FIRST FIVE CHAPTERS

OLIVIA'S NEW LIFE

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Chapter 1
Hey family, I've something to tell you...
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Chapter 1 – or what type of reactions you get to a life changing news?

“I have something to tell you all”, suddenly every member of my family stared at me. I could see their blasé curiosity in their eyes across the dining table. What did I have in mind again? My brother wondered.

I took a deep breath in and looked straight ahead… in the void:

“I want to become a doctor.”

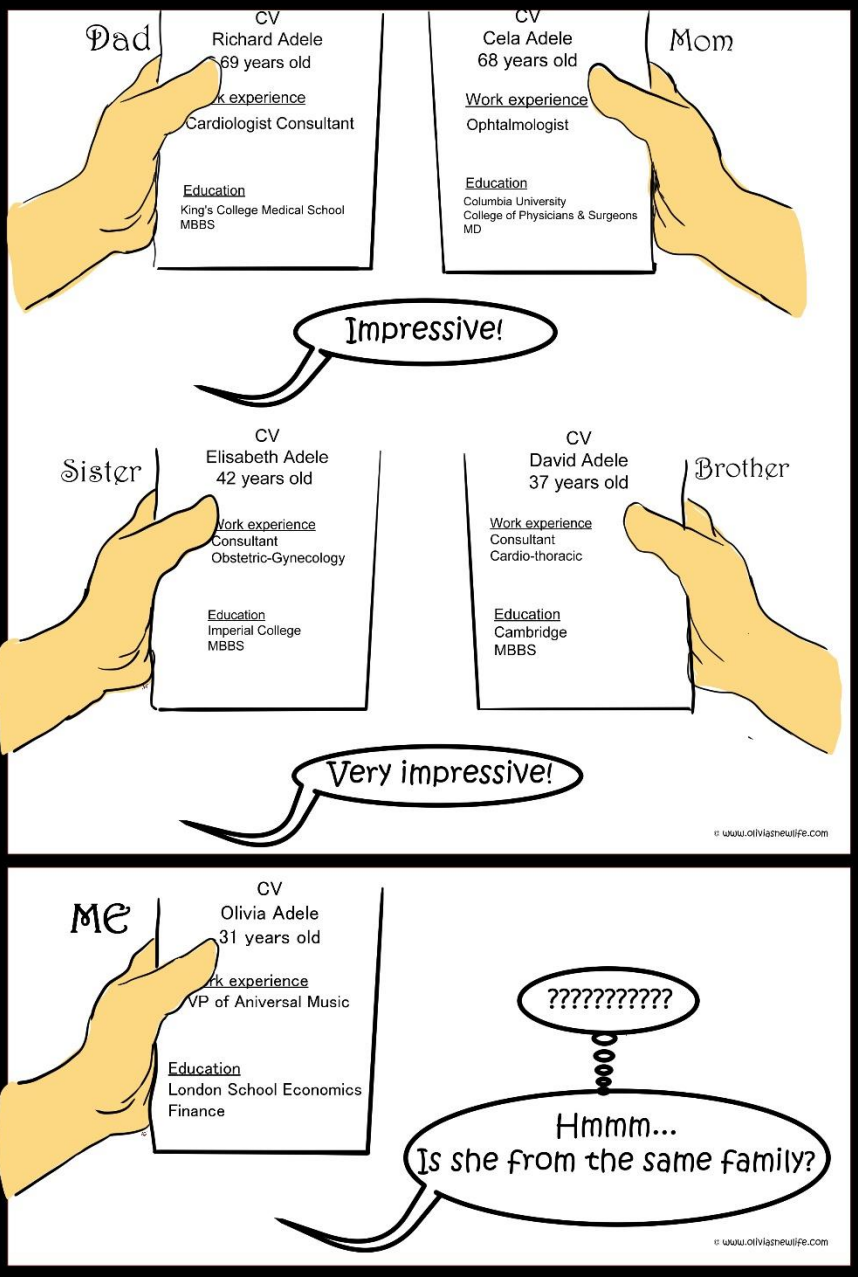
“What? That is one your worst idea ever, Olivia!” screamed my eldest sister.

So you would think that announcing my job dream of becoming a doctor would be welcomed with happiness and pride. Finally, I was gearing toward a “real job”… this is what my father used to say to me. But nope, the idea was welcomed with despair and bemusement.

“Why?” asked my mother, upset.

“Why now?” added my sister in law, who liked to intervene in matters, which did not concern her at all.

But what you do not know yet is, except for my sister-in-law, every single member of my family is a doctor.


Dad
CV
Richard Adele
69 years old
Work experience
Cardiologist Consultant
Education
King's College Medical School
MBBS
Mom
CV
Cela Adele
68 years old
Work experience
Ophtalmologist
Education
Columbia University
College of Physicians & Surgeons
MD
Impressive!
Sister
CV
Elisabeth Adele
42 years old
Work experience
Consultant
Obstetric-Gynecology
Education
Imperial College
MBBS
Brother
CV
David Adele
37 years old
Work experience
Consultant
Cardio-thoracic
Education
Cambridge
MBBS
Very impressive!
© www.oliviasnewlife.com
ME
CV
Olivia Adele
31 years old
Work experience
VP of Aniversal Music
Education
London School Economics
Finance
??????????
Hmmm...
Is she from the same family?
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The fact that they didn't warm up to the idea told me a lot about the profession or at least their perceptions of it.

1. **Being a doctor is a lot of stress**

"You have a lot of responsibilities when you're a doctor. Mistakes can be fatal" rumbled Elisabeth. But at the end of the day, many jobs are very stressful. Being a teacher is stressful, being a cashier is stressful. I did not believe that stress should be a reason not to pursue a career.

2. **Doctors don't even earn that much money anymore**

"You will not be rich by being a doctor." Continued David, who just bought a four-bedroom penthouse near Central London. So I was not sure what he meant by "rich".

3. **It is not that glamorous**

Really??? The last time I checked "Doctors" were among the most attractive professionals for men and women. I called that being very glamorous.

4. **People don't trust doctors as much**

"There is a rampant lack of trust towards doctors. Is this really what you want to experience?" rubbed Elisabeth in. "Oh yes" I interrupted, "The conspiracy theory that all doctors collude with pharmaceuticals for profit. If it was the case, doctors should earn a lot of money, which debunked point number 2 and point number 3, since glamour comes with money. Am I right?" Claire, my sister in law, nodded in agreement.

