

By Proxy

Olivia told lies the way some people smoked cigarettes – habitually and with casual carelessness for the future. She was about to tell another one. She started at her daughter, Acorn, sitting in the nursery school classroom and rapped lightly on the glass of the closed door. Acorn looked up and brushed messy blond strands from her face. Her eyes widened. She grabbed her drawing and ran to the hall to greet her mother.

“Mama! Did you come from work?” she asked, wrapping her arms around Olivia’s pink hospital scrubs.

“I did. We’re leaving school now.”

Acorn looked at her with round, questioning pupils.

“Daddy has a meeting today – so I left work early to pick up you and Gus.” This was a lie. There was no big meeting. Olivia inspected her daughter’s marker-smearred hands and sighed.

“I have to tell Ms. Shannon I’m leaving,” Acorn said as she wriggled out of her mother’s iron grasp. “Here.” She thrust a drawing at Olivia and scampered back into the classroom. Olivia glanced at the paper. A lively purple cat of fantastical proportion crossed the Bay Bridge. Wearing a black beret. Olivia’s cell phone buzzed – a text from her mother.

“Do you have both children in the car?”

“Yes,” she texted. Second lie since her shift.

“Text me when you’re on the road. Sophie is expecting you late tonight.”

Sophie was Olivia's childhood friend. Born two weeks apart, the pair grew up on the East Coast and then escaped to California, to mute their mothers' influence. It'd been years since Olivia had visited Sophie, but as soon as Olivia mentioned the crumbling wreck of her marriage, Sophie invited her to Palm Springs. "Stay as long as you like, until you figure things out," she'd told Olivia.

Ms. Shannon appeared in the hallway with Acorn.

"I wanted to introduce myself – I don't think we've met before," Ms. Shannon said. She smiled warmly.

"Sorry, Ms. Shannon, I've got to take her early today. My son's doctor had an opening last minute – I'd have sent a note this morning if I'd known." Three lies in as many minutes. Worried that Acorn might expose the fib, she gave her daughter a hard stare. "Gus is in the car waiting for us so we've got to get going." Olivia grabbed Acorn's hand and hurried her down the corridor toward the school parking lot.

#

Outside, Olivia glimpsed her son's pointy, birdlike shoulders in the backseat of the beat-up Honda Pilot. An epileptic from infancy, Gus had never been anything but weak. Not that her husband could see this reality. Augustus kept insisting that the child was healthy and intervening in the never-ending stream of doctors' appointments. Didn't he care about the welfare of his only male offspring? Olivia opened the car door and Acorn hopped into the back, buckling her own seatbelt with a satisfying click.

"Good job!" Olivia said. She gave the little girl a high five and gently shut the door.

Gus sat wan and listless on the other side.

“Arms up, baby boy” she said. She yanked the belt across his chest and tightened it.

“Thanks, Mama,” he said.

In the driver’s seat, Olivia pulled a compact from her purse and flipped it open. The rude, round mirror showed dark rings around her eyes and deepening frown lines. She dapped concealer under her eyes and inspected the bump on her nose. She pressed the ridge, as if she might smooth the bump away like Play Dough.

“Are you looking at your witch’s nose, Mommy” Acord yelled from the back.

“Haha, very funny,” Olivia said. She snapped the compact closed and suppressed a smile at the thought of Acorn inheriting the same feature.

Olivia gave the Pilot some gas as they merged onto Interstate 5. The last time she’d seen Sophie was in Malibu over fifteen years ago. She’d taken the scenic route along the Pacific Coast Highway in a rented BMW convertible. The whip of salty sea air pulse through her like the promise of some exciting future. Sophie and Jared were newlyweds then, living hand-to-mouth in that ramshackle surfers’ paradise they shared with three other couples.

“Mommy, this isn’t the way to Doctor Thompson’s office,” Gus whined from the back seat.

Olivia didn’t respond. She was surprised Gus had questioned her so early on. She’d assumed she’d have a few hours to gather her story; to paint a picture of adventure for the children – a colorful canvas from which their father remained conspicuously absent. Olivia flicked her eyes to the rearview mirror. Gus looked angry.

“We were supposed to turn off the highway a long time ago,” he said.

“Honey, you know that stress can trigger an epileptic fit,” she said. “Why not let Mommy worry about the driving?”

Olivia’s cell phone rang, saving her from a full-fledged inquisition. Augustus’s name flashed on the dashboard and she made a split-second decision.

