

Oliver Charles Dice

Science is my least favourite subject. It's dull and I have no interest in what atoms do or how a star is formed. Not only that, but, for some reason, a tight feeling forms in my chest whenever I enter the classroom. The obnoxious, flame-headed boy next to me doesn't help either. Oliver Charles Dice is arrogant, outspoken and overbearing. But I'm stuck with him.

He sits next to me, leaning back in his chair, his hands behind his head and his feet resting on the table. No one stops him, or scolds him. Oliver does and says whatever he pleases.

I move to pick up the test tube for the experiment we're about to carry out.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you." His voice is flat and monotone, as it usually is when he gives orders.

"What's wrong with it this time?" I grow impatient of his games, but he always manages to get inside my head.

"That one's covered in chemicals. You'll burn your hand right off." He makes a waving gesture with his hand, as if it's flying away.

I roll my eyes. "Don't be ridiculous." His facial expression confirms my fears. He can hear the doubt in my voice.

Oliver raises an eyebrow. "If it's so 'ridiculous'," he mimes quotation marks, "Then why aren't you doing the experiment?" He waits, expectantly, for me to reply. I have nothing. He's right. It will hurt me. I'm the one being ridiculous. Why are teachers giving students harmful things to mess around with? Do they want us to get hurt? I glance around the classroom. Everyone else is carrying on with the lesson. They seem oblivious to the danger they are in.

I look back at Oliver, but he's gone. He does that sometimes. He delivers his 'words of wisdom' and then disappears. I don't know where he goes. Sometimes, it'll be a few hours before I see him again. Then he appears at my front door, a grin plastered across his face.

I hadn't realised I was day-dreaming until the teacher appears in front of me. "Are you okay?"

I blink, entering back into the real world. Quick, make something up.

"I just need to go to the bathroom."

Before he can question me any further, I grab my bag and hurry from the room.

I slam the cubicle door shut, heart pounding. Counting to 10 usually helps. *1, 2, 3, 4... Who am I kidding?* My chest grows tighter. My stomach twists into knots.

I leave the cubicle and rush to the sink, frantically applying soap and water to my hands.

The bell rings, signalling the end of the period.

I'm free.

~

The bus is heaving with students. It's a reasonably warm day, so this many people doesn't help. Screams, shouts, laughter and swearing litters the air. I clutch my bag on my lap. The sun glares at me, blinding. It's accusing rays say, "You missed another lesson. You're a chicken. You're going to get

into trouble.” Those three phrases dance around in my mind. *I’m a failure. I can say goodbye to getting GCSE’s. I can’t even sit through one stupid experiment.*

The familiar ‘ding’ of the bell alerts me to my stop. Worming my way through the hoards, I let out a gasp when the fresh air hits my face.

The sun has drifted behind a cloud.

~

I flop down onto my bed.

“Why are you always here?”

“I’m not.”

“You’re very inconvenient.”

“I’m your friend. You need me.”

“You’re always around at specific times.”

“What do you mean?”

I pause. He lies next to me. We both stare at the ceiling. I don’t know how he got in here. I’ve stopped asking. I’ve come to accept that he just appears. In my peripheral, I can see him looking at me.

“I can help you. That’s what friends...”

He’s interrupted by Mum, yelling up the stairs, “Come and put your washing on, please.”

Instinctively, I look at Oliver. He shakes his head.

“I’m doing homework,” I call back. Oliver grins.

“Fine,” I hear Mum sigh. “But it’s your turn next week.” Her slippers make a gentle ‘pat pat’ as she walks away. I feel bad letting her down, but Oliver knows best.

“That’s what I mean.” I move to my desk, not looking back at him, and crouch down to pick up the exercise books underneath.

“Hey” Oliver whispers. He squats next to me, his breath tickling my ear. “That’s your science book.” He points to the yellow, slightly battered pad. I sigh, already knowing the drill.

I wash my hands twice, once with water and once with soap. “You can’t be too careful.” Oliver appears.

I stare at our reflections in the mirror. How did we become friends? I ask myself this on a regular basis. I’m about to ask Oliver. I blink.

He’s gone.

~

“You’re crazy.” Fear builds in my chest, an all too familiar feeling. I watch my boyfriend dip the tip of his finger in whatever chemical we are using this lesson and then lick it. His friends explode into

laughter. I remain expressionless. I can feel the blood draining from my face. The teacher doesn't seem to notice his student's stupid behaviour.

