

ITHACA

Written by

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LOGLINE

When an irresponsible woman is fired from a temp job, she returns to her hometown to ponder her past failings and possible future while living with her grandmother.

INT. OLIVIA'S BEDROOM - DAY

The quiet grace of Degas' ballerinas. The mad swirls of Van Gogh's Starry Night. The iridescent gold of Klimt's The Kiss. The vast loneliness of Andrew Wyeth's Christina's World. Posters of these great works of art fill the walls of this bedroom.

Above a desk is a taped admissions letter from NYU to Olivia Harper: "Congratulations," "Department of Art History," and "National Merit Scholarship," dated March 30, 1991.

OLIVIA, 17, is wearing a red bandanna and a sleeveless military jacket over her black t-shirt. She stares at the mirror on her door as she speaks into the corded phone.

OLIVIA

I look like Kurt Cobain.

MISSY (V.O.)

Better him than Courtney Love.

OLIVIA

This is true.

MISSY (V.O.)

About time we celebrated your full ride to NYU.

OLIVIA

I'll pick you up at ten.

INT. DAVE'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

A small, woody basement with enough teenagers packed into it to be a fire hazard. Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" BLARES out of the speakers. Many are dressed in grunge (flannel, cutoffs, thrift-store), the fashion of the times.

Olivia is sitting on the couch, and she looks tired and confused. MISSY, 17, sits down next to her. They have to scream at each other to be heard over the music.

MISSY

You okay?

OLIVIA

My head is spinning and I kinda wanna cry...?

MISSY

Oh my God. You know what you are?

OLIVIA
No.

MISSY
Drunk.

OLIVIA
So this is what it feels like.

MISSY
(screams to the crowd)
Hey everybody, Ms. Olivia Harper,
our valedictorian, is officially
hammered!

OLIVIA
Jesus, Missy!

MISSY
(holds up a beer can)
And so am I!

Everybody hoots and cheers, and Olivia manages a smile.

A man built like a linebacker appears at the bottom of the stairs. He flips on the fluorescent lights.

Kids shade their eyes from the brightness. DAVE'S FATHER, 54, turns off the music, filling the room with silence.

DAVE'S FATHER
What the fuck? Dave? DAVE!

Missy takes Olivia's hand and leads her away from the commotion.

EXT. DAVE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Missy and Olivia emerge from the outside basement entrance, swaying from the effects of alcohol as they walk towards Olivia's car parked off street. Even from here, they can hear the RANTS AND RAVES of Dave's Father.

OLIVIA
Good thing we're outta there.

MISSY
And on our way home.

Olivia stops.

OLIVIA
I can't drive, not like this.

MISSY

Olivia, pretty please, we'll drive back like five miles an hour. My parents will totally freak if I don't make curfew!

Olivia takes the keys out of her purse, then puts them back.

OLIVIA

No.

Rain starts falling.

MISSY

Oh come on, now that's a sign from God if there ever was one.

OLIVIA

There's a 7-Eleven two blocks over. I'll call my mom to pick us up.

MISSY

Christ. Pneumonia, here we come.

Olivia and Missy hold onto each other as they stumble away from the car.

INT. OLIVIA'S PARENTS' BEDROOM - NIGHT

JOY, Olivia's mom, 41, is in bed, yawning and rubbing her eyes, trying to wake up as she talks on the phone with her daughter. It's a king bed, and next to her, the space where her husband usually sleeps remains untouched.

JOY

(into the telephone)

I'm not mad, Olivia. Okay, maybe a little, because you shouldn't be drinking. But you did the right thing by calling. On the corner of Valley and Monroe, got it.

Joy hangs up the phone and SIGHS. She rises out of bed and opens her closet when there's a KNOCK on the door.

She opens her door and her son, MARTY, 8, stands there in his pajamas, wide awake.

JOY

Did the phone wake you?

MARTY

Sort of.

Marty jumps on her bed head first.

MARTY
Was that Dad?

Joy finds a pair of sweatpants and pulls them on.

JOY
It was your sister.

MARTY
Why are you going out?

JOY
To pick her up.

MARTY
But she has her car.

JOY
Can't drive it, not right now.

MARTY
Why?

When Joy doesn't reply, Marty figures it out.

