
MY
Secret
YOUTUBE
LIFE



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For Mum

I just want you to know I never wanted to do this.

I never wanted to ruin your life.

You need to know that what is about to happen isn't my fault. If you hadn't done what you did, there wouldn't be anything to ruin. If you hadn't lied to us – all 3,054,263 of us.

I trusted you so, so much. I trusted everything you said, everything you told us. How could I have been so stupid?

You deserve all that's going to happen to you. But it also hurts to think of what you're going to go through – the paparazzi, the abuse, the trolls.

I want you to know that I feel bad for doing this, even though it's your own fault. I don't want to hurt you, but I need to make sure people know the truth – one person in particular. Even if you're not who I thought you were, surely even you understand that I have no choice. It's the most important thing I have ever done.

In ten seconds' time I'm going to click publish. Then everyone will know the truth. Everyone will know you lied to us all.

But I wanted to write to you first, just to say I'm sorry.

Issa x

ONE MONTH EARLIER

CHAPTER 1

Lily

I can't even imagine three million people.

I can imagine ten people lined up in a queue. Or about a hundred – Bryan's gigs often hold several hundred faces – but any more and it starts to go fuzzy. How many people can fit in the largest stadium in the world – fifty thousand? A hundred thousand, maybe?

I imagine rows upon rows of seats filled up with faces. Each face a whole life's worth of experiences, families and relationships. Nope. I can't picture it. Even a hundred thousand is unthinkable.

3,002,031

A wave of panic washes over me.

On a day-to-day basis, I don't think about how many people are watching me. But when I do it doesn't feel real. My stomach twists with a mingling of excitement and fear. I can't believe I've hit three million. This is really, properly huge. This is insane.

Instinctively I reach for my camera. What is Bryan going to say? We've been talking about hitting three million for months. The numbers have been creeping closer and closer. I can't wait to tell him!

I lean over to the mirror to check my face. Ugh, I look disgusting. I haven't been thinking about filming all day. Smoothing down my hair, I slick on some lip salve and pull a face at the camera – oh, screw it. I've looked worse. The viewfinder needs adjusting to get my face in shot, and . . . record.

'Bryan! I've hit three million subscribers!'

It feels strange saying the number out loud. Three million people watch your videos. Three million people know who you are. Three million.

Nothing.

'Bryan! I've hit three million!' I say again.

Huh, where is he? The corridor is empty, but there's a faint buzzing of electricity coming from the room at the far end. I go in and see him crouched over his electric guitar, with his phone on his lap, smirking at the screen.

OK, I'm going to scare him. This will make a great shot. I press my fingers to my lips and mouth 'Shh' at the camera. Then I point the camera at my feet and do exaggerated tiptoes behind him.

'I'VE HIT THREE MILLION!' I yell in his ear.

Bryan leaps out of his skin and spins the laptop away from me. He pulls off his headphones.

'Lily, what the hell?!'

His loose hoody has fallen off his shoulder, revealing a long grey tank top – the feathered edge of his black raven tattoo peeping over his shoulder. His fingers, calloused by guitar

strings, clink with rings as he throws his phone across the desk.

I stare at him, the sound of the phone clattering between us. His dilated pupils flick from me to the lens, and he finally twigs.

Great, he knows I'll have to edit that out.

'Err . . . you hit three million? Oh, no way – congrats.'

He gets up and envelopes me in a hug. I stay frigid at first, irritated with him. But then he clutches me tighter and I nuzzle into his scratchy beard and hard, skinny chest – my arm moving round us to get the shot.

My heart starts to thud as I think of all my subscribers – all their imaginary faces swimming in front of me. It almost feels like too many people to please. Too much to deal with.

'I-I just can't believe it,' I mumble thickly, feeling my vision blur.

Bryan whispers into my hair, away from the mic. 'I mean, that is a lot of pre-teen stalkers.'

He sees my face, and changes tack.

'You know what, let's get brunch to celebrate,' he says loudly, stretching his lips goofily at the camera.

