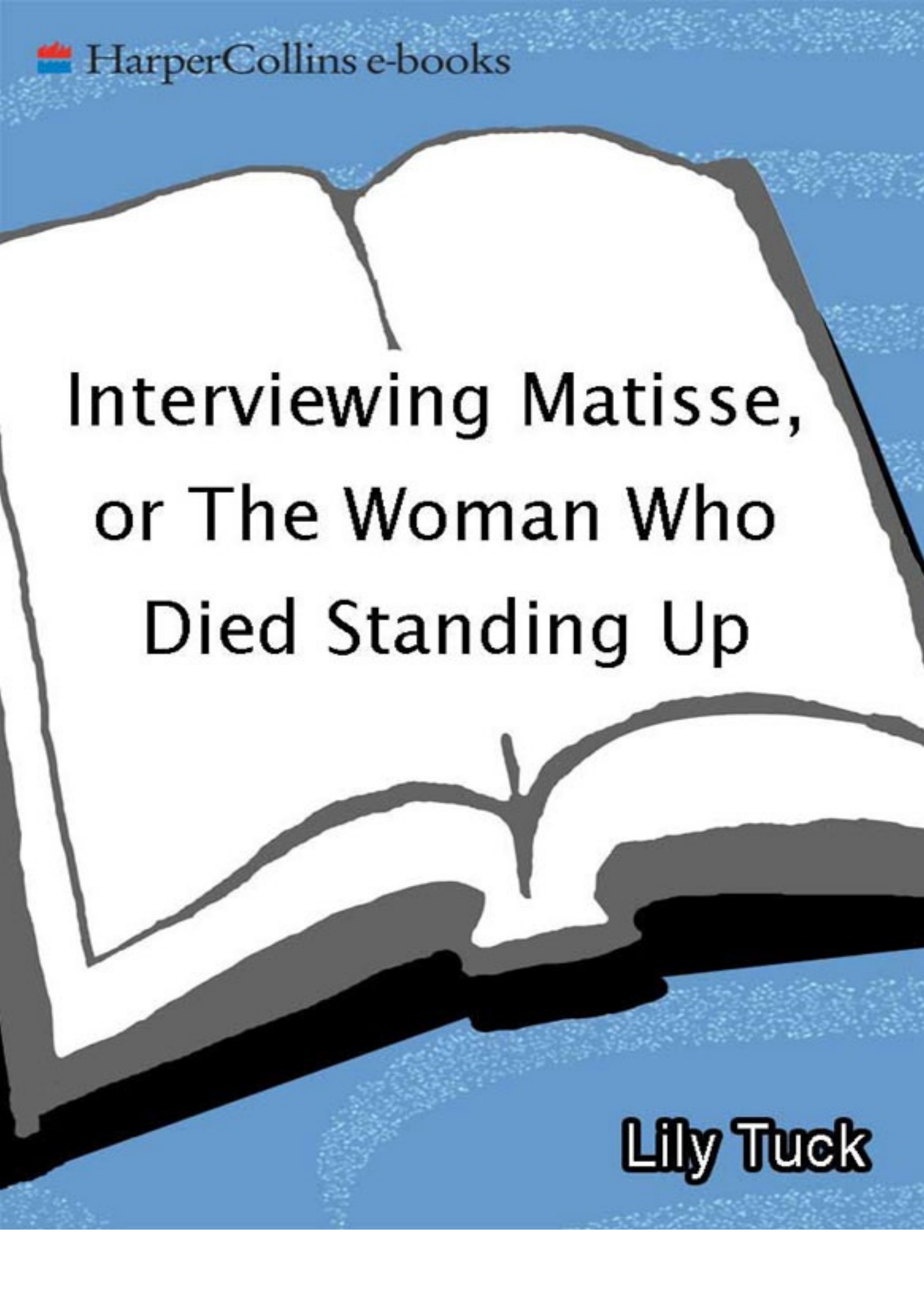




HarperCollins e-books



Interviewing Matisse,
or The Woman Who
Died Standing Up

Lily Tuck

Interviewing Matisse or The Woman Who Died Standing Up

A NOVEL BY
Lily Tuck

HARPER  PERENNIAL

NEW YORK • LONDON • TORONTO • SYDNEY

Dedication

TO EDWARD

I THANK GORDON LISH, MICHELLE HUNEVEN, SUZANNE MCNEAR, AND EDMÉE MONTANDON.

Epigraph

Probable nor'-east to sou'-west wind, varying to the southard and westard and eastard and points between; high and low barometer, sweeping round from place to place; probable areas of rain, snow, hail, and drought, succeeded or preceded by earthquakes with thunder and lightning.

—MARK TWAIN

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The Woman Who Died Standing

Molly said, "She died standing up."

I said, "What?"

Molly said, "Standing up. Inez. Hello?"

I said, "Hello, Molly. Who? Inez?"

Molly said, "They found Inez propped up—propped up like a broom."

I said, "Inez? Like a what? A broom? God, Molly. What time is it?"

Molly said, "In the corner of the room. Inez was dressed in only her underwear. She was wearing boots."

I said, "Boots? Wait. Let me turn on the light, Molly. God, Molly, it's one o'clock in the morning. It's quarter past one in the morning, Molly."

Molly said, "Old fleece-lined boots. Do you know the kind I am talking about, Lily? The old-fashioned kind. Galoshes."

I said, "Galoshes? You woke me up, Molly. Hello?"

Molly said, "The kind of boots with buckles. The kind of boots you might wear in the snow or wear in the winter."

I said, "Winter? No, today is May twenty-third."

Molly said, "Yesterday. Yesterday was May twenty-third—Tuesday. Claude-Marie said they found Inez on Tuesday."

I said, "Where? Found Inez where, Molly? Oh, God, poor Inez."

Molly said, "Strange, isn't it? Isn't this the strangest thing you've ever heard, Lily? Not just about the boots, strange about gravity. Gravity—I am not even going to get into gravity. And I am no scientist, Lily. But you don't have to be a scientist to know about gravity. Everyone knows about gravity. Little kids know about gravity. Still—I have never, no, I have never heard of anything like this—have you, Lily? Like Inez? Like someone dying standing up? Have you ever in your whole life? Lily? Hello? Are you there?"

I said, "Oh, God, Molly, are you calling me all the way from Connecticut?"

Molly said, "In her bra and her panties and Inez was wearing those boots, those galoshes, and Inez was standing right there as you stepped out of the old elevator. The decrepit old freight elevator—remember? Hello, Lily?"

I said, "Hello, yes. I am here. I am right here, Molly. You know what I thought of when the phone rang? I thought: Oh, my God, this may be Leonard."

Molly said, "I am not even in bed yet. I am not even undressed yet. What time did you say it was? Quarter past one?"

I said, "My watch is ten minutes fast. It's twenty after."

Molly said, "But what was I saying? Oh—the elevator—remember? You have to man that elevator yourself and no one is ever there to fix it if it stops or if it gets stuck. It did once. Yes, swear to God. The woman still in the elevator kept shouting: Get me out of here! I can hear her. I can hear her shouting clear as day and as if it were yesterday."