MARTY
She's...drunk?

JOY
How...?

Joy pulls her hair into a ponytail.

MARTY
I overheard her talking with Missy.

JOY
I spy with my little ear.

INT. FOYER - NIGHT

There's an umbrella stand to the left of the door. Joy picks up a set of keys off the table against the wall. Joy and Marty are wearing their coats.

Joy opens the door and sees the rain.

JOY
Fantastic.

Marty takes an umbrella from the stand.

MARTY
Let's do this thing.

Joy LAUGHS as they leave the house.

INT. OLIVIA'S CAR - NIGHT

Olivia and Missy are SNORING away in the car, missing the faint SIRENS in the distance.

Olivia is startled awake. The world has turned foggy, and because of the mist, red and blue lights from the main road glow like a beacon.

Olivia checks the time. She stares at the lights, concerned.

EXT. VALLEY ROAD - NIGHT

Olivia, wet from rain, is bathed in alternating red and blue lights from police cruisers as she approaches a car accident.

OLIVIA
(to herself)
Mom?

INT. HOSPITAL HALLWAY - DAY

At five in the morning, the Cayuga Medical Center is quiet. Two people walk down the wide hallway together, their steps CLACKING against the floor.

MICHAEL, Olivia's father, 43, is wearing a trenchcoat over a business suit. THERESA, Olivia's grandmother on her mother's side, 67, is wearing a raincoat and jeans.

Michael says nothing, jaw tight, eyes burning.

THERESA
You didn't hear Olivia on the phone. She's just a child.

Michael stops abruptly, and Theresa runs into him.

MICHAEL
Like hell she is. In a few months, she'll be in New York City by herself.

THERESA
She's never done anything like this before. What's wrong with you?

MICHAEL
She knows better!

THERESA
No, she doesn't, Michael. She's
seventeen.

MICHAEL
Why are you defending her?

THERESA
Because it's what Joy would do.
(beat)
You're not the sole owner of this
tragedy. Your wife is my daughter,
in case you've forgotten.

Michael puts a hand on her shoulder and tries to calm himself. He looks around at the maze of corridors at this intersection.

THERESA
We're almost there. ICU is the
next wing.

INT. ICU WAITING ROOM - DAY

Michael and Theresa are walking down the corridor. Olivia is up ahead, sitting down with the DOCTOR. From their faces -- Olivia's cheeks wet with tears, the doctor's resignation -- it's obvious what's happened to Joy and Marty.

Theresa hurries to Olivia and embraces her. Michael walks to the window of the ICU room and sees white sheets with spots of blood over his wife and son. Olivia pleads with Michael, but we don't hear what she's saying.

Theresa tries to reach Michael to bring him into her embrace, but he shrugs her off and stumbles down the hallway, one hand against the wall, the other balled into a fist.

Theresa's and Olivia's hands are clasped tightly together.

INT. CORPORATE CUBICLE - DAY

A Christmas family photo, where Olivia, Theresa, and Joy are sitting down and holding hands in the front row. In the back row, Marty, Michael, and Max (Theresa's husband) are wearing matching red and green sweaters behind the women.

The photo frame is on the desk of this beige hellhole of a cubicle. Beyond the cubicle, a large sign hangs on the wall:

NEW JERSEY INSURANCE CO.
WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER

Olivia, now 39, is sitting in front of a computer monitor, hunched over as she follows the values on a printed spreadsheet (wide white and green striped paper with sprockets on the sides) with her left finger.

She punches three numbers on the keypad, the Enter key, three numbers, the Enter key. This is the rhythm of this brain-dead data entry job, the three-one punch of key CLICKS.

Olivia CRACKS her shoulders and stretches her arms. She glances at the clock on the bottom right corner of the monitor: 11:01AM.

Olivia's eyes, the keyboard, the spreadsheet, the monitor. Olivia checks the clock again: 11:01AM. Is it possible she's stuck in a time loop?

On the top of her monitor is a rearview mirror for the cubicle dweller, and Olivia catches the eyes of her supervisor, RON, peering over the wall.

Olivia spins around in her chair and gives him her best, forced smile.

RON, 48, is a good-natured guy, a nice boss.

RON
Sorry, but you gotta move.

