



Branche Olive

book one

Fleur de Lis

*Olivia*

by Tracy Leung

# *Branche Olive - Fleur de Lis - Olivia*

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# Olivia

Martin sat on his motorcycle, positioned near the edge of the green on *Avenue de Breteuil*. He revved the bike slightly, just to get the attention of the pretty girls sitting nearby. When they looked over he took off his helmet, shook out his hair and flashed a wide, bright smile. The girls giggled to each other and Martin swung one leg over the bike and stood up to open his jacket. He was in great shape. Martin was obsessed with fitness, he found that the more attention he paid to his body, the more girls he could get. One of the girls pursed her lips at him and scanned him up and down. Martin grinned at her and winked.

Across the street Olivia had walked to the window of the flower shop to change the OPEN sign. She put her hand on the door to lock it when it was pushed open.

“Oh!” she exclaimed.

“*Excusez-moi, soyez vous ouvert?*” asked a tall businessman with an English accent. He was in desperate need of some flowers.

“*Oui, nous sommes presque fermés.*” Olivia was anxious to close. She could see her boyfriend on his motorcycle across the street. He always got upset with her when she didn’t close on time.

The Englishman stammered in broken French and gestures. Olivia watched her customer pick out a ready-made arrangement. He was handsome, for an older man, she thought. Nice teeth, lovely mouth, too bad he can’t speak French. Olivia was distracted. She shook her head slightly and helped the man finish the transaction, counting the change back in to his hand.

“*Merci, venez encore.*” she said as she followed him to the door to lock it. At the door, she waved to Martin who was becoming impatient.

By the time she closed out the register, set the timers for the plant feeders and locked the shop, Olivia was rushing. She darted across the street to Martin’s bike. Martin was standing with his back to her, writing down something a girl was telling him. Olivia frowned. Martin turned and winked at her and said something to the girl, who smiled. He walked back to her and his bike, flashing a grin.

“*Ma petite chaton.*” Martin greeted her as he kissed her on the forehead.

“Martin, sorry to keep you waiting, there was one more customer, he...,” Olivia started to explain.

Martin cut her off, “here. Let’s go.” He thrust a smaller version of his helmet in to her hands.

“But, Martin, let’s go to my flat, we can walk, come...” Olivia was tired and just wanted to go home. Martin always wanted to go for drinks, then dinner and then meet with his friends.

“Ah, *chaton*, you want to scratch my back now, or later, after some wine and food?” He laughed, confidently.

Olivia really disliked being called kitten, Martin’s nickname for her. She didn’t think it was flattering. Martin sat on the motorcycle and revved the engine. He looked at her expectantly. Olivia hesitated and Martin grabbed the helmet from her.

“Go home by yourself, old cat, I will not wait for you,” he spat at her and revved the bike to drown out any response she may have.

Olivia turned away and walked the few streets to her flat. She looked back once and thought she saw Martin pull away from the park with someone on the bike behind him. When she looked again he was gone.

Olivia walked up the stairs to her third floor flat. The setting sun cast an orange glow through the windows. She put her handbag down on the sofa and closed the curtains around the room. Olivia put the TV on for company and turned on the kettle to make some coffee. A quick scan of the small fridge produced a tomato, some *boudin* and a leftover *roti* from the Indian café. There, she thought, dinner sorted.

She pulled out a plate and a tea cup. They were mismatched, sentimental treasures from old china sets. The blue floral pattern came from a sweet little grandmother. Olivia still had a few plates and a bowl from her. The tea cup was her father's. The handle was missing and there were chips and dings all over it. Olivia dried it very carefully and set herself a place at the table. A silver knife and fork clicked next to the plate. The silverware set was engraved with a *fleur de lis* symbol. They were once a wedding gift to her parents. It was their every day set, the only set they had. Olivia smiled at the memories. She didn't have many worldly goods, and what she didn't have to sell for cash, she truly cherished.

After dinner Olivia flicked on the immersion heater for a bath later and settled in for the night.

She woke before her alarm, as she usually did. Olivia got ready for work. She was expecting deliveries in the shop today. The cell phone in her bag beeped and she fished it out. Her brow furrowed as she listened to the half-apologetic message a drunken Martin left late last night. Olivia clicked delete and put the phone back in her bag. She grabbed her keys and her bag and left.