I said, "Oh, my God, Molly, Inez."

Molly said, "No, not Inez. The woman. The woman in the elevator, but yes, Lily—poor Inez. Yes, Inez was standing right there as you got out of the elevator and one of her arms was reaching out."

I said, "What? Inez's arm? Hello, Molly, I can hardly hear you. Can you speak into the receiver?"

Molly said, "Hello—is this better? Inez's arm was what I said and as if Inez was about to shake someone's hand or as if Inez had just finished shaking someone's hand only—and this was what Claude-Marie said. Claude-Marie said, you could have missed her—missed Inez. Claude-Marie said, if, for instance, you had stepped out of the old elevator really quickly because the old elevator had made it and you were relieved and you weren't really thinking and you walked into the room without really looking, the way people do, you could have walked right past her—past Inez was what Claude-Marie said."

I said, "Molly, Molly, I can still barely hear you. There is something wrong with this phone. I could barely hear Leonard either when he telephoned."

Molly said, "Lily, can you hear me now? I am shouting and my throat is going to get sore, and what I am talking about is how Claude-Marie said you could have walked right past her—past Inez—and how you could have walked right past the gardenia plants."

I said, "Gardenia plants? Oh, now I can hear you. I can hear you fine, Molly. It's the rain, maybe. It rained all day yesterday."

Molly said, "At least half a dozen gardenia plants—remember how all of them were always in bloom? Inez had a way with them—a green thumb was what. And remember, Lily, how Inez would sometimes put a gardenia in her hair? God, Inez had thick hair. God, how I envied Inez's hair. Lily?"

I said, "No, I love your hair. You have wonderful hair, Molly."

Molly said, "I am still sitting here at my desk and I cannot stop thinking—thinking about the gardenias and all the trouble Inez went to. The stand she had built for them especially. The stand right underneath the skylight and right where the plants got all the light. Light is the one thing I do know, Lily. Light is important."

I said, "Poor Inez. I was sound asleep when you called, Molly."

Molly said, "Yes, poor Inez, but what I started to tell you was how Claude-Marie said you could have walked right past the gardenia plants and right past the big butcher block counter where Inez used to chop up the vegetables, and remember how Inez was also always talking to someone on the telephone? Inez had this extra long extension cord, and Inez could talk for hours on the phone—and a Claude-Marie said, you could have kept right on walking, walking past the couch, the secondhand couch Inez was always talking about and saying how she would get rid of it—throw the couch out—how she would put the couch out on the street for the bums to sleep on, and how she would buy another, a brand new leather couch that she had seen a picture of and that she had her heart set on."

I said, "The couch? Molly, this is what I said. I liked the couch. I kept telling Inez not to sell the couch. I kept telling Inez the couch was an antique—unique."

Molly said, "Claude-Marie said the stereo was on. The brand-new stereo was tuned to the station Inez always listened to. The one with practically no commercials, the one with almost continual classical music."

I said, "Oh, the stereo belonged to Kevin. I know the stereo belonged to Kevin, Molly. The speakers, though—the speakers belonged to Inez."

Molly said, "The bedroom was where Claude-Marie said you would have gone to next, Lily. You would have walked on past the couch to where the bathroom was and to where the bedrooms were. The bedroom Inez slept in and the bedroom she had let to Kevin, and Claude-Marie said you would have looked for Inez in there—in the bedroom—and you would have called out: Inez, Inez, where are you? Inez?"

I said, "Poor Inez."

Molly said, "This was what Claude-Marie said: Poor Inez dressed in only her underwear and wearing those old galoshes. You know what I said, Lily? I said to Claude-Marie: Don't forget the

blue-and-white silk kimono Inez always wore. The kimono Malcolm brought back to Inez from the trip he took to Japan—to where was it, Lily—to Kyoto?”

I said, “Molly, I know, I know. I wore the kimono. I wore the kimono to a costume party. Molly, hello? I spilled *sake* on it.”

Molly said, “I know what you are thinking, Lily. You are thinking what difference does the kimono make now, and it is too late anyhow—only this is how I always pictured Inez. Inez wearing a gardenia in her hair and Inez dressed in the blue-and-white silk kimono. And can’t you see how Inez was always tucking in those sleeves and how those sleeves were always flapping and getting into Inez’s way as she was chopping up the vegetables and as she was talking on the phone? I told Inez—I warned Inez over and over again—those sleeves could be a real liability for her.”

I said, “But, Molly, you still haven’t said who found Inez. Did what’s-his-name Kevin find Inez?”

Molly said, “The delivery boy. A young boy delivering something. Dry-cleaning. The door was wide open, he said.”

I said, “Oh.”

Molly said, “The delivery boy called the police. Nothing, the police said, was missing. As far as they could tell, the police said, everything was in place. Claude-Marie said the same thing. Claude-Marie said thank God. And Claude-Marie said the first thing he thought of was the drawing hanging in the front hall—the drawing of Christ being taken down from the cross that Inez said she found in a second-hand store in Toledo and that she said was a Rembrandt, but that the expert from Sotheby’s—or was he from Christie’s? I don’t remember—told Inez the drawing could be from the school of Rembrandt, but he didn’t think so.”

I said, “Molly, believe me, if that drawing is a Rembrandt, I’ll eat it.”

Molly said, “What? Oh, the Inca hats Price brought back from Peru, too. The hats Price said were valuable and Inez said were just dustcatchers. And the silverware. Nothing was missing. Oh, and all those appliances, remember? The appliances lined up right there on the butcher block counter where you couldn’t miss them—the Cuisinart, the espresso machine, the machine to make pasta. Oh, and remember how Inez used to complain that all the instructions were written in a foreign language and she could not understand them? The brand new stereo was right there, too. No one had touched the stereo. I told you, the stereo was still on, the stereo was playing.”

I said, “Molly, I am sure the stereo belonged to Kevin.”

Molly said, “Oh, WQXR. Lily, WQXR is the station Inez always listened to. Oh, and have I mentioned this? Have I told you this already, Lily? What Price told Claude-Marie the coroner said when he examined Inez? The coroner said he found drugs in Inez’s blood.”

I said, “Drugs? Is that what you said, Molly? Oh, my God, Inez didn’t—hello? Molly?”

Molly said, “No, no, Lily. I—Price did not think so either. Price mentioned this right away. This and the boots. Price said the boots were definitely not *his* boots. Claude-Marie said Price said that black cowboy boots would have been different. Price told Claude-Marie that he had had the black cowboy boots ever since he was a boy and sixteen years old and the boots still fit him. The boots, Price said, had a lot of meaning for him, and Claude-Marie said when he heard this, that he told Price that he knew just what Price meant. He, Claude-Marie, said he was French, and that he used to have a pair of shoes that he had bought at a store right off the Place de la Concorde right after the war, and, for him, Claude-Marie, the shoes were a kind of a symbol for him. A symbol, Claude-Marie said, that the war was over, although the shoes were actually made in Italy.”

I said, “Oh—Italian shoes. Italian shoes fit me the best.”

