

If faking love is this easy...
how do you know when it's real?

If I
Never
Met
You

An illustration of a woman on the left and a man on the right. The woman has dark curly hair, is wearing a light pink jumpsuit with a thin black belt, and is holding a yellow handbag. The man has short brown hair, is wearing a dark blue suit with a light green shirt and tie, and has his hands in his pockets. They are standing on a light blue background.

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McFarlane

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IF I NEVER MET YOU

Mhairi McFarlane



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Dedication

For my sister, Laura
the human Lisa Simpson

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Dan

What time you think you'll be back tonight? Roughly?

Laurie

Dunno. SOON I HOPE.

Dan

You hope?

Laurie

Everyone has raspberries in Proseccos 😊

Dan

I thought you liked Prosecco. And raspberries

Laurie

I do! I've got one. 😊 But denotes a certain type of Girls Night Out that's not very me. They're calling them 'cheeky bubbles' 😊

Dan

Your problem is other people like it too? Can't imagine my criticism of a night out being 'people ordered the same drink' 😊

Laurie

... Except when you said you hate stag dos that 'start with getting ten pints of wife beater in at 7am in Gatwick Spoons'.

Dan

You can't take a moment off being a lawyer, can you?

Laurie

HAAH. You misspelt 'you got me bang to rights, Loz' 😊

Dan is typing

...

Dan is typing

...

Last seen today at 9.18pm

Dan must've thought better of his reply. Laurie clicked her phone off and pushed it back into her bag.

Obviously she didn't really mind the cliché, booze was booze, that was *trying to be wittily acerbic* bravado. It was a distress signal. Laurie was at sea and her phone felt like a connection back to shore. Tonight was an unwelcome flashback to the emotions of lunch breaks at secondary school, when you had a single-parent mum and no money and no cool.

So far, the girls had discussed the benefits of eyebrow microblading ('Ashley from Stag Communications looks like Eddie Munster') whether or not Marcus Fairbright-Page at KPMG was a bad arsehole who'd break hearts and bed frames (Laurie thought on what she'd gleaned, that was an emphatic yes, but also gathered that a verdict wasn't desired). And how many burpees you could manage in HIIT class at Virgin Active (no idea there, none).

They were all so glamorous and feminine, so carefully groomed and produced for public display. Laurie felt like a dishwater-feathered pigeon in an enclosure full of chirruping tropical birds.

Emily really owed her. Tonight was the product of something that happened roughly once every three months – her best friend, and owner of a PR company, begged Laurie to join their team night out and make it 'less bloody boring, or we'll spend the whole time discussing the new accounts.' Emily, as CEO and hostess, was at the head of the table putting everything on the company credit card and handing round the Nocellara olives and salted almonds. Laurie, late arrival, was at the far end.

'Who was that, then?' said Suzanne, to her right. Suzanne had a beautiful shoulder-length sheet of custard-coloured hair and the gaze of a customs officer.

Laurie turned and concealed her irritation with a ventriloquist's dummy smile. 'Who was what?'

'On your phone! You looked well intense,' Suzanne rolled her doe eyes upwards and mimed a sort of chimpanzee-like, vacant trance state, her hands moving across an imaginary handset. She whooped with girlish, alcohol-fuelled laughter, the sort that could sound cruel.

Laurie said: 'My boyfriend.'

The word 'boyfriend' had started to sound a trifle silly, Laurie supposed, but 'partner' was so dry and stiff. She had a feeling her present company already thought she was those things.

'Awww ... is it early days?' Suzanne combed her fairytale princess hair over her ears with her fingers, and put her flute to her lips.

'Haha! Hardly. We've been going out since were eighteen. We met at university.'