"*Bon jour.*" Olivia greeted her neighbors. She really loved the area. Her neighborhood, in the Seventh *Arrondissement*, was a very desirable district.

With the inheritance from her father, his whole life savings, she managed to buy her flat and *Breteuil Fleurs*, her beloved flower shop. Olivia put the key in the shop door, went in and turned off the alarm and feeders. She straightened up the display in the window and turned the sign to OPEN.

Time flew when she was busy. There was the usual custom from people visiting the nearby *Invalides* hospital. She also had corporate accounts for some of the nearby office buildings. It was a successful business. Olivia was very proud.

She wiped a cloth across the counter. Olivia ran her hand along the cool marble slab. She bought it at a huge discount from one of the nearby schools when they were refurbishing their science labs. It was a lucky find. So was the cash register.

Her father spotted it one day at the *Les Puces* flea market. He barely managed to get it home on the *Metro*. Olivia would never forget the sight of her father dragging an old baby stroller down their cobble stoned street. Olivia ran over to help her father as he struggled with the bulky stroller.

"Lily," he panted from the effort. "Look." Her father lifted the blanket in the stroller to reveal the true prize of his shopping excursion. The two of them grunted as they half-carried half-thumped the brass and wooden beast in to their apartment.

Her father spent the next two years restoring it. He lovingly polished all the pieces to a brilliant shine. After removing layers of old varnish he was delighted to find a gold colored Lilly of the Valley inlay on the mahogany drawer. The keys were bright white with bold black numbers. In the months before he passed away her father fine tuned all the mechanisms. He found a replacement bell and new beveled glass for the display.

Olivia kissed her father on the forehead as he slept in his chair. He woke with a groggy smile and said he had dreamt of her mother. He gestured at the cash register and Olivia wheeled his chair alongside its permanent place on the dining table. He looked up at her with cloudy grey eyes and smiled. Her father's hand shook when he depressed the SALE button. The drawer slid open with a 'ding'. He placed a twenty franc note inside and pushed the drawer closed.

“Someday,” her father patted Olivia’s hand. “this machine will bring you good fortune.”

Martin stopped by at lunchtime with a sandwich and bottle of red wine. It was his peace offering. She knew he would never tell her he was sorry, or make excuses for his behavior. That was just the way he was. Olivia smiled to herself when Martin tried to speak English to one of the tourists. She had taken English lessons years ago in school. Even though she was not entirely fluent, she was always able to make herself understood.

Martin kissed Olivia quickly before getting back on his bike to finish his day as a messenger. Olivia waved to him from the window as he sped off. They had been together, on and off, for 5 years. She met him just as she left school, right before her father died. Her father never had the chance to meet Martin. Many of Olivia’s friends hadn’t met him either. She began to lose touch with them.

Olivia was pruning a small bonsai that she tried to encourage in to twisting around. The bell on the shop door jingled and she called out “*Entre vous!*” She wiped her hands on her apron and recognized the tall Englishman from the night before. He wanted another bouquet of flowers, lilies this time. Olivia continued the transaction in French, counting out the change again for him. He watched her as she deposited coins in his hand. She felt her face flush as he stared at her then smiled.

“*Bonne nuit*” he said, horribly.

“*Merci, venez encore*” was her standard reply.

With the lunchtime visit from Martin, Olivia knew not to expect him after work. She closed the shop, with her usual routine. Instead of going home she wanted to try the food at the new *Le Bistro de Breteuil*. Olivia felt that it was important to try the places in the area that a tourist might ask about. She was doing a community service. The place was barely occupied as she stepped through the doors. The *maitre’d* sat her at a table near the window, facing the back of the restaurant.

In the corner table she spotted the tall Englishman from her shop, on a date. She looked away, not wanting to intrude. The meal was pleasant enough, she thought, I would recommend this. With the dessert menu in her hand she could hear raised voices from the Englishman’s table.

His date was not pleased with him. Olivia hid behind the menu, trying not to make it obvious that she was witness. The woman stood up from the table and with a magnificent flourish, swatted the Englishman with the lilies he bought. Olivia almost burst out laughing. The Englishman bolted from his seat, threw Euros on table and chased his date out of the restaurant.

“Wait, Brigitte, that’s not what I meant to say. It was the wrong word!” he called out.