Molly said, “Only what I said to Claude-Marie was this, Lily. I said: Inez never took drugs in her life. No. Inez did not drink either. Sometimes, Inez drank a little wine—a glass of white wine. I told Claude-Marie: Inez would not even swallow an aspirin. The time Inez got the flu—the flu with the

funny name that everyone got one winter. Claude-Marie got it, too. Claude-Marie got a high fever, and Claude-Marie said he ached all over, and Claude-Marie said he felt as if a bunch of wild horses had kicked him, and I was lucky. I was lucky I didn't catch the flu from Claude-Marie that winter."

I said, "Oh, you mean the Asian flu? Is that what you mean, Molly? Leonard got really sick from—a high fever, aching, aching all over, those were his symptoms."

Molly said, "Inez took only this homeopathic medicine—little white pills you let melt on your tongue that have no taste—that taste the same—and Kevin kept telling Inez it was all psychological."

I said, "Who? Kevin? Please, Molly, don't talk to me any more about Kevin."

Molly said, "Lily, Kevin was all Inez ever talked about. Kevin this and Kevin that and how much she, Inez liked him, how much she, Inez, loved him, how she, Inez, was in love with Kevin. I could never even get a word in edgewise, and Inez said how it was all right there in her astrological chart. And astrology, remember, was something else Inez always talked about. Inez said how by just looking at the position of the stars and the planets, she could tell. Inez could tell, she said, what would happen and ninety-nine per cent of the time out of a hundred Inez said these things happened and she was right. All the stuff about the divorce and Price and about Kevin—Inez said she could have predicted this and that it was all right there in her chart."

I said, "Molly, I am a Libra, and Inez was—what was Inez? Inez was born in June. Price, remember, Molly, gave Inez the surprise birthday party."

Molly said, "Oh, yes, the party, and Price was the one who telephoned Claude-Marie last night. And Price, according to what Claude-Marie told me, would not go and identify Inez at the morgue. If he did, Lily—that was what Price said to Claude-Marie—this would be the way, he, Price, would remember Inez for the rest of his life. Price told Claude-Marie he did not want this. Price told Claude-Marie he wanted to remember Inez another way—alive, I guess. And Price's new wife didn't want Price to go either, and Price asked Claude-Marie. Claude-Marie had to go to the morgue. Claude-Marie had to drive to the morgue all the way from Connecticut, and too bad, too, it is raining, was what I said to him."

I said, "You're right. You should see it now. It is pouring, Molly."

Molly said, "Because of the rain, Claude-Marie is not going to drive home again, Lily. Claude-Marie telephoned. Claude-Marie telephoned right after he had been to the morgue, and Claude-Marie said how Inez must have been there a while, and how they had to break her arm—Inez's outstretched arm, the arm I was telling you about. Rigor mortis, Claude-Marie said, had set in."

I said, "Rigor mortis?"

Molly said, "The boots, too. The galoshes. And you know what Price did? First thing, Claude-Marie said, Price did was to call the bar—the bar where Kevin worked part-time weekday nights. What's the name of the bar, Lily? The Something Something Avenue Bar?"

I said, "You mean the bar right across from—oh, and who was it who told me he went there once and who should be in there drinking a beer by herself but Faye Dunaway?"

Molly said, "Who? Was Faye Dunaway the one in that movie where Jack Nicholson gets his nose sliced open with a razor blade? Did you see it, Lily? Ugh, it was awful. In the end, Faye Dunaway is slumped over the steering wheel and the horn—but what was I saying? Oh, yes, Claude-Marie. Claude-Marie said Price talked to a waitress named Diane, and Price said he talked to someone else too, at the bar. Both Diane and the other person, Claude-Marie said, told Price the same thing. The bar too, was so noisy and crowded, Price told Claude-Marie, that he, Price, could not hear a thing."

I said, "You mean *Chinatown*, Molly. I saw the movie with Jim in San Francisco, which was a coincidence."

Molly said, "And did I tell you what else Price said? Claude-Marie said Price said he could tell by just looking at Kevin what kind of bartender Kevin was. I know what Price means, Lily. I could tell,

too, by how Kevin lounged around all day on the couch—the same couch Inez wanted to throw out—and how Kevin wore nothing but a pair of old running shorts and Kevin did not run. No. Price ran. Price ran a marathon once, remember? Kevin used to just sit there and ask Inez to bring him his stuff—his cigarettes, his beer, her ass once. Poor Inez. And Inez said she was allergic to smoke, to cigarette smoke, and I remember the time Inez’s mother was smoking a—oh, have you met Inez’s mother, Lily? You met her at the birthday party, and Inez’s mother is not at all the way I pictured Inez’s mother to be or the way Inez was. No, no. Inez’s mother is blond, Inez’s mother is remarried, Inez’s mother chain smokes, and the time I am telling you about now, Lily, Inez kept getting up from where she was sitting and opening up the window, and this was in winter and this was after Price had left—after Price and Inez had separated already, but before Price had remarried yet—and Inez kept telling her mother how she was going to ruin and kill off the gardenia plants with her cigarette smoke and Inez’s mother kept telling Inez how Inez was going to kill *her* off with pneumonia if she did not sit down right this minute and shut the window. Hello?”

I said, “Hello—yes. I am sure I met Inez’s mother at the birthday party, Molly. Inez’s mother lives in New Jersey, she said.”

Molly said, “Yes, but one thing, though—the thing Inez and her mother had in common—they both liked to talk on the phone a lot. I’ll never forget this, Lily, and this was what Inez told me and, swear to God, this is true and what Inez said to me. Inez said, that when she, Inez, was little, her father had tried to call, call home from his office, and the phone was busy all morning. So, Inez’s father got into his car and he drove all the way back home—this was still in Wisconsin—and without a single word to Inez’s mother, who was still talking on the phone, Inez’s father yanked the phone, wire and all, right out of the wall. He left a big hole there, and he never once said a word to Inez’s mother, and what Inez said was that as long as she lived, she, Inez, would never forget the hole in the wall where the phone was.”

I said, “Molly, a lot of men are like this. Sam, Molly. Sam would do this. He would, Molly. Sam, swear, would do something just like this, Molly.”

Molly said, “Oh, and Inez’s father was the one who died of a heart attack, Lily. Now, it’s all coming back to me. Did you hear this already, Lily? Inez’s father died of a heart attack in someone—no, not in Inez’s mother’s arms—in some other woman’s arms, and Inez told me how even now she still could not stop thinking about this. Inez told me how she, Inez, was only twelve then, and how she was away on a school camping trip where the whole class had to hike up all the way to this lake, and Inez also said how she did not want to go on this trip and—no—not because Inez had any kind of presentiment—no—because she didn’t like these school camping trips. Inez said she hated sleeping outdoors. She always caught poison ivy, she said, and Inez said, she had tried to talk her mother into letting her not go and stay home, and when she got back, back from the camping trip, Inez said, not only was her father dead, he was not there. He was gone.”

I said, “But what about the other woman, Molly? Who was she, do you know?”

