

Delivery of Love

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A woman receives a mysterious package from a mysterious man ...

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It would be wonderful to sleep I think, as I sit on the cold, hard bench feeling drained of energy, waiting for the bus to arrive. I had been up the entire night, rewriting conference speeches for my boss. I yawn and close my eyes. I blink.

There's a man standing outside the liquor store, in the rain. He's wearing a long, dark brown coat, with his hands in his pockets. I notice, after staring at him for some time, that he is now staring back at me. It is a little perplexing to see the exact expression on his face, because it is partially masked by the shadowy sheltering hood of his coat.

I look away and shift my focus onto a set of cream-coloured hand towels in the shop window before me. However, my mind's focus is still on the mysterious stranger. I turn back and find that this man is still staring at me. He is still in the rain, which is hitting the cold, dark ground like a fierce army of hungry fire ants marching through a dense forest in search of prey.

He starts walking towards me, his hands still in his pockets, and I feel very vulnerable and frightened. But I don't move from my spot. I can't seem to take my eyes off this man who is making his way towards me. He reaches me and I see his face now. He has a short black beard and though I can't make out the colour of his eyes, I can assume that he is in his early thirties.

He doesn't smile at me, but takes out a red envelope from his right pocket and hands it to me. "This is for you," he says, and I take it from him. As I begin to observe the envelope, he turns and walks away.

"Wait!" I call out to him. "Who are you? How do you know me? Who told you to give this to me?" But he doesn't stop. The rain gets heavier now and clamorous bursts of thunder resound as extravagant cracks of lightning dance in the late afternoon sky. The strange man doesn't look back. He continues walking and turns right, down another street.

Of course I'm not going to run after him. I have no idea who this man is. I look at the front of the envelope and read the black cursive lettering. *To: The Everlasting Desire Of Love.* I turn the envelope around and read *If You Are Looking For Love, Open Me. But If You Are Not, Please Dispose Of Me.*

Am I looking for love? I'm twenty-six and have suffered too many past failed relationships. I think I stopped looking for love two years ago. Am I a happy woman? Am I content with my life? Well, when I think about it, no. I am not at all happy and content. But how many of us in this world can say that we really are anyway? I am not looking for love.

I have rent to pay and I live alone. I have a tasteless working life and the last thing I need is another man to fall in love with so that I can be temporarily happy and then eventually be left alone again, a heartbroken wreck. I have picked myself up and put myself back together enough times to know now that hoping to find a good man is a complete and utter waste of time.

There is one small problem though: curiosity always seems to get the better of me. So when I get back to my apartment, I find myself making a cup of coffee and then curling up on my couch, studying the red envelope. I hold it up to the light to see if I can see through the envelope, just a little bit, to see if I can get even a tiny hopeful glimpse of what's inside. But I am without luck. The envelope is a dark red and it's made from quite a thick, strong kind of paper, almost like cardboard.

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I read all the words again, on both sides of the envelope. *If you are looking for love* – I am not looking for love, am I? Am I supposed to be looking for love? And is the sender implying that I am his/her *everlasting desire of love*? This truly is a mystery and it will remain so unless I open this envelope. I mean, what have I got to lose really? I have got a boring job, no real friends and a past filled with failed relationships.

Okay, here goes. I am going to open it. I rip open the envelope, pull out a small piece of paper and read what it says: – By opening this envelope, you have activated the sensors which are woven into the sensitive fibres of this material. You will now be transported to Love.

Transported to Love? Is this some kind of cruel prank from one of my exes? Wait, what is going on? The lights are flickering. That has never happened before. Great, the power is out and I can't see a thing. As I get up and slowly start making my way over to the window to open the curtain, my surroundings are flooded by a quick gleam of an intense bright light. For a few seconds I feel like I have been blinded by the flash of a huge camera belonging to a giant. But before I can say anything, I am left speechless with shock and amazement.

I am no longer in my apartment. Where I am right now, I have no idea, but my vision has indeed returned. Wherever I am, it must be paradise, because never in my life have I seen so many beautiful things all in one area, all at the same time. I can smell roses. I can see the ocean and the setting sun shining so beautifully against the horizon. I feel so soothed and so wonderful. The gently rolling waves of the sea beckon me and an incredible warmth swarms through my entire body as my feet touch the soft golden sand.

