

“Have you been doing something to keep your mind off it?” Julia asked.

One of the phones vibrated again. We all turned to look, before looking at each other, ignoring it once more.

“Erm, I’ve just thrown myself into crypto and technology, to be honest. I’ve just tried hard to...”

One of the phones vibrated once more. I couldn’t help but want to check, but shaking my head, I ignored it.

“...erm, where was I. Ah, yes. I’ve been trying hard to just concentrate on what I enjoy, you know.”

The girls nodded in understanding. Suddenly, one of the phones vibrated again. Feeling the frustration, we all picked up our phones to check what was going on.

“It’s me,” I said as I saw some notifications on my phone. I remember trying to think who on earth would be contacting me so much. It wouldn’t be Oliver, we were on a break. It wouldn’t be a family member, I spoke to them after we got off the flight. I opened my emails to see what they were. To my surprise had received several emails from an unknown address.

“Who is it, Claudia?” asked Laura.

“I don’t know. It’s some emails from an unknown address, but they’re not in my spam.”

As I scrolled down, I could see that each email contained a video. From the thumbnail, I could see that it was a video of two people kissing. Julia, still sitting next to me, caught a glimpse and snatched the phone from my hand.

“Wahey, who’s been sending you dirty videos?!” she joked as she played around with her thumb, threatening to play it.

“Julia, c’mon, don’t. It’s just a stupid email,” I said, reaching back for the phone. As I did so, my finger caught on the play button, causing the video to start playing. Julia looked at it suddenly as I tried to look away.

I could see from Julia’s face that something was wrong. Her facial expression dropped as her brow furrowed.

“What is it?” I asked, unsure of what exactly to expect. Pausing the video, she hid the screen from my sight as she looked at me, a gaze of concern in her eyes. “Julia, tell me what’s wrong.”

She looked at me in silence, before shooting a look to the other girls, then back at the phone. Her mouth hung open as she tried to find the right words.

“Erm...I didn’t know what this was until I opened it,” she sheepishly uttered.

Laura and Stella leaned forwards, unable to read the situation.

“Guys, what’s going on? What’s in that email?” asked Laura.

Julia looked at me in the eyes.

“It’s Oliver. A video of Oliver. And he’s...kissing someone else.”

For a second, I felt like I was the only person in the room. I felt like I was floating, as if my head was detached from the rest of my body. My skin started itching with anxiety as I could feel the girls’ eyes burning into my face.

“What?” I finally asked after a long few seconds of silence.

Stella walked over to Julia and snatched my phone out of her hand as I sat there, as silent and still as a statue, trying my best to make sense of what she had just said. Clicking on the video, Stella watched the clip and showed it to Laura too, before they all sat down by my side and placed their hands on my shoulder.

“Claudia? Are you okay?” asked Julia quietly. I finally blinked hard and snapped out of my bubble.

“Let me see,” I uttered. Holding the phone, the sight of him kissing another girl made my stomach turn. I could see his hands running through her hair, exactly how he’d do to me. And then her hands on his waist. I felt sick. But suddenly, a glimpse of the girl’s face came into view. As I paused it, I furrowed my brow to take a closer look. Catching on, the girls looked concerned.

“What is it, Claudia? What did you see?” they asked as they crowded around the phone whilst I silently stared at the face.

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“Done,” I eventually said as she turned around.

She looked deep into my eyes and smiled.

“Thank you,” she said gently, as she looked at my lips.

There was a linger once more as I felt my heart beating faster. For a moment, my mind became empty. I couldn’t think of anything to say other than wanting to kiss her. But I didn’t. I couldn’t.

“You look nice,” I eventually said.

She smiled in response.

The door suddenly knocked in interruption.

“Oh, the girls are here. I better go.”

“Claudia, remember to put your location on and message me.”

She looked back at me as she headed through the door.

“I will, boss.”

I opened the door to be met with an empty hallway. I popped my head around the corner, thinking if perhaps one of the girls had already gone downstairs. I headed down the stairwell, not thinking much about it. The girls would do this often – ring the door and then just meet me outside. I opened the building door onto the street. Stepping out, I turned my head to look for them. But nothing. Suddenly, a girl’s voice was heard behind me.

“Hey, Claudia!”

Before I could turn around, a black bag was placed over my face as a blunt object struck my head with force as my screams were gagged by something shoved into my mouth.