



SEX WITH STRANGERS

BY LAURA EASON



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SEX WITH STRANGERS
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SEX WITH STRANGERS was first produced in a developmental production by Steppenwolf Theatre Company (Martha Lavey, Artistic Director; David Hawkanson, Executive Director) in Chicago, Illinois, as part of its First Look Repertory of New Work (Edward Sobel, Program Director) in July – August 2009. It was directed by Jessica Thebus. The cast was as follows:

OLIVIAAmy J. Carle
ETHAN..... Stephen Louis Grush

The world premiere of a revised version of SEX WITH STRANGERS opened at Steppenwolf Theatre Company on January 30, 2011. It was directed by Jessica Thebus; the set design was by Todd Rosenthal; the lighting design was by J.R. Lederle; the costume design was by Ana Kuzmanic; the sound design and original music were by Kevin O'Donnell and Andre Pluess; the production stage manager was Christine D. Freeburg; and the dramaturg was Polly Carl. The cast was as follows:

OLIVIASally Murphy
ETHAN..... Stephen Louis Grush

The Australian premiere of a revised version of SEX WITH STRANGERS opened at Sydney Theatre Company (Cate Blanchett and Andrew Upton, Artistic Directors) in Sydney, Australia, on September 28, 2012. It was directed by Jocelyn Moorhouse; the set and costume design were by Tracy Grant Lord; the lighting design was by Matthew Marshall; the original music and sound design were by Steve Francis; the production stage manager was Tanya Leach; and the voice and text coach was Charmian Gradwell. The cast was as follows:

OLIVIA Jacqueline McKenzie
ETHAN..... Ryan Corr

The New York premiere of a revised version of SEX WITH STRANGERS opened at Second Stage Theatre (Carole Rothman, Artistic Director; Casey Reitz, Executive Director) in New York City on July 30, 2014. It was directed by David Schwimmer; the assistant director was J. Nicole Brooks; the set design was by Andromache Chalfant; the costume design was by ESosa; the lighting design was by Japhy Weideman; the original music and sound design were by Fitz Patton; and the production stage manager was Scott Taylor Rollison. The cast was as follows:

OLIVIA Anna Gunn
ETHAN..... Billy Magnussen

CHARACTERS

OLIVIA, 39, then 41. Smart, sexy, outwardly strong but covering some fragility. American but spent many years living abroad.

ETHAN, 28, then 30. Very charismatic, sexy, a fast talker, used to being the center of attention. From Chicago but has little to no specific accent.

PLACE

Act One: A bed and breakfast in rural Michigan.

Act Two: Olivia's apartment in Chicago.

TIME

The present.

TEXT NOTES

[//] An interruption, where the following line of dialogue should begin.

[...] A suspended thought.

[—] A cut off.

SEX WITH STRANGERS

ACT ONE

Scene 1

The living/reading room of a simple, not overly quaint bed and breakfast. A window looks out on the late, cold, snowy March night. There is a fire going. Next to the couch is a tall stack of books.

Holding a red pen in one hand and a glass of red wine in the other, Olivia sits reading an unbound manuscript. She occasionally makes notes and is happily alone.

The sound of a car approaching. As headlights come into view, Olivia looks curiously out the window.

OLIVIA. *(Re: the car out the window.)* Who are you? *(The sound of the car engine turning off, someone approaching the house. They turn the knob but the door is locked. To the door.)* Hello?

ETHAN. *(Through the door.)* Hey — I'm Ethan Kane. I have a reservation.

OLIVIA. What?

ETHAN. *(Through the door.)* I have a reservation.

OLIVIA. *(To herself.)* You have got to be kidding. *(To the door.)* OK. One second. *(Olivia looks for her sweater. It takes a second.)*

ETHAN. Uh, it's really cold out here.

OLIVIA. I'm coming! *(Olivia puts on her sweater and opens the door. Ethan blows past her into the room, making wet footprints. He throws his coat down on the floor.)*

ETHAN. Hi.

OLIVIA. Sorry, but Anne's not here. She didn't think you were coming. Check-in was between noon and six.

ETHAN. Yeah. I got a late start. And, in case you didn't notice, it's a fucking blizzard out there.

OLIVIA. Well, she didn't leave you a room key. So ...

