

# **Bedtime Stories for Grown-Up Girls: A Novel by Ethel Gordon**

## **Part I: Now and Then**

### **Chapter One: The Funeral**

**Now: November 2004, Lenox, Massachusetts**

Lillian hated the week after the clocks were turned back. The light leaked out of the afternoon by the time the school buses finished their routes, just when there should have been enough light to contemplate the last of the autumn foliage. But, really, who wants to contemplate falling leaves? The whole thing reminded her of a lid on a slowly closing coffin, bit by bit, year after year.

Of course, here she was at Marjorie Bretton's funeral so coffin imagery wasn't inappropriate. Except that Marjorie's coffin was firmly closed and not about to open any time soon. Lillian thought what she always thought at funerals: *Who is really in that box and are they really dead?* She could see Robert Bretton standing next to the casket up at the front of the church, the Republican Senator from Massachusetts – in the middle of ... what ... his 4<sup>th</sup> term? Strange that Marjorie should be buried out here in the Berkshires, far from the hilltop family estate in Lawrell, a gentrified old mill town north of Boston. But there were many things that Lillian did not know about Marjorie Bretton, although there was a time when she would have paid good money to find out.

The church was crowded, as you would expect when the wealthy socialite wife of a US Senator dies suddenly in the company of a much younger martial arts instructor at an exclusive retreat, but maybe Lillian was just being her usual cynical self. Maybe the church was crowded because the people of Massachusetts genuinely liked their up-from-his-bootstraps handsome Senator and were sorry (and a little bit curious) that his gorgeous meal ticket was dramatically dead.

Lillian hadn't seen Bobbie up close since... well, probably since the last time she had seen her former business partner, Cydney Mallone, almost 15 years ago, and that was reason enough for the detour en route back to Boston after visiting her son, Jonathan, at Cornell for parent's weekend. It was a short hop off the Mass Pike to the Lenox Church of the Holy Cross, and Mark, her husband, told her to take her time and spend the rest of the day in the Berkshires.

"Don't rush back; what's the point? Besides, maybe you'll run into Cydney." Mark had said over the phone, as she was getting ready to leave Cornell. Lillian hadn't seen the Boston papers and Mark took great pleasure in reciting some of the little known details about Marjorie's demise in *The Boston Sunday Globe*:

*"Foul play is not ruled out. Marjorie Taylord Bretton was 58 years old..."*

“No way. That bitch had to be older than that.” Lillian felt compelled to respond out loud to news reports whether in print or on TV.

Mark ignored her and continued, “...and had been married to Senator Robert Bretton, her childhood sweetheart, since 1968, when he assumed control of Taylord Mills and turned it into the most successful textile venture on the East Coast.”

“Childhood sweetheart, huh?” Lillian said. “Gee, it’s nice to have your own PR staff. Cydney will go nuts when she reads this. So will her mother, if she’s still alive.” Lillian had a sudden pang that she didn’t know if Bianca was alive or dead. But surely Cydney would have called if Bianca had finally –as she threatened to do for many years – let her heart give out.

“Hey, listen to this,” Mark continued. “*Her personal fortune is estimated at over 20 million in stock alone,...* wow twenty million dollars, no wonder he stayed married to her... *from the sale of Taylord Mills to General Electric two years ago. She died unexpectedly of a freak accident while surveying the construction site of her exclusive Berkshires resort, La Brettania, which is scheduled to open next spring.*”

“What was the accident?” Lillian asked.

“Doesn’t say. Just while walking unsupervised on the construction site. Although it does mention the presence of one of her partners, a personal trainer. There’s a picture; he can’t be more than in his early 30’s. Very buff. Looks gay to me.”

“Mark, everyone under 200 lbs looks gay to you. Walking unsupervised?? What does that mean. She tripped? A beam fell on her head? She screwed every guy on the construction site and died of exhaustion... what?”

Lillian could hear Mark stifle a sigh, or was it a yawn. “Hey, it’s water under the bridge, doll. None of us is remembered in her Will; that’s for sure. Lil, go check it out; but do not – repeat NOT – start playing private eye. Maybe Cydney will be there; it’s about time the two of you got together.”

“Yeah, but I don’t know, Mark. Would that be a good thing or not?”

It was all so long ago -- Cydney, Robert, Marjorie, The Baby Grand Company; but in some ways Lillian felt as though she was still recovering. Even though the company was long since successfully sold and she was able to pay off her substantial debts. Even though Robert was safely in Washington and not hiding out in the back room of her factory, even though Marjorie was apparently dead, even though Cydney was a stage designer of some renown – you just never knew when the past could sneak up and grab you by the back of the neck.

Even so, Lillian decided to bend her rule about funerals – she hated them – and go. Besides, maybe – just maybe – the coffin would be open and Marjorie would be all decked out in the Art Deco necklace.

*Fat chance, thought Lillian. Wherever that necklace is, it won’t be going in the ground.*

\* \* \* \*