“Hi!” She said in her cheeriest voice. There was a pause.

“Liv, hi.” Augustus said. “Sorry, I was trying to call someone else. Must’ve taped your number accidentally.”

That figured.

“While I’ve got you, I should let you know that I’ll be home late tonight – these meetings with the contractors are taking forever.”

“No problem, honey.”

“Can I talk to Daddy?” Acorn yelled.

“Sorry, he’s too busy.” Olivia pressed the “End Call” button. “Does Daddy seem different lately?”

“He doesn’t like to talk on the phone,” Acorn said.

“Have you noticed he’s been coming home late a lot?”

“No...but he smells funny!”

“Dad doesn’t seem any different to me,” Gus said.

“Ok,” Olivia said. She stopped probing. “I guess it’s time to tell you about the surprise.”

“What is it? What’s the surprise?” Acorn said.

“Yeah what is it?” Even Gus seemed intrigued.

“I’ll tell you have the surprise now and if you are very good, I’ll tell you the rest in an hour.”

The children were silent, knowing their mother equated the absence of noise with good behavior.

“We’re driving to Palm Springs for a vacation.”

“Really? That’s so exciting,” Acorn exclaimed. “What’s Palm Springs?”

“It’s a place in Southern California, Stupid,” Gus said. “I don’t believe you, Mom. No way are we going there. We never go on vacation.”

“Do you think I would lie to you?” An edge crept into Olivia’s voice. “We are going to Palm Springs to stay with my best friend Sophie, her husband Jared and their two boys.”

“I’ve never heard of Sophie,” Gus said. He stuck his thumb in his mouth.

“Seven years-old is too old for thumb-sucking, Gus.” When his face crumbled Olivia felt a terrible pull at her heart. “I know...sometimes, habits can be very hard to break.”

“Will Daddy be in Palm Springs?” Acord asked.

“Daddy can’t come this time,” Olivia said. “He’s got too much work for a vacation.”

#

A little after 9pm the Pilot pulled up to Sophie’s house in the Vistas Las Palmas neighborhood of Palm Springs. Sophie had moved up in the world. Mid-century modern homes studded the winding road, their geometric facades with thoughtfully placed windows looked like faces smiling at the spectacular backdrop, the San Jacinto Mountain range. A beacon of opulence, Sophie’s house surged at the crest of the cul-de-sac. Olivia triple-checked the address she had against the house in front of her. Cacti framed the front lawn on three sides and a

family of four sculptured sheep clustered near the entrance. A school of well-fed Koi fish wriggled about in an inlaid stone pond. A thump on the hood of the car startled them all.

“Oh! It’s just Panther,” Olivia said.

The tuxedo cat’s silhouette melded into the darkening sky and its yellow eyes bore through the windshield. Swishing its tail, the animal contemplated the new arrivals.

“That cat must be a hundred,” Olivia murmured. As far as she could tell, Panther was the only remnant of her friend’s old life. Olivia buried thought of her own tiny apartment with its cracking paint, popcorn ceilings and view of the Tenderloin homeless.

“C’mon guys, we’re here.”

Olivia stepped out of the car and stretched toward the sparkling desert sky. The heat had dissipated and stars poked out of the royal blue canopy above rock-covered mountains. San Francisco felt very far away. Maybe they could move here. Not to an estate like Sophie’s but to a normal house at least, with a lawn. Maybe her mother would help her. With that thought, Olivia checked her phone.

“We’re here,” she texted her mother.

She noted six missed calls and eight unread text messages from Augustus.

“Hiii!” Sophie called out from the front entrance. Her yellow, cotton robe hung open, revealing a gauzy white swim suit. Sophie waved one hand; the other held a rocks glass halfway filled with brown liquor. Olivia noticed a stomach pouch – permanent evidence of the children she’d given birth two. Two husky, dark-haired boys stood near their mother, one nearly as tall as she was.

“These are my sons, Johnny and Bruch,” she said.

The boys smiled. Bruce, the older one, cradled a basketball in the crook of his arm.

“You guys wanna play?”

“Not now, honey,” Sophie said. “Kids in the kitchen for snacks and juice. The four of you can play later.”

“No basketball,” Olivia whispered to Gus before he went inside.

Sophie gave Olivia a wide-opened smile. “It’s been forever,” she said. She wrapped her arms around her old friend. “Acorn looks just like you! You must be exhausted.”

