

## 1 Nothing's Perfect

Olivia POV

One more year of high school and I can nally start working toward my degree in marketing. I know it's strange for a seventeen-year-old to want to have such a specic career, but I want to follow in my dad's footsteps. He owns his own advertising business that I plan on joining after I graduate. I am denitely a daddy's girl. Not that I don't love my mom, but my dad and I have a special bond.

I have an older brother who is a bit of a jock, but he isn't conceited. As older brothers go, he is a pretty good one. Don't get me wrong, we have our ghts, but for the most part we get along well. He is two years older than me and in his second year of college. He was actually supposed to pick me up today but aked, which isn't like him. I make my way down our street and notice a car I've never seen in the driveway.

As I make my way up onto the porch, I can hear raised voices. I can tell one is my mom's but the other isn't familiar. A few seconds go by and the yelling stops. I push the door open and stop dead in my tracks at the sight in front of me. My mother is in the arms of a man I've never seen before. Not only is she in his arms, but he's kissing her. I don't even realize I gasp until both their heads turn toward me.

"Olivia," my mother says, and I take a step back. "How could you," I say before I turn running back out the door I just walked through. I don't get far when I run into the solid chest of my brother. "Oli, what's wrong" he says, wrapping his arms tightly around him. "Mom," is all I manage to get out. He rubs circles on my back, but his next words have me stepping out of his embrace. "Mom will explain everything, Oli," he says.

I step even further away from him and look back at the porch where my mother and the pr\*ck she was kissing are standing. I look back at my brother. "You knew, you knew she was cheating on dad." "It's not that simple, Oli. Let's go inside, and we can all talk" he says, taking a step toward me. I move before he can get close. "Where is dad?" No one answers, and I take another step away from them, ready to run. "Where is dad," I scream.

"I'm right here, Oli girl," he says from behind me. I run the ve steps and wrap myself around him. I can't stop the tears that ood my cheeks and the sobs that shake my body. "Dad, I want to leave, please." "Alright sweetheart, let's go" he says. My dad keeps me tucked under his arm as we head toward his truck. "Charles," my mother calls out, but he doesn't turn to acknowledge her. He helps me into his truck and rounds it to get in. Before he opens the door, my mother stops him.

"Charles, please," she says. I hate the pain I see in my father's eyes. "You made this choice, Evelyn." "You know it's not that simple, Charles. I never meant to hurt you," she says. "It's not me, I'm worried about Evelyn. You hurt our daughter. She is all that matters right now," he says. Without another word, he slides into the truck.

My mother comes to my window, but I refuse to acknowledge her. "Oli please. I can explain everything if you just give me a chance. I need you to stay and talk to me. I love you," she pleads. I nally can't stop myself from responding. "Well, I don't love you. You made your choice and I'm making mine. I choose dad. Go be with your boyfriend and your son. We don't need you." "Oli," my dad whispers.

"Please just drive dad." Out of the corner of my eye I see my mother sob, but I can't bring myself to care. As my father turns off our street, I let more tears fall. A few minutes later he pulls into the ice cream shop we have been to as a family countless times. Some of my best childhood memories are getting ice cream here and playing at the park across the street. "I don't think ice cream is going to x this dad."

"I don't think so either, Oli. I just gured it would be easier for us to talk if I parked. I'm sorry you're hurting kiddo" he says. "No, don't you dare apologize for what she has done. This is not your fault. This is all mom's fault and I will never forgive her." "I know your hurting Oli, but this is between me and your mother. No matter what happens, she loves you and your brother" he says. I can't believe him. She cheats on him, and he is still trying to defend her.

"Don't dad. Don't defend her. She cheated on you. I saw it with my own eyes. She destroyed our family." "I know you're upset, Oli, but she is your mother. What happens between me and her won't change that," he says. "It changes everything. I don't care if she is my mother. I won't ever forgive her for destroying our family and hurting you."

