

It was the afternoon of Olivia's fourteenth birthday. She sat in her room quietly making paper cranes, just like she did every other day. Her mom was at work, as usual. Being a single mom, she had to have two jobs to support them. Olivia sighed as she finished another paper crane and reached for a new piece of paper. Her hand found nothing but her bright green blanket. This pack was a good one and had lasted a year, but she had been getting tired of the same old colors. Olivia ran downstairs to check the time.

Olivia's mom had left a piece of cake and a present on the counter, saying to open it around dinner time. It was 4:30, which was close enough for Olivia. While humming the tune of "Happy Birthday" to herself, she took the cake and sat down to open her present. As she ripped off the wrapping paper she saw something shiny. It was a pack of brand new origami paper, with a sticky note from her mom on top that read, "*Love you sweetie! Hope you like this paper, maybe try making something other than paper cranes? -Mom.*" Olivia smiled as she read the note. Her mom must have seen that she was getting low on paper. She quickly finished her cake and ran back upstairs, eager to see what exciting new colors she had gotten.

Sitting cross-legged on her bed, Olivia looked at her new origami paper. She saw the top piece of paper and thought it was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. The paper was a dazzling silver color with flecks of rainbow scattered around. She examined the paper and saw that it sparkled. She smiled and immediately started to fold it into a paper crane. Olivia knew the folds by heart. It was like her fingers had a mind of their own, and she didn't even have to think about folding. She thought back to when she first learned how to fold a crane.

It was Olivia's 6th birthday, and she was sitting next to her dad on a little stool. "Livi, would you like to learn how to make something amazing?" her dad said. She nodded her head and he stood up from his chair that had seemed so big at the time, and walked over to the cupboard. He got out two pieces of white paper and some scissors, and then sat back down. Olivia was confused.

"Don't we need some pencils or something?" she had asked. Her dad laughed.

"Nope! Don't need pencils for what we're doing," he replied. He cut off the bottoms of the two papers to make squares. He put the scissors aside and gave one of the squares to her.

"What are we making?" Olivia had asked.

“We’re going to make a bird out of paper, a crane to be exact,” her dad replied. Olivia nodded but decided that her dad must be crazy. A bird made out of paper? That was definitely crazy talk. First, he folded one for her to show her how it was done. When he was finished she just stood there staring at it.

“How did you do that? Are you magical?” she asked, stunned.

He laughed again, “If you want to think that, then yes,”

“Whoa” she gasped. She was even more amazed.

“You can be too, it just takes a few folds to make a crane,” he said happily.

They sat together making crane after crane until she could make one without his help. When they were finished they had used about 20 sheets of paper and it was well past sunset.

“Now you can make a paper crane!” he said, smiling at her. “Time to go to bed,” he said as he lifted her off the stool and set her on the ground.

“Do I have to go to school tomorrow?” she yawned.

“Why don’t you want to go to school? School is fun!” he replied.

“The people there are mean to me,” she mumbled. He knelt down in front of her.

“It doesn't matter if they’re mean to you, because you can just make a paper crane army to protect you,” he said softly.

“What do you mean?” she sniffled.

“Well, you’re magical now, so if you think about the cranes protecting you, they will,” he replied confidently while brushing a strand of her dark brown hair behind her ear.

“That doesn't make any sense,” she replied, crossing her arms.

“Magic isn't supposed to make sense,” he said.

Olivia brushed a tear off of her cheek. Thinking about her dad always made her sad. If only the paper cranes had protected him... but she couldn't change the past. She finished the paper crane and looked down at it, thinking that it was the most beautiful, perfect crane she had ever made. She walked over to her desk and gently set the crane down. This crane wasn't going to go into the bins and baskets like the other ones, no; this one was going to stay out. She picked up the origami paper and set it on top of her dresser. She was done folding cranes for the day, and leaned against the wall next to her bed to read.

Olivia felt a cool breeze on the back of her neck. Shivering, she stood up and walked over to her window. It was only open a crack, but that was enough to send an icy breeze sweeping across her small room. Her fingertips felt numb as she closed the window. Olivia changed into her pajamas and sat back down on her bed to read herself to sleep.

Olivia was awoken by a soft thud. She sat upright and stumbled out of bed. Her hand found the switch on her lamp and turned it on. The room was illuminated in a soft yellow glow. One of the woven baskets that stored her paper cranes had fallen over, spilling them all over the floor. Olivia sighed and looked out the window. The sun was just setting; she could see the soft pinks and reds disappearing under the horizon. She picked up the basket and stood it upright, only to have it fall over again. She examined the bottom of the basket. Nothing was wrong with it, but every time she tried to stand it upright, it fell over. She stomped her foot down in the middle of a group of cranes, expecting to crush them, but her foot found nothing but empty floor. The cranes seemed to move away from her, as if they were being blown across the floor by an unseen breeze. She stumbled, hitting her head on the floor. The cranes started to fly and spiral around her in a magnificent range of colors as she stood up. Olivia screamed as all of the other baskets fell on the floor. The paper cranes continued to swirl around her in a rippling cloud. As they got closer, the wind from their flight caused her hair to whip around her head. She covered her face and waited for it to end. Suddenly, everything was silent.