Olivia and the waiter speculated over the argument and he treated her to a cup of coffee. She mentioned to the *maitre’d* that she owned the flower shop down the avenue and gave him her business card. She walked home, satisfied with dinner and the unexpected show.

The next day Olivia took an order for a wedding. She called one of her part-time assistants and asked her to consider working more hours. While she arranged a few more ready-made bouquets she thought of the Englishman and the incident from the night before. She wondered if he would be back again. He had such a nice smile. What was she doing? She shook her head slightly to snap herself out of her daydream. Return customers are always nice, she reasoned with herself.

Martin rang to say that he was going to meet her at her flat after dinner. Olivia wondered if he often did that to get out of taking her for a nice meal. Maybe he already had a date. No, of course not. Again, she shook her head. My brain is trying to kill me today.

With the extra help confirmed for the wedding arrangements Olivia smiled to herself, satisfied.

“What a nice smile.”

“*Merde!*” Olivia said automatically. She was startled.

“Oh, *excusez-moi, Je n'ai pas entendu la cloche,*” she apologized quickly. Too quickly.

The Englishman looked puzzled at the rapid-fire French. He mumbled and pulled out a phrase book.

“Do you want flowers again tonight?” Olivia said clearly, in English.

“Oh, you speak English, thank god. I’m getting in to so much trouble in French.”

Olivia smiled, not betraying the secret glimpse she had the night before. “Roses tonight, maybe?”

He looked at her quizzically. What an uncanny perception she has, he mused. “Yes, I think roses are appropriate tonight.”

Olivia nodded, with a smile and began selecting some English roses that came in on Wednesday. She wondered if he would appreciate the subtle touch.

The Englishman watched Olivia with keen interest. She flitted around, confidently making a selection, trimming the stems expertly, wrapping them in a thick decorative paper.

“*Voilà,*” Olivia smiled and presented the bouquet to the Englishman. She blushed again when he continued to stare at her.

“Oh, sorry, I was just thinking that they looked like flowers from a garden in England,” he said and snapped out of his trance.

“*Oui,* they are English roses,” Olivia grinned, pleased with herself.

“Nice touch,” he said. “Your bosses here must be proud of your sales skill.”

“I own this shop myself,” Olivia said, still grinning.

“Nice, and so young,” his face blanched. “Good lord, I didn’t mean it was nice that you were young. I mean, it is nice that you are young, and pretty. Oh no. Shut up Henry.” he babbled.

Olivia couldn’t help but laugh. “Yes, I am young to own my own shop, but I work hard.” She passed him one of her business cards. Henry fumbled in his suit jacket for one of his own.

“Olivia Girardin, pleasure to meet you,” said Henry offering his hand.

“Henry Clifden,” Olivia read off his card “the pleasure is mine, Monsieur Clifden.”

“Oh, Henry, please.”

“*Oui, Henri.*”

Henry held her hand for another moment as he watched her expression. Her eyes looked older than her pretty face, like there was sadness behind them. Olivia cleared her throat and presented the bouquet of roses to Henry again.

“Yes, thank you,” Henry said as he scanned the shop for something else to buy. He didn’t want to leave.

“Forty Euros then,” Olivia watched him.

“Yes, of course.” He handed her two €20 notes. “Do you know a nice place for dinner?”

“*Naturellement*, there are many nice restaurants for you... and your date?” Olivia nodded to the flowers.

“Right,” Henry reacted quickly. “My date.” He looked at his watch.

Olivia made a few suggestions for dinner and said goodnight to Henry. She hummed to herself, pleased with the successful sale to a repeat customer. She looked at her hand for a moment, the one Henry touched. He was nice, she thought.

Martin took a swig of wine right from the bottle and kissed Olivia on the neck, holding her hair in his hand. He had been drinking. When she greeted him at the door he was all smiles and happy to see her. She had been changing her clothes and was only in her bathrobe. Martin’s kisses traveled from her throat to her mouth. He kissed her hard and pushed the robe off her shoulders. His gesture caught her by surprise and she gasped. Martin took this as encouragement and yanked the robe off roughly.

“Martin, please,” Olivia panted.

He took her there, in the front room, on her couch. He threw her down playfully and leapt on her, barely restrained. Olivia was used to Martin’s rough touch. He wasn’t violent, he never forced her, but it was not sensual, not passionate. He was considerate, but she was often left more embarrassed than satisfied. She was inexperienced, he was her first. She still believed that it could be sweeter, they could embrace and actually make love. She wanted to believe that he would show her that. She hoped.