There is silence for a few seconds as I stare out the window. "Oli, your mother wanted to be the one to tell you, but after what happened today, I think it's best for me to tell you now. Your mother and I are divorcing. She is going to live with Xavier. She wants you and your brother to go with her," he says. Rage bubbles up inside me. How dare she even think I would live with her and that a\*\*hole. "No, f\*\*k no." "Oli, language" he says, but I see the hint of a smile.

"I want nothing more than to keep you with me, Oli" he says, but he sounds defeated. "Good because I choose you. I'm staying with you. I'm seventeen, and I'll be eighteen in eight months. I can decide who I want to live with and it's you. She and Connor can live with her boyfriend, but I'm staying here." He pulls me over the console and holds me like he did when I was a kid. An hour later we are heading back toward the house that has always been my safe place.

I was hoping Evelyn and Connor would be gone, but unfortunately they are still here with the man my father called Xavier. I follow my father inside and my mother rushes toward me. I loop my arm with my father's and stare at the woman that seems like a stranger to me. "Oli, let's go sit down and talk." "No, you, Connor, and your boyfriend can leave our house. I have nothing to say to you."

"Charles, please talk to her." "She is angry Evelyn and I can't say I blame her." I swear I hear a low growl, but when I look past her I only see Xavier. "You know this isn't easy for me either, Charles. I'm not trying to hurt you or Oli," she says. "You could have fooled me. Honestly, Evelyn just leave. You have a new family so we don't need you here." "Oli, don't you ever call me by my name. I am your mother no matter how upset you are with me," she says, her voice angry.

"No, you're not. You stopped being my mother when you betrayed dad and destroyed this family. Now I'm going to my room and I hope you're gone when I come back down." I start up the stairs, but her words stop me in my tracks. "Oli, don't make me do something I don't want to do. You can't stay here. You need to live with me," she says. I turn and look at her. "I would rather die than live with you, Connor, and that pr\*ck."

She gasps, but I don't wait around to hear what she has to say. Once I reach the hallway, I breathe a sigh of relief until the door to Connor's room opens. He steps out of his room with his bags. I try to walk past him, but he reaches out and grabs me by my arm. I rip my arm from his hold. "Oli, I know you're upset" he starts to say. "My name is Olivia to you. Only my family and friends get to call me Oli and you are neither now."

He looks as if I just slapped him. "Olivia, you will always be my sister." "No, I won't. Go join your new family. We will be ne without you or Evelyn." His eyes get big hearing me call my mother by her name. I take the opportunity to slip inside my room and lock the door. He knocks a few times, but when it goes unanswered, I gure he must have given up until I hear him speak. "I love you, Oli" through the door. The tears start to fall again, but I quickly wipe them away. Neither of them deserve my tears.

I refuse to cry over him or my mother. They made their choices and I've made mine. I grab my favorite pajamas and head to my bathroom. I step under the hot spray and lean my head against the tile wall. How did all this happen? I thought my parents were happy. They have always acted like they were so in love. I mean I'm sure they have had ghts but nothing that was ever serious.

I'm not sure how long I stay in the shower, but when the water starts to cool I step out and wrap a uffy towel around myself. After I'm dressed, I step back into my bedroom. A knock on the door startles me. "Oli, sweetheart, can you open the door?" I walk over and when I pull open the door I'm engulfed in strong arms. "I love you, Oli. I'm so sorry you're hurting, but I promise you everything will work out," he says.

"As long as I have you, dad, I'll be alright." "You'll always have me. What do you want to do for the rest of the night, Oli girl" he asks. "Can we order a pizza and watch movies?" "I think that sounds like a great idea," he says. He presses a kiss on my forehead. "I'm going to go order the pizza while you pick out a movie." I nod and heads toward the door. He turns when he reaches it and offers me a sad smile.

"No matter what happens, Oli, I want you to remember I love you." His words do nothing to quell the torrent of emotions raging inside me, but I know he needs me to be strong for him. "I love you too, dad."