Olivia shrugged. “It was a long drive.”

“Well, obviously,” Sophie said. She had an easy, lilting laugh. “Come inside, have a drink.” She linked her elbow with Olivia’s and winked at her.

“Some ‘Mommy juice’?” Olivia said, smirking.

“Ha! I can barely keep a straight face when other moms use that moronic expression” Sophie said.

Olivia broke into an authentic smile. This was her friend. Despite the fancy house and apparently perfect children, Sophie was still in there. They glided through the magnificent living area, past floor-to-ceiling windows, under a finished wooden ceiling. Shag rugs covered the floor and desert vegetation sprouted from hand-painted ceramic vases. Sophie slid open a glass door and pulled Olivia onto the patio. Olivia slid off a sandal and poked her toe into a patch of lush grass. How did they grow grass like this in the desert? Jared lounged on a plush outdoor bench next to a serving cart on wheels. Without getting up, he tipped a bottle of Pinot Grigio into a wine glass and dangled it in Olivia’s direction.

“If I remember correctly,” he said. He raised two eyebrows.

Olivia made a face and grabbed the glass. “Don’t get up on my account,” she said, and settled into a cushioned chair.

The three friends sat together in silence. Olivia knew she would have to tell her story; she was desperate to sound even-handed and collected. But, it was Sophie who spoke first.

“So, tell me what’s going on, ‘Liv.”

“My mother probably told you everything already,” Olivia said.

“She said you and Augustus weren’t getting along, but she didn’t get into specifics. I know she never liked Augustus, so I’m waiting to hear the truth from you.

“You’re right, she never liked him,” Olivia said.

She recalled the night before their wedding. Augustus slept at a nearby hotel; Olivia at her childhood home. Her mother had stopped in the bedroom just as Olivia was drifting off and sat on the edge of the bed. As her weathered hands smoothed the wrinkles out of the handmade quilt, she informed Olivia in soft tones that future grandchildren would be raised Catholic. Olivia had laughed off the mandate – at the time she doubted she would ever have children. But, her views changed once Gus was born. She recalled the fight over his baptism. It was the first of the fights they would never recover from – each unresolved argument chipping away a piece of the marital foundation forever.

“Augustus hasn’t contacted you, has he?”

Sophie looked surprised. “No, I haven’t heard from him in years.”

“It’s really the children I’m worried about.” Olivia furrowed her brow and waited as her eyes filled with tears. “Those poor, defenseless kids can’t stand up to Augustus’ temper.”

“He’s not violent, is he?” Sophie asked, aghast.

“I wouldn’t go as far as ‘violent.’ But certainly abusive.”

“What’s the difference,” Jared asked. “He always seemed so carefree.”

Olivia’s pulse quickened and she felt her face flush with indignation.

“You never know what people are like behind closed doors,” she said. “But you’re right – he is carefree. It’s a potentially fatal flaw when you have an epileptic child to keep alive.”

“Right,” Jared said and sank back into silence. It seemed to Olivia that he was about to say more but thankfully plugged his thoughts with the bottle of IPA he was holding.

“I don’t trust him around the kids anymore. He’s in complete denial that his son has a life-threatening problem. I would feel sorry for him if his attitude wasn’t putting Gus in danger. There was an incident last month.” Olivia closed her eyes and drew in a long breath. “We had a birthday dinner for Augustus – a picnic in Golden Gate Park. I invited a few friends and their kids to this cute spot with a playground and picnic tables. About an hour into the party Gus left the kid’s table and tugged on my elbow. He said he felt ‘weird.’ Olivia paused and flicked her gaze from Sophie to Jared and then back again. She had their attention. “Anyone in the medical profession knows that feeling off is a possible indication of an oncoming seizure.”

“I’d never heard that before,” Sophie said. “What’d you do?”

“I looked for other signs of a seizure, which frightened Gus. The Augustus picked him up and said Mommy was being ‘silly.’ Every bone in my body to me something terrible was about to happen. I begged Augustus to put him down but he laughed at me. I remember my vision going blurry – I was so worried I called my mother for advice and she called 911. I guess she asked EMS to hold Augustus down while Gus and I got into the ambulance. But by the time the paramedics arrived Augustus had calmed down and let us go to the hospital.”

“Jesus Christ,” Sophie said. Jared whistled and looked off into the mountains. “Your mother is a piece of work. What happened at the hospital?”

“The doctors gave him a small dose of lorazepam and did a full exam.”