Martin slept in her bed as Olivia had a hot bath. She ran a washcloth over the parts that Martin touched. She closed her eyes at the sensation and tried to imagine Martin caressing her there. Olivia applied more pressure, quickly. The water in the tub sloshed in rhythm. She had images of Martin, holding her up against the wall and closed her eyes tighter. Olivia began to moan softly. She saw Henry’s hand on hers, his eyes watching her face. Olivia tried not to cry out. The water in the tub spilled on the floor as her back arched. She tensed for a few exquisite seconds and then slowly relaxed. When her breathing slowed to normal she sat up in the tub with a start. Henry? Where did that come from?

Olivia and Martin had coffee and croissants at her breakfast table. She opened the shop for only a few hours on Saturday. The tourists were usually around on weekends. Martin planned to spend the day with Gustav. Olivia frowned slightly. She didn’t like Gustav. He hung out with loose women and Olivia didn’t want Martin exposed to that. As Olivia cleared the dishes Martin swatted her bottom playfully. She smiled at him and just walked away, not wanting to instigate another tryst. Olivia was wearing a cornflower blue cardigan that matched her eyes. She didn’t want Martin to rip it.

In addition to the expected flowers and plants Olivia also sold small kites in kits. Kite flying on *Avenue de Breteuil* was incredibly popular with the locals and tourists alike. She usually sold out. Olivia had the forethought to include with the kits, free of charge, long ribbons with *Breteuil Fleurs* printed on them. It was fantastic advertising.

With Saturday business in full swing Olivia was happy with a queue at her register. She looked up at one stage and found Henry staring back at her. When he got to his place in front of her he smiled.

“I was reading through some office papers on my terrace and I saw a sea of kites. I came down to take some pictures,” he held up a camera. “and as I was helping a young boy with his ribbon I noticed the name of your shop.”

“And you want to buy a kite?” Olivia said as Henry just stood there grinning at her. She nodded slightly to the queue behind him and smiled.

“Oh,” he laughed. “Yes, well... no. I don’t want a kite.” He blushed. “Would you like to come for a coffee with me?”

“*Ça alors*, I am busy, no?” Olivia could barely contain a giggle.

“Well, yes. Right. OK. I’ll go then.” Henry backed out of the store. “I’ll come back later.”

Olivia burst out laughing. The few people who understood English laughed too. The rest of the day sped by for her.

She was starting her closing routine when Henry came back in the store. Olivia grinned at him as he flashed an embarrassed smile.

“Now looks like a better time,” Henry laughed.

“*Oui*, I have no more kites, if that is what you want,” Olivia couldn’t help but tease him.

Henry groaned. “OK, I deserved that. Instead of a kite or a coffee, can I take you to dinner?”

Olivia smiled and removed her apron. “Well, I am to meet my boyfriend at *Fermette Marbeuf*, right near the Eiffel Tower. Do you want to come for a drink?”

“I would be delighted,” Henry grinned.

Olivia finished closing her shop and walked with Henry to the Metro station. They passed by her flat, she pointed it out. They crossed a few streets, he pointed out his.

Henry explained that he had moved to Paris three months ago to serve on the Board at the museum at *Les Invalides*. He had a successful gallery in London and was commuting back and forth. Olivia watched him intently. She mentioned to him that she loved her shop and the neighborhood. He asked about her boyfriend.

“Martin?” Olivia’s brow furrowed. “Many women are always on him. They always want Martin.”

“Do you?” Henry asked softly as they went in to the restaurant.

“Look, there’s Gustav! Gustav!” Olivia didn’t hear Henry’s question. Or she did, and just didn’t answer him.

“Gustav, *vous avez Martin vu?*” Olivia asked Gustav. Gustav smiled at Henry and mumbled a polite greeting in rapid French. Gustav kissed Olivia on both cheeks and gestured to the back of the room.

“Do you want to sit here and have a drink first?” Olivia motioned to a small table near the door.

“Sure, that would be nice.”

Henry and Olivia sat and had some wine, then a few appetizers for dinner. They talked about their childhoods. Olivia mentioned the long illness her father had. Henry was 42, almost twice her age. He spoke of an ex-wife and his sister, Margaret, in America. He had traveled to many places, struggling to learn languages for his business. He had Berlitz tapes for French.

