

No One Needs to Know

AMANDA GRACE



OLIVIA

Before I even open my eyes, I know something's off. My bed's too stiff, my pillow is too thick ... and I can hear my twin brother, Liam, snoring.

I want to roll over and cover my head with my blanket, but judging by the light trying to pry its way through my eyelids, it's morning. And a school day. Ugh. I still haven't quite adjusted to September.

I groan and sit up, glaring in the direction of the sound. My brother's sitting on the other sofa, an arm slung over his eyes, his mouth open as he snores. The TV screen is overtaken by a screensaver; random portraits of wild animals glide across the screen, one after another.

We'd been chain-watching *The Walking Dead* on Netflix when I zonked out.

I reach over to the coffee table, scoop up a handful of popcorn, and hurl it at Liam. Only one kernel lands in his mouth, but it's enough. He snorts and coughs and then abruptly sits up, spitting the popcorn onto the ground. His sandy-blond hair is sticking up at odd angles, making me giggle.

"Thanks, dude," he says, glaring at me through slitted eyes.

"*De nada, señor,*" I say, swinging my feet to the floor and then heading to the kitchen for a glass of water. While it fills from the dispenser, I study the flier stuck to the fridge. "I get to choose our Friday night movie."

"I know, I know."

I don't miss that it's more of a grumble than an agreement.

"You can't complain if it has subtitles," I add, tracing the name of one of the movies with my finger. It's French.

My glass full, I walk to the windows and peer out at Puget Sound. In the distance, a ferry steams toward our shoreline, carrying people from Vashon Island. We've lived in the penthouse at *Point Ruston* for two years and I'm still getting used to it. I mean, the elevator, the parking garage, the Brazilian-cherry floors, sure. The view? It's just as awe-inspiring every time I peer out the windows. Our old place, a beautifully restored Victorian mansion, was farther up the hill. The water view wasn't quite as *in your face*.

“Pretty much everything at the Grand Cinema has subtitles,” Liam mutters, finally getting off the couch and walking up next to me, still rubbing at his eyes.

I ignore his whining. “We should go kayaking on Saturday. It’s supposed to be hot.”

“I’m busy,” he replies. “Maybe next weekend.”

I want to ask him what he’s busy with *this time*, but I resist.

“Maybe by next weekend the weather will suck.” My eyes roam the skyline, taking in the high, fluffy clouds. It’s been hot all week. Well, hot for Washington State anyway—mid 80s, blue skies, the feeling of the days stretching on and on. “Summer’s pretty much over.”

“So?”

I frown. “So, if we miss the good weather, it’ll be months before we get out again. Come on, please? You never want to hang out anymore.”

Liam rolls his eyes, then looks down his nose at me like I’m being childish. “We’re going to the movies tonight, aren’t we?”

“Yeah. Okay.” I hate the needy tone of my voice, but I can’t help it. There’s just something ... *off* about our friendship lately, but he won’t acknowledge it.

“You nail down the quarterback position yet?” I ask, walking back toward the kitchen.

“Coach will pick on Monday.” His reply is surprisingly half-hearted.

I study his face. “You still want it, right?”

“Yeah. Of course.”

I chew on my lip. I’m not buying it, but my brother is obviously not in the mood to talk. “Okay, well, good luck.” I set my cup on the counter. “Meet me at the theater at six?”

“Sure,” he says. “See ya then.”

I leave him in the kitchen, walking to my room for a quick shower before heading off to another mind-numbing day of school.

“Marriage of convenience,” my best friend Ava announces as she arrives at our lunch table. She sets down a Diet Coke and drops onto the creaky bench.

“Uh, you mean like an arranged marriage?” I ask, popping a baby carrot in my mouth.

“Exactly.” She dumps her food out of a brown paper sack, and I just barely manage to catch an apple that rolls across the table. I toss it her way and she catches it without a blink. “Wouldn’t that be nice, if some level-headed person could just pair you with the right guy and you didn’t have to put up with all this dating garbage?”

I laugh. “Yeah, because I’m never going to find a boyfriend in an all-girls school. I’d take an arranged *date* at this point.”

Ava grins. “Right?”

“Why is arranged marriage on your mind? Is Ayden being a jerk again?” I ask.

“No. It was last night’s article,” she says, yanking open a bag of potato chips. “It was about how arranged marriages aren’t just in India or whatever, but that a lot of industrialized countries still have them.”

“Ohhhh.” Every day, Ava’s dad makes her read one long-form article from a major magazine or newspaper—we’re talking *Time*, not *Seventeen*—and then discuss it at the dinner table.

