

*Once in
Love with
Lily*

CATHRYN K. THOMPSON

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BROADWAY BABY

Lillian strolled into the sunlit kitchen at eight in the morning, barefoot, in yoga pants and a tank top, still glistening from her workout. Charles had apparently been up for a while, despite the fact that he hadn't come home until well after midnight the night before. A to-go cup from The Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf was in front of him on the table just as it had been for the better part of the last ten years. She sighed unintentionally. He was the only man she knew who considered walking from the car to the coffee shop to be part of his morning exercise routine. Come to think of it, it was the only part of his morning exercise routine.

He was flipping through the morning paper and making good headway on a large slab of the cake she'd made the night before. It obviously hadn't occurred to him that she might be saving it for something, in this case, for his assistant's birthday. He was brilliant and incredibly creative, but not one for remembering what he considered to be small, unimportant details. Birthdates, anniversaries, and quite often, letting his wife know that he wouldn't be home for dinner, were not, as he put it, "in his wheelhouse." She'd been left more than once eating her latest culinary creation alone, usually standing at the kitchen counter, debating what to redecorate next or

whether or not to change her hair color. Last night she'd decided on a nice Ming yellow for the walls in the kitchen.

"Morning," he said, without looking up.

"Good morning," she grumbled, heading straight for the state-of-the-art one-cup coffee machine on the counter. She hit the button to make her latte. "How's the cake?" she called over the hum of the machine.

"Good. A little sweet. What's in it?"

"Nothing special. Just regular chocolate cake, but the icing is almond covered with a chocolate ganache."

"Fancy," he said, playfully mocking, unaffected by the underlying tone of irritation in her voice.

"Hmm. Yes. I actually made it for Cora's birthday. Too late now, isn't it?"

"Aw, shit. When's her birthday?"

"Yesterday, but I didn't see her. You two were at the studio all day. Is she here yet?"

"Yes."

"I take it you didn't get her a gift, then?"

"You know I'm no good at that kind of stuff. That's what I have her for in the first place."

Lillian shook her head and put on a smile. "Don't worry about it. I'll have flowers delivered later, but you get to tell her that you ate her cake."

"Fine. Thank you," Charles said. He put another bite of cake in his mouth.

She took a plain Greek yogurt from the fridge, added a tablespoon of honey, and began stirring. "I thought maybe you'd taken Cora out for her birthday when you didn't come home last night."

"No. I told you I had a meeting with the producers."

"Long meeting."

"What?"

"You didn't get home until almost two," she said, still stirring.

"Did you miss me terribly?" he asked, trying to imitate her British accent.

“No.” She smiled again. “I managed. I actually worked out most of the details for the hospital benefit.”

“Good.”

“I was starting to wonder about you though. I thought it was just dinner with Jones and Gibson.”

“It was. But you know how it is. Dinner leads to drinks and drinks leads to... well, you know. Sometimes you have to wine and dine and play the game, right?”

“Which one of them wears the perfume?” she asked, taking a bite of yogurt.

“What?”

“When I picked up your clothes this morning, your shirt still smelled of perfume. It was nice. But it wasn’t mine.”

“Ah...” he stalled as if trying to come up with an excuse or explanation, but laughed and gave up instead. “Okay. You caught me. Gibson dragged us to Blazing Angels. Are you going to sit down and eat that?”

“I bet he had to twist your arm, didn’t he?” she mumbled sarcastically as she took the chair across from him.

“What?”

“Nothing.” She shook her head. “So did you work out the deal, then?”

“I think we came to an agreement that will be mutually beneficial.”

“And when do you start filming?”

“Two weeks.” He went back to his paper.

She cleared her throat. “Danny called last night.”

“Your brother? Why? Does he need more money?”

“Louisa quit.”

“Who’s Louisa?”

“His choreographer.”

“Aren’t they supposed to start rehearsals soon? Has he found someone else?”

“Not yet. I offered to help him find someone, but he’s worried about bringing on someone new on such short notice because it could put them weeks behind schedule.”

“Right. Which would mean more money. So, what’s he going to do?”

“He has this crazy idea that I should do the show with him.”

“Makes sense. When would you need to leave?” he asked, without ever looking up from the entertainment news.