5. **It takes at least ten years**

"Olivia?" in the chaos, my dad finally spoke. We were all waiting for his reaction, would he back me or take the others' stance?

"it takes ten years to become a doctor, at the GP level… you are 33 years old, and you are a mother yourself, have you thought about this? Why such a dramatic change of career?"

There was the bomb: my age and my society status as a mother.

Yes, I kind of forgot to tell you that I was not a teenager deciding on a university, but a 33-year-old woman, mother of one fabulous little girl, who had a change of heart regarding her career… and as you guessed my name is Olivia.

I understood my father's enquiries, and I did consider the challenges of the decision.

"I think it's my dream job, dad" I responded like a little girl. As if I needed his permission, as if I needed my family's permission. But to be honest with you, I would feel better about this endeavour with my family's backing, despite being 33 and having a job of my own.

Before announcing the news to my family, I surveyed a couple of people, and it was interesting to list the type of reactions I got from the news:

The anti-system

Trusted colleagues: "Oh my god, you're so right, get the fuck out of here before they get you!"

The money-guilt

Best friend 1 Lewa: "You know you will never be rich this way. You should have gonna work for Goldman Sachs."

The motherhood-guilt

Best friend 2 Christina: "Why? By the time you're done your biological clock will be done too. Don't you want another child?"

The loving naïve

My daughter Lina: ""if that makes you happy, mum."

That's why I hang out with children, from their perspective everything is possible.

Now let's go back to the Sunday family dinner.

"How do you know Being a doctor is your dream job?" asked dad.

It was a difficult one to explain.

"Well, I have always wanted to be a doctor" I whispered.

"What????" to the general surprise of the room

Despite being speechless by the news, they were speaking a lot, or should I say yelling. I continued ignoring the storm: “I know what you are thinking, when I was younger I kept saying that I didn’t want to be a doctor because all of you are doctors and I just wanted to set myself apart… I just wanted to be special”.

Generation Y issue… I know.

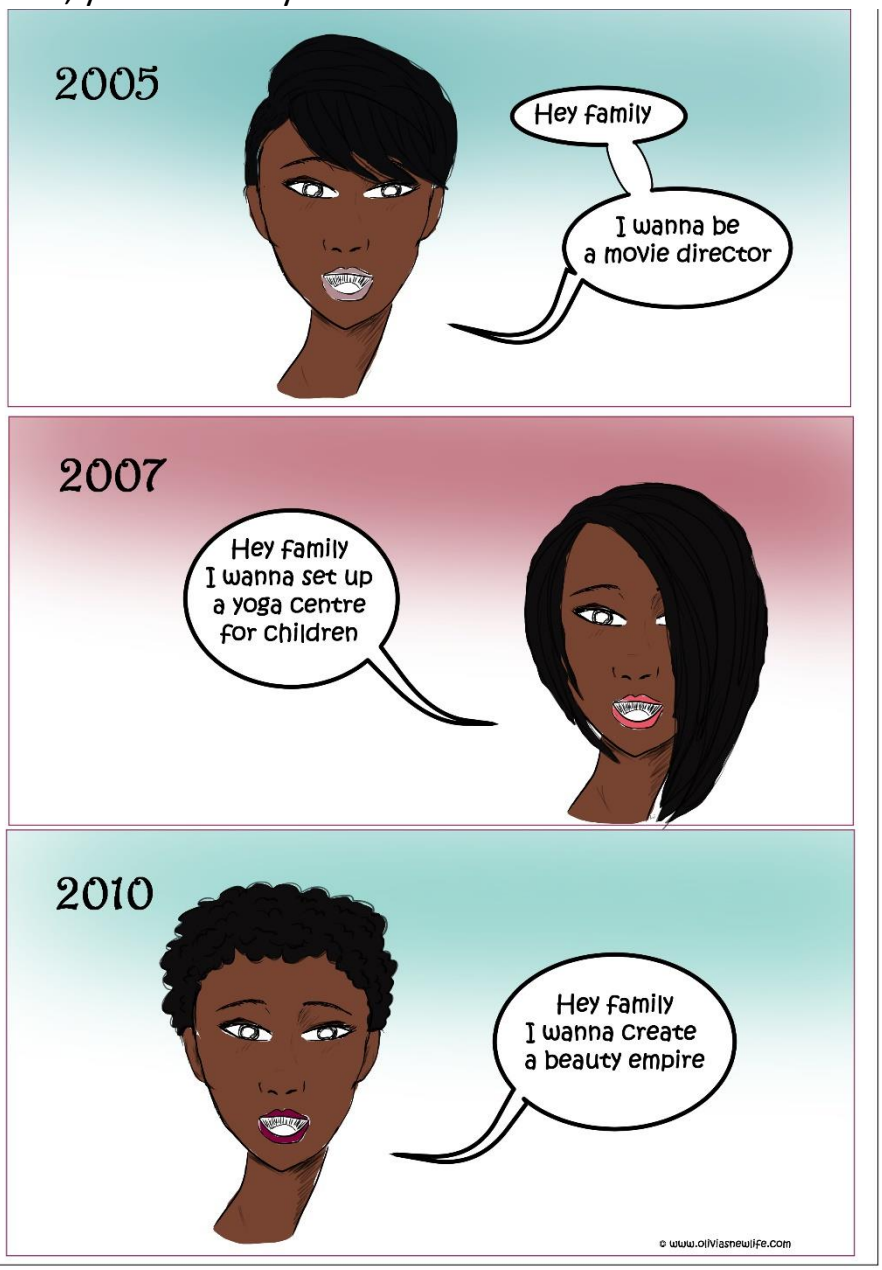
The chaos got even stronger.

“Enough!” screamed my mum. “As a family, we should support Olivia; this is an important decision.”

Thanks, Mom!

“Under one condition Olivia…” she added. I didn’t see that one coming.

“Over the years, you had many ideas…”



"… therefore I am going to ask you to work on that idea for a full year, and I know what you think, I don't care about your age. But for a full year, you are going to experience life as a doctor; you are going to spend time with patients and in any shape or form. Yes, on top of your job and your duties as a mother… and if after a year you are still convinced that this is your dream job, then you'll get our full and unconditional support."

