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I have finally finished my novel. It is my ultimate work, my masterpiece, Everest. The greatest sense of accomplishment I have ever experienced is surging through my body. I have sacrificed my marriage, my children, my home, everything for my novel. It is honestly a 900-page work of pure genius. I will soon begin to send copies of my manuscript to publishing houses, but first I am thrilled to hear my best friend Richard’s thoughts on my piece. I am meeting him for coffee in fifteen minutes and I can’t control my excitement.

Richard sits across from me, in silence, with the 900 pages in a neat stack on the table in front of him. I wait in anticipation.

He begins to pick up each page, one by one, slowly tearing them in half and discarding them in the Starbucks garbage bin. The grin leaves my face as I watch him do this, page by page. I feel hot tears form in my eyes by page 300. The very last page, in which my entire life’s work comes skillfully together, he packs with marijuana and rolls into a joint. He leans back, taking a hit of my heart and soul, grins, and watches me as I fall into uncontrollable sobbing.

John walked down the street next to Linda. When she stopped to look at something in a shop window, he stopped too. He usually hated this mundane activity – especially on dates when there were other things to do. More fun things. He sidestepped an old lady whose purse swung to and fro from her elbow and held in a sigh. He needed new gloves, his hands were freezing. Maybe tomorrow he and Linda could do something more worthwhile. He had always been a big fan of movie dates because you could sit in the back row and… on second thought, maybe he should get a haircut. He ran his hand through his hair and looked down at Linda.

Her brown hair blew away from her face in the icy breeze and she shivered, looking up at John. She thought that his hair was a bit long as he combed his fingers through the mess. She hoped he’d cut it soon. As the two walked they looked into the shop windows, allowing silence to replace words today. She liked silence. It meant she could ignore the things in the windows and just... think. John’s idea to go for a walk was sweet, but her nose could no longer handle the cold. She wished for coffee.

She drifted off into her own head, her thoughts straying from her to-do list to her freezing nose. She imagined John turning to her, “Do you want coffee? I’m freezing.”

“Yes, please,” she smiled at him. He told her that he knew a place and took her hand, leading her into a cute little coffee shop just near her apartment. “This is my favorite place!” Linda said.

“Mine too!” John replied, surprised. A sharp breeze woke her from her daydream.

The next window was a café. Linda took John’s hand and led him into the warm glow of incandescent light bulbs. The barista glanced up at the sound of the bell and offered a barely audible “welcome.” Milk, espresso, syrups, he measured each into a Styrofoam to-go cup. Maybe they’ll order something interesting, he thought. They seemed to be an interesting couple – him with his