I smile. I'm already thinking how I can edit this into a full vlog. We'll need some footage of us getting brunch, perhaps an Instagram if I can get a good shot of the food . . . then if we could get something of us thanking the viewers, perhaps wandering around a park. That would look good. Or did we do a park last week? I could end it with a monologue into the camera saying how grateful I am.

My chest feels tight. I've got two sponsored videos to finish by the end of today, and I'm only halfway through the emails my PA Sam has sent over. I also really should do an Instagram post. But that last shot should be pretty easy to film. If I can

get enough footage of us at the breakfast place, I can fill most of the vlog with me talking after I've finished my work. It'll need editing though, but I can do that tonight. My mind starts whirling with things to do. I put a hand on my neck and feel my blood pulsing against my fingertips.

I can't not upload a vlog tomorrow when I've hit three million. Maybe if I get up at six tomorrow, I can fit in the editing. It won't take long, anyway. I won't film much, and it'll be under ten minutes – I'll try to keep my filming to about forty. I'll just have to fit it in, somehow.

Ouch. I flinch and realize I've bitten my lip so hard it's bleeding. Shit. I'll have to edit that out. I look up at Bryan.

'That would be amazing!' I smile, twinkling my eyes at the lens and reaching past Bry to place the camera on the desk.

Bryan's phone starts buzzing, and he reaches across me to retrieve it. When his eyes catch the screen, he smirks. 'I, um, just need to finish up on some music stuff.' He smiles at me and nods to the door. 'Be ready in ten.'

CHAPTER 2

Melissa

I wish I looked like LilyLoves. She's just posted a selfie on Instagram to celebrate hitting three million – and she looks amazing. She has these huge eyes, framed thickly by smoky black kohl liner and long sweeping lashes. Her hair is also perfect – in a pixie cut, which she styles into these beautiful blonde wisps that skim her eyes.

I could never pull off short hair; my face is way too fat. And my hair is the same dull mousey-brown colour as Mum's – I would look like a boy. Not a cute, girly-looking boy either. An actual boy. People at school would go, 'Hey, who's the new guy in form H?' And when I'd sit next to Suze she would probably go bright red and refuse to speak to me.

She's like that with boys.

I click on Lily's latest post – 'A Little London Adventure' – and scroll through the photos. She's clutching a pot of strawberries outside a market stall, her fingers bejewelled with rough amethyst and topaz rings. *Had a wonderful day exploring London with my*

lovely friend – hope your weekend was also fabulous! Love Lily xoxox

I love Lily's blogs. Every time I see a place she's visited, it makes me desperate to go there. When she posts a breakfast Instagram, it looks so good I just want to reach through the screen and devour it.

Actually, it's probably a good thing I can't. I'm already a bit chubby around my thighs. If I ate like Lily, I would probably need a crane to lift me into school. There's a picture of her crouched over a beanbag in leggings – these long silver beaded necklaces draped across her chest. My legs will never be that tiny.

I tried to re-create that picture a few weeks ago, but the only necklaces I have are these cheap silver ones from H&M, which I've worn so much the colour has faded. I tried stealing a couple of Mum's gold necklaces, but when she saw me taking photos she didn't understand and freaked out.

'What are you doing wearing my necklaces and photographing yourself? This isn't for the internet, is it? Melissa, tell me you're not posting that to THE INTERNET!'

She says I-N-T-E-R-N-E-T like it's this scary place where paedophiles go to lure children away. I bet she has no idea that the girls from school use it to trick boys into saying they like them on messenger, before screenshotting what they say and sending it to the entire class. There's no point even trying to explain vlogging to her.

It was pointless anyway – the selfies looked terrible. I don't have the bone structure.

As I'm scrolling through Lily's feed, I open another tab and click on Bryan's YouTube page. I don't find Bryan's channel half as fun; he mainly just talks about weird music. I tap through to his Instagram page. I mean, I don't mind the photos of his

bandmate Jerry – he's quite hot – but my favourite thing is the pictures he posts of him and Lily.

