

Bedtime Stories for Grown-Up Girls

A Novel by Ethel Gordon

Part One: Now and Then

Chapter 5: Old Friends

Now: November 2004, Lenox, Massachusetts

Several minutes passed and Lillian still hadn't turned around to look at Cydney whom she suspected was not kneeling along with the rest of the mourners.

"Still into that shit Lil?" Cydney's voice, that husky smoker's voice that belied her delicate stature, whispered from somewhere behind and above her right shoulder. Lillian kept looking straight ahead because she wasn't sure what she would do if Cydney had changed.

Lillian and Cydney had not seen each other since 1989 – at least 15 years earlier, even though they lived perhaps 10 miles apart in the Boston suburbs. No particular reason, mostly the exhaustion of being constantly and interminably intertwined for several intense years. Lil had invited Cyd to each of her three sons' Bar Mitzvahs, but there was always a reason why she couldn't make it. A broken car, a restraining order that she had just received or was about to send, a big client, Bobbie sneaking back in town – really, it was exhausting to be around Cydney. Sometimes Lillian did not know how she had ever put up with it.

The eulogies were almost over. Robert Bretton hadn't said a word. He and Marjorie had no children, ("...don't be ridiculous," Cydney once commented, "she would have eaten them.") and no sobbing relatives stepped up to the plate. A colleague of Marjorie's on some charity board gave the last eulogy during which Cydney kept making sounds directly behind Lillian that could not be mistaken for grief. At the mention of 'legendary kindness', Cydney practically choked and Lillian couldn't avoid it any longer. She turned around and stared at Cydney. "Christ you haven't changed at all."

Well, that wasn't quite true. Cydney's hair was still mostly black but streaked with gray and blonde highlights. Her eyes were still a bright aqua blue set off by the dark skin but crinkly in a net of fine lines, and her teeth looked like they had undergone a fairly expensive transformation from white and slightly uneven to super white and perfectly straight. But still, Lillian would have known her anywhere. She was surprised at how happy she was to see her again in the flesh.

"Neither have you," said Cydney with a straight face and Lillian had to believe her because Cydney could not tell a lie.

The casket rolled down the long aisle and Lillian shrunk as far into the crowd as she could. When was the last time Cydney had seen Robert? Lillian watched the distance disappear between Cydney and the remains of Marjorie as the entourage approached, but Cydney stood impassively, shoulders squared, hair flying loose. She must have been

wearing spike heels (out here in the woods, that would be just like Cyd) because the top of her head came all the way up to Lillian's nose.

Robert walked behind the coffin, flanked by a few aging relatives. His eyes were lowered; this was no place for campaigning, and he walked right past them without any sign of recognition. Cydney folded her arms and rocked back and forth. She turned to Lillian with a big grin. "So Lil... are we going to the cemetery? Cuz I don't have a car. I was in New York working on a set for a 42nd Street Revival and I read all about it over my morning coffee. So I took the train up and figured I'd know somebody who could get me back to somewhere."

"Well... I wasn't planning on it frankly," Lillian said. "I came mostly because it was on my way back from Cornell..."

"Who goes to Cornell?"

"Jonny."

"NO WAY. He's just a munchkin baby face. How could he be in college? I am not that old." Cydney looked suddenly vague. "How's ... um, Christ I forget his name, isn't that awful?"

"You mean David?" That's weird, thought Lillian. Her eldest son, David, had been Cydney's favorite; and David flat-out adored her.

"David, Yikes. I just blanked out there. How's my guy? Do you think he's old enough for me yet? Is he married? Just kidding... relax."

They had slipped into the aisle at the end of the procession and were trailing the crowd out of the church doors into the mid-afternoon autumn dusk. Gray rain clouds threatened overhead and umbrellas started to pop open in the crowd assembled at the foot of the church stairs.

"David's working while he applies to law school. He's trying to save money, which is a joke because he's living in the South End and it's costing a fortune." Lillian said, noting that her shoes were starting to hurt, and would never make it if she had to start walking through a cemetery in the rain.