“So, he had a seizure?”

“No, thank God. We got to the hospital just in time. But after that night I started planning to separate from Augustus.”

“When was the last time Gus had a seizure?” Jared asked.

“Just after Acorn was born,” Olivia said. “So, nearly five years ago.” Olivia though she saw Jared and Sophie exchange a look. “He may have had a very small one last year,” she added.

“Liv, remember that time when we were kids and you found a little white spot on your tongue? You were convinced it was cancer so I took you to the school nurse who said it was nothing,” Sophie said.

“I remember. When I got home I showed my mom and she took me straight to the ER.”

“I didn’t know that,” Sophie said.

“It’s the truth. Anyway, what are you trying to say? You think Lewis doesn’t have epilepsy?”

“Hang on – I never said that, Olivia. If you say he’s had seizures I believe you. But sometimes kids grow out of these things. I just don’t want you to stress needlessly.”

“No, I know, of course,” Olivia said. “But I have to be vigilant – if his mother doesn’t protect him who will? Anyway, my mom made an appointment a children’s neurologist for

tomorrow. I going to meet with him myself tomorrow. Can the kids stick with you guys for a couple hours while I take care of that?”

“Sure. Whatever you need,” Sophie said.

#

Before bed, Olivia looked in on her sleeping children, two little lumps puffed up underneath a king-size quilt. She hovered over the Gus lump and wrung her hands. The first seizure had been like an avalanche – out of nowhere and worse with each passing second. He was three weeks old when it happened and there she was, a first-time mother, unsure of herself but desperate to do everything right. She’d heard a scuffle over the baby monitor. It was a minor noise, small as a mouse dashing through the brush. She was wrecked with exhaustion but Augustus was sound asleep and snoring softly. The infant’s doll-size hand was whacking the crib bars when she went to him. His little body convulsed uncontrollably and his eyes rolled back into his head. She didn’t remember much after that. They got Gus to the hospital and somehow seven years later he was still here. Olivia never told a soul that she had dropped Gus during a feeding that morning.

Back in her room, Olivia undressed in the glow of the bedside lamp and rolled into bed. She scrolled through her phone. There was a series of texts from her mother. She tapped out a quick reply, “Safely in Palm Springs. Could be the place to settle.” Then she switched off the bedside lamp and closed her eyes. A tremor of uneasiness passed through her body. Something wasn’t right. Olivia checked her phone again. Not a single text from her husband in hours. Why had he stopped trying? Had he figured it out? Maybe she had neglected to dispose of some telling scrap of paper, or left her browser open to a page about Palm Springs’ schools. Sophie

would never alert Augustus, would she? Olivia's eyes rested on a shadow that loomed from the walk-in closet. She sat up and flipped and checked her phone. The last text from Augustus was from 7:17. That was five hours ago. If he had figured out where she was and left at 7:30 he might be close by now. How fast would he have to drive to get here in only five hours? Olivia slid out of bed and crept to closet. Standing with her back against the wall, she stretched her right arm to the closet door. She closed her eyes briefly, shoved the door inward and stumbled into the closet, ready to confront Augustus. Frantic, she tore Sophie's old clothes off the hangers. But the closet was empty.

#

Olivia arrive at the Desert Regional Medical Center fifteen minutes before her scheduled appointment with renowned pediatric neurologist, Dr. Clifford Kudro. The Center's red brick roof and whitewashed adobe walls boosted her mood. This place looked nothing like the drab, grey hospitals in San Francisco. Her phone buzzed.

"Make sure they agree to all the tests we talked about," her mother texted. "Don't skip a thing. It's been years since he had a comprehensive exam."

"I know, Mom, I'm a nurse, remember?" Olivia texted back.

"As am I."

The air in the waiting room. was warm and the atmosphere tranquil. Framed black and white photographs of desert scenery hung from the walls. Olivia jotted down the litany of tests she wanted for Gus. At 10:20 the receptionist called out for her.

"Ms. Greene?"

“It’s Mrs.,” Olivia said. “Is the doctor running late?” She walked over to the desk and noted the plastic nametag clinging to the receptionist’s uniform.

“Yes, he is. But that’s not why I called you up here.” The woman shifted uncomfortably in her tight blue scrubs. “Where is your son?”

“He’s...he’s at home,” Olivia said.

“Dr. Kudro only takes appointments with the actual patient. He’s asked that you reschedule and come back with Gus.”

