

Cameron

April 2020

Div 4 Humanities

IOROW short stories

Ollie and Olivia

With a swift tug at the thick flannel blanket, a young olive-skinned girl was revealed, clutching her pillow as if she feared it would run away from her. The girl was protected by a fortress of pillows, outlining her figure. Her mother, Vanessa, held the stolen blanket in her left hand and tried to shake the girl awake with her right. Unphased by the insistent shaking, the girl continued to sleep soundly. The mother's bony fingers attempted to tug the pillow her daughter had been holding, but the sleeping hands' grip stiffened.

“Olivia! For goodness sake! Wake up! It's your first day of school.” Olivia mumbled in unintelligible protest and continued to sleep. Vanessa gripped the pillow with Olivia still attached and pulled with all the strength her frail body could muster, sending the two tumbling onto the floor. As Olivia sat up, a few of her thick curls fell out of her messy bun onto her face. Her hazel eyes were still clouded with sleep, and she moved her lips slightly as she cursed her mother under her breath. Vanessa rose from her knees and dusted off her work uniform. She bent over to place a kiss on Olivia's forehead.

“I have to head to work a little earlier, sweetie. I won't be home until late again tonight. Make yourself some breakfast and head to school.” Olivia simply nodded in response, dropping another handful of chocolate curls in front of her eyes. She kept her sleepy eyes shut, listening to her mother's footsteps fade further away until she couldn't hear them anymore. With a heavy sigh, she clumsily rose to her feet and stumbled into the uniform neatly laid out at the foot of her bed.

An hour had passed and Olivia, as usual, was running late. At a glance, anyone could tell she was a rather innocently clumsy person. She missed her 7:45 bus because she couldn't decide what to make for breakfast. Although it was only a 15-minute walk from her apartment to her new school, she sprinted the entire way, tying her hair into a tight knot as she ran. As she reached

the steps of the high school, she realized how foreign it all was to her. It was a private school: kids with rich daddies were dropped off in front of the steep, cobblestone steps. Each and everyone of them looked as if each hair had been intentionally and neatly laid by a careful set of hands. Each and every one of them looked back at her as if they knew she didn't belong there. Her skirt was crooked, and she hid the tight fitting shirt under a large sweatshirt. She *hated* skirts, but only wore it because she promised her mother she'd wear it for her first day.

As she nervously fumbled with her hair and straightened her clothes, she noticed another student, no older than herself, sneaking a glance or two at her. She had the same striking hazel eyes but they were much more resolute than Olivia's soft gaze. They practically had the same face. The mystery girl's curls were placed into a neat high bun except for two strands of hair that outlined her olive-toned face. Olivia moved toward her, but the bell rang, sending a swarm of students flooding through the towering double doors. The overwhelmed student followed the stream of teenagers until she somehow managed to find herself in the proper homeroom class.

Olivia glanced around the room and noticed the mystery girl staring out the window. After a moment, the teacher noticed Olivia lingering by the door and instructed her to sit at the empty desk by the mystery girl, whose name she learned was Ollie. The two girls looked at each other and exchanged a knowing smile— a smile that one would exchange with an old friend. As Olivia made her way to her new spot, the similarities between the two grew more apparent; their freckles traced across their cheeks, and they shared the same beauty mark beside their pear shaped noses. Ollie scribbled something onto a torn piece of paper and handed it to her new neighbor. The note was neatly written in blue ink with a simple “hey :)” sprawled evenly across the lines. The two continued passing each other notes during the rest of their classes, bonding over the boring drawl of each lesson. The blue and black ink painted the frayed paper. The two wrote as if they'd known each other their whole lives. Ollie finally tore a new piece from her notebook, scribbled a last note, and passed it with her neatly manicured hand. Olivia unfolded the note and smiled. Ollie invited her to dinner later that night. The thought of asking her mother crossed Olivia's mind but she shrugged it off, promising herself that she'd be home before her mother could notice she had gone out.