There it was, the last type of reaction. I called it the **Prove it** reaction. The hardest to brush off, because it was up to me now to make it happen. At least with the other types of reactions, I could have just said:

But the "Prove it" reaction meant what it said on the tin, not just to my family, but most of all to myself.

Later that same evening, I went home thinking there was one last person I needed to speak to.

"Hey! How was dinner?" he asked.

"You could have come, you know," I responded not answering the question.

"I don't have to anymore." He smiled. "Let me put our daughter to bed."

"Sure! Afterwards, can we talk?"

He looked at me suspiciously. I didn't waste another second. I just told him.

"is that it? That's what you wanted to tell me?"

I nodded surprised by his lack of reaction.

"Well, good luck!" he said turning his back on me and pulling our daughter along with him.

Yes, I think you are missing an important information. This man I just introduced you is my husband, Cole… and we are separated, living in the same house though.

" That's all you have to say, Cole?" I pursued.

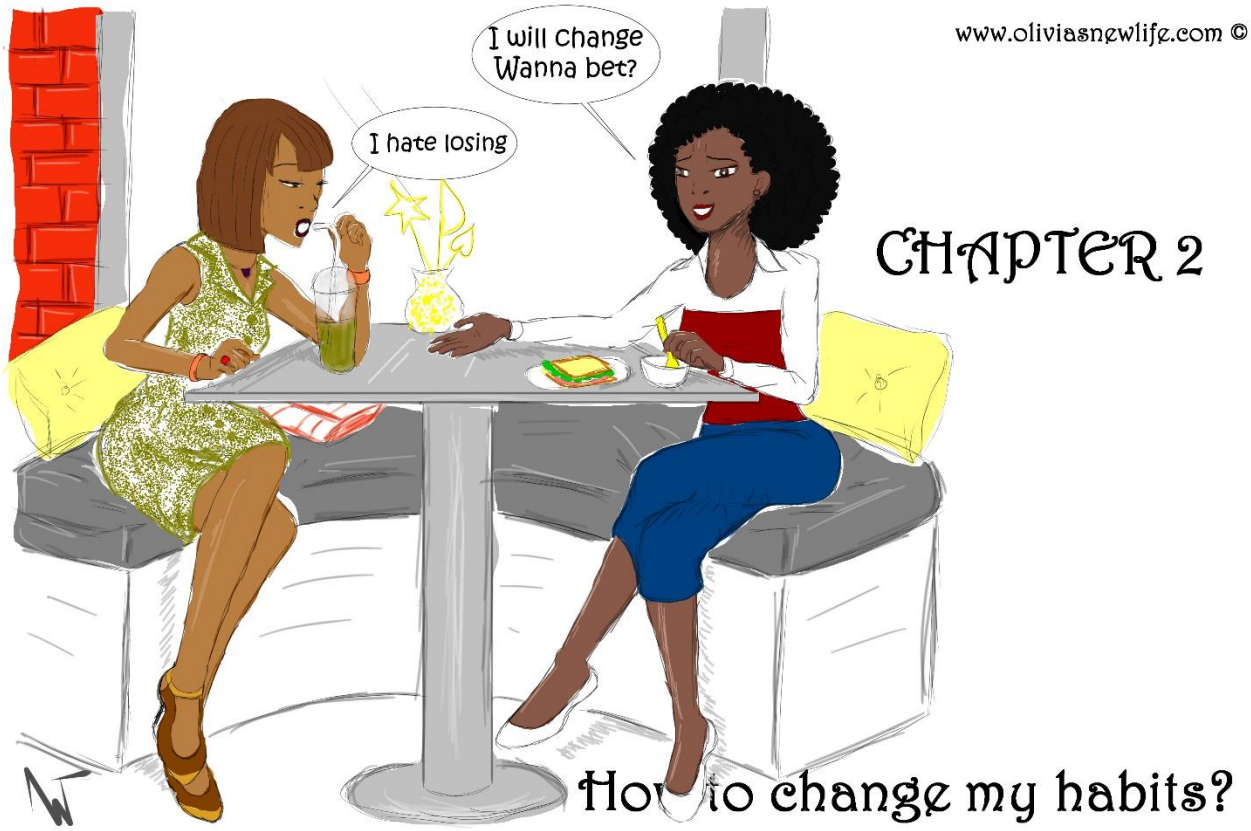
"You're the one, who wanted to end things. Why should I be concerned with your decision?" he replied, shrugging off.

Alright, I thought. After all, he was right, this decision concerned me and me alone, and I needed to make some action plans.

I had 12 months, or 52 weeks or 365 days to make it happen. Where should I start?

When was the last time I opened a chemistry book? I suddenly wondered.

“15 years ago.” Oh my God!



Chapter 2 or how to change my habits?

So, if you remember, I decided to overturn my life and become a doctor, even though I am 31 years and a mother.

According to my research, there were three types of exams, two of which required science knowledge. I was going to need a chemistry and biology refresher. I worked out I could study two hours before going to work in the morning and another hour and a half in the evening.

I recently read that we needed three weeks of daily occurrence to turn a new habit into an old habit that becomes second nature.

Waking up early was doable. I just needed to hold on for three weeks and then it would be like riding a bike. I was on it!!!

Hum… well, I underestimated the struggle of changing my habits. Waking up early was NOT natural to me at all! It was indeed painful. That was the only word coming up to me. I was desperate because this was the only window I had on top of my job to revise chemistry and biology.

Therefore, I went looking for advice.

Why-do-you-bother advice

Christina, one of my good friends, asked me why should I bother. This advice instilled a seed of doubt. I could be just playing, having dinner with friends and watching Frozen with Lina. After all, my job wasn't so bad. The colleagues were OK. This advice was questioning my desire of wanting more from life. But it was a valid question.

Life-is-hard advice

Elisabeth, my sister, was the queen of unsupportive remarks. “People around the world are dying from poverty, diseases and war… and you complained of waking up at 5 am, please!”

First world issues… I know.

I-don’t-know-how-you-do-it advice

Useless!!!! Talking to a colleague and this was what I got. I hadn’t done anything yet! I was just three weeks in.

Work-hard-play-hard advice

“How can you work hard if you don’t have the right balance of pleasure?” suggested Lewa, my other good friend. She must have invented this advice. It was part of her DNA. At 33, she was a regular in clubs.