Olivia plastered a tight smile on her face. “Mandy, I’ve had this appointment for weeks and this is the first I’m hearing about this requirement. My son is a very sensitive boy – it’s not appropriate to discuss the tests in front of him.”

“Hm.” Mandy tugged down the cotton top that had risen over her belly. “Maybe you can tell me which tests you’d like for Gus and we’ll schedule a follow up.”

“I’m not sure I would call it a follow up as I’m not actually seeing the doctor today,” Olivia said. She handed the list of tests over the counter. “My son has a serious illness and I don’t appreciate this delay.”

Mandy removed a pair of reading glasses from her shirt pocket and placed them on her nose. She took her time reading down the list, making little noises in the back of her throat.

“Mrs. Green – I see that you want Gus to have a functional MRI. We only do this test prior to surgery. Also, the SPECT scan isn’t something we would ever do during the first stage of testing. We’d only resort to it if the MRI and EEG can’t pinpoint the origin of the seizures. The rest we can do.”

Olivia dug into her pocketbook and lay her nursing credentials flat on the counter.

“You’re a pediatric nurse?” Mandy asked. “And you didn’t know you’d have to bring your son to the appointment?”

“Of course, I know the standard protocol, Mandy. But doctors make exceptions all the time.”

“Ma’am, I’m not a doctor, and I don’t make exceptions because I intend to keep my job. If you can come back next week, we have an opening Wednesday at 11.

“That’s fine,” Olivia said. She spun around and walked briskly toward the exit.

“Please remember to bring Gus,” Mandy said.

#

The rising desert sun easily penetrated the Pilot windows, warming the left side of Olivia’s face. She drove down the main street in a mortified fury, only noticing the illuminated gas light after she had passed through the town. The orange tank icon mocked her, forcing her to make a U-turn and fill up at the nearest station, where she paid with her credit card.

#

Olivia pulled up to Sophie’s house in time to see Gus grab a white flag and sprint across the lawn where his apparent teammates were cheering him on. As far as she could tell, the kids and dogs were all on one team and Jared on the other. Bruce was jumping up and down yelling, “you got this, Gus,” and a German Shepherd ran beside him, coaxing the flushed, sweaty boy over the line. Frozen in disbelief, Olivia watched as Jared dashed after Gus. Just before he Gus crossed the line, Jared reached out and grabbed him by a skinny white ankle. Gus lunged forward but fell on his face, mission incomplete. He hit the ground with a thud that broke Olivia’s horrified trance. She jumped out of the car to save her son.

“What are you doing?” She yelled at Jared as she cradled Gus’ head in her lap.

“I’m okay, Mom,” Gus said. He brushed a few blades of grass off his face and tried to sit up, but Olivia held him down tightly.

“Gus doesn’t play games like that,” she said to Jared. Her expression was cold and in control.

“Sorry, ‘Liv,” Jared said. His face told Olivia otherwise.

“I don’t give a damn about your sorries,” she said.

#

Monday morning, Jared left at 7:30 to take his sons to private school. Olivia still wasn’t speaking to him. She dressed Acorn and Lewis and told them to be good for Sophie. She was going to scope out the Palm Springs elementary school. When she brought the kids into the kitchen Sophie was talking quietly on her cell phone. She immediately got off the call and slipped a piece of paper into her jean’s pocket.

“What’s that,” Olivia asked.

“Are you going to visit the school today?” Sophie said, ignoring Olivia’s question.

“Yes – I have high hopes for it,” Olivia said. “Who were you talking to?”

“Oh – no one – electrician.” Sophie waved her hand in the air dismissively. “When will you be back?”

“The meeting starts at 9am and I’ll stop and the grocery on the way back. I can keep the kids with me if you’re too busy?”

“No, they can stay with me. It’s no problem,” Sophie said. She smiled but her hands gripped the top of the kitchen stool and white streaks ran down her knuckles.

#

The meeting at Palm Springs elementary school only lasted 15 minutes. Ms. Llewelyn, the Vice Principal, said Palm Springs did not permit inter-district transfers mid-year. Olivia was free to apply for the upcoming year, but admission wouldn't be granted unless she moved into the correct school district. She could apply to a private school if she wanted mid-year admission. Fat chance of that.

