

OLIVE AND THE LONG HAUL

(An animated short)

Written by

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EXT. OUTER SPACE

A weary little starship floats in the twinkling expanse. It's a real rust-bucket, but the hand-stenciled lettering on the hull is tidy and fresh. It reads: "BIO-ARK IV."

We hear the faint CRACKLING of a radio tuning through frequencies to land on a traffic report.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (V.O.)
Gooooood morning, lunar long-
haulers!

One sternward porthole illuminates from within.

INT. SLEEPING QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Seven-year-old OLIVE, drooling into her pillow, snores an EPIC SNORE. The wall above her bed is plastered with magazine cut-outs of living rooms and gardens.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (O.S.)
Today's meteor shower on
Interstellar 66 is expected to slow
down traffic in all directions, so
if you don't love gridlock, you
better hit the road soon.

Across the room, half a croissant sticking out of their mouth, sixteen-year-old FRAN buttons up a worn-out jumpsuit with their name embroidered over the pocket.

RADIO ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)
Up next: some sick jams for your
traffic jam!

FUNKY SPACE-POP MUSIC fills the sleeping quarters. Fran guzzles half a thermos of coffee and turns down the radio.

FRAN
Rise and shine, Sweet Potato.

Olive stops snoring but doesn't budge. Fran lobs a pillow at her.

FRAN (CONT'D)
C'mon, Olive. There's gonna be
traffic!

Olive hurls the pillow back and yanks the blankets up over her head.

OLIVE
 (muffled)
 Olive isn't here right now leave a
 message after the beep BEEEEEEEEP.

Fran sweeps the blankets back. Olive HISSES like a vampire exposed to sunlight, but Fran cuts her off by popping the rest of the croissant into her mouth.

FRAN
 (innocently)
 Olive? Wow, that's so weird! I
 thought you weren't home!

Olive glowers at them but sits up to properly chew. She's got wild bedhead and already wears a smaller version of Fran's jumpsuit, homemade name tag pinned above her pocket.

FRAN (CONT'D)
 Boots, please. You gotta do your
 rounds real quick before buckle-up.
 (beat)
 Today, Olive.

Olive groans and yanks on one boot.

OLIVE
 Today and then tomorrow and then
 the day after that-

Fran kneels down to speak to Olive eye-to-eye. Their noses are practically touching.

FRAN
 It's just a job, Ollie. And it's
 just for now. Not forever.

OLIVE
 Just for now?

FRAN
 Just for now. Couple more
 deliveries and we'll top off that
 jar!

Olive frowns over at the jar of coins on her shelf. Taped over the old jam label is a lovingly-rendered pencil drawing of a house with a big yard and a tree.

OLIVE
 I mean I GUESS I could do my rounds
 if weren't so HUNGRY.

Fran grins and magically produces a second croissant.

FRAN
 (sweetly)
 In space, no one can hear you
 whine.

Olive rolls her eyes, pockets the roll, and reaches over to turn the FUNKY SPACE-RADIO JAMS all the way up.

INT. VARIOUS - MORNING

A high-energy MONTAGE! Fast cuts and zippy camera moves!

- Fran and Olive hop out of the same open hatch and jog in opposite directions.

- Olive scurries up the rungs of a ladder tube.

- Fran hops down the cockpit steps two at a time.

- Olive slides down the ladder firefighter-style, a canvas sack bursting with leafy greens slung over one shoulder.

- Fran hoists themselves up into the pilot's seat. The cockpit console lights up panel by panel.

- Olive slides down with a package of vacuum-sealed birdseed.

- Lit from below by glowing controls, Fran flips three little switches and glances up.

- An enormous bale of hay plummets through the ladder tube and disappears out of frame, immediately followed by Olive, diving cannonball-style into the hay.

- Over the console, a huge octagonal shutter irises open to reveal the view through the cockpit viewport. Stars glitter in the expanse beyond.

FRAN
 (to the expanse, warmly)
 Good morning, everybody.

- Olive steers a cart of supplies toward a big, dark airlock. She smashes the intercom button on the wall as she zips past and then yells back at it over her shoulder:

OLIVE
 Fran! Daylight, please!

- Fran puts a headset on and gets busy pressing buttons.

FRAN
 (into mic)
 Here comes sunshine.

- In the cavernous cargo hull, banks of overhead lamps come on row by row, illuminating aisle after long aisle of livestock stalls occupied by animals big and small.