“Monday. But—”

“But what?”

“Well, I’m not sure I want to do it.”

That got his attention. “What do you mean you don’t want to do it? Doesn’t sound like we have much choice, do we. Unless you think we should flush a little more money down the toilet.”

“I’m not even sure I *can* do it.”

“You have a history in theater and a background in just about every kind of dance there is. Why not?”

“How about because I haven’t seen anything but a soundstage in the last ten years? Live theater is just not my thing anymore, is it? A Broadway show with an inexperienced cast and crew—it’s a huge undertaking. I’d already be months behind in preparation. I don’t know if I have that in me. Even if I don’t have to start from scratch.”

“What does that mean?”

“Danny said when Louisa stormed off, she left her notes.”

“So some of the work is already done?”

“Yes. They want me to interpret her vision and fill in the holes. But—”

“Then it’s a no-brainer.”

“But taking her work and claiming it as my own? That would be cheating.”

“Desperate times call for desperate measures. At least you’d have somewhere to start.”

“Charles, either way, I’ve never choreographed a live show. It’s completely different. I’m completely different.”

“He knows what he’s getting. You just do it your way.”

“Then I need Nina. I need her to do my demos. What if she isn’t available?”

“She’s available. That’s what we pay her for. It’ll be fine. It may even be good for you.”

“How do you mean?”

“It’s been seven years since the accident. Don’t you think maybe it’s time you got over it?”

“It’s not that simple.”

“Maybe it should be that simple. You’re the one who’s always saying that God sorts things out. If that’s true, then maybe he’s giving you a little kick in the ass. You call Nina and Danny. I’ll have Cora get started on the arrangements.”

She let out aggravated sigh and got up from the table.

He picked up his phone and checked his calendar. He shook his head. “I’ll have to be back by the ninth. I have to sit down with the crew and go over a few details before we start,” he said, looking slightly put out by the inconvenience.

“You mean you’re coming with me?”

“I think I’d better.”

“I thought you hated New York.”

“Yeah, well, I hate to lose money even more,” he said as he stood and picked up his coffee. “I want to set up a meeting with their production team and make sure they know what the hell they’re doing. I should have done that a long time ago.” He gave her an irritated glance over the top of his cup as he took a sip. “I’ll see you later. Cora’s waiting for me to go through next week’s appointments, which we now need to reschedule.” He walked out of the kitchen, still fumbling with his phone. His office door

closed a few moments later. She cleared his breakfast items off of the table and sat down at the breakfast bar. She took a deep breath and reluctantly picked up her phone.

* * *

Forty-eight hours later Lillian, Charles, and both of their assistants were aboard the jet headed for the Big Apple. Lillian looked at her watch. They had been in the air for only two hours, but it felt like much longer. She was restless. Anxious. She had good reason to be apprehensive, didn't she? In just a few short hours they would be touching down in New York and the next day she would be on her way to meet with the cast. She hadn't even visited the City on vacation, let alone for professional purposes, in over ten years. A Broadway show was a daunting task and she still wasn't sure she could handle it. And the show, *Love On World Tour*, was something akin to *Love American Style-The Musical*.

"Ridiculous!" She said under her breath.

The plot, if there was one, seemed doomed from the start. Nevertheless, Danny had begged, Charles had insisted, and Lillian had grudgingly consented. What else could she have done?

"Nothing," she blurted out loud.

"Who are you talking to?" Charles asked.

"No one," she sighed. "I'm just trying to remind myself again why this whole thing was a good idea."

"Well, let me see... it's a job, it's exposure, and he's your brother! Besides, it's Broadway, baby! This is exciting stuff! Think of what this'll do for your credibility if it goes well. No pressure."

"I've done Broadway before. It's not all it's cracked up to be." She shook her head and shrugged, looking over at Cora who was watching the interaction from across the aisle. "And stop saying that!"

"You're just nervous. Stop saying what?"

“Broooooadway, baby! Ugh!” She threw her head back against the seat and closed her eyes. “You sound like some Rat Pack knock-off or something. And don’t call me baby! You know I hate that.”