"I guess you can't kiss him today then," Oliver smirks. He leans against the desk, looking at my boyfriend. I bite my lip, thinking about my after-school plans. My boyfriend and I are going to watch a firework display. It's supposed to be romantic, but Oliver puts a stop to that.

My boyfriend doesn't seem to mind how close Oliver and I are. At least, he seems quite accepting. Either that, or he doesn't understand. No one can understand completely what it's like to deal with Oliver. I overheard two girls talking about Oliver once. They spoke about him like they knew him. I hate it when people say things like that. They say he's their friend too, like they want him there, like he's something special to have, exclusive. They don't know him like I do. They don't want to.

~

"Are you sure it's okay?"

Oliver and my boyfriend sit, side by side, on my bed. Oliver shakes his head. My boyfriend nods. Both have grins on their faces, but for different reasons.

"That was hours ago. And I've drunk plenty of water since," my boyfriend says.

"Those chemicals were deadly. He could die. If you kiss him, you could die too." Oliver's words are so convincing, they suffocate whatever good my boyfriend is trying to do.

"Tell him to wash his mouth again."

I glare at Oliver. How dare he sit so close to someone I love. How dare he take control of this part of my life. He has no right to be here. This is intimate. Private.

My boyfriend notices my fists tighten. He takes one in his hands.

Oliver inches to the edge of the bed. His eyes glint and his grin widens.

"I've done many stupid things," my boyfriend's voice is soft and gentle. "They haven't killed me yet."

"Yet," Oliver smirks.

"Holding my hand won't hurt you and neither will kissing me." He leans forward, pressing his lips to mine. Nothing happens. My lips don't melt. I don't die. Maybe Oliver is wrong?

I glance to where Oliver was sat, but no one is there.

~

"Hey!" my sister calls out to me. I pause on route to my bedroom.

"Yeah?" My voice is croaky. A cold is on its way. She's about to speak, but I can feel a sneeze building. It tickles, before erupting and making us both jump.

My sister offers me a tissue. Just as I'm about to blow my nose, "There's bleach on that." I turn cold. She knows Oliver. She's helping him.

"She's right," Oliver nods. He leans against her door frame. No. She can't be right. This tissue isn't wet. There's no bleach on it. Is there?

My sister is only young. She doesn't know what she's talking about. She doesn't take Oliver seriously. I think that maybe I shouldn't take him seriously either.

He's messing with my family now. It's one thing toying with my relationship, but this is a step too far. I choose to ignore him.

I smile at my sister, "It's fine."

I leave Oliver behind and walk into my room. He can't get to me through my family. I won't let him.

~

"I have a headache."

"So?"

"So, go away."

"I can't. You need me right now."

"No. No, I don't."

This is something I've realised more frequently. I don't need Oliver. He's a nuisance. He's done nothing to improve or better my life in any way. I want him to go away. The only hurdle in this plan is that he won't. I can't get rid of him.

He's been pushed further to the back of my mind of late. It works sometimes. However, he always manages to crawl right back. He follows me. Oliver is like my shadow.

Every now and then, it will feel like the walls are closing in on me. Oliver is the walls and he's suffocating me. There's so many of him that I can't breathe. He's everywhere.

Imagine a prison cell, but it's only just big enough that you can fit when you're curled up into a ball. This is what it feels like when Oliver's around.

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Even after my boyfriend leaves, the science class' end and then the next boyfriend quits, Oliver still visits me. He's the only one who persists.

People try to help me. They attempt to rid him from my life. For three years, a psychiatrist tried her best.

Oliver's appearances have become more infrequent. He still shows up at inopportune moments, but not nearly as regularly. I'm grateful for that. It was all becoming a bit much to handle. Sometimes, it was like talking to a brick wall. I would try to speak up, but he would shut me down immediately.

I've made new friends, but Oliver is always the consistent one. I've been to different countries, different schools, different jobs. Oliver comes too.

People will never fully understand him.

Only I will really know what he's like.

He's my friend and my enemy. The line between the two has always been a bit hazy. I don't think Oliver will ever leave me. He may fade, become ghost-like, but he'll still whisper in my ear

sometimes. He's a guardian angel, without the angel part. I'm not entirely sure what he is to me anymore, but I know one thing for certain.

He's my

Oliver

Charles

Dice