I reach for another carrot. “I don’t know. If it was up to your dad, you could end up married to a total creep who looks really great in pictures. You know, for the campaign trail or whatever.”

“But at least the creep would attend the charity brunch my mom is coordinating this Saturday, unlike Ayden, who’s trying to ditch it.” Ava sits up straighter, fingering the strand of pearls on her neck. “I mean, they’re not *that* bad. I got to meet the president last year.”

“Yeah, no, they’re really that bad,” I say.

“Whatever.” Ava grins because she knows I’m right.

“Do you want to work on our reading list this weekend? I’m completely overwhelmed and we’re, like, only two weeks into the semester. I’m so screwed.”

Her nose scrunches up. “Ugh, *no*. CliffsNotes. They invented them for a reason.”

“There’s still the essay assignment, and the million calc problems, and the chemistry lab—”

“Whoa, take a deep breath and quit worrying about it, will you? You sound like you’re about to break out in hives,” she says.

I sigh. “It wouldn’t kill you to work with me on homework. I mean, one of these days Mrs. Emery is going to realize you’ve never read *any* of the assigned reading, and this is your third year with her.”

Ava smiles, wide and triumphant. “I look forward to that day. Then I can remind her that my dad pretty much paid for the library that houses said books, and she’ll have to shut up.”

I toss a carrot at her. “You’re terrible.”

“Terribly awesome,” she says, flinging the carrot off her green plaid skirt—which is standard issue for all girls at Annie Wright School. “You’re just jealous I’m so cool and collected. Unflappable ... unflustered ... composed ... ”

“Oh come on, Ava,” I say. “You’ve gotta worry about school at some point.”

“Please. If I’m going into politics like my dad, I can’t get worked up over freaking homework.”

I prop an elbow on our lunch table and rest my chin in my hand. “Have you done *any* of it?”

“Yeah, of course. I’m totally done with the mock campaign posters for leadership.”

I snort. “Naturally.”

“I’m so gonna ace that class. I’ve been waiting *years* for it.”

I pop another carrot in my mouth, wondering how many I can eat before I turn orange, and let Ava’s words go in one ear and out the other. She can blather forever when it comes to leadership class, and before I know it, the bell rings. She disappears almost immediately, waving goodbye to me over her shoulder.

My stomach growls as I stand, shoving most of my lunch back into my bag. It’s not that I’m trying to lose a ton of weight, but a pound or two would help

my gymnastics performance. It's a small price to pay, really.

I try not to look at the stack of homework in my backpack, or the three textbooks I need to bring home, but it's impossible to ignore the tightness in my chest as I remember how behind I am already. I don't remember school being this overwhelming this fast before.

I zip my backpack shut, wishing I could push away the stress as easily as I can bury books in my bag, and then head across the cafeteria, striding straight toward the restroom.

Halfway there, a small group of sophomores blocks the path, completely oblivious. I pause, waiting for them to see me, but they're too busy talking. I only have a few minutes to duck into the bathroom and get what I need from my bag, out of the view of the student body.

"*Excuse me,*" I announce, annoyance lacing my tone. "Maybe you could take your little conversation out of the pathway?"

The girl nearest me, a redhead, grabs her backpack. "Oh, uh, sorry." She moves just far enough that I can squeeze past them and make my way to the door of the restroom.

I'm relieved to find it empty. I set my backpack on the countertop, then fish out a little purple pill box.

Just as I'm about to open it, a girl from my history class, Zoey, waltzes through the door, her torn-up sneakers squeaking on the tile floor. The shoes look ridiculous with the schoolgirl outfit, like some lame attempt to make our standard uniform look punk rock.

I freeze, standing there like a deer in headlights, my fist clenched around the pillbox.

Zoey pauses, her gaze flicking to my hand and then to my face and back again. I must look like I got caught with my hand in the cookie jar.

After a few heartbeats of nothing but staring back at her, I let out a jagged breath of air.

One side of her mouth curls up in a mocking smile as she glances down at my fist again. "Diet pills, maybe? I mean, you don't really *seem* like the type to go for the harder stuff ... "

My face flushes and I shove my hand back into the pocket of my backpack, dropping the box inside. I zip it shut, panic tightening in my chest. “I don’t do drugs, you idiot. I’m a gymnast. I can’t poison my body like that.”

They’re prescription, so it’s not like they’re *drugs* drugs. Not the kind of thing girls like Zoey probably do.

“Hmmm ... ” She tips her head to the side, tapping one black-lacquered finger on her chin in an annoyingly exaggerated gesture. “And yet I’ve caught you red-handed doing *something* ... ” She brightens and claps her hands together. “Oooh, pregnancy test?”