“Lillian, think of it this way. Due to unforeseen circumstances, you’ve been handed an incredible opportunity that some people wait their whole lives for. You’ve studied ballet, tap, jazz, and ballroom dance with professionals from around the world, worked on stage and screen, and starred in what is probably the most popular teen dance film of all time—and the sequel. Of course the sequel was less popular, as is typical, but I digress. There is no reason you can’t handle this. Besides, you said he has her notes. It’s not like you have to reinvent the wheel, right?”

She glared at him out of the corner of her eye with pouty lips.

“Come on. Don’t look like that. Like it or not, you’ve got to bite the bullet here. Your kid brother needs you.”

“He’s not exactly a kid, now is he? He’s over thirty!”

“He’s still *your* kid brother.”

“And then there’s the matter of your personal investment.”

“There is that. I wasn’t going to bring that up again. Look, stop worrying. You’ll be fine. And for the record, I was not calling you baby. It’s just an expression.”

“Fine.”

“If you ask me—”

“Fine!” she repeated, throwing her hands up in surrender.

He put his hand on her knee. “Relax! Do you want a drink? Maybe that would help take the edge off.”

“That’s the best idea you’ve had all day.” She sighed and cracked a smile. “Thanks.” She put her hand on his.

He patted her leg and then pulled his hand away to pick up the magazine he’d been reading. “Cora, would you mind? The usual please.”

“Of course, sir,” she said, springing into action.

Lillian knew she had to pull herself together. She would need to put on a happy face for Danny. If he sensed that she was upset, he would think she was upset with him. It had nothing to do with him really, but he was so sensitive he would most certainly think so. Besides, although she’d had her moments of pessimism and self-pity, she generally considered herself an optimist. As the great Winston Churchill once said, “A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity. An optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty.”

“Okay Lillian,” she thought, “you can do this. You, the girl from bloody Hackney, are flying from L.A. to New York on your husband’s private jet. Seven years ago you were in a wheelchair because some dumb-ass in a Chevy ran a red light. You weren’t sure in you’d ever walk again, much less dance. Against all odds, with hard work, determination, and a rich, supportive husband you now have a successful career as a choreographer. So suck it up, buttercup! You can do this.” With that, she smiled and took a healthy sip of the Manhattan that had appeared during her little pep talk.

* * *

Two drinks, half a novel, and twelve crossword puzzles later they were touching down at LaGuardia. Danny was waiting there with Steven. They were waving madly as Lillian and Charles stepped off of the plane.

“Jesus. Do they have to wear matching rings?” Charles whispered as they made their way toward them.

“Why shouldn’t they? It’s legal now and they’re happy about it. Just because you don’t wear a wedding ring...”

Lillian said, surprised that he even noticed the rings.

She hugged and kissed them both. Charles shook their hands gave Danny a half-hearted pat on the back when he was pulled into an embrace against his will. After the pilot

had unloaded their bags Charles thanked and dismissed him and they were off to Danny's and Steven's apartment on the Upper East Side.

Charles had tried to convince them that they could rent a car, but Steven insisted on driving them in his new Scion. Even their overnight bags barely fit in the cargo space. Her garment bag was crammed on her lap. Charles was awkwardly holding her makeup case while attempting to answer emails on his phone. It was a good thing neither of them were any taller or they would have had to leave half of their belongings on the street just to have room for their knees in the back seat. The drive seemed almost as eternal as the flight had, especially with the guys chattering away up front. Cora was damn lucky to have escaped that ride to the city. She and Nina had left them at the airport and taken a car filled with the rest of their luggage to the Plaza to oversee the arrangements for the remainder of their stay.

Lillian was thrilled when they arrived at the charming brownstone that Danny and Steven shared on East 78th Street. Steven scored a parking spot in front of the building and was positively elated. Charles must have been happy to arrive too. He had the door open and was prying himself out of the backseat before the vehicle had even come to a complete stop.

"Lil, we are so glad you're here. I can't tell you how much this means." Danny dropped their luggage inside the door.

"Here hon. I'll take that," Steven said, tossing his keys down on breakfast bar. He picked up their bags and took them into the tiny office guestroom.

"I'm glad I could help, Danny," Lillian said.

"Lil, it's Daniel now, remember? I'm thirty-two years old."

"Yes, well, you're still my little brother, Danny," she smiled.