Before long, I find what I'm looking for – a selfie of Bryan and Lily snuggled up on the sofa together with Bryan's parents' little white puppy, Polar, wriggling between them. Bry's pulling a mock stern face, Polar's paws are entwined in his beard, while Lily has her head tipped back with an easy smile.

They look so happy. I click through to Lily's vlog channel, LilyLives, and open a video of them exploring London. These are my favourite. Bry is running ahead, laughing and jumping on some railings, while Lily is pretending not to watch and rolling her eyes.

'*Seriously, Lily, what is this – 2005? Let's order it online*,' he complains as she drags him into a supermarket. Then Lily pouts, and he laughs, spinning his feet round to follow her.

I lose a good hour wrapped up in their videos, in fact it's 12 p.m. before I notice the time. Oh crap. Mum, Dad and my brother, Aidy, will be back from swimming soon. I tear myself away from Lily's videos and look around my room. Mum is going to flip. It's a mess of clothes, hairbrushes and discarded make-up. My life is so much worse than Lily's – I wish I had a beautiful home and a boyfriend.

Not that Bryan is really my type – there are much better-looking guys in lower sixth. Bry is very skinny, and his eyes are slightly too close together. But then he does have the whole band thing, which somehow makes him sexier. And he does really care for Lily.

Nibbling my nail, I think about what life would be like if I had a boyfriend. Me and a tall, dark, good-looking guy going for a trip to London – posting pictures on my blog of us visiting

quirky restaurants, coming back to our flat to rustle up dinner, him laughing and teaching me to cook. Or maybe we'd both be terrible at cooking, so we'd get a takeaway and snuggle up together, kissing the grease off each other's lips . . .

I click back to Lily's blog. The pathetic thing is I don't have a boyfriend. I haven't even kissed a boy. Well, not properly. I had a couple of awkward lip clashes with my boyfriend Yousef a couple of years ago, but we were such little kids – it wasn't a real relationship. At the end of year nine, he moved schools, so I dumped him. That was the depth of our love.

Sixteen years old and I've never had a proper boyfriend. This is my life.

I open my own blog and split the screen so it's side by side with Lily's. All I've written about so far is make-up reviews, and I've now exhausted everything in my collection. My follower count is stubbornly stuck on fifty-one. I don't know what else I can do. I've already tried and tested nearly everything in our house.

I click through some more London beauty blogs. I pause, looking at one blogger's photo of some Shoreditch street art. It looks like something you'd see on Flickr.

Hmm, I wonder . . .

I type 'Shoreditch street art' into Flickr images. A flurry of East London shots pop up on my page. They look seriously cool. If only I'd been there. If only I could have taken these images. My blog would look great.

I click on one of the images and notice a tiny 'C' with a score through the middle of it, with 'public domain' written underneath. Wait a minute – does that mean I can use this image for my blog?

I read the blurb. From what I can see . . . yes.

Within minutes I have a bank of free images from London – market food, street art, even some touristy-looking shots from Buckingham Palace.

With trembling fingers, I upload them to a new blog page. Keeping Lily's blog open beside mine, I start writing:

Wonderful day out with my friends in London! You all have to try these locally sourced fruits – they're delicious, truly divine. Had to take a snap to share with you. I just couldn't help myself! Love IssaAdores xoxox

I title the post 'Issa's London Escapade'. It looks like a really fun day out. My hand hovers over the publish button . . . I can't quite decide whether to publish it. I feel like I am crossing some invisible line.

But, I mean, I could easily have gone out and taken these photos. I could easily have visited these places. There's nothing weird about it – I will probably one day actually visit all of these spots. And then I can replace the photos with my own. They're just placeholders really.

With my mind set, I click publish and feel a surge of elation. My blog looks much cooler – much more like Lily's. I give it a couple of minutes and refresh the page. My follower count has already leaped up to fifty-three.