This place, whatever it is, seems so quixotic. I hear a dog barking. I turn around to find a beautiful golden labrador retriever, running down towards me. But where it is coming from is really captivating. In the direction the dog is coming from is the most gorgeous-looking beach house I have ever seen. As the dog arrives it barks and wags its tail delightedly as if it is so happy to see me. I laugh a little and greet it with a friendly – hello! – as I pat its back.

I then notice a small red envelope about the size of a business card dangling from the dog's blue collar. I check both sides of the envelope to see if there is anything written on it, but there isn't. So I open it. Inside there is a tiny card with a white background and a picture of a shiny red heart on it. Inside, the card reads: – I love you Jestina. – Okay, what is going on here? I am Jestina.

– Mummy! – I look up and see a little girl and boy running towards me. Did they just call me *mummy*? I am so confused now I don't really know what to say. So when the little boy and girl arrive, I just crouch down low and say hello to them. And they hug me and say – I love you, mummy. – I hold them, but the confusion intimidates me so I rise quickly. Did I miss something here? I mean, is this a part of my life I have completely forgotten about? Have I gone mad? I hold my hands up to my head and start taking quick breaths, as though the world is about to run out of air for me to breathe.

– Don't worry mummy, – the little girl says, her wide eyes squinting as she looks up at me.
– Daddy is coming soon. –

– What?! – I say in shock and disbelief. The little girl giggles and then runs off to play with the dog.
– Don't go too close to the water, – I find myself saying, concerned as though this little girl really is my daughter. I look at the little boy who is picking up rocks. He looks up towards the house and says delightedly – Daddy! –. Oh my gosh. Daddy, as in *my husband*?

The man is walking towards us. He is smiling. There is something about him that looks familiar. The little boy runs to join his sister, and the man walks until he has reached me.

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“Jestina,” he says.

“Okay,” I say. “What’s going on here? I mean, your kids seem to think that I’m their mother and I suppose that you’re my husband. Even the dog seems to act as if it knows me. And don’t try and tell me that that is our house, okay? I’ve never seen this place before. I live alone, in a small city apartment. And there’s nothing really beautiful about it. So what’s the deal here? And who are you anyway?”

The man kisses me softly on my lips, and I find myself longing for more.

“My name is Kenneth Noble, and none of this is real,” he tells me.

“What?” I say in bewilderment.

“Look around you. What do you see, honestly?”

My eyes scan my surroundings—the two beautiful children, the golden labrador retriever, the exquisite house and its immaculate ocean view. And then I look at the very handsome man before me, who looks quite familiar. “Well, what do you see?” he asks me again.

“I see everything I’ve ever wanted,” I tell him.

“Exactly,” he replies. “Welcome to Love: Legal Optimistic Virtual Existence.”

“Legal what? Hey, wait a second.” I suddenly realize something. This man has a clean-shaven face but I definitely recognise him. “It’s you,” I say. “You’re the guy in the coat who gave me the red envelope.”

“Yes, that was me,” he begins. “Jestina, what I want to say quite simply, is that you and I are meant to be together.”

“What are you saying exactly?”

“Fate wants us to be together. When you see me, you’ll know. Life can be wonderful, if you’d only give love another chance. You had a series of failed relationships, and so you eventually gave up and closed the door on love, shutting practically all men out of your life. You have a job you hate. Quit it, and pursue your dreams. You’re a talented artist. Don’t give up on your dreams. You can have everything you want if you have the drive to go out and make it happen. If you continue living your life the way you are right now, you will soon end up feeling suicidal and you may very well go through the act of taking your own life. Your curiosity has brought you here. But this is not the real world. Be curious in your own life and start living again.”

“So what am I supposed to do? Go look for you?” I ask.

“You will find true love, or it’ll find you. Either way, things will work out in the end. The important thing is that you take control of your life and make the most of it.”

I open my eyes. Huh? I look around. Whoa, that was one crazy dream. I check my watch and realise I’ve missed the bus. I’ll have to wait for the next one. My boss is going to kill me.

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Just then I notice a beautiful golden labrador retriever wandering alone across the road from me. I walk over and pat its soft, thick fur. That's when I notice the red tag on its collar. It says *If found, please call Kenneth Noble 0382 695 495*. Fate really does want us to be together.

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