

# Imogen, Obviously

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1

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# 1

I haven't quite unclicked my seat belt, but I'm getting there. Obviously. Just waiting for my brain to stop doing the thing where I'm being interviewed on a talk show in front of a vaguely hostile live studio audience.

*Imogen, is it true that it's your first time visiting Lili on campus, even though she's one of your two (2) best friends, and she's invited you fifteen billion times, and Blackwell College is so close to your house, you literally drove by it last weekend going to Wegmans?*

Gretchen raises her eyebrows at me from the driver's seat. "Want us to hang for a sec?"

"Or more than a sec," adds Edith, and I twist around to look at her. She's buckled in, legs crossed, denim jacket spread over her lap like a blanket. Bright blue eyes and wind-ruffled curls. My hair's two shades darker and a little straighter, but besides that, we're almost identical. Everyone thinks so.

Otávio's back there, too, playing a game on his phone. This

campus isn't much of a novelty for him at this point—he and his parents come up here a lot, even just to take Lili and her friends out to dinner. But this time, he's just along for the ride. I'm the only one who's staying.

For three nights. Approximately sixty-five hours. Not that I'm counting.

"I'm good." I tack on a smile. "I don't want you getting caught in rush hour."

"I don't give a shit about rush hour," says Gretchen.

I know she really means it, too. I didn't tell Gretchen my parents needed both cars this weekend. She just caught me checking the Yates Transit bus schedule and swept in for the rescue. Say what you want about Gretchen Patterson, but she's a drop-everything kind of friend, through and through.

"I can't believe you're meeting Lili's queer college friends." Edith stares out the window, puffs her cheeks out, and sighs. "I want queer friends."

Gretchen blinks. "Um. Hello?"

"See, but you're more of a mentor," says Edith.

I breathe in. "Okay, texting Lili now."

"Are you *sure* you don't want—"

"Yup!"

Edith claps. "Look at you. Lone wolf, living up to your badass reputation."

Right, so now I'm trying to picture the alternate universe where my reputation falls anywhere in the vicinity of badass. Like, let's just put that in bold for a minute. **Imogen Scott:**

**badass.** It barely even makes sense as a concept. I'm the kind of person who has a favorite adverb (*obviously*, obviously).

Edith, on the other hand.

I mean, our baby pictures tell the story. Like the one from the Yates County Fair animal barn, where I'm standing next to an all-caps sign that reads: PLEASE DO NOT PET DONKEY!!!!

Edith is in the corner of the frame, petting the donkey.

Or the one of me at an easel, carefully painting a blue stripe for a sky. Edith is crouched beside me in a diaper, chest fully covered in her own tiny green handprints. And of course, there's a whole series from my seventh birthday where Edith is literally dressed like Jason from *Friday the 13th*.

To be fair, my birthday is Halloween. But.

It was noon. And she was five.

She springs out of the back seat as soon as I open the passenger door—as if Otávio Cardoso, certified teddy bear, is going to fight her for shotgun. But instead of moving up to the front, she follows me around to the trunk of Gretchen's car.

"Immy, hear me out. As your big sister—"

"That's factually inaccurate—"

"Chronologically? Sure," she says. "But spiritually? Aesthetically?"

In effect, Edith's a modern-day Amy March. Whereas I fall squarely in the category of Wants-to-Be-Jo, Is-Actually-Meg.

"All I'm saying is, the whole point of college—"

"According to you, a junior in high school."

"*The whole point of college,*" she repeats, "is that it's a chance

to break out of your comfort zone. I've given this a lot of thought, and—Immy, I really think you should give up flossing for the weekend.”

“The point of college . . . is me not flossing.”

“Exactly.”

I hoist my suitcase out of Gretchen's trunk and pull the door shut. “I'll take it under advisement.”

“Also, I think you could use a few spontaneous campus high jinks.”

“Mmm.”

“This is spring break! At college! With cool queer people!”

“You know we have queer people in Penn Yan, right? A whole club of them?” I tilt my palms up. “You could try—I don't know—actually going to one of the meetings sometime?”

She shakes her head. “Can't do Tuesdays.”

Edith has a standing Zoom date with her girlfriend on Tuesdays. And on days that aren't Tuesdays. But even before Zora, she always managed to find a reason to avoid Pride Alliance. Meanwhile, I've been to almost every single meeting since freshman year, as the group's only capital-*A* Ally. Or I *was*, until Otávio joined at the beginning of this school year, after Lili came out. Everyone in the group lost their minds about Otávio. *Woke king, brother of the year*, et cetera. Kind of funny, I guess. People still seem confused about why I'm there.