“Give it up, Danny!” Steven joked as he came back across the living area to the kitchen.

“Okay, fine. I’ll let it go, since you’re here to save my ass,” he laughed. “Can we get you two anything to eat or drink? A cup of tea?”

“Tea would be lovely, thank you.”

“Coming right up,” Steven called. “Charles?”

“I’ll take a beer if you have it,” Charles said, flopping down on the brown, soft leather sofa.

“We have some Blue Moon,” Steven said as he put the kettle on the stove and bent down to check the height of the flame.

“Figures,” Charles grumbled. He leaned back, kicked off his shoes, and propped his feet up on the coffee table.

Danny sat down at the large, wooden dining table rolling his eyes. Lillian scowled at him. He raised his eyebrows and shrugged with a silent “What?” He gestured toward Charles.

“Charles, would you mind taking your feet down, please?” she asked.

“It’s weathered wood and metal. What the hell difference does it make?” Charles said.

She ignored his comment. “Okay, let’s take a look at Louisa’s notes, shall we?” She sat down across from Danny and pulled out her laptop, a note pad, and a pencil.

“You just got here. You want to work now?” Danny asked.

“Yes, please.”

Danny shook his head. He opened his attaché case that was on the chair next him, fished out a bulging manila folder, and slid the folder across the table to Lillian.

“Is this it? Haven’t you got a flash drive or anything?”

He shook his head again. “Nope. That’s it.”

“She is old school, isn’t she?” Lillian sighed.

Charles cleared his throat. “If you three are going to talk shop, do you mind if I turn on the TV?”

“No, darling,” she answered. “Just keep the volume down, would you, so we can still carry on a conversation?”

Charles didn’t answer, but reached for the remote in the caddy on the small metal side table. “Jesus Christ, it’s like a God damned Ethan Allan catalog in here.”

“Really?” Steven asked, handing him the Blue Moon. “I was going for a New York Brownstone meets London Townhouse kind of thing. Much more Restoration Hardware.”

“Oh, sure. Now that you mention it,” Charles scoffed, taking a chug from the bottle. He flipped through the channels and settled on the Sundance channel. Then he pulled out his phone to check his messages for the third time since they’d touched down.

Steven brought the tea kettle and three cups to the table. He sat down next to Danny and took his hand. They both stared at Lillian as she began to examine the file. Almost immediately she started to bite her lower lip. Ten minutes later she closed the folder and picked up her tea cup.

“Well?” Danny asked.

“Well...” She repeated, still staring at the folder. She pulled out her ponytail, shook her hair out, and ran her hands through it. She exhaled slowly. “Okay. I’m going to need a copy of the script and the score.”

“I’ll get them.” Steven stood.

“Thanks. Can you show me your costume sketches too? I’d like to get a feel for your vision and see what kind of range of motion I have to work with.”

“How bad is it?” Danny asked once Steven was out of the room.

“Let’s just say that there’s a lot of work to do and I’m glad Louisa’s contract was payable upon completion.”

“Why?”

“For starters, there are only complete notes on about three numbers here. The rest is a bunch of disconnected chicken scratch if you ask me.”

“That good, huh? Can you use any of it?”

She ran her fingers through her hair again. “I don’t think so. If I’m going to put my name on it I’d be better off to throwing it out and starting fresh.” She shook her head, still deep in thought. Steven returned with the script and sketches. Lillian finally made eye contact with Danny.

“I’m sorry for sucking you into this,” he said, putting his hand on hers. “I had no idea. I should have realized. If you want out...”

Lillian stood and stretched, trying to pull herself together. She did want out, but this was Danny’s dream. She couldn’t walk away when he needed her, not that Charles would let her anyway. She couldn’t fail either of them. “Suck it up buttercup!” she told herself.

She managed a smile. “I’m here now. Let’s do this.”

“Thank God!” Danny said.

“Thank Lillian!” Steven corrected.

He and Danny sprang from their chairs and pulled her into a group hug.

“Hallelujah!” Charles muttered from the sofa. “I’m glad that’s finally settled.”

Lillian, Danny and Steven worked for several hours while she went through two pots of tea. Charles gave up and went to bed around midnight. By one o’clock Danny and Steven were ready for sleep too. Lillian said goodnight and sent them to bed, insisting that she had just a few more notes to make before turning in herself. Two hours later, she finally decided to call it quits.