The two sat with anticipation until the final bell rang. They made their way to the suburb on the edge of town. They walked as they talked, sharing stories about their childhoods. In no time, the two found themselves standing in front of the kind of house that Olivia had only seen in movies. She stood at the bottom of the stairs in awe as Ollie made her way up. Ollie noticed her frozen comrad and joined her at the bottom of the steps. She smiled at Olivia and led her up the stairs and into the house. As she pushed open the door, Ollie shouted aimlessly into the void of her house, informing her mother that she had brought a friend over for dinner. Her mother responded from the kitchen in a language that Olivia assumed was Filipino, having only understood a few words that her mother used from time to time. Ollie turned to Olivia and explained that dinner would be ready soon, and her mother asked the two of them to set the table. The disembodied voice was named Christine. She eagerly spoke to the girls from the other room, asking about their day and the usual basic small talk. She was the kind of woman that acted as if every child was her own. Each word rolled off Christine's tongue like sweet honey, and she spoke as if she were singing a melody. She began to gush about how excited she was that Ollie had finally made a new friend, causing her daughter to scold her mother with Filipino words Olivia *definitely* never heard her mother say, and frankly hoped she never would. The three laughed and giggled until Christine announced she'd finally finished dinner.

As the girls finished arranging the dishes, a slender woman with loose, dark brown curls pushed the door open with her back, carrying a large pot of kare-kare with thick white pot-holders. She turned to greet the girls with a big smile, but as she locked eyes with their guest, the pot slipped from her hands, spilling its contents on the tile floor. The three stood there in shock, unsure what to say. The woman finally closed her eyes and spoke.

“Get out...”

“Excuse me?” Olivia was taken aback by this sudden change in character. Christine's sweet voice turned bitter.

“Are you deaf? I said get out!” She grabbed Olivia's wrist and led the girl toward the door. Ollie grabbed the other and pulled against her mother's insistent tugging.

“What the hell, mom? What are you doing?” Ollie tugged again, freeing Olivia's hand from the woman's grip.

“She can’t be here!” The mother sounded desperate.

“Why not?” Both girls stepped just out of arm's reach.

“It's not safe!”

“What the hell is that supposed to mean?” Ollie wasn’t willing to buy into the vague excuses. Christine muttered something in filipino under her breath and releases a deep sigh.

“Olivia... you are just as beautiful as I remember. The two of you were always inseparable.” The woman’s face painted a bittersweet expression as she locked eyes with the young girls. It seemed as if, with each passing memory, her smile grew nostalgic and her eyes welled.

“How do you know my name?” Olivia asked slowly.

“The last time I held you, you barely had any hair. You always had a smile on your face.” Her smile turned bitter as she continued. “Olivia, your mother Vanessa is my sister. She may have raised you but she is not your birth mother.” Before the two girls could speak, she continued.

“She took you from me when you were barely six months old. She told me that if I ever attempted to come in contact with you or tell anyone about what happened, she’d hurt you.”

“You’re lying,” Olivia muttered. The girl’s face contorted as she thought of Vanessa, the woman who couldn’t bring herself to kill a spider and agonized over the thought of it having a family.

“There’s no reason to lie. My twin girls, seperated. I was absolutely devastated. I couldn’t even attempt to see you. But I knew, wherever you were, you were safe.”

Olivia left the house quickly with the excuse that Vanessa would be home soon. She arrived at the small studio apartment and locked the door behind her. Vanessa wasn’t home yet. *Was that woman telling the truth? She knew me. She knew my mom--I mean Vanessa--I mean... I don’t know... I don’t know...*

She heard a familiar car door slam, so she hurried into her room and packed a bag just in case. *I doubt I’ll need it, but I need to be sure.* Her heart pounded as she listened to Vanessa fumble with the keys at the door. When she’d finally opened it, she saw Olivia standing a few feet away with a stuffed duffle bag at her hip.

“Hi sweetie-” Vanessa began in her usual soft greeting.

“Do I have a sister?” Olivia interrupted.

“What?” Vanessa scoffed with confusion and mild amusement.

“Are you my mom?” Olivia continued. Vanessa froze. She realized Olivia was dead serious. The girl asked again with a much more stern tone, “Are you my mom?”