I let out a snort of ugly laughter. “I’m a freaking virgin. I don’t even have a boyfriend. And I swear to god if you start spreading rumors ... ”

She screws her crimson-painted lips up to the side and ignores my words. “But then a pregnancy test is too big to fit in your fist like that, so—”

“Just shut up, okay?” I grab a paper towel and dry off my hands. It’s just my luck that our school’s resident pariah was the one to find me in here. She’d probably love to hand the title off to me and dust her hands of the whispers that follow *her* around like smoke trails a fire.

Then Zoey turns around, reaching for the bathroom door. I scramble over to her and grab the strap of her messenger bag, yanking her toward me just as her fingertips brush the door handle.

“Whoa,” she says, stumbling back and turning to face me.

“Just forget about it,” I snap.

Her expression morphs from triumph to something else. Sympathy? Ugh. The last thing I want is Zoey Thomasson’s *sympathy*.

“Huh,” she says. “So the girl who has everything has something to hide.”

I do nothing but stare into her eyes, willing her to forget it. She saw nothing. She knows nothing. But I can’t get my heart to stop spasming painfully against my ribs.

“All right, all right,” she says, breathing it out on a reluctant sigh. “Your secret’s safe with me, princess.” And then she pats my cheek, smiles, and pushes past me, disappearing into a bathroom stall.

I don't trust her—*no one* trusts her—and I stand there for a long moment, uncertainty swirling in my stomach. I don't think she actually saw what was in my hand, so there's nothing for her to tell. But I screwed it all up with that panicked, frozen reaction. Now she knows I'm hiding something, and that's enough to freak me out. I leave the bathroom without another word, simply because I'm not sure what else to say.

The late bell rings before I'm halfway to Chem, but I can't bring myself to care.

ZOEY

Olivia Reynolds has a secret.

Those five words have been rolling around in my head for the last hour and a half, and part of me regrets that I didn't just knock her out and dig into that ugly Coach backpack of hers to find out what it is. One decent punch to the nose and I bet she would've keeled right over.

It was that wild, cornered-animal look that stopped me. The building panic gleaming in her eyes.

The girl who beams from every yearbook photo, who has single-handedly filled one of the trophy cases in the hallway, has a whole lot more going on in her head than I'd ever expected. And it's almost ... *almost* enough to make me like her. You know, if she weren't such a self-entitled bitch.

I push my way through the crowd, heading toward the only class I share with Olivia—history. I make it through the door with only seconds to spare and sink into my chair, glad I'm several rows behind Olivia. She currently has her back to me and is chatting with Ava, her BFF, the one I would like to strangle with my bare hands.

Mr. Nelson walks to the front of the room, a stack of paper in his hand. "All right guys, settle down. I'm returning your quizzes today. Some of you have some ground to make up, but I've got good news for you: we're getting into our first big project of the new semester. It represents twenty percent of your grade for this term, so you're going to want to spend some serious time on it. Especially those of you who didn't fare so well on our first quiz."

He's walking around the room now, setting quizzes face-down on desks as he goes by. When he reaches my desk, my breath hitches in my throat. I *need* a solid grade in this class, in *every* class, or I lose my scholarship.

This place—Annie Wright School—is the only good school I've ever gone to. Inside these walls, I forget about the hellhole I call home. But if I get even *one* C, I'm out. And even though I'm pretty damn smart, even though I work hard, the pressure constantly makes me second guess.

I hold my breath, flip the quiz over, and instantly grin. A-. I can handle an A-.

“Okay then,” Mr. Nelson continues. “The project will be done in pairs. You’ll be choosing one time period in American history. You’ll then report on a historic event from two different perspectives. Choose two people involved and showcase their viewpoints. Be creative. For example, you could show the Civil War through the eyes of the president and a slave, or show a battle from both sides. You can write a compare-and-contrast essay or two fictional letters or create a skit, anything along those lines. Basically, I want to see how two people with wildly dissimilar perspectives view the same event.”

He turns to the board and starts writing *DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES ON AMERICAN HISTORY*, and the class starts to hum. Someone’s chair screeches as they slide over. Four rows up, Olivia and Ava smile at each other.

Ah, yes, the familiar sting of rejection. I haven’t had an automatic-partner in three years, ever since ... well, in three years. I don’t want to think about why every girl in this school refuses to acknowledge me.

“Settle down, folks. I will be *assigning* partners.”

I sigh. With a bit of luck, I would have ended up as the odd one out and I could’ve done the project alone. Twice the work, sure, but none of the drama. Last spring, in junior English, I got paired with Charlotte Vincent, Ava’s cousin. She refused to get together outside of class and I did the entire project myself. I just showed up and handed her cue cards for her speaking parts.