Molly said, “Lily, funny—I asked Inez the very same thing. I asked Inez if her father was really in love with this woman. And Inez said she did not know either, only she could not stop thinking about it. With Price, too, Inez said. When she and Price were making love was what Inez said she meant. Each time she and Price made love, Inez said, she could not stop thinking about what if Price had a heart attack right there on top of her, even if Price was only her husband.”

I said, “Like Rockefeller. Remember what’s-his-name Rockefeller, Molly? Nelson. Nelson Rockefeller.”

Molly said, “Yes, Nelson, but what was I saying? What was I talking about, Lily?”

I said, “Inez. You were talking about Inez, Molly.”

Molly said, “Oh, yes, Inez. I was talking about Inez, and I was saying how I should have warned

Inez. I should have told her what Price said about Kevin. About how Kevin was the kind of bartender who uses shot glasses with phony measuring rings so that it looks to everyone like he is pouring out a lot more than he is and a lot more than just an ounce—oh, and did I tell you this, Lily? Kevin left a whole bunch of stuff—old paperbacks and magazines, a pair of jeans, some T-shirts, one good dress shirt with French cuffs. His toilet kit, too, Price said. Price told Claude-Marie he found the toilet kit in the bathroom. The toilet kit was filled with Kevin’s toothbrush and stuff, an electric razor and a package of condoms, and Price’s new wife, Claude-Marie said, threw everything out, and Price’s new wife wore rubber gloves. Rubber gloves, swear to God, this is true, Lily. Claude-Marie said he was there, and Claude-Marie said Price and Price’s new wife would not touch any of Kevin’s stuff. The two kids would not either.”

I said, “Who? Molly, who? You are fading again. Speak into the receiver, will you?”

Molly said, “Hello? Can you hear me, Lily? Inez’s two kids. Inez’s two boys. Price Junior had to fly in from San Francisco—San Francisco is where he lives now—the other boy is still in school. In Colorado, in Denver, I think. Or is it Boulder? Boulder, Colorado, Lily. And Claude-Marie said to me I would never have recognized these two boys. The two boys have grown so. Grown, I suppose, the way Bibi, my own daughter, has grown. This year, Bibi is going to be fourteen. I can’t believe this either.”

I said, “Fourteen? Molly, I can remember when Bibi first started school and she had to wear the little blue uniform.”

Molly said, “Poor Bibi. Bibi hates living in Senlis with Dominique, Claude-Marie’s sister, and Lily, just stop and think for a minute—think of how long it has been. It has been over ten years now since we moved into the house on rue Madame.”

I said, “Molly, hard to believe, isn’t it? And I was still married to Jim. We were living in the apartment with no hot water overlooking the Parc Monceau.”

Molly said, “The same year Price came to Paris to look at the site for his sculpture. No, it must have been the year after, Lily—the year I had all my hair cut, and Price—I’ll never forget this either, Lily—Price always wore this wool jacket, this red-and-black-plaid jacket like the jackets lumberjacks wear, and Price wore the jacket all over Paris. Price never took off the jacket—not even inside a restaurant.”

I said, “I haven’t seen Price in months. I haven’t seen Price since Yuri’s opening and we went to the Vietnamese restaurant.”

Molly said, “Claude-Marie sees Price. Claude-Marie sees Price all the time at the gallery and you know how tall Price is, Lily? Much taller than Claude-Marie. Price is head and shoulders taller than Claude-Marie, and Price, I remember, towered over everyone else along the Boulevard Montparnasse and I remember I was telling Price how Gide, Malraux and Sartre had sat in those cafés—the cafés on the Boulevard Montparnasse—the Coupole and the Rotonde and the other one, the Dôme, and when Price and I got as far as the Closerie des Lilas, I told Price how the Closerie des Lilas was Hemingway’s favorite restaurant and how Hemingway always used to eat there, and Claude-Marie, I think, must have been away for the weekend then—Claude-Marie must have been in Senlis visiting Dominique, his sister—and Price and I had a drink there—a drink at the Closerie des Lilas—and at that time, I had no idea who Inez was or that Price was married. Hello?”

I said, “Hello, yes. I can hear you. Molly, you know what time it is? It is nearly a quarter to two in the morning.”

Molly said, “Yes, and Inez said she and Price got married too young. Inez said she and Price got married straight out of high school. One week after their high school graduation. And Inez told me how she had given up everything so Price could paint, so Price could sculpt. But what Inez said she really blamed Price for was for sneaking around her back with what’s-her-name—with Price’s new

wife. Oh, why can't I remember the woman's name, Lily? Price's new wife's name is on the tip of my tongue—a funny name. A nickname. Nora would know. I can ask Nora. She and Nora take the same yoga class. Price's new wife is a whole lot younger was what Nora also said. And from the very beginning, Claude-Marie said, he did not want to take sides. Claude-Marie said he did not want to be in the middle. What could I do, Lily? What could I say to Inez? In the restaurant. The last time I saw Inez, Lily. When was this? Two weeks ago when Inez and I had lunch together and it was raining."

I said, "Where, Molly? Which restaurant are you talking about?"

Molly said, "The Italian restaurant. The Italian restaurant I went to with Yuri once—the time Yuri came to New York for his opening. The time Nora complained about. Inez and I, I remember, we were the very last ones to leave the restaurant. The waiters were scraping the chairs and setting up the tables, and the whole time too, Inez just kept talking—talking and telling me how she loved Kevin and how after Kevin left in the evenings, she could not get to sleep and how she could not resist it. Inez could not help herself was what Inez said to me. Inez said she went down the street and around the corner to the bar and to where Kevin worked part-time at night, and Inez said she would watch Kevin from the window, in the dark and from outside in the street. Inez told me she watched how Kevin made the drinks and how he talked to the waitresses, and Inez said how she hated herself. Inez told me how she would wait for Kevin to come home at two or three o'clock in the morning and she made love to him whether, at first, Kevin wanted to or not. Inez told me how she, Inez, would do anything for Kevin. Inez said how she would crawl naked on her hands and knees to the door of his bedroom—the door of her bedroom, Lily—because, of course, after the first couple of days, Kevin no longer paid any rent."

I said, "What? No rent? Kevin did not pay any rent, Molly? How much rent was Inez asking, Molly?"

Molly said, "Lily, the rent made no sense. I said so myself. I said this to Inez. So did Patricia—Patricia, Inez's sister. Patricia told Inez that if Inez were she, Patricia, Kevin would have to pay every bit of the rent, every last penny of the rent. Patricia told Inez that Kevin would also have to share the utilities, the gas and the electricity, and when I told Claude-Marie this, Claude-Marie said he agreed. Claude-Marie said he agreed completely with what Patricia had said to Inez. Also, Claude-Marie has something about electricity. Because of the war, I guess, Lily, Claude-Marie is always turning off the lights—turning them off after me and after everyone, even if, say, I am just leaving the room for a minute to go to the bathroom, even if I am planning to return to the room almost immediately. I don't know how many times I have told Claude-Marie not to and besides, it is not always so economical the way Claude-Marie says it is. Like stopping and starting a car to save gas, which everyone knows is a fallacy."

I said, "I know what you mean, Molly. I told you about when Jim and I were crossing the desert and I said to Jim: Jim, for once in your life, please listen to me."