“Olivia...” She didn’t wait for Vanessa to finish. She picked up her bag and pushed her way passed the frail woman, sprinting until she was out of sight. She didn’t stop until she reached Ollie’s front door.

Vanessa

****17 years ago****

“You can’t stop me, Vanessa. My mind is made up.”

“Christine, they’re children! They’re your children!”

“Just one of them. I only need one. I’d get a pretty fair price for the other.” Christine clutched Ollie in her arms. I peered at baby Olivia’s sleeping face. I tried to slowly make my way toward the baby’s crib while Christine was distracted by her own breathy mumbling. I will protect her. I have to protect her.

“Christine, you don’t need the money. You have enough blood on your hands. This has officially gone too far.” She stopped and stared back at me.

“You don’t know me. You don’t know my life.” She began to shake. She’s gonna blow. I lunged for Olivia and held her close to my chest.

“Don’t come any closer. I swear to God if you ever come near this child again, I will tell the police about your little trafficking business.” Christine stared at me with pure hatred. I can feel her bloodlust pool as she stared back at me. I backed up until my back met the door and ran until her piercing gaze couldn’t follow me anymore.

****Present day****

I’ve never seen her look at me like this. Olivia is my daughter. I raised her. I loved her. I love her. But now she’s looking at me like she doesn’t even know me.

“Are you my mom?” I want to say yes, because I am, but I know that’s not what she means. She knows I am her mother. She knows I love her. She just wants to know why I lied, why I’m lying. I hurt her to protect her. I can’t lose her... I can’t... fuck...

“Are you my mom? I reach out for her hand as she pushes me out of the way and sprints out the door. I knew letting her do cross country would come back to bite me. I need to get her back. I know she’ll go back to Christine. She doesn’t *know* Christine, and I absolutely won’t let Christine hurt her.

I run after Olivia, watching her disappear into the distance. I have to keep running. My knees are beginning to give out, but I have to keep running. I finally see Christine’s flashy mansion as I round the corner. The house was made from impractical geometric shapes. It practically screams, “I have money, but don’t ask where I got it.” And all of these stairs? What the hell is wrong with her? My legs buckle with each step but I make it to the door, and begin desperately ringing the doorbell, praying that Olivia is the one that answers. I keep ringing with no answer. Please, please, please, Olivia, please! The door swings open and my heart stops. *Fuck*. My eyes stay glued to the floor, staring at the obnoxiously pointy heels.

“Hello, Vanessa.” She knows I lost. She knows *I* know I lost. Her voice says it all. What she meant to say is, “The girl chose me, so fuck off.”

“Where’s Olivia.” My voice cracks and my eyes begin to sting, but I continue staring back at the she-devil. Her smug grin somehow pisses me off more than the usual Cheshire grin she wore as she counted the money after each job.

“Vanessa, I am feeling generous. If you pack your things and leave town, I won’t call the police.”

“You vindictive little --”

“I mean you *did* kidnap my daughter. There's no denying that. And whether or not she knows the *whole* truth, she knows that you took her. You have no leverage, you have no allies.” She’s practically singing as she speaks. I’m fucked. I just want to lunge at her. I want to push her out of the way and call out for Olivia. But I know she won’t forgive me, not anytime soon at least. I turn away from the breathing spawn of evil and make my way back down the hellish stairs.

“Leave tonight. If I ever see you in this town again, I *will* ruin you.” Okay, now she’s actually singing. My face flushes with anger as my pace quickens.

Home. What can I bring? Where will I go? Fuck. I stuff a week’s worth of clothes into an old duffle bag and rush toward the door. Olivia. I can’t leave her like this. I grab a pen and paper and scribble as much as I can before the tears threaten to flow. I can send it from the train station! I make a break for the door with my bag on my shoulder. I’ll see her again and explain everything properly, but for now this letter will have to do. As I’m speed walking toward the station I feel someone walking close but I can’t see them. She wouldn’t have someone tail me right? I just have to make it to the station and then I’m free.