“You should come with me. Come on; it would be like good old times when we used to party and then skipped classes on Friday morning.” She remembered, not nostalgic because she hadn’t changed.

How about trying?

I needed to find the resources and the extra motivation to change my habits, and this was more challenging that I imagined. I don't know about you, but when you watch tv or read a book, it always seemed like things turned around very quickly. The characters overcame their struggles so easily, but in real life, it was another story.

"How much do you want to become a doctor?" asked my mother

"I really want it. I'm just stuck." I responded honestly.

"Then, you're gonna have to consider changing every aspect of your life, Olivia. The question is: are you ready to change?" she added.

How do I know?

Part of the answer came from my daughter. I picked her up from school, and she told me "mum, I want to live an adventure." I asked her if she knew what an adventure was. "Of course, mum, an adventure means you'll meet new people, you'll be scared, you don't know what will happen, but it will be a happy ending". Her notion of adventure was essentially based on Disney's stories, but she had a point. Changing my habits was similar to living an

adventure, I didn't meet new people, but I was scared, and I didn't know what would unfold. But like Lina, I wanted to live a life full of adventures.

So the next morning, I woke up at 5:30 am sat down at the kitchen table and opened my chemistry book.

"You're up early," whispered Cole, half asleep. "What are you doing?"

"Just studying."

He opened his eyes to read the title of the exciting book in front of me: "A2 Chemistry."

"and you wake up every morning early to study chemistry?"

"Yep". I thought I would just avoid a long conversation about my struggles of early rising.

He whistled, impressed.

"Look, Olivia; I have an idea. I know things are pretty weird between us…" as in we were about to get divorced, but we were still living in the same house.

"… but I've been thinking of shedding some pounds off, so how about you wake me up every morning so I can go to the gym?"

This was what I needed, someone else I had to check on to force me to rise early.

"That's a great idea Cole. I'm in!"

"Cool. I'll start tomorrow," he smiled.

Changes were easier to embrace when relying on someone else, who was walking the same path.

"Nope, start today. It's 6 am; you can do it."

He ground, but eventually put his sneakers on. I went back to my chemistry book, hiding from him my grinding face.

Chapter 3 or how to find an apprenticeship at 31?

So if you remember I decided to become a doctor at 31 years old, with the blessing of my daughter. I woke up early most of the days to study chemistry and biology, which I hadn't explored for the last 15 years. I was pretty rusty, but holding on to it.

All medical schools required from their applicant experiences with patients, it could involve hospitals, GP surgeries, clinics, charities… therefore I was on the hunt for the next apprenticeship.

The good thing at my age was I cut through the crap and went directly to the people I know.

"Are you looking for an apprenticeship with me?" asked David, my brother. He is a cardiothoracic surgeon.

Absolutely not! I loved my brother, but he would make my life miserable asking me difficult questions because he would want to prove that he only accepted me because I was highly intelligent and not because I was his sister. So no thank you, Bro.

“I would prefer a surgery environment or a clinic. I am sure you must know someone, who owns one and could have me as an apprentice for a couple of months. If you think of all the Cambridge alumni in your network.”

If I wanted something from my brother, I always reminded him that he went to Cambridge, and obviously, I didn’t.

“OK, I’ll ask around.”

Yes, I should get a response very quickly… and a couple of days later:

“I think I got you the perfect apprenticeship!!!” he announced enthusiastically.

“It’s a plastic surgery based in West London, and they’re actually looking for an assistant.” He continued.

See, finding an apprenticeship at my age was not difficult because

1) **It’s all about the people I know**
2) **It’s all about the people I know in the right field**
3) **It’s all about the people I know in the right field, who are decision makers**

“That’s great! Whom did you get the tips from?” I asked.

“Do you remember my classmate Lucas? He’s one of the co-founders.”

Lucas??? Oh no! I had a huge crush on him when I was 16.

See finding an apprenticeship at my age was tricky because

1) **I tapped into the people I know**
2) **The likelihood of reaching out to old flames increases dramatically**
3) **Basically, I tapped into old flames**

“Lucas?” I innocently asked, pretending I didn’t remember and avoiding eye contact.

But I remembered like it was yesterday. My crush on Lucas consumed me. He was kind, tall, cheeky, beautiful eyes; he was at Cambridge, and I was just 16. One weekend, David brought him home. I fell for him straight away. During the whole weekend, I was looking for signs that it was reciprocal.

When he left, I found out his address and wrote inflamed love letters that only a 16-year old could produce, straight out of Mills & Boons.

After a couple of months and about 16 letters later, he came down to our home for another weekend with my brother. I was over the moon, daydreaming of our first kiss. I couldn't believe it.

And there he was in front of me. I was melting; my heart was racing. I almost fainted when he said:

"Can I talk to you for a second?" He took me to a quiet corner.

OH, MY GOD!!!

“Can you please stop sending me letters?” he took out from his bag all the letters I ever sent.

“It’s disturbing.” He added.

Dude, what’s disturbing about love?

“I haven’t told your brother, but you need to stop. I am just not interested, and you think it’s love, but it’s not. You’re just falling for a Cambridge student.”

And there he was in front of me. I was melting; my heart was broken into pieces. I ran away to my room hiding my tears. He made me feel so unspecial. This was the end of the world, and I took months to recover. I never told my brother. I only saw him once after that episode, at David’s graduation ceremony. That day I did my best to avoid him, and indeed since then, I tended to apply the same rule: i.e., just avoid Lucas.

“I’m not sure who Lucas is.” I continued, amnesic.

“Are you kidding me? You hit on him when he came home.” He sneered.

During all this time he knew. So Lucas has not been that quiet after all. Certainly bragging about it.

“Who told you? Lucas?”

“No one, it was so obvious, he didn’t need to tell me.”

OK Lucas, my bad!

“So you understand that I would rather not be around him,” I added.

“As a matter of fact, I don’t. It was… what? 20 years ago? Who cares now? You had a crush on him, OK. But since then you moved on, you got married, you’re a mum, you lost a lot of weight.”

It was true, I was overweight as a teenager, and this heart-broken business made me lose my appetite.

“it will be an amazing apprenticeship, he loves teaching, and he’s an excellent surgeon. Don’t let the 16-year-old Olivia make you miss this opportunity, for which a lot of people would kill.”

Do you think he’s right?

