



# 1. OLIVER

My eyes sting against the brightness in my room when I wake up. I didn't sleep well. I usually don't before I have to get on a plane. I try to concentrate on the sound of the waves crashing outside my room, but it just reminds me of how much open water my plane will be flying over. I haven't had a panic attack the entire trip, and I don't want one on my last morning in the Dominican Republic.

I get out of bed, grab some clothes, and head to the bathroom. I'm so tired as I brush my teeth that I drop my toothpaste cap down the drain. Which means I have to throw out the rest of my toothpaste. The travel-size tube is almost empty anyway, so it's dumb that losing the cap bugs me, but it does.

Annoyed, I quickly put on my clothes and head to the hotel lobby, which has been set up as a dining space for us volunteers. Everyone has their phones out and is swapping numbers and emails and stuff, including Emily, who is talking to Devon. She puts her hand on his arm, and I almost go back to my room, but she sees me and waves. I'm not sure if the wave means I should go over there or not, but I decide I should, even though Devon is less than thrilled as I approach their table.

Emily's eyes look even bluer with her new tan. Her smile turns to an expectant look. "Do you want to sit down?" she finally asks.

"Sure," I say, sitting. But I quickly spring back up. "I should get my breakfast first," I mumble.

"We'll save your seat," Emily calls as I get in line at the buffet table. I start to pile my plate with scrambled eggs, but in my hunger and tiredness I drop a bunch onto the platter of pancakes. I stand with the ladle in my hand, trying to decide if I should scoop the eggs off or just leave them, feeling my ears burn.

I decide to leave the eggs, but as I head back to the table, I hear someone behind me in line say, "Eww, someone dropped eggs in the pancakes. That's disgusting."

My ears feel like they're going to catch on fire as I sit down again.

Emily and Devon are both scrolling on their phones, so I'm not even sure if they've noticed I'm back, but Emily looks up just as I'm shoveling food in my mouth.

She asks, "Oliver, I heard you're not on our flight anymore?"

I've just taken a huge bite, so I nod. They both look at me, and I realize I'm supposed to say more. "Going back on the earlier flight," I finally manage to choke out.

Devon rolls his eyes. "What, big party in Brooklyn you need to get back to?"

My ears start to burn again. That's actually exactly why I'm going back early, but it's clear I can't tell Devon that.

"It's a sorta . . . family emergency," I lie.

Devon rolls his eyes again and grabs his breakfast tray. "Have a safe flight," he says, sarcasm dripping from his voice. Then he smiles at Emily. "See you at the beach in ten?"

Emily gives him a dirty look, but Devon leaves smiling. "He's such a

jerk sometimes.” She watches him walk away, then turns to me again. “So, really, why are you heading back by yourself? I think you’re the only volunteer who actually *wants* to leave the Dominican Republic.”

I fidget in my seat. “It’s not that. Something came up last minute back home.” Which is only 50 percent a lie. Kelsey mentioned the party on the first day of my trip, but she only actually invited me yesterday morning.

“Olive . . .” It’s the nickname she thinks she invented for me. I haven’t had the heart to tell her my aunt Jana has called me “Olive, because you’re too little to be a whole Oliver” since I was three and it’s never not annoyed me.

I avoid her eyes and pull my phone out of my pocket and start fiddling with it.

Emily quickly reaches across the table and grabs the phone from me. It’s open to my pictures—specifically the one of Kelsey that I saved off Facebook. “Does *Kelsey* have anything to do with your early departure?”

Busted. Maybe I’ve talked about Kelsey too much with Emily. Maybe I’ve talked about Kelsey too much with everyone.

She raises an eyebrow at me, but I just sort of shrug, and she goes to my contacts to add her number.

“Trade you,” she says, sliding her own phone my way. It’s totally different from mine, so I fumble for a bit with her watching while I add my phone number. I include the *r* in *Oliver* without even really thinking about it, then worry she’ll read into that, but I’ve already slid her phone back to her a little too hard. She barely catches it before it slides off the table.

