at it. I'm being ridiculous! I open the messages...

Hi, Marie, thanks for the compliments about my eyes! They go alright. My dog is my best friend – she goes everywhere with me. Her name is Susie, she's a shepherd and she's almost eight years old now. Do you have any animals? Mike.

Oh, I almost forgot, I am an instructor. I teach ppl how to scuba dive. Mike. x

He sent an 'x' back. I'm going to need a stronger drink at this rate! I take my drink, grab my cigarettes and head back outside. I read all the messages again. He seems friendly. What's the harm in getting to know someone over a dating app? I light my cigarette and think about things a little longer. Without even realising I'm doing it, I am back looking at this man. Brown hair, green eyes, five days of growth on his face, a cute smile... I could see myself with him.

I laugh at myself. Way to go, Marie, living in a fantasy before you even know where he is and if he's married. Oh my god, what if he's married?! Lord, wait till I talk to Tash! Natasha is my best friend. we don't live close, but we talk every day and call each other on weekends. She's my rock and I consider her my sister. She knows more about me than anyone in my life, including family. We can spend hours talking and laughing. Tash is the kind of person who sees only your good qualities and embraces your not-so-good ones. As she told me once, 'Marie, you aren't you without the dark places. You can't always be light and air – sometimes you need to be dark and scary too! Either way, I love you.' She just gets me.

Hi! She's a beautiful dog. Scuba diving sounds like a fun job! Although sharks scare me... A LOT. Lol. So where are you in the world? Do you have a favourite drink? Atm I'm drinking vodka, lime and soda water. It's Friday for me and it's nice to unwind with a drink and have a cigarette. Please don't judge me for smoking, I know the risks. It's my one bad vice... well, it's not but it's the worst one, I think, lol! Anyways, now I'm rambling! ~Marie xo

I stare at my phone, I did it again! And this time I added a hug. What the fuck is wrong with me?! If that doesn't scream 'desperate' I don't know what does! I need to call Tash! I check the time; it's eight

p.m. here so it must be close to eleven p.m. where she is. Ahhh fuck it, I know she'll be awake, she's always awake. I pick the phone up and call Tash.

'Hello, gorgeous.' As soon as I hear her voice, I know what she's going to say when she hears what I've been up to.

'Hi, babe! Did I wake you?' She laughs at me. I knew she'd be awake.

'You know I wasn't sleeping. I was rearranging my rocks. So what's new in your world?'

I take a deep breath. 'Well, remember that dating app I downloaded and then did nothing with?'

She makes a non-committal sound.

'I got a message from a guy today. His name is Mike.' Silence for a spilt second...

'Tell me EVERYTHING!' she practically yells down the phone at me.

I spend the next three hours telling her what little I know about Mike and by the end of the call I'm feeling a lot better about the whole thing. It feels right when Tash says to see where it goes and enjoy the ride. It could be the best thing I've ever done. I guess time will tell.

I shut my phone off and leave it in the kitchen to charge overnight. Three hours on the phone and four or five drinks and I'm ready for bed. Tash got me thinking and after all her reasons to go for it, my reasons not to paled in comparison. As I climb into bed and close my eyes, I can't help but daydream a little about what it could be like with someone laying right here next to me. I fall asleep all warm and fuzzy inside, a slight smile on my face.

Chapter 2

Good lord my head hurts! I roll out of bed, stumble to the kitchen and make coffee. I walk outside and light a smoke. It's still early – maybe five a.m. – the sun is just peaking over the roof tops, there is a light breeze, the birds are singing their good mornings to the world and the air is warm. I have a few messages from Tash who has probably slept for a maximum of three hours in the last twenty-four. I don't know how she does it. I answer her and continue scrolling my notifications. I nearly drop my phone when I see there are four messages from Mike! I open the app, scrolling the messages – just general chit chat. I drink my coffee and finish my cigarette. I'm lost in a daydream when I hear that familiar *ding*. I snatch up my phone so fast.