The thing is it was difficult to occult the 16-year-old self. A lot of my self-awareness feelings were born out of traumatic events that happened during these formative years. Here is a list of the main feelings (list not exhaustive):

1) **I am not beautiful enough**. I know I wasn't a model, but I wasn't that bad either. I assure you I knew girls, who looked far worse than me and still manage to get some pretty hot guys. So I was still carrying this feeling with me.
2) **I am not blonde.** In the same vein of not being beautiful enough, I could have got away with it if only I were blonde. I never ever ever ever understood the attraction for blondes. Petite blondes, fat blondes, dumb blondes, sophisticated blondes, whatever the types of blonde, she would still have more chance than the rest of us… even get promotions before us in the workplace. So I was still carrying this feeling with me.
3) **I am boring.** Unfortunately for me, I was a very obedient child. I didn't go out much. Instead, I was reading a lot… a lot of romances. I was just following the rules, and I could see all the guys I had a thing for falling

for girls, who would sleep around or go out in the evening, or break the rules, none of which I was doing. So I was still carrying this feeling with me.

4) **I am doubly boring because I didn't drink.** This has been an absolute deal breaker for me. I didn't drink alcohol. Therefore I wasn't getting drunk at parties. Therefore I wasn't making out. Therefore, I was boring. So I was still carrying this feeling with me.

With all these feelings continuing to float around me, did I really want to get an apprenticeship with Lucas?

David suddenly interrupted my thought process with: "We don't have all the time in the world. He's expecting you today at his office to interview you… checking on your motives."

What? Today? I wasn't prepared.

"So you decide Olivia, do you want this apprenticeship?"

Chapter 4 or what constitutes a good excuse?

So, if you remember, I decided to become a doctor at 31 years old, and for this purpose, I needed an apprenticeship, which David, my brother, got me. The only issue, it was located in the clinic of my teenage crush, whom I hadn't seen in a very long time.

The truth was I felt petrified. This man broke my 16-year-old's heart, and this heart was not ready to face him. I looked at the clock's I had a couple of hours left before the interview. I so didn't want to go!!!! I thought of all the possible reasons for me not to show up:

1. *I am sick, but he's a doctor*
2. *My daughter is sick, but he could check with David if it was true*
3. *I got stuck in the tube, a classic excuse but he might reschedule.*

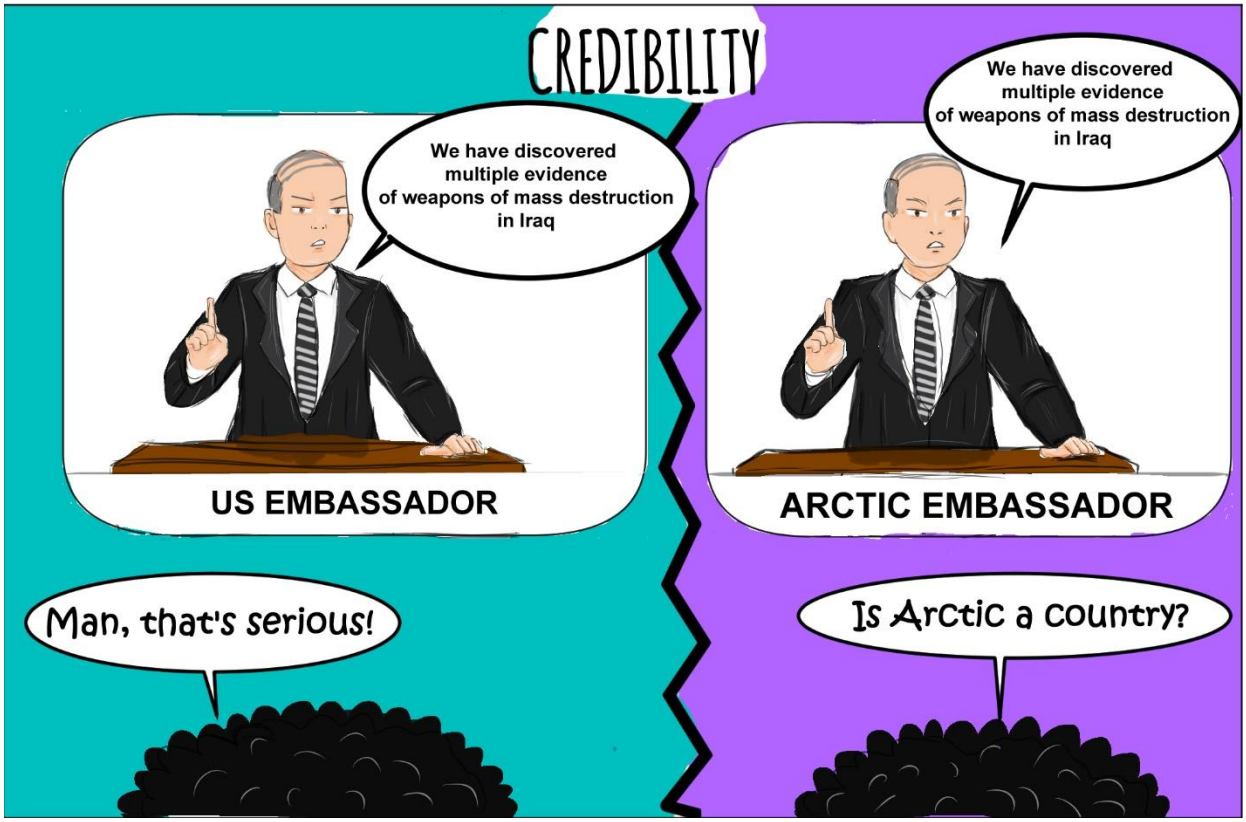
"Don't even think about the tube excuse!" Lewa, my good friend from uni, interrupted me during my reflection over excuses. "This would be really lame, Olivia."

I called an emergency meeting with her; this was a matter of life and death… ok, perhaps not that dramatic, but my life hung in there.