I cringe, but Emily just laughs again. “Bye, Olive. Don’t go breaking any hearts, okay?” She clears her breakfast dishes and heads out to the beach.

I watch her leave, and as I look at the back of her head, her hair reminds me of Kelsey's. I swear Kelsey used to wear her hair in a braid like that all the time. Maybe.

I sit at the table by myself and pick up my phone. I scroll through all my texts with Kelsey. I pulled her number off Facebook and saved her in my contacts months ago but never actually texted her. Then suddenly on the way to the airport she texted me *2 bad ur gone all spring break*. I stared at the message for a while, telling myself she had probably meant to text someone else, even though I had just posted a picture of my suitcase. I composed and rewrote and deleted, and when my mom went over a bump, my finger tapped the guy-in-sunglasses emoji. I wanted to throw up at first. But then she sent the wink emoji back, and somehow we texted the whole spring break, even though we have hung out exactly once outside school, when a big group of us went ice-skating. That was four months ago, and since then I could count the number of conversations I've had with her on one hand.

I head back to my room to pack. I spent my junior-year spring break helping build houses in the Dominican Republic, so most of my clothes are dirty. I throw my crumpled and sweaty laundry into my suitcase. I look out my window one last time, at the beach and palm trees. I see Emily and Devon walking together, and I grab my suitcase and head to the lobby.

I'm the only volunteer on the little airport shuttle. We stop at a couple of resorts to pick up other travelers. One man has three huge suitcases, and the driver can't fit them in the undercarriage of the small bus. There is some rearranging, some yelling, and finally the man, who is now drenched in sweat, brings one of his suitcases on board. He doesn't make eye contact with any of us and fans himself with his boarding pass.

We're already running late, and some of the other passengers are

grumbling, but it's fine with me, really. The less time I have to spend at the airport, waiting to get on a plane, the better. I wish there was a train that went from the Dominican Republic to Brooklyn. Or even a boat. Something lower to the ground that doesn't go tens of thousands of feet in the air. I take a deep breath, wipe my sweaty hands on my legs.

When we get to the airport, the sunburned resort-goers pile off the bus in front of me. Because I was the first one on the bus, my suitcase is the last one the driver pulls out. He wipes the sweat off his face with his shirt. I wasn't watching anyone else, so I'm not sure if a tip would be welcome or insulting. I opt for a handshake, which he looks confused about. I mumble "*Gracias!*" and walk into the airport. I should say more in Spanish—should *know* more Spanish, considering my dad was born in Mexico—but I don't.

The security line is long and moving slowly. My mom tries calling, but I feel weird talking on the phone with so many people around me. Then she texts—and she doesn't stop texting. *Hope you're at airport. Did you get my last text?* I can picture her pacing our pristine apartment, wiping down the counters for the third time this morning, the phone in her other hand.

I send her a quick message: *Sorry, was packing and saying bye. I'll see you in a few hours.*

She writes back so quickly I wonder if she already had the message composed: *You're sure everything is okay? You're really just coming back early for a party??*

I look up at the line, take a deep breath. *Yes, Mom, just a party. At security.*

A millisecond later: *Okay. Let me know when you're on the plane.*

I close out of the text with my mom and send a quick group text to Kelsey and Lucy asking for the address tonight, even though I was at

Lucy's house a few months ago when we had to do a history project together. I'm getting close to the front of the line, so I shove my phone into my bag. I look up, and a woman is trying to walk through the metal detector while on a phone call. She looks confused when the security workers make her hang up. No one else seems bothered . . . except for a girl at the front of the line, who I swear is wearing a flannel shirt that Kelsey has. She's looking around, and our eyes lock for a second. Without thinking about it, I roll my eyes and smile, and she smiles back at me.

She has a really great smile.

Airports suddenly seem a little less scary.

Flying in general seems less scary when I get to the gate and see that the girl is on my flight.