OLIVE
 (bellowing)
 HI HELLO HOW ARE YOU?

- While her greeting still echoes, Olive spins a big crank, and fresh water sloshes out of dozens of spouts into troughs. HORSES, EMUS, and one GIRAFFE all lean down to drink.

- Olive runs along a row of rabbit hutches, pouring food pellets haphazardly over alarmed RABBITS.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
 Good morning, good morning, good morning!

- Olive pushes her shoulder into the big bale of hay to unroll it for a DONKEY, a BISON, and a BABY RHINO - the last of whom does an excited lil wiggle.

- Olive pops her head up into a little nook where three GEESE are nesting and deposits a big scoop of grain in front of each, greeting them in turn:

OLIVE (CONT'D)
 (loud whisper)
 Silly Goose. Serious Goose.
 Eleanor.

- Olive jogs across an overhead walkway, lobbing guavas to the gang of RING-TAILED LEMURS below.

- Olive zooms down a row of rocky terrariums, flinging handfuls of lettuce at VARIOUS REPTILES and wholly burying the last TORTOISE in a shower of green leaves.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
 Salad salad salad!

- A second later Olive zips back around, chastened and slightly winded, to dust him off.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
 Sorry sorry sorry.

She pats his shell gently.

END MONTAGE

INT. CARGO HULL - MORNING

Drooping with exhaustion, Olive trudges toward the last crate with the remaining birdseed. Inside is a BLACKBIRD.

The bird is also drooping glumly, and Olive takes a good long look at him, frowning.

OLIVE
Hi, you. Why so blue?

He cocks his head at her, and Olive cocks hers, too. They are mirror-images of each other.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
You've been in there a real long
time, huh?

The intercom suddenly CRACKLES to life. Olive glances over her shoulder to the speaker mounted on the wall.

INT. COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

Wearing a headset on now, Fran's hands glance off dials and buttons.

FRAN
(into mic)
Hey Olive. Nearly done?

INT. BACK OF CARGO HULL - CONTINUOUS

FRAN (O.S.)
We need to hit the road yesterday.

Olive frowns and turns back to the bird. She's thinking real hard. She reaches out, hesitates, and then finally opens the door on the little crate.

The bird hops forward, blinks at her, and darts out. He glides elegantly around the cargo hull, diving low over a drinking trough to drag one wingtip through the water before wheeling back up to the rafters.

Olive watches, delighted and mesmerized.

OLIVE
Oh wow.

Then the intercom CRACKLES again. Olive jumps, startled.

FRAN

Olive, did you hear me? Are you
ready to go?

Olive grimaces and punches an intercom button on the wall.

OLIVE

Totally-definitely-almost ready!
(hushed, to the bird)
Okay, you. Back in your box.

The bird alights on the threshold of the open cargo hull hatch and blinks back at her. He hops once. And then flits away down the corridor.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

No no no no! Come back!

In a panic, she bolts after him.

INT. CORRIDOR B - MORNING

The bird shoots down the narrow corridor.

Olive dashes after, ducking under drooping wiring and hopping over airlock thresholds to keep up.

The intercom crackles noisily.

Olive glances up, alarmed, and trips over a loose floor panel, hitting the ground hard. She curls up reflexively, crying out and clutching her knee.

FRAN

(O.S.)

Dude, what is the hold up?

Olive blinks down at her torn jumpsuit and scraped knee, and then looks up to see the bird getting further away from her.

She punches the nearest intercom button.

OLIVE

I'm just cleaning up after Eleanor!
GEESE, amiright? OKAY BYE FRAN.

She hauls herself up, limps once, runs.

INT. CORRIDOR - MOMENTS LATER

Olive skids around a corner and spots the bird perched in an open air vent some twenty feet away from her. She narrows her eyes.

OLIVE
(under her breath)
Don't you move, bird.

She stalks forward deliberately, trying not to spook him.

INT. COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

On the cockpit console, a tiny indicator light labeled with Olive's name is blinking red.

FRAN
(into mic)
Listen, Olive. I gotta warm up the engines-

INT. CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

FRAN (O.S.)
-so decks one and two are going to short in the ripple. But you're still in Cargo, right?

Olive glances away from the bird to look at the "DECK 1" sign stenciled on the wall by her face. She gulps.

OLIVE
(into intercom)
Y-yes?

