

# LILY

## By Matt Buchanan

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**CAST:** Female, The speaker is a dress-shop mannequin, but we don't realize this at first.

You probably think I lead a pretty glamorous life and I guess you're right. It's not too bad, getting to wear all the latest styles, always the pinnacle of haute couture. But don't envy me so easily. Sure, my clothes are always new, always expensive. But I never have any say in what I wear. Other people always choose my outfits, and some of them have very strange taste. Last Christmas I had to wear this hideous red and purple thing with what looked like tinsel streamers on the shoulders. And how would you like being dressed and undressed by strangers all the time? And it's not like they treat you with respect. Once they took all my clothes and left me there, totally naked, for almost an entire day. Right in the window! Fortunately I'm not anatomically correct or somebody would have been arrested. But the *shame*. Actually, I think it's worse because I'm not anatomically correct. Somehow all that smooth, featureless plastic feels even *more* naked. That was probably the most mortifying day of my life, unless it was the time they were having a sale in Menswear and some genius decided to borrow me. They took my regular hair, gave me a bad male wig, and put me in a suit. *What* a disaster! I may not have all the bits and pieces, but I *do* have a shape. Wig or no wig, I *do not* look like a man! At least it was just guys shopping over there and they mostly don't notice anything.

What's even worse is I can't shut my eyes. People watching is fine, and I do have a great view from my window on Main Street, but haven't you ever *not* wanted to look at something? Something disgusting or upsetting? And *you* can look away. You can shut your eyes and pretend it's not there. Or even just something embarrassing. Like, okay—most of the time it's bright enough in my window and people can see right in, but during morning rush hour when the sun slants directly on my glass my window looks like a mirror from the outside. And people *use* it like one. Here's a news flash for you: My window may look like a mirror to you, but from my side it's still a window. I *do not* need to see you picking spinach quiche from your teeth or checking to see if your tongue is coated. It's embarrassing! I don't really mind people checking their hair, and sometimes it's kind of funny to watch guys slow down to check their full-

body profile, but it's also kind of pathetic. Still, you do meet some nice people.

I met Lily about seven years ago. It was around New Year's and I was wearing a really gorgeous ball gown. It was pale peach silk, feathery light, and cut a little like those "flapper" dresses they used to wear during Prohibition—only more formal. It was just getting dark and this really, really old lady stopped outside my window. She was a little stooped and a little chubby, with sweet snow-white curls poking out of a knit hat and bright little button eyes. She was wearing a knit shawl over a wooly coat that had been mended several times and carrying a clumpy purse and a mesh shopping bag.

She stood and gazed at me for a long time. Well, that's nothing new—people do it all the time, and it was a beautiful gown. Then I saw that she had tears in her eyes. Slowly her arms came up until she looked like she was holding a dancing partner. Her stoop seemed to vanish, and she began to sway gracefully to music I couldn't hear. Pretty soon she was waltzing back and forth on the sidewalk. People were hurrying past but it was like she couldn't see them. They dodged out of her way, some of them annoyed and some with indulgent smiles, and she danced. When she finally stopped her face was shiny. She pressed her face against the glass for a last look and then walked slowly and a painfully down the street. A little while later she came back the other way with a few groceries in her mesh bag and she waved to me as she passed.

She came back the next day about the same time, with the same mesh bag and the same faraway look in her eyes. She stayed for a few moments then went on her way. A little while later she came back by with her day's groceries.

I decided to call her Lily. I don't know—she just seemed like a Lily to me—kind of soft and lovely and a little sad. She came by every day. Sometimes she only stayed for a moment or two, but she always stopped. Once every two weeks she'd cross the street to the little Automated Teller Machine booth at the bank.

Lily talked to me, too. She always told me what she thought of the

clothes. "Oh, my dear," she'd say with a shake of her curly white head, "That's not you at *all*, dear! Whose idea was that, I wonder?" That was usually when I was wearing something modern and revealing. She loved the really formal things best. "Oh, yes!" she'd exclaim with a bright smile and a little clap of her hands. "That *is* gorgeous, isn't it, dear? I wish I were you!" She never seemed to expect me to talk back. Sometimes people passing by would hear her and give her a look, but she ignored them and so did I.

I used to try and imagine the story of her life. I imagined a tragic love story. Her lover went down with the *Titanic* or died in the war overseas. I imagined she was a dancer in a speakeasy and stabbed her boss when he tried to get fresh. I imagined her as a faded movie star still trying to hang onto the lost glory. Somehow all the stories I imagined were a little sad.

I knew she had a family because I'd seen pictures. She carried a thick album in her handbag. Most of the photos were of a young woman and a small girl. Her granddaughter and great-granddaughter. She showed me the pictures at least once a week, chattering away proudly about their achievements. I learned that her granddaughter was a lawyer and sometimes sent her money, and that her great-granddaughter played the 'cello. But the stories never changed, and there were never any new photos. Not in six years. I began to think she'd made them up.

That's why I was so surprised the day she brought her granddaughter to meet me. She was a little later than usual, but then here she came, with a grumpy-looking middle-aged lady in tow. It was prom season and I was in a ball gown. "There, you see! Isn't it lovely?" Lily said. "It's perfect!"

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