Good morning, Marie. I am assuming it's morning there anyway. You never told me where you are. Anyway, I hope this finds you well and I hope to hear from you soon. Mike xo.

I rock back a little in my chair. Why did that just make me feel all warm and fuzzy inside? There's nothing really in it and the ones before that were just the same. Idle chit-chat and no real context, he is just telling me about his day as it happens. I find myself scrolling through the messages again. Something is drawing me in, I just haven't put my finger on it yet. He is handsome, he seems sweet in the messages, no real red flags, he isn't pushing for information and seems happy to just talk. I need a shower, I feel gross. I'll answer when I feel something closer to normal.

Thanks to everything holy for plumbing and instant hot water! I'm starting to feel more like Marie and less like something that dragged itself out of the gutter after a hard night on the town. That thought has me thinking about Tash again. I miss our nights of debauchery – we used to wreak havoc. It might be time to go visit her. *Ding*. The sound pulls me out of my daydream.

Hello again. Sorry I'm bombarding you with messages. I'm not sure what it is about you, but every time I look at your picture, I am drawn to you. You have beautiful eyes and a great smile. I hope to hear from you soon. Mike xoxo

Oh! There's that feeling again! How did he do that? I want to know everything about this guy and I've been talking to him for less than twenty-four hours.

Good morning, Mike! My eyes are beautiful? Have you been drinking? Lol. It's 6.35 a.m. here at the moment. I've just had a shower and am starting to feel human once again. I don't think I told you where I am, but let's get to know each other a little more first. Marie xoxo

I start doing all the things I need to for my day and spend a good hour talking to my mother. Lord, that woman can prattle on about nothing! I finish the dishes, put the washing on and move on to other things that I've been putting off for a good week. I find myself checking my phone more often than not, waiting for that sound. I need a distraction. I pick up a book and start reading, hoping to immerse myself in someone else's fantasy. It works for a little while until I read the sex scene and then my mind makes the crazy leap to Mike. I can't seem to stop thinking about him. I can feel myself getting wet just at the thought of that man's hands on my body!

I slide my hand down into my pants; I can feel how wet I am. I start rubbing my clit in little circles. God, that feels good. I bring up a picture of Mike and, after studying for a minute, I lean back and close my eyes, imagining that face buried in my pussy, tongue sliding into my wetness. I rub my clit a little faster, moaning. I arch my back as I get closer to toppling over the edge. My imagination runs away with me, seeing Mike's hands sliding up my body, squeezing my nipples, his finger slipping into me... OMG, yessssss! I cum. *Ding*. That sound drags me back to reality in a hurry. Did he know I was looking at his picture? I try to collect my thoughts that I just scattered all over my couch! I pick up my phone that I dropped as I was cumming.

Well, hello there. Why are you awake so early? I'm a fan of a good sleep in. I am currently on my day off. I think I'm going to have a few drinks and watch some sports. Do you have any plans for your evening? Yes, your eyes are amazing. Just so you know, the whole package is beautiful. If I don't hear from you before I go to bed, thank you for being a part of my day. Mike xoxo

Did he thank me for being a part of his day? That was really sweet!

Hi, Mike! I was just thinking about you! He doesn't need to know I was cumming while doing it... It's about lunchtime here. I'm currently on vacation from work for the next three weeks, so I might have a drink with you. What sport are you watching? I know a little about football but not much about anything else. Hope to hear from you soon. Marie xoxo

I stare at my phone. I seriously wanna give this guy my number so I can see when he's texting me back! Oh my god, that sounded desperate even to me! I need Tash. I pick up my phone and make a call.

'Hello, sweet cheeks!' Tash always sounds so happy.

'Hiya, Tash! I'm calling you to prevent me giving my number to this guy!' I laugh.

'What's the problem with that? Do it!'

I snort. Maybe I shouldn't have called Tash. 'Are you high? I can't be giving my number to random guys I just met on a dating app! What is wrong with you?'