Olivia rises and follows Ron.

INT. CORPORATE HALLWAY - DAY

The shape and location of the desk, the color of the chair, the position of the telephone, the filing cabinet with its key dangling off the lock -- it's identical in every way to where Olivia currently sits.

OLIVIA
What's the point?

RON
(shrugs)
Facilities assigns spaces for the new employees, and since you're a temp...

INT. CORPORATE CUBICLE #2 - DAY

In her new cube, Olivia attempts to adjust the seat level of her ergonomic chair, but the lever is stuck. She rolls the chair out of the cube to exchange with her old one, but a woman stops her.

CORPORATE WOMAN

You can't do that.

OLIVIA

What do you mean?

CORPORATE WOMAN

Each chair is barcoded, paired with the desk. Please put it back.

Like a schoolteacher, the woman waits and watches Olivia take her chair back, then leaves.

Olivia sinks into her bad chair. She picks up the family Christmas photograph to the right of her mouse pad and brings it close to her eyes.

INT. THERESA'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

The same photograph, except bigger (16x20), hangs above the mantle in Theresa's living room. A lot is stuffed into this room (knickknacks, paintings, pictures, etc.), a sign of an elderly person having lived here a long time. Everything is old: a tall grandfather clock, a fatscreen TV, a thick VCR.

An old Siamese cat sits and YOWLS on an armchair.

THERESA

I know what you want, Johnny man.

Theresa moves slowly and carefully, the unfortunate by-product of being 87 years old. She still gets around without a walker or a cane, but nothing is easy and everything hurts.

Theresa turns on a CD-playing boombox on the side table next to the sofa. Light classical music PLAYS, a Mozart concerto.

Johnny looks at her and YOWLS.

INT. THERESA'S KITCHEN - DAY

Theresa walks into her kitchen, which is as old fashioned as the rest of the house. She opens the white fridge and gets a can of cat food from the top shelf.

Theresa gets a spoon and pries the remaining half moon of the cat food from the can, then expertly aims it from a standing position (to save herself from having to crouch down), the cat food THUMPING onto Johnny's dish below.

Johnny eagerly devours his food.

THERESA

Pretty good for an old broad, huh?
A gold medal to Theresa Williams,
for the Cat Food Drop.

Theresa rinses the cat food can and places it in her recycling bin. She looks up at the clock above the sink and sees 11:39AM.

THERESA

I'm forgetting something...

INT. REFRIGERATOR / THERESA'S KITCHEN - DAY

She opens the fridge door. Her face is framed inside the appliance.

THERESA

Joshua!

INT. REFRIGERATOR / CORPORATE DINING AREA - DAY

Olivia's face is framed inside the fridge, too. She reaches in and brings out her brown bagged lunch, and then, popping her head back out to make sure nobody else is looking, takes a yogurt that has the name "Julie Baker" written with a thick magic marker on masking tape.

INT. CORPORATE DINING AREA - DAY

Olivia brings her loot back to her spot on a long cafeteria-style table that she shares with three others who are clustered on the opposite end. The view from the windows of this dining area is of the ugly parking lot below.

Olivia sits down and opens her bag to eat a sad plastic-wrapped bologna sandwich. She's got three pieces of reading material with her: an art history book, a Sotheby's catalogue, and People magazine.

She tries to read the art history book, but in the corner of her eye, she sees the headlines from People: BRAND NEW BODY! THEIR HOT ROMANCE! EXCLUSIVE PHOTOS!

She switches to the Sotheby's catalogue from an art auction, but once again, her eyes are drawn to People: EMOTIONAL BREAKDOWN! WEDDING BELLS! HOW SHE SURVIVED!

Olivia SIGHS and picks up the celebrity rag.

INT. THERESA'S BEDROOM - DAY

Sitting in front of her bedroom vanity, Theresa applies makeup to her face. Much like Theresa herself, the Victorian vanity is old and graceful, with an ornate oval mirror.

Theresa puts on a layer of foundation, a manageable task even with her shaky fingers. Tougher is putting on the eyeliner, which she attempts multiple times.

THERESA

Come on, you can do it.

Around the mirror are many small photographs. A black and white of her at age five, blowing out her birthday cake. A bathing suit shot of her in college. Posing at the top of a mountain. Inside a racing car. Volleying on a tennis court.