“I’ve got eleven pairs of numbers in this hat, so choose a number and then find your match,” Mr. Nelson says, walking up to the first row. As he works his way back to me, I glance around, trying to decide the best case scenario. There’s a new transfer student who wasn’t at Annie Wright when everything went to shit. She’s probably heard about me, but she might not care about my apparent super-power of stealing boyfriends.

Mr. Nelson finally gets back to my corner, and I’m the last to choose a number. Around me, the desks are already screeching across the floor as the students find one another. And as I unfold my scrap of paper and find the number three on it, the transfer student is already chatting with her new buddy.

I stand up and look around, grabbing my ratty messenger bag and heading toward the front, to where a few people are still comparing numbers. But the closer I get, the more the dread spins through me.

Because Ava just walked off with her partner, and the only one still alone is Olivia. Great. She'll probably do the same thing as Charlotte and ignore me, and I have no time to do both sides of the project. I'm barely staying afloat.

When she looks up and meets my eyes, her face flushes and she stiffens.

"Number three?" I ask, holding it up. She doesn't speak, just flashes me the matching number on her slip of paper. So I drop into the seat next to her, spin the desk to face her, and meet her eyes.

She stares back, and a thousand things seem to fly between us. She's questioning me, challenging me, judging me. And suddenly I want to defend myself.

"I meant what I said in the bathroom earlier," I find myself saying. "I mean, I won't—"

"*Shut it,*" she says, cutting me off. She darts a nervous glance over at Ava. Wow—girl is dodgy. "Look, you and I aren't friends, and this project isn't going to change that. We'll settle on a topic and do a simple essay. I'll write my paper immediately. Then you can look it over so that the compare and contrast aspect is clear, and you write yours. I'll review it to be sure my paper still stands, and we're done."

I stare back at her, wondering how much of this has to do with whatever she's hiding and how much has to do with hating me, with believing everything she's heard about me. Behind her, Ava is darting glances our way, as if to be sure Olivia is being rude enough to me.

"No talking necessary then, huh?" I say, anger igniting. "You've got it all figured out, as always."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You're a planner. A color-coder." I wave my hand over her binder. "You know. A control freak."

"Look. Unlike you," she snarls, her eyes sweeping over me as if she can tell by my appearance I'm some wastoid loser, "I care about my grades, and I'm not going to let you screw this up. So let's just settle on a topic and get to work, okay? We don't have to like each other."

Of course she thinks I don't care about my grades. Of course she thinks she's better than me. Olivia has no idea what it's like being one bad grade

away from losing my slot in this school. Her parents have no problem ponying up the cash to send her to this place, with its brick façade and manicured lawns and ridiculous tuition.

“Clearly,” I mutter, wondering why I ever once wanted to be her friend. I actually used to admire her. It seems like a lifetime ago.

I flip open the textbook. We skim over a few chapters in silence, the only sounds coming from the turning of the pages. The tension settles around us like a fog, but I can’t think of anything to dispel it. I’m the enemy. Because her friend hates me. Because I caught her doing ... something in the bathroom.

I should just tell her I don’t even know what the hell she was doing in there, but part of me likes that she’s so on edge. It makes her almost tolerable.

“How about the abolition of slavery?” she says, glancing up from her textbook. The look in her eyes has morphed back into the cool, composed Olivia I’ve come to know and loathe.

“Too obvious,” I say.

“The Boston Tea Party,” she says.

“Too boring,” I say.

“The signing of the Declaration of Independence.” She’s flipping rapidly through the pages now, scanning the chapter titles.

“Overdone.”

She tosses her hands up in the air, and I kind of like that her frustration is already bubbling over. Pushing her buttons is proving way too easy. “What do you suggest, then?”

“Everyone’s going to cover the major events, but they’re overlooking the simpler things. I say we compare and contrast the socioeconomic standing of two Americans during a rapidly changing time in history. A factory worker or a farmer or something, and someone wealthy. Make it less about an event and more about everyday living.”

She stares at me, and it almost looks like awe. Like she thought I’d go, *Erm, I dunno, how about, like, whatever?* Does she really take me for such an idiot that saying anything intelligent has rendered her speechless?

“When?”

“The Industrial Revolution,” I say. “The changes would’ve had a big impact on daily lives, both in a factory and at home. Think of the ways the workplace must have changed. Imagine the new inventions rich people could buy. There’s a lot to work with. The compare and contrast practically writes itself.”

Olivia’s finally warming up to the idea, nodding her head and flipping to the corresponding section in our text. “Who writes about which viewpoint?”

