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The One

Written by John Marrs

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THE ONE

JOHN MARRS



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Chapter 1

MANDY

Mandy stared at the photograph on her computer screen and held her breath.

The shirtless man had cropped, light-brown hair, and posed on a beach with his legs spread apart with the top half of his wetsuit rolled down to his waist. His eyes were the clearest shade of blue. His huge grin contained two perfectly aligned rows of white teeth, and she could almost taste the salt water dripping from his chest and onto the surfboard lying by his feet.

'Oh my Lord,' she whispered to herself, and let out a long breath she didn't realise she'd been holding. She felt her fingertips tingle and her face flush, and wondered how on earth her body would react to him in person if that's how it responded to just one photograph.

The coffee in her polystyrene cup was cold but she still finished it. She took a screengrab of the photograph and added it to a newly created folder on her desktop entitled 'Richard Taylor'. She scanned the office to check if anyone was watching what she was up to in her booth, but no one was paying her any attention.

Mandy scrolled down the screen to look at the other photographs in his Facebook album 'Around the World'. He was certainly well travelled, she noticed, and he had

been to places she'd only ever seen on TV or in films. In many pictures he was in bars, trails and temples, posing by landmarks, enjoying golden beaches and choppy waters. He was rarely on his own. She liked that he seemed the gregarious type.

Curious, she looked back further into his timeline, from when he first joined social media as a sixth former and through his three years at university. She even found him attractive as a gawky teenager.

After an hour and a half of gawping at nearly the entirety of the handsome stranger's history, Mandy made her way to his Twitter feed to see what he felt the need to share with the world. But all he ranted about was Arsenal's rise and fall in the Premier League, occasionally broken up by retweets of animals falling over or running into stationary objects.

Their interests appeared to differ greatly, and she questioned exactly why they had been Matched and what they might have in common. Then she reminded herself she no longer needed the mindset required for using dating websites and apps; Match Your DNA was based on biology, chemicals and science – none of which she could get her head around. But she trusted it with all her heart, like millions and millions of others did.

Mandy moved on to Richard's LinkedIn profile, which revealed that since graduating from Worcester University two years earlier, he'd worked as a personal trainer in a town approximately forty miles from hers. No wonder his body appeared so solid, she thought, and she imagined how it might feel on top of hers.

She hadn't set foot in a gym since her induction a year ago, when her sisters insisted she should stop lamenting her failed marriage and start concentrating on her recovery. They'd whisked her away to a nearby hotel day-spa where she'd been massaged, plucked, waxed, hot-stoned, tanned and massaged again until any thought

of her ex had been pummelled out of every back and shoulder knot and each clogged pore of her skin. The gym membership had followed along with a promise that she would keep up with the workout schedule they'd set up for her. Motivating herself to work out regularly had yet to become part of her weekly routine, but she paid for the membership regardless.

She began to imagine what her children with Richard might look like, and if they'd inherit their father's blue eyes or be brown like hers; whether they'd be dark haired and olive skinned like her or fair and pale like him. She found herself smiling.

'Who's that?'

'Jesus!' she yelled. The voice had made her jump. 'You scared me to death.'

'Well, you shouldn't have been looking at porn at work then.' Olivia grinned, and offered her a sweet from a bag of Haribo. Mandy declined with a shake of her head.

'It wasn't porn, he's an old friend.'

'Yeah, yeah, whatever you say. Keep an eye out for Charlie though, he's after some sales figures from you.'

Mandy rolled her eyes, then looked at the clock in the corner of her screen. She realised that if she didn't start doing some work soon she'd end up taking it home with her. She clicked on the little red 'x' in the corner and cursed her Hotmail account for assuming the Match Your DNA confirmation email was spam. It had sat in her junk folder for the last six weeks until, by chance, she had discovered it earlier that afternoon.

'Mandy Taylor, wife of Richard Taylor; pleased to meet you,' she whispered. She noticed she was absent-mindedly twiddling an invisible ring around her wedding finger.

Chapter 2

CHRISTOPHER

Christopher shuffled from side to side until he reached a comfortable position in the armchair.

He placed his elbows at ninety-degree angles on the chair's arms and inhaled deeply to take in the scent of its leathery covering. She hadn't scrimped on quality, he thought, confident from both its smell and soft touch that it hadn't been purchased from a run-of-the-mill high-street retailer.

While she remained in the adjacent kitchen, Christopher glanced around her apartment. She lived on the ground floor of an immaculately restored Victorian building that, according to a stained-glass mural above the front door, had once been used as a convent. He admired her taste in pottery ornaments, which were arranged on shelves built into the walls surrounding the open fireplace's chimney breast. But her choice of literature left a lot to be desired. He turned his nose up at the paperback works of James Patterson, Jackie Collins and J.K. Rowling.

Elsewhere in the room, a suede-covered square tray was placed centrally on a chunky coffee table that held two remote controls. Four matching place mats had

been perfectly laid around it. Her use of symmetry put him at ease.

Christopher ran his tongue across his teeth and it hovered over a sliver of pistachio nut that had become trapped between his lateral incisor and canine. When it failed to dislodge, he used his fingernail, but it still wouldn't move so he made a mental note to inspect her bathroom cabinet for dental floss before he left. Very little irritated him more than a piece of trapped food. He'd once walked out on a date mid-meal because she had a stray piece of kale in her teeth.

A vibrating from his trouser pocket tickled his groin; not an entirely unpleasant experience. As a rule, Christopher was quite fastidious when it came to turning his phone off at appropriate times and he loathed people who didn't extend him the same courtesy. But today he'd made an exception.

He removed the phone and read the message on the screen; it was an email from Match Your DNA. He recalled sending them a mouth swab on a whim some months earlier but had yet to receive a registered Match. Until now. Would he like to pay to receive their contact details, the message asked. *Would I*? he thought. *Would I really?* He put the phone away and pondered what his Match might look like, before deciding it was inappropriate to be thinking about a second woman while he was still in the company of the first.

He rose to his feet and returned to the kitchen to find her where he'd left her minutes earlier, lying on her back on the cold, slate floor, the garrotte still embedded in her neck. She was no longer bleeding, the final few drops having pooled around the collar of her blouse.

He took a digital Polaroid camera from his jacket and used it to take two identical photographs of her face

before waiting patiently for them to develop. He placed both photos in an A5 hard-backed envelope and then slipped it into his jacket pocket.

Then Christopher scooped his kit into his backpack and left, waiting until he had exited the darkness of the garden before removing his plastic overshoes, mask and balaclava.