Molly said, "Which reminds me of the other thing Claude-Marie said when he telephoned—no, not the first time—when Claude-Marie telephoned from Ivan and Nora's apartment—this is where Claude-Marie is right now, where Claude-Marie is spending the night—on Ivan and Nora's sofa bed. The same sofa bed Yuri slept on, and what I was going to say was how Claude-Marie and Price and damn—damn, why can't I remember the woman's name? It's driving me crazy, Lily."

I said, "Go through the alphabet. Start with A—Abigail, Alice, Ann; then B—Barbara, Bea—"

Molly said, "I'll think of her name in a minute—but what Claude-Marie said was Price still had a set of keys, and Price told Claude-Marie he did not want to go there alone. So Price, and Price's new wife whatever her name is, and Claude-Marie, all three of them went, and this was what I was going to tell you, Lily—what Claude-Marie said he had noticed from way down in the street. Claude-Marie said he noticed all the lights were on and not just the stereo, the way I said, Lily. The dry-cleaning to

The dry-cleaning, Claude-Marie said, was lying right there on the floor as you stepped out of the old elevator. The dry-cleaning was lying right under the picture of Christ being taken down from the cross and right where the delivery boy had dropped it probably, when he saw Inez. Poor Inez. No one, Claude-Marie said, had bothered to turn off the lights or turn off the stereo, and no one—not the police even—had bothered to pick up the dry-cleaning, which in a way, Claude-Marie said, was ironic. The dry-cleaning was someone else's tuxedo, Lily, and—oh, the delivery boy told the police, at first, he thought Inez was one of those statues—one of those life-sized statues like the one on Park Avenue—the one of a man hailing a taxi—Lily?"

I said, "Yes—by George Segal."

Molly said, "But I should have guessed, Lily. This is what I kept thinking. This is what I kept saying to myself—I should have guessed in the restaurant—I told you already, Inez kept me waiting and it was raining—oh, and you should have seen what Inez was wearing, Lily. Inez was wearing T-shirts—a whole bunch of T-shirts that were layered one on top of each other and all of them were different colors—oh, and this reminds me, Lily, Inez gave me a T-shirt to take back to Bibi. A T-shirt that says *Shit Happens* on it that Claude-Marie said Bibi could not wear and that I said: In France, it does not matter. In France, I said to Claude-Marie, no one knows what *shit* means, and Claude-Marie said: No, in France, people do know. But what was I saying? Oh, Inez was also wearing this scarf. A yellow gauzy silk scarf that Inez had tied turban style and that covered her hair—her thick hair. The scarf had these little gold bangles sewn on the ends gypsylike and the little gold bangles kept shaking and shining while Inez kept talking and telling me about Kevin and telling me how she wanted to travel, too, and how she had never been anywhere except for that one time to Spain with Price, and Spain, Inez said, had been a mistake, and I said: Inez, I only have the five hundred dollars to lend you."

I said, "Five hundred dollars? What five hundred dollars, Molly?"

Molly said, "I told you, didn't I, how I told Inez I couldn't lend her the money she asked me for and how I said: Please believe me, Inez, I don't have a thousand dollars. I said: Inez, don't forget, we have to sell the house in Connecticut. And I said: No, no, no—it's not all Claude-Marie's fault. Inez, don't blame Claude-Marie. I blame Thomas Hamlin Aldrich."

I said, "Who, Molly? Thomas who?"

Molly said, "Claude-Marie's broker. But this is a whole other story. I am not even going to get into Thomas Hamlin Aldrich with you, Lily. Anyhow, it is too late now. Thomas Hamlin Aldrich was electrocuted to death when his dog peed against a lamppost. This is true—swear to God. The dog died too. The wires were not grounded or insulated or whatever they have to be. This was what I told Inez. I told Inez how Claude-Marie went to the funeral, and how Claude-Marie said the church was packed although most of the people there were just like him probably—like Claude-Marie—broke. And I told Inez how I had so much to do still. I said I have to sell this house in Connecticut, I said I have to pack up our stuff. I have to pack up the cat. You don't like cats, do you, Lily? And you should see my desk, Lily. The desk I am sitting at right this minute as I am talking to you. I have saved nearly everything—bills, letters, recipes, clippings, things out of newspapers—everything."

I said, "But Molly, what about Inez and the money?"

Molly said, "Five hundred dollars so-help-me-God-or-strike-me-dead was all I said to Inez I could lend her—oh, this was what the only other married man said to me too, Lily, only he said this to me about his wife. The only other married man besides the French count said he had not slept with—he had not had sex with his wife in nearly ten years and not since the time we landed the astronauts. He said he remembered this distinctly. He said he had watched this on TV and he remembered, he said, how they, the astronauts—had walked on the moon without gravity, how they had looked as if they were floating. He remembered too, he said, how hard it was for them to step up and back up into their

capsule, and how after that he and his wife had made love, and that time, he said, was the last time they had done this—so-help-him-God-or-strike-him-dead.”

I said, “I watched the same program, too, Molly, and to me, the moon landing did not seem real. To me, the moon landing looked made up in a studio and Sam—Sam, who was watching the program with me—said just like Orson Welles.”

Molly said, “Who? But Inez—I’ll never forget. Inez was in Spain then, and Inez said she only saw the picture later in *Life* magazine, and what else did she say? Inez said at the time—the same time—she did not know how a good Catholic girl like herself could go to bed with someone named Jesus, and I said to her: Inez, wait a minute. The Spanish, Inez, all have names like Jesus and Immaculate Maria. The Spanish, I said, all go to bed with each other. Oh, and Ramirez. Ramirez was what Inez said. Inez said she would always remember this—how everyone in the village outside of Toledo was named Ramirez and how they were all related and how everyone in the village always wore black and how no one said a single word to her for the entire year and all Inez did was lug the kids and the groceries up this steep hill to where they lived the year Price got the grant. But where was I? Oh—in the restaurant. But first, did I tell you, Lily? Did I tell you Inez arrived half an hour late? My shoes, too, my shoes were soaking wet, it was pouring, pouring just the way it is today. I was all set to go back—back to Connecticut—and when Inez finally arrived, guess what? Inez arrived in a taxi. If Inez needed the money, Inez could have taken the bus, Inez could have taken the subway. Instead—oh, Inez also had an argument with the taxi driver. An argument over the fare. Inez said *fuck you* to the driver and the driver laughed. He said *dosvidanya*.”

I said, “Oh, the driver must have been Russian, Molly.”