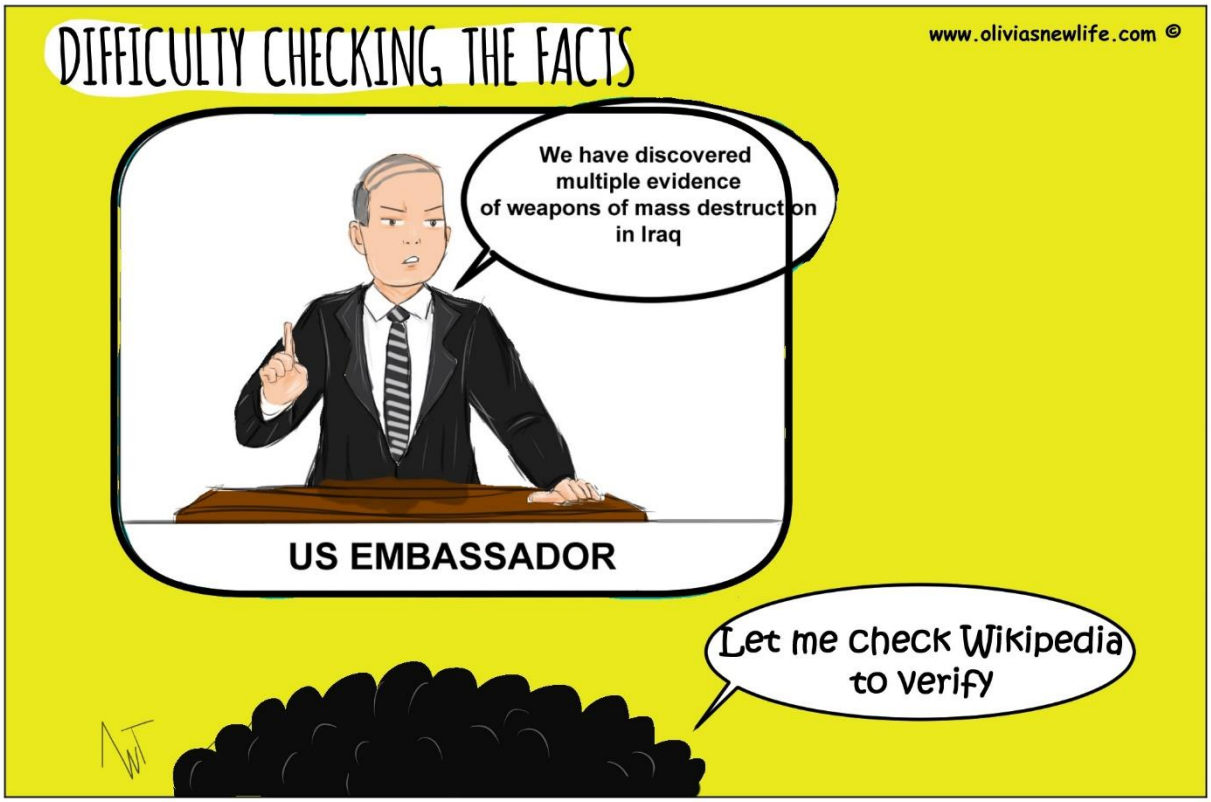
“You don’t understand Lewa; the reaction is visceral. The idea of meeting this man… I’m nauseous.” Surprised by the violence of my reaction, I started to analyse what could be an acceptable excuse.

1. **Credibility**

Number 1 criteria. Was the source of the excuse credible?



2. **Difficulty verifying the facts**

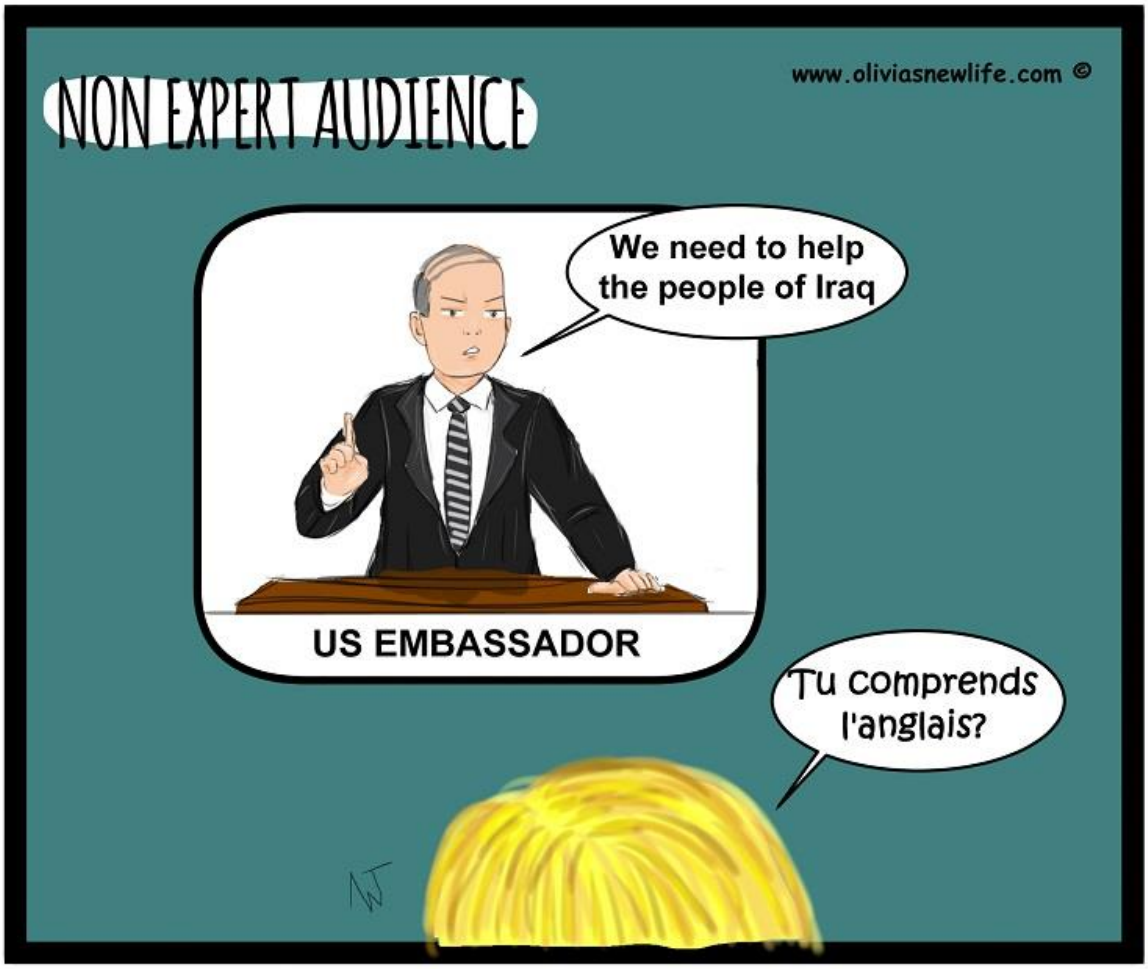


3. Moral engagement

4. **Short Timespan**

5. **A non-expert audience**

This one can be optional. The four factors above are sufficient, but if you really want to bury your audience, then this one is great!