ETHAN. OK. (*Dropping his bag by the couch.*) Well, I'll just crash here.

OLIVIA. On the couch?

ETHAN. Yeah. What do you want me to do? Sleep in the car?

OLIVIA. No. I wasn't // suggesting you —

ETHAN. Is there food?

OLIVIA. Food?

ETHAN. Yeah, I'm starving. There's got to be something in the kitchen.

OLIVIA. I don't think you should be rooting around in the kitchen —

ETHAN. You're really rule-oriented, huh?

OLIVIA. No. I just don't // think you should —

ETHAN. (*Pointing to her open bottle of wine.*) Did you buy that bottle of wine?

OLIVIA. I'll tell Anne I drank it and she'll charge it to my bill.

ETHAN. So, she can charge what I eat to mine. This way? (*Ethan goes to the kitchen. Olivia collects her manuscript.*)

OLIVIA. (*To herself.*) What a jag-off!

ETHAN. (*Calling.*) You want anything?

OLIVIA. (*Calling.*) No, thanks.

ETHAN. (*Calling.*) Am I seeming like a dick?

OLIVIA. (*To herself.*) What?!

ETHAN. (*Calling, louder.*) Hey — am I seeming like a dick?

OLIVIA. (*Calling.*) Yeah. Yeah, you are.

ETHAN. (*After a beat, calling.*) Sorry. Hungry. Man, I got so lost coming here! Once you get off the highway, there are no street lights *anywhere*, half the signs I couldn't see, and with the snow, I was like, where the fuck am I?!

OLIVIA. That's why they tell you to get here before six. (*Ethan returns with a bowl of cereal and an empty juice glass.*)

ETHAN. Smart.

OLIVIA. Um, I should head to bed.

ETHAN. You don't seem tired.

OLIVIA. Well ...

ETHAN. I think it's all that rage you're barely suppressing.

OLIVIA. (*Smiling in spite of herself.*) I thought I was managing it pretty well.

ETHAN. Stay for a minute.

OLIVIA. No. I should get some sleep.

ETHAN. (*Holding out his empty glass.*) You sharing or...?

OLIVIA. I don't really want to.

ETHAN. C'mon. You can bill my glass to the couch.

OLIVIA. (*After a moment of consideration.*) All right. (*Olivia fills Ethan's glass.*)

ETHAN. So, you've been here before?

OLIVIA. Yes.

ETHAN. (*Laughing.*) And...?

OLIVIA. And yes. I've been here before.

ETHAN. Are you usually this easy to talk to or...?

OLIVIA. Who *are* you?

ETHAN. What?

OLIVIA. *Who are you?* Why are you here?

ETHAN. Is it weird that I'm here?

OLIVIA. Yes!

ETHAN. Why?

OLIVIA. You're not the kind of guy who usually comes here — How do you even know about this place?

ETHAN. A friend of mine's been here. Said it was great. (*Fiddling with his iPhone.*) I'm on a deadline and I'm really distracted at home and he thought I could get some work done here so — (*Looking at his phone.*) I have no signal. Do you get signal here?

OLIVIA. No.

ETHAN. Never?

OLIVIA. Never.

ETHAN. Seriously? (*Looking to his phone.*) Shit!

OLIVIA. Is someone trying to get a hold of you?

ETHAN. It's not about someone trying to get a hold of me ...

OLIVIA. There's a phone if you have to make a call.

ETHAN. It's not that I have to make a call, but, I mean, *my phone isn't working!*

OLIVIA. (*Mocking him.*) Are you gonna be OK?

ETHAN. (*Frustrated, waving his iPhone.*) I can't find the wireless. She said there was wireless.

OLIVIA. It's down.

ETHAN. What? It's, like, broken?

OLIVIA. Yes.

ETHAN. So, can I plug in somewhere?

OLIVIA. No. Something's wrong with the line. Someone was supposed to come fix it in the next day or two, but with the storm ...

ETHAN. So, no internet at all?

OLIVIA. Nope.

ETHAN. Fuck!

OLIVIA. It's been great, actually. No distractions.

ETHAN. But *I can't get online!* People will think I'm dead. And what if you have to look something up?

OLIVIA. I don't.

ETHAN. But what if you need to know something?

OLIVIA. What would I need to know that urgently?