Molly said, “But, Lily, I am trying to remember what else Inez said besides how she and Price got married straight out of high school, only a week after their high school graduation, and how she, Inez gave up everything so Price could paint, so Price could sculpt, and how, in this village, all she did was wash—wash out clothes, wash out diapers—and there was no one in the village for her to talk to except for this one boy who babysat—Jesus Ramirez. And Jesus, Inez said, was really only a child. Jesus, Inez said, was maybe fourteen or fifteen years old, and the time Inez was talking about—the time the astronauts landed—Price was out. Price had gone to Toledo to buy paint brushes, to buy art supplies. Inez was at home alone, she said. Inez said she was washing out clothes and the water was running. Well, nearly alone. The two boys were there. But the two boys did not count. The two boys were little, Inez said. The two boys were napping, which makes me wonder out loud, Lily, what those two boys look like right now—right this minute, I mean. The older boy, Price Junior, I know, looks just like Price. The younger boy, the boy who was nearly born in the car, doesn’t look like anyone. Matthew does not look like either Inez or Price—oh, yes, except once—once Inez said, if Matthew were to put on a bow tie, Matthew would look just like her father. Inez’s father. The one who died of a heart attack. The one whom I was just telling you about. He, her father, Inez said, always wore a bow tie, a polka dot bow tie. Oh—this makes me wonder too, Lily, about the poor woman—remember? The poor woman whose arms he died in? I wonder about how she would have had to get Inez’s father dressed again. How she would have had to put on Inez’s father’s socks and put on his vest—if, that is, Inez’s father had worn a vest—and how she would have had to tie the bow tie and how she probably had never tied a bow tie in her life and how she probably had to tie the tie a dozen times before she thought she got it right and was halfway satisfied.”

I said, “Molly, I know. Sam tried to teach me how to tie a bow tie. It’s not easy, Molly. Sam made me practice on my knee.”

Molly said, “Strange too, what this makes me think of. This makes me think of my own father. My own father did not wear bow ties, Lily, and my father did not die of a heart attack. My father died of an aneurism sitting right there at his desk, and what this makes me think of is how my father said he

wanted to be cremated. Cremated in his white linen suit, he said. A suit he had had made to measure England—especially. Only when he died, the suit no longer fit him. My mother had to have that white linen suit altered, Lily. I tried to talk my mother out of it—out of letting out the suit. I told my mother if my father was going to be buried this would have been different. My mother said I was hard-hearted and, what was more, I had no respect for the dead. I said to her: After all, I am just trying to be practical, and when I told Claude-Marie—told Claude-Marie what my mother had said—Claude-Marie said he knew all along anyway that all Southerners were crazy. Virginians. Virginians is what keep reminding Claude-Marie, and I keep telling Claude-Marie there is a big difference. Virginians, tell Claude-Marie, are not Southerners. Virginians are different. I had the same discussion with Yuri once. Yuri is Russian, and Russians, too, are different. In a way, Lily, Russians are a lot like Virginians. I told Yuri, he, Yuri, would have loved my mother. Only you cannot believe everything Yuri says—for instance, about his own mother. Yuri is always saying how his mother knew Chekhov and Chekhov, we all know, died in 1904, which would mean that Yuri's mother was over a hundred years old—oh, like Havier's grandmother. You know my friend Havier in Old Saybrook—Havier who helped me with the seagull, Havier who is Fred's lover? According to Havier, his grandmother has nineteen children, sixty-four grandchildren, and God knows how many great grandchildren, and Havier, because he is gay, is the only one in his family, he says, except for one sister, who has something wrong with her ovaries, not to have any children. Inez—when I told her this—Inez could not believe this. Inez only has the one sister—Patricia. And Patricia has no children. Patricia, Inez said, had electroshock treatment. Patricia moved to Hawaii. Lily? Electroshock treatment, Lily, is not as bad as it sounds and a lot of people I know have had it. Amy, my best friend from school in Charlottesville, has. Amy had electroshock treatment because she saw monkeys—monkeys instead of people. Oh, did I say Charlottesville, Lily? I said Charlottesville because Charlottesville is simpler. I lived in a small town outside of Charlottesville. But Crozet is not really a small town either. Crozet is a bunch of houses, a general store, a post office. What's more, no one has ever heard of Crozet, and if Claude-Marie thinks all Southerners are crazy, Claude-Marie should have lived in Crozet. Claude-Marie should have met the Miss Marys, which reminds me of the town Kevin said he was from—LeGrange, Texas.”

I said, “Molly, it is two o'clock. Two o'clock in the morning. There is not much we can do now, is there?”

Molly said, “No, no, you are right, Lily, only I can't stop thinking. Thinking about Kevin, and how by then, Inez said, she was desperate. The ad too, Inez said, was expensive and when the phone rang, Inez said, she nearly did not answer it. Inez said she had given up hope. Inez said she was at the end of her rope. I know. I put an ad in the paper once—the *Old Saybrook Star*—an ad for kittens. For three days, the ad cost me sixty-five dollars, and Claude-Marie said I was crazy. The ad too, Claude-Marie said, was too wordy, and I told Claude-Marie I was just trying to be accurate and to find good homes for the kittens. You know how I feel about kittens, Lily? How I feel about animals? Europeans—Claude-Marie, for instance—do not have the same sensibility. Take Suzanne, for example. Before Suzanne and Harry moved away to Santa Fe, Suzanne always took in strays. Suzanne, remember, Lily, lived next door to us, then the Thomases bought her house. Now, someone else has moved in there whom I haven't met yet and who, Claude-Marie says, is the spitting image of Mercedes. Oh—you mean Mercedes, didn't you, Lily? Mercedes is Nora's sister. Mercedes came to New York from Bogota or Bolivia, and the funny thing, come to think of it, was Nora also tried to call Inez. Nora tried to call Inez to rent the room for her sister. For Mercedes. Actually, it was me. I tried to call Inez that day—oh, that awful day. The day I shall never forget, Lily. And, of course, I was not home either when Claude-Marie, Ivan, and Nora got there. Claude-Marie said how they had to take a taxi, a taxi from the train station in Old Saybrook, and Claude-Marie said he thought the trouble was the car. Claude-Marie

thought the car would not start. Claude-Marie had bought a new battery, and Claude-Marie thought this was the reason why I did not come to the station to fetch them. But it wasn't the car, it was the cat. I told you how I stopped driving then. I refuse ever to drive again. And the reason is, Lily, each time I see a cat, the cat turns into a child. A child just like Bibi, even though Bibi is almost fourteen and Bibi is almost taller than I am now. Can you blame me? The other thing I keep thinking about is: Was it because I was in reverse? Have I told you this already, Lily? Have I told you how I was backing out of the driveway and how first I was on my way to the grocery store before picking up Claude-Marie—Claude-Marie, Nora and Ivan—at the station? The cat must have been lying under the car, and what still troubles me is my reaction. Instead of putting on the brakes, I pushed down harder on the accelerator. Oh, God, and what was it Ivan said? Ivan said this was a normal reaction while wouldn't you-know-it Claude-Marie never stopped talking about the car. There was nothing the matter with the car. Oh, yes, maybe, the fender, a little. Oh, you have met Ivan, haven't you? Ivan and Nora. Ivan escaped from a gulag in Russia. I met Ivan at Yuri's opening. Afterwards, we all went to this Vietnamese restaurant Claude-Marie said was the 'in' restaurant to go to. Inez was there, too. Inez sat next to Yuri, and this was when Yuri told everyone about his mother, about how his mother had known Chekhov, and Inez, I remember, said how she loved Chekhov."

I said, "Molly, have you forgotten? I told you, I was there. I was at the Vietnamese restaurant. I sat next to Malcolm, and Price was sitting at the other end of the table with what's-her-name, his new wife, only they were not married yet."