I fight the urge to roll my eyes. “You can relate to receiving new inventions the second they’re available, right?” I ask, glancing down at the iPhone sitting at the edge of her desk. “So you take the yuppie and I’ll cover a factory worker.”

Olivia makes a disgusted noise in the back of her throat. “Just because my family’s wealthy doesn’t mean I don’t know what it’s like to be a hard worker.”

“Right. Next time you want to cover my double shift in place of your little tumbling events, just let me know.”

She narrows her eyes and opens her mouth, as if to argue, but I cut her off.

“I think we covered that we’re not going to be friends, so what do you care what I think of you?”

She crosses her arms and leans back in her chair, like she’s just remembered that we hate each other. “I don’t.”

“Exactly. You’re more into ruling with an iron fist.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

I scoff. “You know, stomp on people? Rule through fear? Instead of earning respect, you demand it.”

She snorts. “Oh please. You’re the one being judgmental and rude.”

“I’m serious. When you walk out of this classroom, take a look around. Look at the people who will avert their eyes just because you look their way. Walk right up to someone less popular, less perfect, and see if they smile at you or shrink away.”

“Oh come on. People aren’t *afraid* of me.”

“Right.”

She stares right at me, her jaw line tight, and I know I’ve annoyed her, pushed her just far enough that she’s going to bite back. “Fine. Know what? I’ll do it. But you have to too.”

“No one’s afraid of me,” I say, rolling my eyes at the mere suggestion. “I’m a joke to them.”

“That’s exactly my point. You’re totally paranoid because you’re stuck in the past. Newsflash, nobody cares anymore, but you still skulk around this school like a kicked dog.”

I swallow. She doesn’t know the extent of what Ava put me through.

She leans back, smiling at my obvious unease. “Talk to a few people. I bet you could be normal if you weren’t so paranoid that people are making fun of you behind your back.”

“Fine. You know what? You’re on.” I yank my desk away from her and pull out a blank sheet of paper, quickly scrawling down a bullet-point list of ideas and topics to cover for my side of our essay.

And for the rest of the class, Olivia doesn’t say a word.

An hour later, before my last class of the day, I pull myself up onto the window ledge and slide my crappy old phone out of the front pocket of my backpack. I can’t remember whether I’m supposed to work today, but I’ve got it programmed into my calendar.

Just as I unlock the screen, Olivia rounds the corner, all smiles. With the way she curled her hair today, it’s really bouncing around her shoulders. She’s alone, her thumbs hooked into her backpack straps as she meanders down the hall like she’s got all the time in the world. I bet she could show up late to any class and get out of a tardy.

As her eyes leisurely rove the faces of our classmates, it hits me.

My jaw drops. She’s actually doing what I dared her to do. Olivia freaking Reynolds, who hardly even spoke to me until today, is actually rising to my challenge.

Holy shit.

My mouth goes dry as I watch her pause, scanning the hall. There are two girls from the school band in the corner, gripping instrument cases as they lean up against their lockers, lost in conversation.

I grin as Olivia sets her eyes on them and then clicks into motion, heading their way. I'm dumbfounded—not just that she's doing what I told her to do, but that she has no idea what's about to happen. My only regret is that I'm way too far away to hear, because this is bound to be some damn good entertainment.

She walks up, and one girl's eyes widen. Her face pales as she glances over at her friend.

When the friend turns to see Olivia Reynolds standing directly in front of her, she sort of jumps, and the back of her head knocks into the locker.

I don't have to be an expert lip reader to make out *Oh, uh, hi*, coming out in a desperate jumble of words.

I grin and drop my feet down, then jump off the window ledge and inch closer to the action as Olivia tips her head to the side. She must be speaking, but her back is to me and the crowded hallway drowns out her voice. The two girls nod, their expressions serious, and then Olivia turns around just as the two girls share nervous glances.

Olivia takes two steps and then stops short, staring across the hall at me.

I grin, pop a hand on my hip, and mouth *I told you so*.

Something flares to life in her eyes, but I don't know what it is. Surprise, anger ... confusion? I blow her a teasing kiss and then turn and walk away, feeling stupidly triumphant.

Olivia just got one rude wake-up call. I can hardly believe she even attempted that, but those two girls, their reaction ... so flawless.

I'm around the corner, still grinning to myself, when I remember her own challenge to me. Her preposterous assertion that people don't even care about my reputation as a boyfriend-stealing slutbag. I'd dismissed the whole conversation about three and a half seconds after we'd finished it. But now I've seen Olivia living up to her side of the bargain. And maybe I have to return the favor and actually talk to someone.

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