“Oh, the roses, they worked, yes?”

“The roses worked, no. She hit me with them.” Olivia burst out laughing.

During the next two hours the rest of the world dissolved away. Henry sank in to Olivia's blue eyes. He wanted to brush the curls off her face and run his hands through her hair. Olivia couldn't stop watching Henry's hands. They both reached for the wine bottle at the same time. Their hands touched.

"*Olivia, mon dieu !*" A tall skinny girl threw her arms around Olivia. "*Démuni je vu vous en années!*"

Olivia looked at Henry, translating quickly. "*Henri*, this is Giselle, my schoolmate. We haven't seen each other in years"

"Allo *Henri*," said Giselle, switching to English. "Wait, he is here! Olivia, my boyfriend..." Giselle pulled a man out of the crowd and thrust him in front of their table.

"Olivia!" Martin said as she ran out of the restaurant.

Henry jumped up. He mumbled about doing this too much and threw some Euros on the table. He chased Olivia until she stopped when he called out. Henry caught up with her. She turned to him and buried her face in his chest. He held her there for a moment, trying to console her.

Olivia looked up at Henry. "I don't know why I am so upset. I never believe he loved me." She started sobbing again.

"Shhh," Henry dried her tears with his hankie. His hand brushed her cheek and Olivia clutched it to her face. Henry looked down at her huge blue eyes and touched his lips to hers. Olivia felt a spark go through her. He looked at Olivia and sighed. They walked quietly for a few streets.

"I should go," Olivia said aloud. They took the *Metro* back to *Avenue de Breteuil*.

Neither of them wanted to leave.

"This is my flat," Henry said quietly.

Olivia lingered, not sure what to do. She looked up at the unassuming building. She knew this street. She had passed this spot many times before. It was suddenly a very significant place, and time. Her life had been very simple with Martin. He expected very little from her. She learned to accept very little from him. Maybe this was a chance to have a real relationship. A balanced love.

Henry scanned Olivia's face. "I think I can see your shop from my terrace!" he said too loudly.

"Really?" Olivia had to smile at Henry. He was so charming, in a clumsy, over-eager way. There was something about him that put her at ease. Something about him that let Olivia be herself.

"Um, want to come look?" Henry winced. "God, does that sound desperate to you?"

"I would love to see my shop from your terrace," Olivia said brightly.

They stepped in to the lift together. Henry reached forward to press the button marked PH. His cheek grazed Olivia's hair and he inhaled deeply. They stood very closely, but not touching. Both were transfixed by the lights marking off the floors as the lift ascended. They paused when the elevator stopped and both giggled slightly when the doors opened. Henry led Olivia down the hall and opened his front door. They stepped in to one big room with sofas, a dining table and small kitchen.

Olivia looked around quickly. The flat was functional, the furnishing basic. Apart from some of Henry's papers and a pair of shoes by the front door, there was very little personality in the room. There was a collection of near dead plants by the window. The only thing thriving was a small ficus tree.

"Would you like some wine?" Henry offered. Olivia smiled and shook her head. She still looked so sad.

“The terrace is out there,” Henry pointed past the dining table. He slid the glass door open for Olivia. She stepped out and clutched the deck railing with both hands. Henry leaned forward, straining to see over Olivia’s shoulder.

“There,” he said, motioning with his arm extended, “you can just see the front of your shop...” Olivia could feel Henry pressing in to her back. She gripped the railing tightly and let out a small gasp. Henry put his hand on her shoulder.

“Olivia?” She spun to face him and drew his face to hers with both hands. They kissed deeply, panting on each other’s cheek.

She whispered, “oh, *Henri*.”

He kissed her again, nibbling on her lip, giving her tongue little flicks with his. Henry groaned loudly and stepped away from Olivia. Whoa, he thought. Too fast, too young. Henry didn’t want Olivia to rush in to anything after an emotional scene at the restaurant. Olivia looked at him coyly, smoothed her cardigan and stepped back in to the flat.

“I think I’d like some water,” Henry said after clearing his throat. He pointed the bottle and glass at Olivia, she nodded.

She was looking at a painting on the wall.

“This is nice,” she said as he handed her a glass of water.

“The flat came furnished,” he said, standing too close to her again.