The largest of the photos is her wedding, she and her husband on the steps of the church, a spontaneous shot that catches them looking at each other with smiles of a joyous future.

She puts down her eyeliner and looks at herself in the mirror. Where has the time gone? Who is this wrinkled creature staring back at her?

INT. CORPORATE DINING AREA - DAY

Finished with her sandwich, Olivia picks up her stolen forbidden fruit, the yogurt. She pries the lid open and licks the yogurt stuck on the bottom of the foil lusciously.

One of the co-workers sitting at the other end of the table surreptitiously slips his hand into the pocket of his pants.

The CO-WORKER removes his hand from his pocket to reveal a camera. He turns it on with a quick flick of his thumb, the lens popping out with a quiet WHIRL.

Olivia takes a spoonful of the yogurt and puts it in her mouth -- pure bliss.

The co-worker whips out the camera and takes shots of Olivia holding the cup of yogurt and the spoon in her mouth.

As the device emits its ersatz SHUTTER CLICKS, Olivia is caught red-handed, the name "Julie Baker" on the yogurt container plainly visible.

INT. MOOSEWOOD RESTAURANT - DAY

JOSHUA, 84, is sitting at a table by the window of the Moosewood Restaurant. Around him, there's a bevy of activity -- people eating, waitresses rushing. A distinguished, silver-haired gentleman, Joshua is wearing a sweater and slacks. Two glasses of red wine are on the table.

Theresa sits down in front of him, out of breath.

THERESA

I hate being late.

JOSHUA

If you'd stayed the night...

THERESA

Joshua.

JOSHUA

...then you wouldn't be late. I could've even made you breakfast.

THERESA

Who'll take care of Johnny?

JOSHUA

Pet sitters do exist.

THERESA

Can I have a sip of wine before you continue to badger me?

JOSHUA

I'm sorry. I was on Facebook before I got here. Remember Harold Bingham? You dated him in '47.

THERESA

You expect me to remember a date I had back when Truman was President?

JOSHUA

Well, I remember him.

THERESA

Why? How?

JOSHUA

I remember all the guys you went out with. You were two classes ahead of me, so of course, you didn't even know I existed.

THERESA

So what about Harold Bingham?

JOSHUA

Lots of condolences posts on his page. He died last week.

THERESA

Oh dear.

JOSHUA

I clicked on his profile and saw all these things he was a fan of -- colonial times, apparently, because there was George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, the Liberty Bell, and then, for some reason, magnolias, the tree...

Joshua trails off, and Theresa swirls her glass of wine, happy to wait for him to finish his thought.

JOSHUA

And then I went back to his wall, or feed, or whatever they call it, and I don't know, Theresa, it just all seemed so damn sad. This was what was left of him, these *interests* of his, and his friends and family leaving pithy little comments. "You'll live in our hearts forever." "The world is a darker place without you."

THERESA

Would you rather they'd left no messages at all?

JOSHUA

Maybe. Maybe silence is the best way to honor a death. All I know is that it just felt wrong.

THERESA

All their messages, written into the ether. None of it really exists, and yet it does, just not on my terms.

A chime RINGS from Theresa's purse. She finds her phone and kills the sound, the reminder for her to take her pills.

THERESA

Speak of the electronic devil.

She taps a few tablets out of her pillbox.

JOSHUA

They do have their uses.

She swallows her pills and smiles.

INT. RON'S OFFICE - DAY

A small, windowless office that's well-lived in. A mini fridge sits in one corner. On the shelves above the desk, there's enough food (cans, boxes, jars) for this office to be a small convenience store.

Ron sits behind his desk while Olivia sits on the other side. There are high piles of papers on his desk, so much that he has to move two stacks out of the way to see Olivia.

RON

Julie Baker, the woman whose yogurt you commandeered, she works in HR and has full access to your file.

OLIVIA

So?

RON

So she informed her supervisor that you have a prior.

OLIVIA

"A prior." Been brushing up on your *Law and Order*, I see.

Ron opens a folder and scans it.

RON

Shoplifting and resisting arrest.

OLIVIA

Like twenty years ago. I'd just turned eighteen, which is why the record is still on my file.