ETHAN. I don't know. (*Looking to his phone.*) Anything ...

OLIVIA. No matter how many times you look at it, you're not going to get a signal.

ETHAN. Shit!

OLIVIA. How long are you planning on staying?

ETHAN. If there's no wireless ... I mean, *I* have to look stuff up.

OLIVIA. Probably best you leave in the morning then.

ETHAN. (*Laughing at her harshness.*) OK.

OLIVIA. I'm just thinking of you.

ETHAN. Well, I'm not going anywhere tonight. (*As he talks, Ethan pockets his phone, looks around for the bathroom.*) God, it took so long to get here. My friend was like, "It's a couple of hours," and I was like, Michigan, OK, sure. (*He goes offstage into the unseen bathroom and starts peeing.*)

OLIVIA. You drove from Chicago?

ETHAN. (*Offstage.*) Yeah, and it took forever with all the ice. When is this going to stop? It's *March*.

OLIVIA. (*Re: the sound of his peeing.*) Could you close the door?

ETHAN. (*Offstage.*) Sorry. (*Ethan closes the door. Calling through the door.*) Shouldn't we be by the lake? (*Toilet flushes. Ethan comes out of the bathroom. He takes out his phone again.*) Why come all the way out here to not be by the lake?

OLIVIA. It's more built-up near the lake. Here, it's quiet so people can write.

ETHAN. (*Looking to his phone.*) Right.

OLIVIA. Jesus, you can't stop.

ETHAN. Yes. I can. (*Ethan puts down his iPhone. He refills his now-empty glass, then holds out the wine bottle to Olivia.*)

OLIVIA. (*After a quick moment of consideration.*) Why not? (*He pours. They drink.*)

ETHAN. (*Looking at her manuscript.*) What are you working on? Looks like you're proofing.

OLIVIA. Yeah.

ETHAN. A book?

OLIVIA. A novel. But I'm ... I'm more of a *hobbyist*.

ETHAN. What does that mean?

OLIVIA. I don't do it professionally.

ETHAN. No?

OLIVIA. No.

ETHAN. So, what do you do? Professionally.

OLIVIA. I teach.

ETHAN. Isn't it a schoolnight?

OLIVIA. Spring break.

ETHAN. (*Teasing her.*) Wow, you're really getting crazy, huh?

OLIVIA. (*Teasing back.*) Don't feel any pressure to keep up.

ETHAN. (*Looking around.*) I was afraid this place'd be lame, "quaint" or something, but it's not too bad.

OLIVIA. When's your deadline?

ETHAN. Last week.

OLIVIA. Oh, no.

ETHAN. Yeah, so, I have to finish by Friday.

OLIVIA. Is that possible?

ETHAN. It has to be. My friend Ahmit says this place was like magic for him so —

OLIVIA. Ahmit? Ahmit Faulk?

ETHAN. Yeah.

OLIVIA. You know Ahmit Faulk?

ETHAN. Yeah. I took a master class with him last year and now he's a buddy of mine.

OLIVIA. He and I were in school together. I told him about this place, actually. I brought him here.

ETHAN. Right. You're Olivia Lago.

OLIVIA. (*Slowly.*) Uh, yeah. I am.

ETHAN. When Ahmit told me about this place, he said you used to come here. I've, uh, I've read your book.

SEX WITH STRANGERS

by Laura Eason

1M, 1W

How far will you go to get what you want? Will you be the same person if you do? When twenty-something star sex blogger and memoirist Ethan tracks down his idol, the gifted but obscure forty-ish novelist Olivia, he finds they each crave what the other possesses. As attraction turns to sex, and they inch closer to getting what they want, both must confront the dark side of ambition and the trouble of reinventing oneself when the past is only a click away.

"A twisty and timely two character drama about lust, love and the complex nature of identity in our digital-dominated era."

—**The New York Times**

"A thoughtful comedy about privacy and publicity. Eason offers resonant observations about how technology both eases and complicates relationships."

—**The New Yorker**

"Just like a page-turner, this smart comedy pulls you in and keeps you wondering what's coming next ... well-crafted, with sly wit and pitch perfect dialogue."

—**New York Daily News**

"Sexually and intellectually provocative ... A hell of a lot of fun!"

—**The Hollywood Reporter**

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