When I arrive, I buy my ticket and prepare to board the train. I find a bench as far away from the man who is nose deep in his frayed copy of *Carrie*. An hour has gone by, and I begin to daydream about being reunited with Olivia again as I feel an arm wrap around my neck. I have no clue who this is, but it’s definitely not Christine. Must be the dork from earlier. He was reading Stephen King, so I have no idea how I didn’t suspect him sooner. Ignoring my stupidity, I elbow him in the gut, forcing him to release me, and land a solid right hook into his jaw. Fuck. My letter to Olivia falls from my pocket, out of reach. I try to quickly pick it up in my attempt to escape, but the man’s right arm finds its place at my neck once again. I knew she wouldn’t let me leave so easily. His grip tightens, and my vision fades as I drown in the droning echo of Christine’s laugh playing over and over in my head.

Christine

Olivia rang the doorbell continuously, her heart racing and beads of sweat racing down her face. She continued to ring until Christine finally opened the door. Without hesitation, Olivia threw herself into Christine’s arms and began to sob. She wrapped her arms around the crying girl and led her to Ollie’s room. The three of them sat on Ollie’s satin sheets, hugging as tears streamed down Olivia’s face. The doorbell rang desperately and Christine rose from her spot next to the girls.

“We know what she’s here for. I’ll send her home.” She stroked their hair and made her way downstairs and to the door. With a confident deep breath, she swung open the door.

Christine hadn't felt such a rush in years. Her sister's pure hatred bled from her lips with every word. Christine had won. She had finally won, and they both knew it.

"Leave tonight. If I ever see you in this town again, I *will* ruin you," Christine called after Vanessa just before slamming the door behind her. She exhaled as if she'd been holding her breath for years—17 years to be exact. The woman made her way into her study. Its walls were blood red with velvet furniture to match. As if music were playing, Christine danced across the white tile floor, sweeping up her phone as she spun. She dialed a number and began to hum along to the dial tone. When the person on the other line answered, she let her words spill from her lips sweet as honey.

"Vanessa has been dealt with, which means we are back in business!" She threw herself onto the velvet loveseat and continued, "Let's pick up where we left off, shall we? A set of twins... yes, they're mine but the details aren't important. I'm sure the doctor would offer a pretty penny for this set." Christine wedged the phone between her ear and her shoulder as she made her way across the room to her bookshelf, and traced her fingers across the books. The two discussed the final details of their business, ending with an exchange time and the sound of a kiss. She continued to dance as she walked, opening the door with a grand swing. But there stood the two girls with a tray of tea in Ollie's hands staring back at her. Ollie dropped the tray and the two ran back up the stairs into their room locking it behind them. Christine cursed under her breath and ran after them, banging her palm against the door.

"Girls, you don't understand. It's not what it sounded like," Christine pleaded as she continued banging against the wood.

"Then what the fuck was it exactly?" Ollie growled from the other side. The girls listened with their ears pressed against the door. It was silent. The two exchanged confused glances and peered under the door. Gone. They retreated to the king sized bed and sat in silence, watching the door until they eventually fell asleep side-by-side. Later that night, Olivia was woken by voices in the darkness. She half expected to wake up back in her room with the sound of Vanessa warning her that she'd be late. She hoped that she'd wake up and that Vanessa would be holding her, reassuring her that it'd all been just a bad dream. She tried to sit up, but she couldn't budge. It wasn't a dream. Vanessa wasn't coming back. Olivia tried to shout, but all that escaped her

lips was a pained groan through the duct tape. Naturally, she began to panic, trying to pry her arms free, but they were tied tight behind her back. She quickly realized that she wasn't going anywhere. She sighed and stifled a sob with the limited air the duct tape permitted to pass through. As Olivia's eyes began to adjust to the darkness, she was able to make out a figure in front of her. There sat Ollie, eyes wide with terror and a matching piece of duct tape over her mouth. As she began trying to speak, a voice hugged their ears.

“Hello, girls.” Christine's sweet voice filled the room as they felt consciousness slowly slipping away from them.