Charles was snoring away on the sofa bed in the guestroom. Lillian quietly changed into her new pink and white flannel pajamas and slipped into bed next to him. She closed her eyes and focused on her breathing in an attempt to clear her head, hoping to rid herself of the menacing thoughts of failure on the live stage. She couldn’t possibly have known that her concerns about the show would soon pale in comparison to the new issue that

loomed on the horizon—an issue that would bring with it enough drama to throw her world completely off of its axis.

LONG TIME NO SEE

By the time Lillian woke up the next morning, the boys were already awake and seated around the dining table. Danny and Steven were drinking tea. Charles had his usual black tall from The Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf. He managed to scout those places out wherever he went.

“Good morning, Lil,” Danny sang out boisterously. “So glad you could join us.”

“What time is it?” she asked groggily.

“Half past eight.”

“Good Lord. Charles, you’re usually up by six. Why didn’t you wake me?”

“Well, the guys and I were just shooting the breeze and I thought you might need the sleep.”

“Yes, but thank God you’re up,” Steven called out. “These two have both been in director mode sharing trade secrets and I haven’t been able to get a word in edgewise.”

“Sorry Steve. I’d have brought you in, but wardrobe really isn’t my bag,” Charles laughed. “I have people for that. Come to think of it, I have people for just about everything.”

All three of them laughed at that. Lillian was pleased to see that Charles seemed to be much more pleasant with Danny and Steven today. A night’s rest seemed to have done him good. She hoped his good mood would hold out for a while.

“I don’t suppose you brought me a coffee, did you darling?” she asked him.

“No. Sorry. You don’t want me to go back, do you?”

“Oh, dear God! Please, Lillian, don’t make him go back,” Steven said. “He had to walk five blocks.”

“Yes! Heaven help us if he has to make that trek again. We’ll never hear the end of it,” Danny said.

“Do you two always have to be so dramatic?” Charles asked.

Lillian heard the flare of agitation in Charles’s voice.

“Okay. Never mind the coffee, darling,” she said.

“Gentlemen, what time do we need to be there?”

“We were due there at nine,” Steven said.

“But I’ve already called and made excuses for you, Sissy,” Danny said. “I bought you another hour, so get in there and pretty yourself up so we can get going. I can’t have you embarrassing me on your first day, now can I?”

“I think you probably do that well enough on your own, but I shall try to make myself look presentable just the same. Lucky for you, I’m not as high maintenance as I look or we’d never make it. I’ll be ready in a few.”

* * *

“Well, here we go,” Danny said as they arrived at the rehearsal space.

“Yep. This is it!” Steven said. He and Danny smiled widely at each other.

The two of them had been bubbling with talk about the show from the time they got on to the subway at Lexington Station, but Lillian hadn’t heard a word they’d said. She was far too busy worrying about how the cast would react to her and her unconventional methods.

Danny held the door open. Steven motioned for Lillian to enter before him, but she hesitated.

“Ah...You two go on in,” she said. “I think I need to grab a coffee. We have a few minutes, don’t we? I’ll be back in five. Do you want anything?”

“No thanks,” Danny said. He looked surprised by the sudden burst of words coming out of her mouth.

“Do you know where you’re going?” Steven asked.

“No, but I’ll manage. I hear you can’t walk three blocks anymore without running into a Starbucks in this city.”

She headed down 8th Avenue through the throngs of people already crowding the streets. “Ah, New York,” she thought. “The honking taxis, the charming street vendors with their poached sunglasses and purses, and the faint smell of homeless that lurks just off of the main drag really give it a certain *je ne sais quoi*.” She crossed the street against the light along with the natives, leaving a gaggle of tourists in the dust. As she suspected, she found a Starbucks in about two minutes. She was pleased to find that the line wasn’t too long. There were two registers open so things were moving quickly. She stepped up to the counter and placed her standard order.

“Good morning. I’d like a venti skinny vanilla latte, no foam, with whip.”

As she uttered those words she heard something that made the hair on the back of her neck stand up. A lump formed in her throat. At the register next to her a familiar voice placed an identical order. She hadn’t heard that voice in over a decade, but she recognized it instantly. She turned to look at him. For a moment she could only stare, her mouth agape.