Olivia uncovered her face and gasped. She was standing on a hill with overly green grass around her. At the bottom of the hill she saw a group of cottages with pink roofs and light grey walls. Looking closer, she saw brightly dressed people moving about. Olivia started down the hill towards the village. "Someone down there might be able to help me," she thought.

The sun was shining high in the perfect blue sky when Olivia got to the bottom of the hill. She stepped onto the cobblestone pathway and looked around. Groups of brightly dressed people were talking and laughing all around her. In front of her was a tall wooden signpost. She studied it for a few moments, discovering that "The Farms" were to her right, and that "The Common Area" was right in front of her. "Excuse me," she asked a girl walking past. "Would you mind telling me where I am?"

“What? How can-” The girl fell silent when she turned around to face her. Olivia stared at the strange looking girl who had bright green hair, and mint green eyes that were so light that they couldn't be natural. She had never seen eyes that color before.

“Um, I kind of woke up on that hill over there,” Olivia pointed. The girl nodded, looking stunned. “I was wondering if I could use your phone to call the police?” Olivia noticed that it had suddenly become very quiet, and that a circle of people were gathering around her.

Whispered words floated towards her from the crowd, “Is she real? Police? Can we trust her? Look at those brown eyes... and that hair!”

“I- I really don't know what's happening right now,” Olivia stammered nervously as she looked at all of the strange people surrounding her. Every one of them had something strange about them. One boy had pumpkin orange hair with violet eyes, while one woman had icy blue hair and eyes with irises that were almost white. A figure pushed its way through the crowd.

“C'mon miss, I'm to take you to the castle for questioning,” said a tall man with a deep voice. Olivia nodded and followed him through the crowd. The man wore a grey helmet and a simple grey and black uniform. Olivia guessed he was a policeman of some sort. He had an air of authority about him that made her hesitate to speak.

“Sir, what's happening?” Olivia asked. He glared at her with bright orange eyes. Olivia thought it best to not ask any more questions. She looked past him and saw a majestic castle in the distance that looked like it was from a fairy tale.

“We go to that castle,” the man stated. Olivia nodded and tried to keep pace with him.

To Olivia's surprise, they took a horse drawn carriage to the castle. The carriage had a dark green interior with wooden benches to sit on.

“So... carriages, huh? Are cars too boring for you?” said Olivia, trying to start a conversation. The man just looked at her with a confused look on his face. “Right...” Olivia mumbled as she turned her head to look out the window. They were moving at a surprising pace, much faster than she had expected. She could see rolling green hills with a few animals wandering around on the hill tops. She stuck her head out the window, hoping to catch a glimpse of the castle she had seen earlier.

“Hey! Get your head back in here!” A hand pulled her roughly back into a sitting position in the carriage. Olivia frowned, but decided not to protest.

The carriage eventually came to a stop.

“Stay here,” commanded the man as he got out of the carriage. She sat in the carriage obediently, but she craned her neck to try and see what was happening outside. The man appeared, surprising Olivia. “Come,” the man said, walking away again. She opened the door and jumped down, unprepared for the sight she was about to see.

Olivia’s jaw dropped as she looked up at the castle that towered above her. The castle’s tall towers topped with waving blue flags reached up to gently touch the sky. The walls surrounding the castle were made from pieces of light grey stone, each one perfectly cut. The man looked at her with the slightest hint of a smile on his face. “The Princess is waiting for you,” he said kindly. Olivia followed him over to what she guessed was the front gate of the castle. The man said a word and the gate slowly swung open, revealing an inner courtyard. Olivia followed the man into the courtyard. The courtyard had a well-trimmed lawn with a dirt pathway lining the four walls.

They were walking on a stone pathway which led to a wooden door straight in front of them. Another man, who she assumed was a castle guard, stood in front of the door. He moved aside as they got closer to the door, nodding to the man Olivia was following.

“The Princess will see you now,” said the guard. Olivia hesitated.

“Well, what are you waiting for? Go in!” the man commanded. Olivia stared at him for a few moments before pushing open the door and stepping inside. She could hear the door close behind her. A young girl with silver hair was sitting in front of her on a simple throne.

“Hello Olivia,” she said. The girl had a high pitched but graceful sounding voice.

“Are you the Princess?” Olivia asked. The girl gave her a strange look.

“Who else would I be?” the girl tilted her head slightly, and Olivia saw something metallic sparkling on her head. Olivia nodded, feeling stupid. “I apologize, you are not accustomed to our land,” the Princess stood up and walked closer to Olivia.

“Where am I?” Olivia watched the Princess as she walked. She was wearing a long dress that shimmered and changed color as she moved.

“You are somewhere that you might find impossible,” the Princess answered mysteriously.

“That really answers my question,” Olivia said sarcastically. The Princess smiled.

“Come, I will get you some proper clothing,” the Princess turned and walked gracefully away. Olivia glanced down and groaned. She was still dressed in her pink and blue pajamas from before. How could she have not noticed that?