After sharing with Lewa the five factors of a good excuse, I came up with

My boss (*credibility*) revealed that the company is working on a secret merger deal (*difficult to verify*) and we have been summoned (*moral engagement*) to organise our financial accounts starting today (*short timespan*) until next week as the CEO (*big credibility*) wants to be briefed ASAP (*again short timespan*).

Not bad? I was pleased with myself for making up such a credible excuse. I was starting to believe in it myself.

Lewa shook her head, with a stare of disapprobation, when I called Lucas's assistant to relate my well-crafted excuse. She represented the perfect non-expert audience.

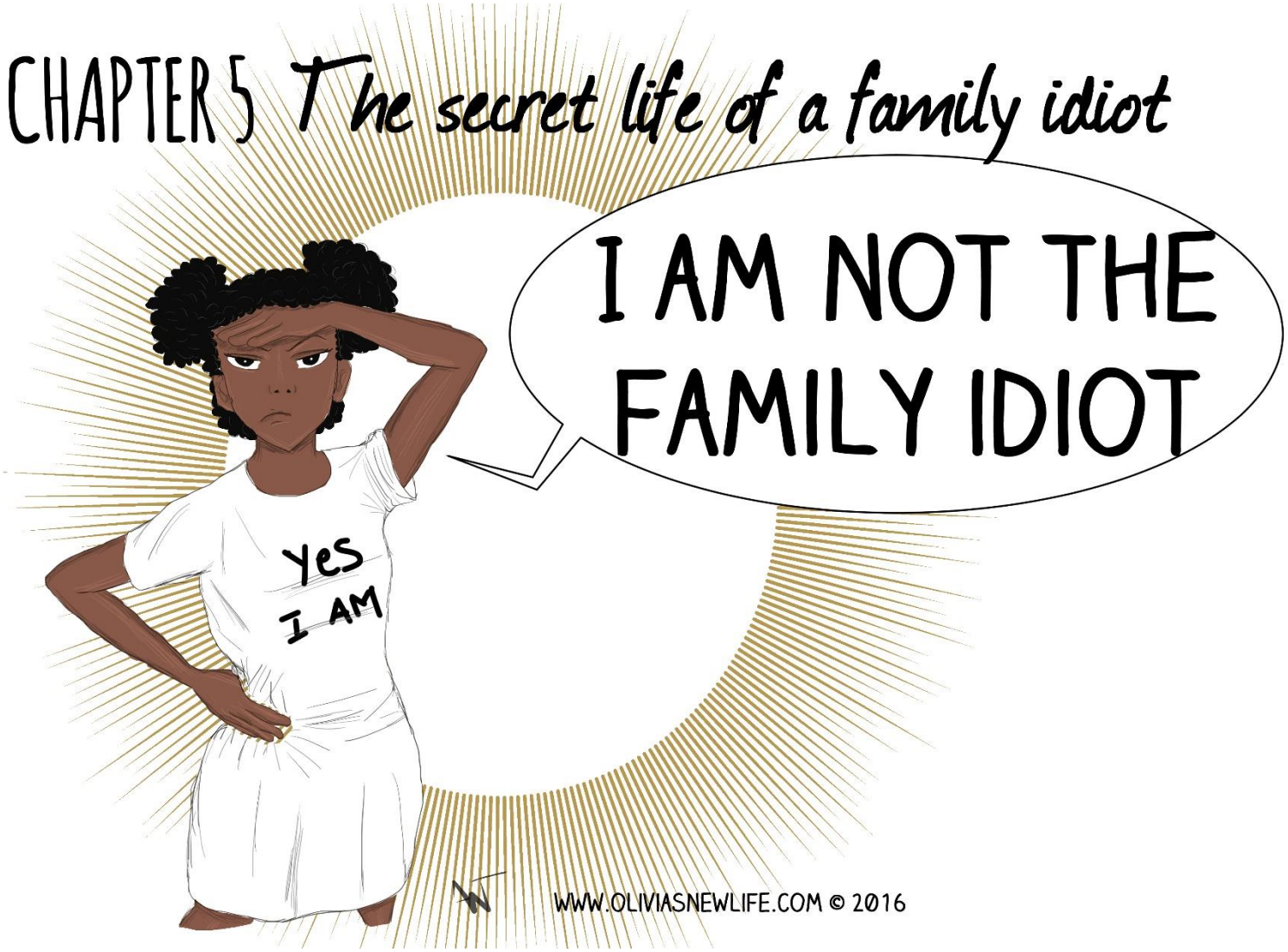
As I hung up, I looked up at Lewa, who hadn't stopped shaking her head. She finally broke the silence and whispered: "You're an opportunity waster."

Perhaps, but I was not going to meet Lucas, and that is all that mattered.

I was convinced I would find an alternative.

“Why don’t you just ask your sister? Everyone is a doctor in your family.” Lewa raged.

You also had this question in mind… let me answer this with the next chapter.



Chapter 5 or the secret life of a family idiot

So, if you remember, I decided to become a doctor and this life-changing decision involved many challenges. Some of them more difficult to address, such as meeting up with an old crush, who could offer me a great apprenticeship. But I know you all wondered why I just didn't ask any member of my family for an internship, since they are all doctors.