Molly said, "Price. Yes, of course, Price. Price met Yuri the time Price came to Paris. As a matter of fact, Price and Yuri were both in the car with Claude-Marie, me, and Bibi—Bibi was in the car too then—when the plane crashed. This was before I met Inez. I met Inez the same year my mother had to have surgery. The year I had to fly back from Paris on one day's notice, I'll never forget this, Inez—the first time I met her—was sunbathing on the roof. Inez was sunbathing nude. In July. I am certain about the month, Lily. The tar on the roof was melting in kind of silvery pools. I also remember how the World Trade Centers looked like two giant pieces of aluminum foil, and I remember how little rivulets of sweat were streaming down Inez's naked belly and the sweat was full of little black soot specks. Mostly, I remember how I have never been so hot in my life. I am not kidding, Lily. God, it was hot. Also, I was jet-lagged. Hello?"

I said, "Hello. Yes, I'm here. New York in July is terrible, Molly. July and August, Molly."

Molly said, "I flew over from Paris on one day's notice. My mother, Lily, was in the hospital—the Martha Jefferson Hospital—oh, and the turbulence. I will never forget the turbulence on that flight, Lily. The plane bucked its way across the Atlantic Ocean and not once during the entire flight, not once during the seven-and-a-half hours, did they ever turn off the seat belt sign. Not once. I swear, Lily. They could not serve lunch or dinner or whatever the meal was. Midway somewhere, midway across the ocean, I suppose, the pilot apologized. The pilot promised us, the passengers, a coupon. A coupon for a free meal at the airport, a free cocktail too, he said. The pilot announced this over the intercom, and I may still have the coupon here somewhere—somewhere here in my desk. I told you, Lily, I keep everything. I may have kept the note I wrote then as well. I remember, I put the note in my pocket, next to my wallet and next to my passport—you know me, Lily, I hate to fly. I am afraid of people screaming and clutching at things, I am afraid of disorder and mayhem, afraid of disfigurement and dismemberment, and if I could, I would take a boat back. Really I would. A boat back to France. Like the first time. The first time, I took the *Queen Mary*. I was only eighteen then. I had never been anywhere except to New Orleans, and, oh, yes, I had been to Nag's Head. Nag's Head, North Carolina was where I went to visit Amy—Amy, I told you, didn't I, was my best friend? And Amy's parents owned a house in Nag's Head. I love the ocean and I love to swim, Lily. I swim here in Old Saybrook only now it's raining. It's been raining all week and the water here is much colder than the water off

the coast—oh, and I just thought of this—Inez—Inez did not know how to swim. Did you know this, Lily? When Price told me I could not believe this either. Everyone knows how to swim was what I said to him.”

I said, “Of course, I know how to swim. My mother taught me how to swim when I was little, but my father—my father, Molly, always said he had a healthy respect for the ocean.”

Molly said, “And I asked Price: How come Inez did not know how to swim? How come Inez graduated from high school without passing the test? Inez, Price said, knew how to tread water and anyway, you did not have to pass the test to graduate from high school then. You only had to pass the test later and to graduate from college. Inez, Price said, only went to college after, while he himself, Price said, did not go to college ever. After Price was discharged from the Navy, he went to art school he said. Just think, Lily—Price a sailor? Can you picture Price in those pants? And Price said he was stationed in Norfolk, and Norfolk, Lily, is not far from Nag’s Head. But I was already in France by then—I had already met Matisse by then. How old is Price Junior? Norfolk was where Inez said Price Junior was born. And what was it Inez said? With Price Junior, Inez said she was in labor for thirty-six hours and still she was not dilated enough. Oh, and on the roof and when Inez was sunbathing nude—and how I was just telling you, Lily—right away, I remember, I noticed the scar. The scar was unusually large—a jagged scar. Too bad, and in France, Lily—the south of France where I met Matisse and where I went swimming, Lily—I saw dozens of women in tiny little string bikinis with barely a pencil mark. Inez’s skin, maybe. Inez had very fine skin. Thin skin. The kind of skin you feel you can see through. Inez’s skin and Inez’s hair—don’t you agree, Lily?—were by far Inez’s best features. Inez was lucky, too. Inez hardly had any wrinkles, any wrinkles to speak of, or if you compared Inez, Lily, to someone say, like myself. I am just a few years older than Inez and I have plenty of wrinkles already—have you taken a look at my neck recently?”

I said, “Inez was my age, Molly, only I was born in October. “

Molly said, “Only if you looked closely, Lily, or if you looked at Inez in the bright light or outdoors in the sunshine, then you could see these little blue veins on Inez’s forehead. A whole network of them. The same little blue veins showed up again under Inez’s eyes and on the sides of her chin. And those little veins—capillaries, I guess—made Inez seem fragile somehow. Those little veins, too, made me think that Inez did not grow up in Wisconsin the way Inez said she had and that Inez grew up somewhere indoors—somewhere airless and crowded. And Inez was not exactly what I would call the athletic type. But Inez did surprise me. Inez surprised me the time we went riding. Have I told you, Lily? I told Nora. I told Nora how Inez rode this big horse. The horse, I swear, Lily, was over seventeen hands high, which just goes to show what I have always said: The bigger the horse, the gentler he is.”

I said, “Just what I have always said too, Molly. Leonard is six feet two.”

Molly said, “Small horses tend to be mean—like when I was a child in Virginia, in Crozet. I had a pony. A pony named Domino. Lily, I swear to you, every time I rode Domino, Domino tried to kill me. Every time too, I complained to my father about Domino—my father, Lily, was a great horseman. My father was Master of the Hounds of Albermarle County. In front of my father, of course, and wouldn’t you know it, Domino always acted like he was the best trained horse in the world—ears forward, eyes not rolling. And, of course, too, my father would not believe a word I said about Domino. But at night, I would lie awake in bed and I would try to think up ways of paying Domino back. For instance, I would go for days, Lily, three or four days, not cleaning out Domino’s stall. Let Domino stand in his own shit was what I would think. I am telling you, Lily, it got vicious between us. All animals, Lily—like children—are a huge responsibility, and just look at me, if ever we sell this house, this house in Connecticut, I will have to go back to France with the cat. And the cat, Lily, has a way of always disappearing just before we are meant to be leaving, to say nothing of having to fly all

the way back to France with the cat clawing his way out of the bag on my lap. But when I said children, Lily, I was also talking about Bibi. Inez's two boys are a lot older, although Inez, I remember, said: No matter, I never stop worrying. Inez said she worried about Price Junior all the way out there in San Francisco with the girl friend—Sara. Sara the dancer. Inez said she also worried about earthquakes, and what else did Inez say she worried about, Lily? Oh, now I remember—the convergence of planets. Everyone, Inez said to me, including the Indians, predicted the world would come to an end then, and Inez said how first she wanted to throw crystals into the Pacific, only Price would not let her. Price told Inez to take a ride on the Staten Island Ferry, to throw her crystals in there, into the Atlantic. It was a whole lot cheaper, was what Price said to Inez. The same weekend. The weekend I started to tell you about, Lily. The weekend Inez went riding after the argument—no, not the argument over the crystals, the argument over Jack Kennedy, over Jackie.”