Around them, the ship makes an odd grumbling sound and then begins to shudder violently. Olive grabs onto the nearest railing as the lights flicker and then go out.

After a very long moment the ship finally stops shuddering.

We hear Olive exhale.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
I should have stayed in bed.

In the dimness we can just make her out as she pries open a panel in the wall. Behind it: a mess of sparking circuits and wires.

Olive frowns. She yanks her sleeve down over her fist, draws back, and then punches the circuit board. The lights sputter back on.

She looks up just in time to see the bird disappear through a hatch at the end of the corridor. Stenciled in bright yellow letters above the hatch are the words ENGINE ROOM and DANGER.

INT. ENGINE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Olive comes charging through the hatch, furious.

Inside, the engine is a churning, growling, white-hot block of machinery. The bird is perched on fan vent just beyond it.

Olive inches forward, wincing and turning her face away as a jet of steam shoots at her.

OLIVE
(yelling)
This isn't a playground, bird! You
can't go running around just
anywhere!

The engine seems to be making more and more noise, seems to be rotating faster and faster. Olive can't get any closer. The heat is too much.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
Come down now. Please, bird.

The bird just blinks.

INT. COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

The little indicator light is still blinking red.

Fran frowns at it.

Finally they lean close to the console to scan through the noisy video feeds coming from every deck of the ship.

Fran stops on a glitchy aerial image of Olive in the machine room, inching toward the hot engine.

Horrified, they bolt for the door.

INT. ENGINE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Olive is bellowing at the top of her lungs, her shoulders shaking with fury.

OLIVE
Come down already!

Fran hurtles through the engine room's side-hatch, out of breath and about to lunge forward. But they stop when they see Olive shouting.

Olive doesn't notice them.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
You're terrible! Can't you see it's
not safe here for you?
(beat)
Bird. It's just a job.

Fran takes a step back into the shadow.

OLIVE (CONT'D)
And it's just for now. It's not
forever.

Olive is breathless now. She's looking hard at the bird, and Fran is looking hard at her.

Olive's face suddenly changes. She reaches into her pocket and pulls out her forgotten breakfast. She waggles it at the bird and then breaks off a piece and holds it up in the cup of her palms.

FRAN
(whispering)
Come on, little dude.

The bird hops once, and then drops down onto the pastry, into Olive's open hands. She closes them gently around him.

OLIVE
(sweetly)
You're awful. You are the worst,
worst bird.

Olive slowly backs away from the roaring engine. Fran ducks out through the side-hatch unnoticed.

INT. CORRIDOR B - MOMENTS LATER

Olive trots toward the cargo hull, her shoulders squared and her hands cupped gently around the bird.

INT. COCKPIT - CONTINUOUS

Fran slumps in front of the pilot's console. They hold very still. Finally they lean forward and press a button. The intercom crackles to life one more time.

INT. CARGO HULL - CONTINUOUS

Olive leans in close to the bird-crate to latch the little door. Inside is the bird and half of a breakfast roll.

From the intercom:

FRAN (O.S.)
Okay, Olive. Whenever you're ready.
We leave when you say go.

Olive straightens up, frowning. She turns her to look out the cargo hatch toward the cockpit.

INT. COCKPIT - MOMENTS LATER

Fran switches off the intercom. We see now that the pilot's console is also decorated with little magazine cut-outs of houses and trees.

Olive hops down the steps into the cockpit and leans over the back of the pilot's seat to rest her chin on the top of Fran's head.

OLIVE
We leave when *I* say go?

Fran gives a big nod and Olive's head bounces along with it.

FRAN
Yup. Or you can say, "We're not
going anywhere today." Your call.

That's a whole lot for Olive. She frowns real hard to cover it and then opts to just smush her whole face into the crook of Fran's neck.

Fran freezes at that -- the way you do when a butterfly lands on you, halfway between startle and delight.

But then Olive recovers enough to take a big pretend-chomp out of Fran's shoulder and plops herself into the copilot's seat.

She buckles her seatbelt, and the little blinking light beside her name on console turns green. She looks out the viewport at the vast field of twinkling stars before them.

Fran waits.

OLIVE

I hear it's gridlock out there.
Maybe we need some sick traffic jam
jams?

Fran grins and spins a dial. FUNKY SPACE-POP fills the cockpit.

OLIVE (CONT'D)

Well NOW I'm ready. Let's go.

Fran flicks one last switch. The starship launches.

THE END