Let me answer with three words:

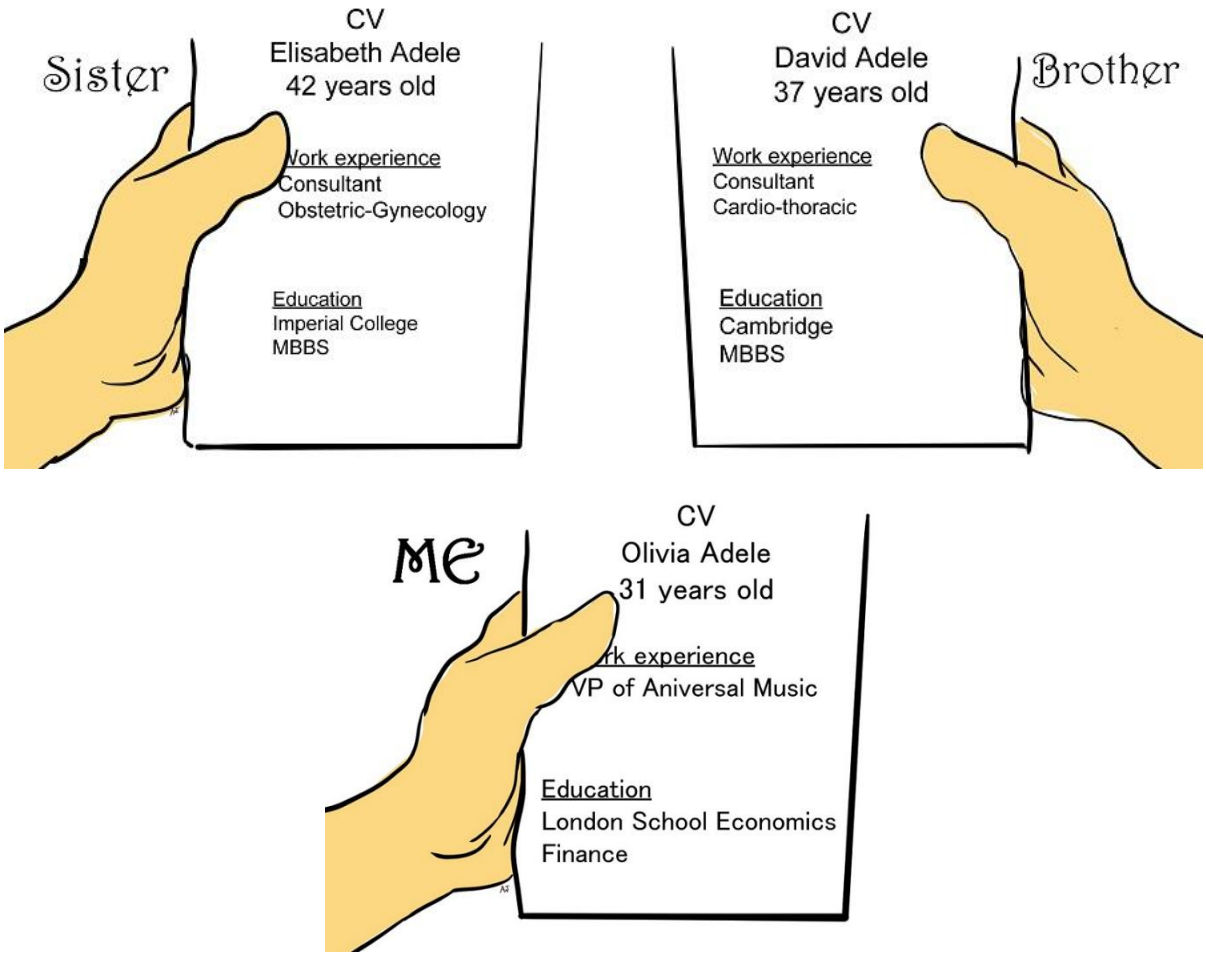
"The family idiot"

Each family has an "idiot" (if you didn't know, you may fulfil that role… just saying)

I was the family idiot, a role I played since I was born. Elisabeth and David started walking at 11 and 10 months old respectively, I took my first step at 13 months old (which was within normal range) but this fact set my life as an idiot

for good. Every achievement was compared to those of my siblings, who obviously performed better than me.

Look at their CV:



I know what you're thinking, the London School of Economics enjoyed a worldwide reputation, especially after Khaddafi's son became an alumni. Well, being a family idiot summed it all. I was not up against the average citizen, I was fighting against my siblings for a seat in the court of intellectual brightness. My parents were both bright and they expected more from us. A lot of pressure that since my first step I did not handle very well.

What was the life as a family idiot?

Lack of credibility. Whatever I said, defended, argued, proved, my siblings were asked to confirm my point. So annoying! Why asking me the question in the first place then?

Because of their higher pedigree and better-ranked universities, people considered them as expert in all the subjects.

Genes didn't work in my favour. As the family idiot, I suffered from a random pick of unlucky genes or unlucky genetic mutations, turning me into a victim. After all, I shared the same parents and the same education as my siblings, but for me it created "dumbness".

The use of this gene-story brought me some sympathy from members of my family.

I was officially a victim of genetics!

Number one topic in family gossips. As I tried to differentiate myself from the rest of the royal family, I started acting as the "buffoon". According to my family's standards, I was doing crazy shit!!

My mother surprised me kissing the little neighbour and spread the information to everyone. She said: "kissing boys… instead of focusing on school. God knows what's in her head now?"

For the record, this neighbour was my secret boyfriend, and I was 15.

Everything I did became a source of family gossip. At least, they had something to talk about; my endeavour entertained them.

A need to excel in a different field. To set myself apart, I relentlessly put my best effort to choose fields that my siblings did not care about or looked down on. Elisabeth graciously flew during her classic dance classes; I was flown across the room during karate. David displayed an effortless talent playing the piano; I hammered a drum. They hated me for it.

I would not be surprised if many people who turned to art or comedy, did so because of their background as family idiots. I used to say “You can’t appreciate art because you don’t understand it”. My family did not appreciate art as an intellectual discipline, but they did admit their total ignorance. It felt damn good to have a hand over them! Therefore, I chose art, and not medicine.

This reputation was the main reason why I didn’t want to be a doctor in the first place. The odds and the genes defeated my willingness. The family idiot wishing for a career in medicine...

“Are you cut for it?” Elisabeth interjected when I evoked the possibility at 12 years old.

“The competition is intense to get into med schools; you need much better grades.” David decreed when I evoked it again a year later.

I was thrown off the project.

But now that I picked up that project again, I wanted a clean slate regarding this family idiot role, and I would not get it if I were working with them.

My family cast me for a role that did not suit me anymore, but they kept me in this role. So rather than fighting their perceptions, I chose avoidance.

To answer the question bluntly, I did not wish to get an apprenticeship with my family, because, I, Olivia, aka the family idiot, declined the role.