

*Late the next morning. Snow continues to fall outside. Olivia is cleaning up a stack of books that were knocked over the night before. Ethan enters from the bedroom.*

Ethan: Hey.

Olivia: (*Overly casual*) Hey.

Ethan: Still snowing?

Olivia: Yeah.

Ethan: (*Re: her cleaning up*) Is someone else coming?

Olivia: No. Anne called and everyone else canceled because of the snow. I'm just cleaning up.

Ethan: So, it's just us.

Olivia: Just me, officially, Anne asked if I could take care of the place while she checks on her Dad up in Mackinaw. I didn't mention you were here.

Ethan: No?

Olivia: Since you're not staying.

Ethan: Right. So...last night was pretty great.

Olivia: Oh. Don't. I hate to reminisce about sex.

Ethan: That's just about all I do. Have sex and reminisce about it. (*Re: the books*) What are all of those?

Olivia: They're mine.

Ethan: You can read all of these in a week?

Olivia: No. I always bring more than I can possibly read, including favorites to reread, which I never get to. I just like having them around, I guess, knowing they're close by.

Ethan: (*picking up an old hardcover*) This one's old, huh?

Olivia: First edition.

Ethan: (*smelling the book.*) This smells like a library to me.

Olivia: How's that?

Ethan: (*smelling the book.*) Like old paper...and use...and time...

Olivia: (*smelling the book.*) Old books...best smell in the world.

Ethan: (*picking up a copy of The Lover by Marguerite Duras.*) How's this?

Olivia: You never read it?

Ethan: I'm a little behind honestly.

Olivia: I'm guessing not many nights at home curled up with a book.

Ethan: Not many nights at home.

Olivia: I find this so strange. I see it with my students all the time. Writers who don't read.

Ethan: (*Quickly*) I *do* read. But mostly living writers, I'm good on the big guns — Egers, Franzen, Zadie Smith. But also who's next. So, yeah, I'm a little behind on some of the *dead* people. But I'm committed to catching up.

Olivia: (*impressed*) nice.

Ethan: (*re: the book*) What do you like about this?

Olivia: Well, I was nineteen when I first read it and totally devotional to it, so I'm not very objective. But it's the way she uses language — it's very spare, but incredibly vivid.

Ethan: Yeah?

Olivia: The way she evokes the feeling of desire, of passion. Of feeling inexplicably connected to another person ... what happens before words are even spoken and, then, later when you don't need them anymore. And I know it's a clichè but there is something about passion and the French.

Ethan: Ahmit said you lived in France for a long time?

Olivia: Did you ask him about me?

Ethan: I did. I wanted to know everything about you.

Olivia: Just from reading my book?

Ethan: Yeah. And I saw a picture of you.

Olivia: You did? Where?

Ethan: Your book jacket.

Olivia: Right

Ethan: But also on Facebook.

Olivia: I'm not on Facebook anymore.

Ethan: Ahmit posted a photo of your class or something.

Olivia: (*really horrified*) Oh, God. What photo?

Ethan: (*re: what she was wearing*) Red pants.

Olivia: (*concerned*) Oh no. (*After a beat of reflection.*) Actually, I looked good in those pants.

Ethan: You did. When I saw you, I thought, she wrote that unbelievable book and she looks like that?

Olivia: (*smiling*) OK...

Ethan: I looked you up. But there's basically nothing. So, where's your new book?

Olivia: In my room. Why?

Ethan: I want to read it now.

Olivia: Well, you can't.

Ethan: Come on!

Olivia: No.

Ethan: We did what we did last night but you won't let me read your book?

Olivia: Nope.

Ethan: Why not?

Olivia: Too personal.

Ethan: Come on! I'm sure I'll love it.

Olivia: That's not the point.

Ethan: Right. The point is you like it and everyone else can fuck off.

Olivia: No. The point is, if you read it, I'll want you to like it and I don't want to want you to like it. I want to not care. But I will. This is my problem. And, for years, I've worked really hard and spent a lot of money on ... (*finding the right words*) *health-care professionals* trying to stop wanting people to like what I'm doing. To just do it.

Ethan: That's good.

Olivia: But, I can't. I'm sure if my first book had done better, I'd feel differently. But knowing my work is good and never having had that response? I still care.

Ethan: Well, it's not like you can totally not care. I mean, everybody cares a little.

Olivia: Yeah. But it felt so important to be ... *important*, you know?

Ethan: Whatever that means.

Olivia: To make something that people would think was ... brilliant.

Ethan: But a lot of people will!

Olivia: Now, I just want to be happy. And people misunderstanding or dismissing my work made me really unhappy. So, I'm not showing it to anyone right now. I'm just writing what I want. No compromises. No second guessing. No hopes. No expectations.

Ethan: But you have to have some expectations or you wouldn't be writing.

Olivia: (*joking*) Sure. Maybe it'll be discovered after I'm dead and everyone will think it's a masterpiece and feel sorry for me that I wasn't celebrated in my own time.

Ethan: Who are you, Emily Dickinson?!

Olivia: (*Re: the Dickinson reference.*) Good one.

Ethan: Well, she got mixed reviews, too. And so do I. But, we're proof that you shouldn't be discouraged by the assholes' response.

Olivia: It's not just that.

Ethan: What then?

Olivia: If something was going to happen for me, it would have already.

Ethan: Now, that's crazy.

Olivia: Why? People I know from school are on their third or fourth book. Some have been successful so long they're in the *comeback* phase of their career. They're making a comeback and I never got anywhere.

Ethan: Because you stopped trying!

Olivia: I mean, Ahmit, who, when I met him at twenty, had only written short stories. I convinced him to try writing a novel. He has a *Pulitzer*.

Ethan: But that doesn't mean that you aren't as good as he is.

Olivia: Look, I don't wanna compete with the twenty-two-year-olds trying to get off square one, trying to have my little voice heard over the throngs of hundreds and millions. At this point, it would be stupid.

Ethan: You don't have to think of it as competing against anyone.

Olivia: And isn't the world already choking on all the shallow, trivial observations of millions of self-important morons? Not you.

Ethan: Thanks.

Olivia: So, why should I try to fight my way through that?

Ethan: Because unlike most of the shit that's out there, your writing is incredibly good.

Olivia: But what if people don't respond to this new one that I think is my best yet? What do I do then?

Ethan: If it's even *half* as good as the one I read, it is a huge loss to the world if people can't read it.

Olivia: What are you being so nice to me?

Ethan: Why are you being so suspect?

Olivia: I just keep waiting for the asshole to show up.

Ethan: Well, he'll be here tomorrow. So, if there's anything you want to do with the nice guy, we've got some time. *(Ethan moves to her and kisses her. Passionately. It escalates. Clothes come off. Sex is imminent.)*