"And the baby?" asked Cydney.

"You mean Adam?" answered Lillian, surprised. Adam was born while Lillian and Cydney were in the full-blown midst of their partnership. Cydney was responsible for Lillian's gaining 50 lbs by force-feeding her clam chowder every day for lunch. Cydney had practically cut the umbilical cord. What did she mean, the baby?

"Of course...Adam," said Cydney, looking completely blank.

"What's wrong with you? Are you OK?" Lillian turned around to really stare at her for the first time. "I mean I know it's been awhile but I haven't forgotten the names of your sisters, for example – and how are they by the way -- or your mother, and I hate to ask how Bianca is, but you get my drift."

Cydney shrugged and looked right through Lillian, her eyes clouded over, as though she had momentarily been sucked into another dimension. Then, just as suddenly she was back. Her eyes cleared and she gave Lillian a big-dimpled smile. "Mom's great; isn't that amazing? All those years with a heart condition and she's still going strong. And my wonderful sisters; let's see. Carmen is still a bitch; I'm surprised she's not here frankly – that would shake Robert right up, and Risa is living in Amsterdam doing who

knows what, giving tours of the red light district maybe, and Mel is teaching at UCLA – the only one of us who made our mother proud.”

Lillian thought that she sure sounded like the old Cydney, catty, and matter-of-fact, that school-of-hard knocks, don't-mess-with-me, tough girl front. But something wasn't quite right.

“So, are we going to the cemetery or are you going to drive me back to Boston,” Cydney asked, standing in the doorway and blinking hard in the light. “Both would be good, actually. Say yes, come on. We'll have a drink, I'll tell you all about my fabulous life in stage and screen.”

Lillian could see the casket being lifted into the back of the hearse at the bottom of the steps. Cydney had really creeped her out back there for a minute. Part of her wanted to get to her car as fast as possible and leave, pronto. But the rest of her needed to check up on Cydney and see what was going on. “Only if you tell me what's doing with you. Are you on drugs or something? That was weird; your not remembering my kids' names.”

“Hey, just checking.” Cydney said, tapping her perfectly manicured pearl nails on Lillian's forehead. “Just making sure you are still the same sharp, obnoxious and critical bitch you always were.”

“Look Cyd,” said Lillian, pulling away from the nails, “don't start with me or there is no way I'm driving you back.”

“How about the cemetery then, maybe they have booze.” Cydney rummaged in her large purple leather handbag for a cigarette.

“Don't blow that shit in my face. Purple bag huh? What happened to pink? Beautiful,” said Lillian fingering the soft leather. “Reminds me of the kid gloves, remember? Where did you get it?”

“Purple? It's fuchsia, dummy – but look who I'm dealing with. And I designed it myself, see? “ And she held the soft leather bag out proudly at arms length, brass zipper opened.

Lillian wasn't sure but she thought she could see a ... gun? Was that possible? The barrel of a gun in the bag? “Christ, Cydney what is that?” Lillian said, grabbing the bag to pull it open.

“Relax! It's a fake. Boy, you are still so jumpy. I work in New York remember? I work with weird people who are up all night entertaining visits from guys selling them large quantities of illegal substances. Occupational hazard. And I'm not married; I don't have grown sons to protect me like you do, so lighten up already.”

Cydney took a drag of her cigarette and blew the smoke away from Lillian in a long thin stream. “Look, are we going to the cemetery or aren't we; the cars are all pulling away. Besides, don't you want to see Robert? Ask him about his latest health care initiative, or maybe products liability insurance; wasn't that one of your favorites? Or how about the price of rubies and their effect on rare Art Deco jewelry? C'mon Lil; let's go.” Cydney said, putting her arm through Lillian's and tugging her down the church steps.

With the other hand she pulled the cigarette out of her mouth and ground it out with the very pointy toe of her matching fuchsia shoe. “That bitch couldn’t have kept it from him all these years.”

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