Ron holds up a pamphlet: "Our Mission, Vision, and Values."

RON
In this corporate manifesto,
there's a whole spiel on honor and
whatnot, and theft of personal
property is a terminable offense.

Ron stares at Olivia with regret.

RON
Julie said she's had at least half
a dozen of her yogurts stolen.

OLIVIA
You're firing me?

RON
I'm sorry.

OLIVIA
But I'm a good worker!

RON
Well...

OLIVIA
I show up on time every day.

RON
That you do. I like you, Olivia,
you know that. But this has gone
up to one of the senior vice
presidents. It's out of my hands.

OLIVIA
It's a cup of yogurt. It wasn't
even that good. I'll give her the
fifty fucking cents.

Ron closes up his folder and meets Olivia's eyes with
kindness.

RON
When people do silly things like
stealing yogurts out of employee
fridges, it's because they're
looking for something else to give
them a sense of satisfaction than
their work.

Olivia looks pissed, but Ron plows on.

RON
Olivia, I can't imagine you're
happy here, doing what you do.
(MORE)

RON (CONT'D)

You're certainly qualified to do better things. Would you agree with that?

OLIVIA

What brilliant observation will Dr. Ron make next.

RON

I'm just trying to help.

OLIVIA

Then don't fire me from the job that lets me eat.

RON

I called your temp agency with a glowing review, so sooner than later, you'll get another job like this one. If that's what you want.

Olivia looks as if she's about to say something cutting, but she looks at Ron, at his fatherly, caring face, and she stops herself. She rises from her chair and holds out her hand.

Ron rises and shakes her hand.

OLIVIA

It's been a pleasure, Ron.

Ron gives her a wistful, understanding smile.

EXT. OLIVIA AND JUDY'S APARTMENT - DAY

A red-bricked apartment complex that's seen better days.

Olivia pulls up next to a U-Haul truck and parks her car.

She makes her way up the cracked concrete path with the box of her belongings from the office. She glances back at the U-Haul truck, mystified.

INT. OLIVIA AND JUDY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Olivia can only open the door a crack.

OLIVIA

What the fuck?

She pushes harder, and a heavy box blocking it slides away. The living room is littered with boxes and trash bags full of stuff. Olivia adds her box from work to a stack.

JUDY, 23, an airhead, holds a tape gun. She's about to seal a box, but she freezes. She puts on a fake smile.

JUDY
Hey...you!

Judy quickly tapes the box shut.

OLIVIA
You said you weren't leaving for three months. At the earliest!

JUDY
Yeah, about that...listen...

OLIVIA
You were just gonna fucking leave?

JUDY
The girl who was supposed to do the singing in the film broke her leg. If I don't fly out to the shoot this week, they'll replace me.

OLIVIA
So these people are just gonna push you around.

JUDY
It's Hollywood, Olivia. Show business. If I only work for nice people, I'll be a waitress in Jersey forever.

Olivia looks around. The cheapo entertainment center is bare, all the components (TV, amp, speakers) now gone. A stack of CDs sits on top of a dusty rectangle.

OLIVIA
Christ, it's like everything in here was yours.

JUDY
I'll pay my share of the rent for the next three months, right?

OLIVIA
Fine.

JUDY
I'll mail you a check.

OLIVIA
Ha!

JUDY
I will! It might take a month or
so, but I swear.

OLIVIA
Even if you do, I'm fucked, okay?
I got fired today, and can you
guess how much I got for severance?

Judy claps and jumps up like a cheerleader.

JUDY
Ten thousand dollars?

OLIVIA
Ten thousand...? What?!??

JUDY
I don't know! That's a trick
question!

OLIVIA
They're even gonna dock my last pay
because I took too many sick days.

Olivia crumples to the floor. Judy joins her.

JUDY
I'm sorry. But hey, it'll be easy
to find another girl to live with.

OLIVIA
I've been in this apartment for
thirteen years now. You're my
fifth housemate.

The doorbell DINGS.

JUDY
It'll be all right, you know?
It'll all work out.

OLIVIA
Uh-huh.

JUDY
(sings)
"The sun will come out, tomorrow!"

Olivia closes her eyes and leans against the wall.