She laughs at me; it sounds like a bell pealing. 'Yeah, I guess, 'cause you've got people lining up out your door trying to get a little of what you are letting grow over!'

Did she just call me a born-again virgin?! 'Tash!' I exclaim.

'Well? What have you got to lose? You don't know if he's even close by. It's not like he is going to show up on your doorstep!'

She has a point. God damn it, she's always right! 'Yeah, you're right! Fuck it, I'll give him my number next time he sends me a message.'

'That's my girl! Now go be the hoe I love! Bye, bye, sweet cheeks!' She literally hangs up on me knowing I would pummel her with questions. Ass! Tash knows me too well. That said, that woman has been there through many a sad bitch hour with me. I couldn't ask for more from her. *Ding.*

Hola! I'm watching football tonight, but I watch most sports. My favourite would be hockey. Do you watch sport? So three weeks off! Nice! Do you have plans? I guess not as most of the world is off limits at the

moment. I went to Canada for my last vacay; it was amazing! You know what will make this easier? Being able to actually talk to you. Let me know if you'd like to exchange numbers. Talk soon sweetheart. xoxo

Did he hear my phone call?! He called me sweetheart! I swear I swooned. I feel my heart melt a little. That man has all the right words, so much right. I make a cup of tea and contemplate his message. He seems so sweet and genuine. He isn't pushy, hasn't asked for nudes, hasn't made me uncomfortable and, let's face it, I just got off to his picture! I need therapy or sex... I haven't decided which, probably both and, knowing me, my therapist would need their own therapy straight after! I walk back to the lounge and pick up my phone and send him my number. Nothing else, just my number. He'll either call or he won't. I take my tea and walk outside for a smoke.

My phone rings. I nearly drop it! I'm so confused. I don't recognise that number! I just sit there staring at it. I place it on the table and watch it vibrate across it. I've never been one for answering unknown numbers. If it's important they will leave a voicemail. But I have no idea who would be calling me from another country! It's probably telemarketers or that fake tax office bullshit! It stops ringing. *Ding*. Oh, a message! My heart jumps a little bit as open the message.

I sincerely hope you gave me the right number! LOL. Mike.

Oh fuck!

OMG I'M SO SORRY! I didn't recognise the number! I'm sorry. I've got it now. I'll add it to my phone to prevent it happening again! Marie.

Another face palm moment. How did I not click that it was Mike calling me? *Ding*.

Well, I guess now that you have my number you can call me back! Hope to hear from you soon! Mike xxoo

Well, fuck! I'm instantly nervous. This random guy is making me feel stuff I haven't felt in forever, or even ever! Now he has thrown a massive curve ball into my court and I have to call him! FUCKKKK! I roll a smoke with shaking hands. Why are they shaking? I try to light it but can't make the lighter work. God damn it woman, get a grip! You've spoken to random people before, what is wrong with you? I try the lighter again and get it to work. Slamming it back onto the table, I try to calm down. I bring up his profile. Just looking at those eyes still makes me nervous and something else I haven't quite figured out yet. I draw on my cigarette and study the man I'm seeing. There is nothing

remotely scary about him yet I feel... scared? No, it's not scared, it's something else. I look a little harder. His eyes catch me. There is something in those damn eyes. It's like he can look right through me even though it's just a picture. It feels like he can see me, the real me without even trying. *Ding.*

Are you going to call me back? Mike.

Shit, how long had I been stuck in thought?

Hi, Mike. Sorry, yes, I'll call you back. When is good? Marie xx

I stare at my phone wide eyed, why did I say that? *Ding.*

Now! I'm looking forward to it!

My heart is racing, I check the time and walk straight to the kitchen. I pull my vodka out of my freezer and pour myself a strong drink; I'm going to need some liquid courage for this! Lord, how I wish Tash was here to kick my ass a little. This isn't even hard! I down my drink and make another. I walk out to the table and I pick my phone up. There's that picture again, those eyes, I dial the number... it rings.