Sickened with frustration by another failure, Olivia decided to skip the grocery store and return straightaway. She hated to admit to herself that hadn't thought through the details of transferring the kids to a new school. She had been so focused on the escape...maybe she could home school them for the rest of the year. A nervous flutter surged Olivia's gut. She didn't believe in ESP or any other hocus pocus, but sometimes her body gave her signs that acted like a sixth sense. The flutter grew into full-fledged anxiety as she approached Sophie's house. Olivia slowed to a stop on the side of the road when she saw the red, flashing lights at the end of the cul-de-sac. Two police cars and a faded, beige Buick huddled around Sophie's driveway. Augustus' white, BMW 3 series hugged the curb, its hazards flashing. Olivia saw her husband's jet-black hair and unmistakable broad frame. He stood on the lawn talking to a grandmotherly woman who was holding hands with Acorn on her left and Gus on her right. A policeman stood near them. From the policeman's conciliatory hand motions, Olivia guessed he was trying to urge Augustus back into his BMW. Olivia dialed her mother.

"Mom, he's here. He found us," she whispered into the phone. "The police are at Sophie's and a strange lady has the children." Olivia's throat tightened and she held back tears.

“A ‘strange lady’,” her mother mimicked Olivia’s tone in disgust. “Like a social worker? How could you let this happen, Olivia? You must’ve done something moronic.”

“Maybe Sophie told him,” Olivia said, remembering this morning’s strange behavior. Clearly, the plan had been to remove the children before she returned from town. The insultingly brief meeting with the Vice Principal had inadvertently helped her catch them in the act. She counted the small blessing as she drummed a fingernail on the dashboard. But, she would have to thank God later. Her mother’s yelling continued unabated from the cell phone but Olivia had stopped listening. She dropped the shrieking cell phone on the passenger seat and thrust the car into park. Shoulders held high, Olivia took brisk strides toward the children.

“There’s Mommy. Hi Mommy!” Acorn cried out.

A stern female policewoman blocked Olivia’s approach.

“Olivia Greene?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Would you mind coming down to the station with me?” The tone clarified that this statement was an order.

“Of course not,” Olivia said. “But, the children need to stay with me.”

“That’s not possible right now,” the policewoman said. She pulled a folded paper from her back pocket. “We have a warrant for your arrest. The charge is kidnapping. Would you please get in the car? I’d rather not cuff you in front of your kids.”

“You don’t understand,” Olivia protested. “I’m protecting them.”

The policewoman glanced at Augustus. His jaw was tense and his face blotchy and red. She put her arm on Olivia's shoulder. "If there's been a mistake we'll sort it out," she said. "For now, I need you to come with me."

Olivia nodded. She summoned her most acquiescent voice. "I'll come with you, but please have the kids stay in police custody. Gus is an epileptic and needs to be monitored."

Augustus slapped his hand against his forehead and held it over his eyes for a moment too long. When he dropped the hand, he revealed swollen eyes. Olivia wondered when he had last slept.

"How did we get to this, Olivia?" For a very brief second Olivia wanted to go to him, to comfort him and reunite with her family. The moment ended.

"Who told you I was here?" Olivia locked eyes with her husband. "Did she call you?" They both looked at Sophie.

"In fact, Sophie did call me. She was worried about you, Olivia. Everyone is. But I already knew where you were because I was watching your credit card transactions. If you'll remember, I got that card for you," Augustus said bitterly.

Olivia blinked. Her mother was right. She was a moron. But self-righteous rage quickly eclipsed self-hatred.

"Can you imagine the psychological damage you are doing to these kids – bring the police here?"

"Please try to be an adult," Gus said. "You need to accept that actions have consequences."

"Stop fighting," Gus yelled at both parents.

Olivia struggled to loosen her thin arm from the policewoman's grip. She twisted and turned, grunting with the effort.

"Mommy, stop!" Acorn pleaded, but Olivia could only think of reaching Augustus and slapping him across the face.

"Oh God," Augustus yelled.

He began to back away, a repulsed to on his face. But, to Olivia's surprise Augustus wasn't looking at her, rather over her shoulder. She turned around and there was Gus, writhing on Sophie's perfectly manicured grass, saliva dripping from his mouth, urine soaking his shorts. She looked at the petrified faces around her – cops, her husband, her best friend – threats from every direction. Olivia dropped to her knees and rolled Gus onto his side. She tilted his head with her hand, directing the vomit to the ground.

"Do you all think I'm lying now?" she asked. When no one responded, Olivia turned to the policewoman. "Would you please call an ambulance?"