The Princess led her past many doors and through twisting corridors before stopping next to a light wooden door. “Inside you will find some clothing, please change before meeting me in the garden,” The Princess turned away and started to walk back down the corridor. Olivia was about to ask where the garden was, but the Princess answered her question before Olivia could speak. “One of the guards will show you the way.”

“Thank you!” Olivia called after the Princess. She went inside and put on a knee length blue dress that was laid out on a table. With her pajamas folded neatly on the table, she went back into the hallway to find a castle guard.

Olivia walked through an arched doorway into the garden. The Princess was sitting on a wooden bench surrounded by beautiful flowers. The sun was just starting to set in the horizon. Olivia went over and sat next to her.

“I’m assuming you want to know where you are?” the Princess looked over at Olivia.

“It would be nice,” Olivia looked straight back at the Princess.

“Well, I’ll get to the point then. Basically, we are your paper cranes,” The Princess paused. Confused, Olivia looked ahead at the flowers. The Princess sighed, “We don’t really understand how it works, but it does. Every time you fold a paper crane, one of us appears in this world,” the Princess stood up. “You create us, and we wanted to show you our land. We figured out a long time ago that there is a door between our worlds, one end of the portal is on that hill, and the other end is in your bedroom,” the Princess stood in front of Olivia and looked down at her. “Unfortunately, we can only keep you here until tomorrow at sunset,” the Princess glanced at the horizon.

“None of this makes any sense,” Olivia decided that she was the only sane one here.

“It doesn’t have to make sense, it’s magic,” the Princess walked back inside through the arched doorway. “I will see you in the morning; decide whether or not you want to believe me.” Olivia stared at the doorway for a few minutes after the Princess had left, and without knowing why, she decided to believe.

Olivia spent most of the next day talking to people and walking around the village. She wished that the day would never end, but sadly, it did. She stood at the top of the hill just before sunset with the Princess and the man that took her to the castle.

“Do I just stand here?” Olivia asked while looking around.

“Yes, but there is one thing that we want you to do for us,” the Princess said quickly, glancing at the horizon. The sun was hovering just above the horizon. “Never stop making paper cranes, we age and die just as you do. We also ask that when you grow and have children, you pass on the art of crane making, just like your father passed the art down to you.”

“Wait, did my father come here too?” Olivia asked. The sun had started to set.

“Yes, he did. Your ancestors have been coming here for many generations.” Colors started to swirl around Olivia and spiral up towards the sky.

“Will I be able to come here again?” Olivia was starting to lose sight of the Princess and the man.

“Possibly!” the Princess shouted to be heard through the thick wall of colors. The colors completely surrounded her and all she could hear was the rushing of wind around her. Olivia closed her eyes and waited for it to end.

When she finally opened her eyes she found herself in a blurry but brightly lit room with beeping all around her. Her eyes focused and she realized that her mom was sitting next to her in a worn out blue chair. When her mom saw she was awake, she reached out and hugged Olivia tightly.

“Oh, you scared me so much!” her mom said quietly.

“What happened?” Olivia looked around her. “Am I in a hospital?” Olivia asked. Her mom nodded.

“When I found you unconscious on the floor of your room I called 911 because I couldn’t wake you up, you’ve been here for a few hours now,” her mom said while squeezing Olivia’s

hand. "Do you know what happened?" her mom asked. Olivia didn't know what to think. Had all of that been a dream?

"I think I might have fallen and bumped my head on the floor," Olivia told her mother.

Olivia grew up, and forgot about the paper cranes. She decided that they were a childish thing to waste time on. She got married and had two kids, a girl and a boy. One day, when her daughter was six and her son was four, they were up in the attic looking through boxes.

"Mommy, what does this say?" her daughter pointed to a dusty old cardboard box. Olivia went over to it and read it aloud.

"It says... *Daddy's box*," Olivia recognized the messy handwriting as being her own.

"Our Daddy?" her daughter said excitedly.

"No, mine. Your Grandfather. You've never met him, he died a very long time ago," Olivia said sadly.

"Well, does he mind if we open it?" her son asked.

"No, he doesn't mind," Olivia took the tape off of the box and opened it. Inside were a few photographs of Olivia and her dad when she was four. Olivia's eyes started to get watery as she looked at the pictures.

"Is that you?" her daughter asked, pointing to the young Olivia in the picture. Olivia nodded, not trusting her voice.

"Who drew this?" her son asked, holding up a piece of paper.

"Where did you find that?" Olivia grabbed the paper and looked at it. It was a drawing of a castle.

"I found it in the box!" her son said proudly while pointing at the box. Olivia looked back at the drawing. Her dad must have drawn this, she thought. The castle looked so familiar, where had she seen it before? Olivia's eyes widened. The tall towers, the waving blue flags gently touching the sky, everything was drawn in perfect detail.

"Mommy?" her daughter asked, suddenly worried. Olivia smiled at her daughter and put the drawing on the floor.

"It's nothing, but I think we've gone through enough boxes today. How about we go downstairs and I show you two how to make something amazing?"