He looked older, more distinguished, but she would recognize him anywhere. His wavy, sandy brown hair was only slightly graying and a bit longer than before, giving him a more rugged appearance. His cool blue eyes still sparkled with a touch of sexy softness. By the looks of it he was still quite interested in physical fitness and, though

she wouldn't dare admit it in public, he was still very handsome.

Tony thought he must be dreaming. It couldn't be her. Surely there were other women in New York who ordered their coffee that way. But that voice... He turned to face her. It *was* her, and she looked as fabulous as ever. The years had been more than kind to her. She still had a dancer's figure. Her long dark hair was a bit shorter than it was the last time he saw her and it was layered to the shoulder, framing her face beautifully. Her large brown eyes, though he remembered them as warm and loving, looked pained or angry. He wasn't sure which. The color had gone out of her face, making her full red lips even more noticeable than usual. He figured it was only a matter of time before she started to bite at her bottom lip.

Time seemed to stand still as they stood staring at one another in the middle of the store. "Excuse me, are you going to pay for that?" one cashier asked.

"Sorry," they both answered. Each of them tossed their cash onto the counter and slipped out of the line of irritable customers behind them. They inched over to the pick-up counter without ever taking their eyes off of one another.

He spoke first. "Lily Josephson. Of all the coffee shops in all the towns, in all the world, you had to walk into mine," he smiled.

The tiniest bit of color returned to her cheeks. She looked away, her lips curled in a tiny nervous smile.

"I wouldn't have come if I'd known that you were here," she said, her voice quivering. "What... ah... What *are* you doing here?"

"I live here, remember? Well, here as in the city, not here at the Starbucks," he went on.

Her heart was racing. Her stomach was doing somersaults. It was all she could do to stay standing. Yet there he stood cracking jokes, calm and collected as always.

It was unnerving. She looked up at him biting her lip, which made him smile again.

“What?” she asked.

“It’s just that you... nothing.” He shook his head.

“What are *you* doing here?”

She tried to give a confident answer. It didn’t go as well as she might have hoped. “Work... Working,” she stammered. “Danny... ah... my brother—”

“Yes, I know who he is.”

“Right. Well, he has a show starting production today.”

“Oh. Are you in it?”

“No. Choreography. I’m choreographing it.”

“I see.” He paused, smiling at her again. “You’re looking well. How have you been?”

“Fine,” she said, without elaborating. She looked toward the door and then at her phone. The run-through was due to start any minute. “Tony, as exciting as it is to see you,” she lied (it was more distressing than exciting), “I have to go. They’re expecting me at the studio. So, I really have to go.” She picked up her latte, which the barista had set on the counter, and walked out of the shop.

“Aw, bloody hell,” he said. “Lily, wait!” He grabbed his cup and took off after her.

She walked quickly, holding her coffee in one hand and her coat closed with the other. The wind was hitting her harder in the face with every step. She knew he was following her, but she refused to look back. By the time she reached the end of the block he had caught up to her. She kept moving without acknowledging his presence for fear that any one of the many emotions she’d been trying to hide might escape.

“Lily, at least let me walk you to wherever it is you’re headed. I won’t bite, I promise.” He grabbed her arm to keep her from getting away again. She stopped and yanked free of his grip. She took a deep breath, put on her brave face, and turned to face him again.

“Too late. We’re already here.” she said as calmly as she could.

He looked at the name on the door of the rehearsal studio. “You’re kidding. This is Danny’s show?”

“Yes. So, if you’ll excuse me...”

“Aw, bloody hell!” he said again.

“What?”

“It looks like we’re stuck with each other, at least for the time being.”

“Why is that?”

Just then Danny came bursting out the door and almost ran them over.

“Aw...fuck!” Danny said. A look of panic washed over him as he looked from one to the other.

Steven came rushing out behind him.

“Oh, Lillian, there you are. We were just about to come looking for you. And Tony’s here now too. Perfect. Have you two met? Lillian, allow me to introduce you to our set consultant, Tony Ward.”

Lillian let out a guffaw. “Steven, darling, allow me to introduce you to Tony Ward, my ex!”