For a while, I was worried I *shouldn't* be there. I spent weeks reading every blog post and Reddit forum I could find about allies and safe spaces, and whether it was even okay for me to

show up at the meetings. Was I just another straight girl invading queer territory? Was I an outsider, sucking all the oxygen from the room? The discourse offered no clear consensus. I hated that—hated the lack of certainty. My mind never really settles in a new space until I know all the rules for engagement. What’s encouraged, what’s allowed—or even what’s not allowed. Because restriction carries its own kind of safety.

Well, I knew I was *technically* allowed to be there. At least according to the official guidelines for extracurricular groups, as outlined in the Penn Yan High School student handbook. And of course I knew how important it was to Gretchen, given everything that happened in the queer club at her old school. Not that she’d ever outright admit this, but I think we both know I’m her emotional support hetero.

I just feel a little unworthy sometimes—too normie, too distinctly unqueer. Like when Gretchen calls Otávio and me “heteropotamuses,” or when people can’t even ask us our snack preferences without saying they’re “conferring with the straights.”

My phone buzzes with a text from Lili. *You’re here!!!!!! And I’m coming!!! give me like five min!!!!!!*

By now, Gretchen and Otávio have already stepped out of the car to join us. I shake my head. “Seriously, this is already so above and beyond—”

“Hush.” Gretchen takes my suitcase and starts rolling it to the edge of the parking lot, the rest of us trailing behind her. When we reach a sidewalk, she stops to survey the space—a

small, grassy quad tucked behind a cluster of brick buildings. No sign of Lili yet, which isn't all that surprising. Lili's always running "five minutes" behind, which sometimes means five minutes and sometimes means she just woke up, still needs to get dressed, and she *wishes* that would take five minutes.

A bunch of students spill out of one of the buildings—bright-faced and boisterous, full weekend mode. Gretchen leans in, studying them so intently, I half expect her to scribble down field notes. Maybe that's what I should be doing—observing real college kids in their natural habitat.

After all, in less than six months, I'll be one of them. At this very school, even.

That part doesn't feel real yet—though, in fairness, it's only been a week since I accepted Blackwell's offer. Gretchen thinks I'm playing things too safe, sticking too close to home—but once the scholarship money came through, it wasn't really a question. The location's just a bonus.

"Oh ho ho." Gretchen nudges me sideways, eyes still locked straight ahead. "Found one."

"One of what?"

"College guy."

"They do tend to have those on college campuses—"

She laughs. "I mean a *cute* college guy. Hottie with a body."

"Not a disembodied head. Got it."

Edith leans in, following Gretchen's gaze. "What are we looking at?"

"Gray shirt, white hat. That's Imogen's spring break fling—"



“Um. What?”

Edith looks delighted. “Do we know him?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Not *yet*—but we will! Let’s call him Bruce. Or Bryce?”

Gretchen tilts her head. “Bruce. I’m thinking . . . sophomore. And he’s from somewhere cool.”

Otávio looks up from his phone. “Who’s Bruce?”

“MAINE. He’s from Maine.”

I blink. “Is Maine cool?”

“And he likes lobsters. Because he’s from Maine.” Gretchen shrugs. “Sorry, that’s all I know about Maine.”

“Mmm. Are we done?”

“WAIT. No. No. Hold up.” Gretchen presses both hands to her cheeks. “New target. Okay. Okay, just stepped out of the second door. Not the facial hair guy. Green hoodie, next to the girl—”

“Even better. Guy with a girlfriend.”

“A girlfriend wearing a carabiner and a thumb ring?”

I bite my lip. “Maybe?”

“Hey—sorry! Hi! I’m here!” Lili skids to a stop on the sidewalk, sneakers only halfway on her feet. She hugs me, hugs Edith, ruffles Otávio’s hair, and then hugs him, too. Then she turns stiffly to Gretchen. “Hi.”

“Hi.” Gretchen nods.

Lili claps. “Okay! Should we . . .”

“Yes! Okay, um. See you guys at home?” I say. “Gretch, really, thank you for driving.”

“No prob. Hey.” Gretchen meets my gaze. “You good?”

“Yeah. Yup! Of course.”

Lili rolls her eyes faintly and reaches for my suitcase.

Gretchen hugs me. “Tell Bruce we say hi, okay?”

“And no flossing,” Edith adds, her dimple flashing with even the quickest of smiles. Just like mine does.

## Texts with Gretchen

GP: Okay we're off!! Have FUN!!!

GP: And take lots of pictures with your man!!!! 

GP: Ok but seriously, let me know if you need a rescue

GP: I can swing back and pick you up, for real

GP: I don't leave til tomorrow morning

GP: anyway, I love you, have fun at COLLEGE