

Things Olivia Would Like to Avoid (If Possible)

Jennifer Yu

- 1) O does not want to go to the farmer's market on Tuesday because she was there already on Monday. The vendors may recognize her and wonder why she is always coming around. They may see through her carefully focused gaze; they may realize she has nowhere else to go.
- 2) O walks past the ears of corn, the fragrant tomato baskets, the crisp lettuce leaves, pausing every now and then to look at the pluots more closely, the spinach bundles, the red oranges like little suns. She moves on when the vendors look like they are looking at her. She wants to avoid being looked at. She wants to avoid being asked any questions—questions like: *Do you need (any) help?*
- 3) She does not want to cancel her appointment on Thursday because she is afraid the person she is canceling on will think she always cancels and be annoyed. But it would be more convenient for O if she did cancel because then she will be able to stay in Canada for another week with the love of her life. She canceled the last two times for the same reason and this time she must not cancel, even though it is what she wants.
- 4) O does not want take out too many books at the library (more than 10). The librarian may become flustered over having to scan so many books at once while a small line forms behind Olivia. But really, she would like to take out too many books from the library. She would like to always have something to read, for every mood and every state of curiosity.
- 5) Olivia does not want to drive anymore. She would like to be able to walk everywhere, or take a flying carpet home and back again, to her palace and her King. If she must drive, she would like to be able to read while driving. She would like someone to invent this possibility.

- 6) O does not want people to speak with her in foreign languages. She would like to please them by nodding and understanding, but she does not understand. She does not want them to give her directions or to tell her the way back to the street where her boyfriend lives. Even though she does need help, she will not be able to be helped by these people. She will pretend, however, to make them feel helpful and good.
- 7) She does not want the couple in front of her to notice that she noticed that they cut her in line waiting to order a cheeseburger. She is angry but does not want them to see that they have angered her.
- 8) Her burger does not have any pickles on it. She will not, however, complain. She will pretend everything is fine. She files this away in her list of things to tell K when he gets home from work. He will make a sad bunny face that means: *Oh no my poor baby O!* Because he knows how much she needs pickles.
- 9) She does not want to walk to the ATM at the same time as this other person on the opposite side of the street who does not see her and walks briskly. She knows that she can either walk faster and get to the machine first or walk slower and get there second. Either scenario makes her uncomfortable. She does not want to get there first because then the man may be annoyed with her for making him wait. If she walks slower, she will get there immediately after him and then will have to wait for him to be done. She will wonder why she is waiting when she could have easily arrived there first. She also thinks that he might look up at any moment and their eyes will meet and it will be apparent what she is thinking. To avoid this situation entirely, she will make a sharp turn to the left so that she is no longer heading toward the ATM at all, but to the supermarket across the street. When she is several meters away, she turns around and sees the man in front of the ATM. She pauses for a second before she enters the supermarket. If she walks up and down every aisle and then returns outside, he may be gone.
- 10) O does not want to spend too long looking for exact change though she would prefer to pay with exact change so she does not get too many coins in return. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees that the cashier is waiting so she stops and hands him a \$50 bill. He gives her several bills in return

and a handful of coins that she will not bother counting.

- 11) O does not want to spend too much time looking at the food behind the glass partition at the Japanese food stall as the people behind the counter may get impatient and she will feel obligated to buy something she doesn't really want. She does not want to sample their chicken and then walk away.
- 12) O also does not want to go back to the store and return an item even if she has second thoughts and realizes that she does not need another picture frame or another candle holder. Instead, she thinks about how she could have bought a giant potato for K for no other reason but that she loves him.
- 13) She would prefer not to have to go to the bathroom more than twice on the 6-hour flight from New York to San Diego, but she has eaten many pretzels and needs to drink water to balance her water:salt ratio. She would not mind going more than twice if she was sitting in the aisle seat, but she is sitting in the middle seat and the person next to her will surely fall asleep at some point—at the point at which Olivia may need to go very badly.
- 14) O does not want to visit a children's playground when there are other, real children and their parents around. She wants to swing on the swings and climb the web of ropes and jump on the trampoline but only if no one can see her. She needs to bring her nephew or adopt a small child to bring with her so she can play on the playground with good reason.
- 15) She does not want to pick up the phone anymore. Too often it is a business call or her mother. It is never who she would like it to be.
- 16) O does not want to use the term "boyfriend" (although she does use it now, when forced) because it seems so suggestive of insignificance. She thinks that "boyfriend" is a cheap microwaveable dinner, and "husband" an expensive one. What she wants: Homemade pasta. Mushrooms with truffle butter. Permanence.
- 17) O is afraid that she will miss her stop because there are too many people on the subway and they will not move when the doors open, and she does not want to say, "Excuse me, excuse me, I need to get out." She thinks it

will require some pushing, and she does not want to touch anyone and be rude, even if they are the ones being rude by standing there, not moving, in front of the door.

- 18) O must get home before K gets home, or else he will wonder where she is. She cannot use her phone in this country and she cannot use a payphone because she has never used one before and she does not know how to work it. Then she thinks if she uses a payphone, someone will try to mug her. Someone will grab her owl purse and pull and she will let them; she will give in.
- 19) Olivia does not want to get married. She does not want congratulations. She does not want a party, or two, or three. She would not mind, however, some gifts. For example, a blender and a pull-out couch, a lifetime supply of tea, a table lamp; a house would be nice.
- 20) She does not want to change her last name if she gets married because then people will not know right away that she is not white. If they are going to have prejudices, she wants them to have them right away, and not afterwards, when they meet her.

Jennifer Yu is a writer and creative person who writes to express the feelings and thoughts that float around in her head. She likes to compose stories in her head while running and in quiet, clear moments of the day. You may visit her blog at wanderingfeeling.wordpress.com.