I said, “Jackie? Jackie Kennedy? Jackie Onassis, you mean.”

Molly said, “Suzanne and Harry were there. So were Fred and Havier. Fred and Havier came after dinner. No, no, Lily, this was not a dinner party. You know me, I hate to cook. Claude-Marie cooks. In France, Claude-Marie does all the cooking. Claude-Marie does the shopping on his way home from the gallery. Claude-Marie likes to do this. Claude-Marie likes to talk to all the people, to all the shopkeepers, to the butcher, the baker, the woman with the goiter on rue Vaugirard who sells Claude-Marie fresh vegetables—well, frankly, I don't think her vegetables are so fresh, but this is not something I am going to get into with you just now—Claude-Marie knows all their names. Claude-Marie knows how many children they all have, and this is the kind of thing I hate. I hate to make small talk. I have no small talk to make. I hate to talk forever about the weather.”

I said, “I know what you mean—rain, rain, rain. Is it still raining in Connecticut? They say it is going to rain all week. This was what I am afraid of—afraid it will rain for Leslie's wedding. Leslie's wedding is on Friday, Molly.”

Molly said, “Still, I said to Claude-Marie, I can't stay cooped up all day in the house sorting through all these things. I have to go for a walk on the beach, Lily. I am a real beachcomber at heart—no telling what you can find sometimes. I found the shoe horn, didn't I? I found the seagull. I found the seagull after a storm—a hurricane. The beach was full of debris washed up from the sea. What was the name of the hurricane? This was after they stopped being sexist and after they began naming hurricanes after men. Havier was with me. Havier was telling me about how grateful he was to AA and about how if he had not quit drinking, Fred—Carol. Lily, Carol was the name of that hurricane, and you should see Havier now, Lily. Havier is a changed person. You would never recognize Havier now and Havier helped me put the seagull into the trunk of the car—the same car. The car we have now. I was still driving then. This was the year I stayed in Connecticut alone all winter to photocopy the seagull. Well, nearly alone. Tom was there. Lily? Lily—are you listening?”

I said, “Yes, Tom—it's getting late, Molly.”

Molly said, “Tom was supposed to fix the roof—like Kevin. I mean Kevin could have fixed things. Kevin could have fixed the refrigerator that was always leaking, Kevin could have painted the front hall. God knows, there was plenty of fixing and painting that Kevin could have done, I said to Inez—only Tom, Tom—I have to admit—did not finish fixing the roof, Tom did not work out the way I had planned. And, Lily, I am the first to admit this. I admitted it to Claude-Marie, Lily. Some old busybody ran into Claude-Marie in the grocery store—the grocery store that stays open on Sundays—which is why frankly, I prefer France. In France, this kind of thing is not so important. In France, I am a foreigner, people leave me alone. People assume what I do is odd. Different—the photocopying is what I am talking about now, Lily. From the very beginning, Lily, when I was still photocopying clothes—remember? Clothes with double seams, clothes with hand-stitched button holes. Every time too, I had to go farther and farther by bus or by metro to other arrondissements from where I lived on

reue Madame. I'll never forget this—everywhere I went, everyone accused me of stripping the beads. Now, thank God, I have my own photocopier. The last time, come to think of it, I had any trouble photocopying something was photocopying Inez's scarf. Poor Inez. I never heard the end of this. Yes—no—Lily, not the scarf in the restaurant with the bangles, the spangles. I have no idea where that ugly scarf came from. If I had to venture a guess, I would guess the scarf came from the second-hand clothing store in Soho where Malcolm bought the plaid cummerbund. Oh, and please, Lily, please, do not ask me why Malcolm bought the cummerbund if that is what you want to know. I have no idea. Not the foggiest notion. Maybe Malcolm bought the cummerbund to take to someone in Africa. Malcolm, don't forget, is always talking about how Africa changed his art—or was it his life? No, his art, and Inez had one of Malcolm's sculptures, a Masai, standing right there behind the couch, and Price told Inez—what was it Price said? Price said to Inez that if she swore never to sell it, sell the Masai, Inez could keep it, and Inez told Price that, of course, she would never sell Malcolm's sculpture but that Price could not tell her what to do with it either. If she, Inez, wanted to sell the Masai, she bloody well could and she would too, which reminds me—did I tell you what Claude-Marie said about Price? Claude-Marie said when all this was finished that Price was going to go to Cincinnati for a show."

I said, "Cincinnati? Cincinnati is awful, Molly. Believe me, Sam and I spent a few months in Cincinnati and, aside from the zoo, there is nothing to do. Hello? Molly? Molly—it is nearly two-thirty in the morning."

Molly said, "Is it that late? Hold on just one more minute—what was I saying? Oh, how Price told Claude-Marie he was going to Cincinnati while Price was watering the gardenia plants—Inez's gardenias—and while Claude-Marie was turning out the lights, and you know what else Claude-Marie said, Lily? Claude-Marie said, Price looked as if he had fallen into a trance. Price looked a lot older, and the whole time too, while Price was watering the gardenia plants and picking off the dead leaves, Fiddle, Claude-Marie said—oh, Fiddle! Fiddle is her name, Lily! Price's new wife's name! Thank God! I knew all along I would remember Fiddle eventually. And I knew too, the way to remember Fiddle was not to think about it. To think about something else. But, Lily, what can Fiddle possibly stand for? I am asking you, do you know, Lily? Nora might know—she and Fiddle take the same yoga class—but what was I saying? Oh, Fiddle. Fiddle, Claude-Marie said, was asking Price while he was watering the gardenia plants what he was going to do with them. Fiddle was telling Price he could not throw these plants out and he could not keep the plants either, and all the time, according to Claude-Marie, Price was acting as if he could not hear Fiddle—could not hear what Fiddle was saying to him. Price never once answered Fiddle, and Fiddle—I already told you, Lily—was wearing those rubber gloves, and this was when Claude-Marie said to her: No good deed goes unpunished."

I said, "Molly, what? You have to speak into the receiver, I can't hear you again. What did Claude-Marie say to Fiddle?"

Molly said, "No good deed goes unpunished is Claude-Marie's favorite American expression. The time and Be careful what you wish for. There is no way, Claude-Marie says, you can translate these expressions into French. In French, Claude-Marie says, these expressions make no sense. Like *As I Lay Dying*, the Faulkner novel—the classic example of the untranslatable. As a matter of fact, Lily, this is what we talked about in the car. No, not the Faulkner novel—Be careful what you wish for. The time I was telling you about. The time the plane crashed and I told Yuri that lying and wishing were not the same thing. The reason I told Yuri the plane crashed, was that the baggage door blew open. This had nothing to do with me, I said. Anyway, I should know better than to feel guilty and than to listen to Yuri—Yuri is nothing but a superstitious old peasant from Russia. The money too, Lily. The five hundred dollars is what I am thinking about now, and if I had lent Inez the thousand she wanted, Inez would have spent it. Spent the money on Kevin. Spent the money on something. To be honest—"

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