

Lisa never thought she'd find love again, then someone unexpected swept her off her feet. But was everything as it seemed?

Our chats made my day

Me and Poppy

The real Dr Chris Brown

'I'm so sorry, love'

THE DR WHO DISAPPEARED

Chatting to my mum, she said something and I instantly shook my head. 'Why don't you put yourself out there?' she'd suggested. 'I'm not ready,' I told her. But the truth was, I didn't think I'd ever be ready to date again. Although 10 years had passed since I'd lost the love of my life in a car accident, I was still grieving. Even if I felt ready to meet someone, I was under no illusions – dating wouldn't be easy for me. A childhood accident had left me disabled and needing support, so I still lived at home with my parents. At times, I felt isolated and

lonely, but I had my hobbies, including swimming and Taekwondo, and in the evenings, I was happy to curl up with my cat Poppy and scroll through social media while I watched TV. One night, I was doing just that, when I spotted a post by Dr Chris Brown, the charming Aussie vet I'd been watching for years on the TV show *Bondi Vet*. I'd always had a soft spot for him. As well as being gorgeous, he was so kind and compassionate, too. On impulse, I left a comment under one of his posts. *You're amazing with animals – such a kind soul*, I wrote. I didn't think much of it, but a few days later, he replied, saying,

'I think I'm falling for you'

Thank you, Lisa, that means a lot, how long have you been a fan? Surely this can't be real? I thought. But I double-checked his profile and there was nothing fishy. There were hundreds of photos of him on there. After I'd replied, another message pinged back. *Would you like to keep chatting?* he asked. *We could talk on WhatsApp, it's easier.* At first, I was nervous. Why would a celebrity want to talk to me? But then I thought, maybe he's just being kind, so I agreed. As soon as we got on to WhatsApp, messages flew back and forth between us as we

chatted about our lives, our interests, and even how we took our tea! He asked lots of questions about my life and made me feel so special. He'd remember the tiniest details from our conversations and told me he admired strong women – and that he respected me for not letting my disability define me. Soon I was waking up every morning to a message from Dr Chris that read, *Good morning, beautiful.* And at night, he'd sign off with, *Sleep tight, my Lisa.* I began to crave those pings on my phone and my life began to revolve around our conversations. Then one evening, he messaged saying, *I think I'm falling for you. You're not like*

anyone I've ever met. But I felt mixed emotions. I'd read online that he'd been dating a model. *I've seen the news stories*, I messaged him. He confided in me that she'd cheated on him with someone from his management team and while I still felt a bit uneasy, our chats had become the highlight of my day. Days later, he took my breath away when he messaged saying, *I want to come and visit you. I'm going to marry you one day, Lisa.* We'd only been chatting for a couple of weeks and the intensity of it felt overwhelming. But he seemed serious about our future, and began explaining how hard it could be to get time off while he was filming the next series of *Bondi Vet*. *The only way I can visit is if I*

pay someone to cover my shifts, he explained. *The flights are expensive, too. Could you help me out with £2000?* My stomach dropped. That was two months of my disability allowance. But having resigned myself to never finding love again, I now had a gorgeous man prepared to travel thousands of miles to give me a second shot at happiness. How could I say no? *I promise to repay you*, he messaged when I sent the money. So far, I hadn't told anyone about Dr Chris, but now he was going to visit, I'd have to open up, so I started with Mum. 'I've met someone online,' I told her. 'He lives in Australia, but he's coming over.' Mum looked surprised and said, 'Who is he?' 'You'll never believe it,' I replied, telling her about our relationship. 'It's Dr Chris from *Bondi Vet*.' Her face fell. 'It's a scam, love,' she said, softly, and I bristled. 'No, it's not,' I replied,

defiantly. 'He's planning to come over soon.' 'He's a big celeb,' she said. 'Why does he need you to send him money?' 'He's going to pay me back,' I told her. I wished I hadn't told her anything. But while I waited for Dr Chris to arrange his visit, he sent more requests for cash. *I'm stuck out in Africa and need money for the hospital*, he said. *Surely your travel insurance covers that?* I responded. *I forgot to take it out*, he explained. *I'm out here without a bank card, too.* Worried, I sent another thousand pounds. Then a few weeks on, he asked for £7000 to hire a temporary production team so he could leave filming for a while to visit. He introduced me to cryptocurrency and guided me step-by-step on how to set up a digital wallet. He also asked for money through giftcards and PayPal. *I know it's a lot*, he said. *But we're going to be together forever. I promise.* It was what I wanted more than anything, so I began dipping into my savings to help him out. In 18 months, I sent him £11,000 and now all my savings were gone. To save money, I stopped going swimming, gave up my Taekwondo lessons and cut back on groceries. And if I felt fed up, all it took was a loving message from Dr Chris to remind me why I was doing this. *We're going to grow old together, Lisa*, he'd tell me. *You're my soul mate.* When he said he'd take me back to Australia with him when he visited, I began looking into a visa. But then his tone started to shift. He became distant and slower to reply. And when I told him I had no money left to send, his messages stopped completely. No explanation or goodbye. Just silence. Desperate to hear from him, I checked my phone every hour, but nothing. Feeling hurt and upset, I went back through our

chats and suddenly saw all the holes. He'd never once FaceTimed or phoned me, despite me repeatedly asking him to. The email addresses were Yahoo ones and not what you'd expect from a media professional. I felt a slow, sickening realisation creeping over me. *I'd been conned.* Now, as I tearfully admitted to Mum that she'd been right, she didn't say, 'I told you so.' Instead, she said, 'I'm so sorry, love.' The next day, I went to the police who passed everything on to Action Fraud. But the damage was already done. I'd handed my heart – and my life savings – to someone who never even existed. To this day, I don't know who this person really was – and I probably never will. I let my guard down and spent 18 months building a connection with someone, only to realise they were just playing a part. It wasn't just the money they stole, it was my self-worth, my trust in people and my belief that love would find me. Once the burning humiliation had subsided, I decided I didn't want others to go through what I had. So I decided to raise awareness about the dangers of scams and the lengths these people will go to take your money. I gave them everything – my love, my trust, my last penny. But what I didn't give them was the final word. That's mine. **Lisa Knock, 44, Lichfield, Staffordshire**

by Danielle Lett and Sara Linn. Pictures Getty Images/Shutterstock

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