Henry was drunk from her scent. His soul was starting to ache for her. Olivia brushed his arm gently as she walked past him to set her glass on the kitchen counter.

“You are so lucky to have a terrace in this flat,” Olivia said over her shoulder.

“There is another one,” Henry took a loud sip of water. “It’s in my bedroom.”

Olivia took a deep breath. She was about to leap in to a new life. The choice was standing there, right in front of her. She was tired of the games she played with Martin. Tired of settling for a quiet life. She desperately needed to feel passion. To feel like she belonged somewhere, with someone. She desperately needed to feel loved. Olivia walked back to Henry.

“Show me,” she said, and took his hand.

They kissed as they walked down the hall.

“Shit,” said Henry as he kicked something in the dark. Olivia giggled. They stood at the edge of his bed. As much as he wanted her, Henry was reluctant to rush anything. As much as he wanted to throw her on the bed and ravage her, he wanted to savor every moment.

Olivia was used to a faster pace. For the first time in her life she wanted to rip off clothing and race to that sweet clutching embrace. She reached up and started to unbutton Henry’s shirt. Her soft, warm hands cupped his shoulders as she slipped it off him. She stared in to his face and slowly unbuttoned the tiny pearl-like fasteners on her cardigan. Olivia let that slip off and fall to the floor. Henry gently lifted the thin hem of her camisole up and over her head. She stood before him in her bra and skirt. He moved one strap off, watching it land on her arm. Olivia impatiently yanked the other one off. Henry’s hands shook a bit as he pulled her bra down to reveal her perfect little breasts. Olivia stepped closer to Henry, pressing her breasts in to his chest, kissing and nibbling him. She reached around and unfastened her skirt, letting that fall to the floor with her bra.

Olivia knew that Henry wanted her. She could feel it. She wanted to touch it. Her hands caressed his bottom, squeezing lightly. Henry felt her right hand touch his thigh and move to cup the front of his pants. With a slight moan he picked up Olivia, burying his face in her neck and hair. He laid her down on the bed and ripped off the rest of his clothes.

Henry traced the seams of Olivia's panties, across her taut middle to her hips, over her thighs to a sweet damp spot. Olivia's mind raced. Her experience with love so far had never been so slow and deliberate.

She let out a gasp when she felt Henry's teeth tugging at the lace. His tongue darted in and out, following the seam. Olivia groaned and arched her back involuntarily. Henry used the gesture to undress her, his lips never losing contact with her skin. Olivia could feel Henry painting her with his tongue, covering her with his whole mouth. Henry darted his tongue over a small ridge and Olivia inhaled sharply. He flicked the same spot and she groaned loudly, throwing her hands over her head.

"*Mon dieu,*" she breathed as he circled it, pressing on it with his lips. Henry felt her thighs tense and he pulled the small ridge in to his mouth and began sucking on it. Olivia's hands jumped to Henry's head, pushing him on to her as she screamed out his name. This was, finally, the tenderness she was looking for.

Olivia panted as Henry made one last pass of his tongue over her glistening skin. He reached up to lie next to her, and turned to kiss her.

"*Oh Henri,* never before..."

Henry kissed her again. "I think I have a ..." He hesitated, looking in the direction he thought his pants were. He never had casual sex or one night stands. It had been years since he needed a condom. He didn't think he actually had one.

"*Que?*" Olivia whispered in to the kiss.

Shit. Henry didn't want to ruin the mood. He desperately needed Olivia now. "I don't think I have a condom."

"*Ne s'arrêtent pas,*" she panted. "Don't stop. Please. I have the pill."

Olivia pulled him to her and he fit inside her deeply. She looked at him with wide eyes and newfound passion.

"*Oui,*" She kissed him again.

Henry tried to control his pace. Olivia moved with him. She began squeezing him, from her core, and he moaned deeply. He moved almost entirely away from her, trying to slow down. She pulled him back, lifting her hips off the bed. Henry tried a few times to hold back, gritting his teeth. Olivia pressed her nails in to his back, her heels on his ass, her hips pushing against him. She began thrusting herself on to him. She cursed in French, deep guttural sounds from her throat. Henry could hold back no more. He leaned back once and slammed against Olivia's quivering body. She shuddered and whimpered beneath him as he sank in to her, pulse after pulse.

After a time they pulled away from each other. He cradled her in his arms as he spooned against her back.

"Oh, look," she said, "the other terrace."