INT. TOWN LIBRARY - DAY

Olivia is sitting at a public computer. Flanking her are a teenager with earbuds on Pinterest and a homeless-looking guy reading about the history of ballet on Wikipedia.

Olivia goes onto craigslist and clicks on the roommates wanted section, but she can't make herself write the ad.

Olivia checks Monster. She's searching for jobs in museums and art galleries, but there's only one match, and it requires a candidate with a doctoral degree.

Olivia tries perezhilton.com, but alas, the site is blocked.

INT. OLIVIA'S CAR - NIGHT

Olivia is about to crank the ignition, then sees the frame from her office on the floor of the passenger seat.

Olivia picks up the frame and stares at her smiling grandmother, Theresa. When Olivia puts the frame next to her seat, a calmness comes over her. And something else -- hope. For the first time all day, she smiles -- but then it fades.

Olivia grabs the steering wheel tightly. She leans her head against the wheel.

INT. OLIVIA AND JUDY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Olivia returns to an empty room, save for the ugly couch and a lamp without a shade.

She steps on an envelope that was slid underneath the door: "SECOND NOTICE - RENT DUE IMMEDIATELY."

With all the boxes gone, her footsteps on the hardwood floor emit a hollow ECHO. A stack of unused flattened boxes lean against a wall.

Olivia sits on the couch. On the cushion is a stack of bills. All bad news -- past due, collections, etc.

In her hand is the frame from the office. She places it on her lap. Olivia's gaze shifts from her grandmother to her father, back and forth.

Olivia SIGHS, gets her cell phone from her purse, and dials.

INT. THERESA'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Theresa is sitting in her easy chair with Johnny on her lap. Standing next to her is a tall drying rack for clothes, and a hanger with a clear medical solution bag hangs off it.

A tube runs from the bag, terminating at a needle that is inserted underneath the cat's skin, delivering hydration subcutaneously. There's a small hump on his back.

THERESA

The hunchback of Ithaca, New York.

Theresa strokes Johnny, who PURRS. Theresa wipes a tear from her eye. The bag now empty, she pulls out the needle.

THERESA

If you want to go, you can. You know that, don't you, Johnny man?

The phone RINGS three times, then the machine picks up with a BEEP. Olivia's tinny voice comes alive.

OLIVIA (V.O.)

Hello, Grandma. Remember me? It's your favorite granddaughter. I know it's been entirely too long since I called...

Theresa is surprised and happy to hear Olivia's voice.

OLIVIA (V.O.)

I know I'm imposing, but I want to come and visit. Maybe for a bit, if that's okay.

Concern crosses Theresa's face. It can't be good news if Olivia is coming like this.

Johnny is now on the easy chair by himself, and Theresa is moving as fast as she can to the telephone.

OLIVIA (V.O.)

Seven years. I can't believe it's already been that long since I last saw you, but, well...you were there. Not exactly gonna make my life's highlight reel.

Theresa gets to the phone, picks it up, drops it because she's trying to hurry and her hands aren't dextrous enough.

THERESA

Oh, fuck!

She picks it up and hears Olivia's LAUGHTER.

EXT. OLIVIA AND JUDY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Olivia carries boxes from her apartment to her car. A NEIGHBOR who lives next door gestures to see if she needs help, and Olivia gratefully accepts. As the dialogue runs, the two of them move her out.

THERESA (V.O.)

Is it funny when old people say
"fuck"?

OLIVIA (V.O.)

Yes.

THERESA (V.O.)

I'm just as likely to be frustrated or angry as a young person, if not more so, considering that there's not a part of my body that isn't in some state of distress. And yet I'm supposed to exclaim, "Oh my" and "Golly gee" and "Heavens to Betsy" when I stub my toe, when what I really want to scream is, "Goddamn motherfucker, that hurt!"

OLIVIA (V.O.)

You should be doing stand-up. You and Louis CK, touring the country together.

THERESA (V.O.)

I don't know who that is, but he sounds like my kind of guy.

OLIVIA (V.O.)

Talking of guys, are you still seeing Joshua?

THERESA (V.O.)

Was I with him when you were here for my 80th?

OLIVIA (V.O.)

You sound surprised.

INT. THERESA'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Johnny is now up and about, walking a circle around Theresa as she places the speakerphone down on the counter.