

# The Recipe Club

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A TALE OF FOOD AND FRIENDSHIP

A NOVEL



ANDREA ISRAEL & NANCY GARFINKEL

*The Recipe Club* is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the authors' imaginations or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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"Each friend represents a world in us,  
a world possibly not born until they arrive,  
and it is only by this meeting  
that a new world is born."

—ANAÏS NIN

Older Cookies (Cookie Press)

4 pd. butter  
cup Gran. Sugar  
egg (beaten)

Vanilla - 1 tbsp.

1/2 cups flour } sift well  
alt

75 - 8 min. Very Light Brown

oven sifted with 1/4 tsp salt -

Part One: 2000



am well  
add 1/2 cups  
1/2 cup brown  
peped banana  
in 1 tablesp  
1 1/2 cups  
temp salt -

5 min. 10" x 10" pe  
cream.

TO: LSTONE@dotnet.com

FROM: VRUDMAN@webworld.com

DATE: APRIL 6, 2000

SUBJECT: HELLO AGAIN

Dear Lilly,

I've started a letter just like this about a thousand times. "Dear Lilly," I'd write, as if I knew what came next. But that was as far as I got. I never knew what to say or how to say it. And I wasn't sure you'd ever want to hear my voice again.

But today I know exactly what I have to tell you, and I know you'd want this to come from me. My mother died. Last month, of cancer. Maybe your father already told you; I don't remember what he said at the funeral. It was a hard day. It's been a hard two years. And now that it's over, it feels like walking through a dream—a milky gauze of grief. And relief. And guilt at the relief.

Oh, Lilly. This is not how I hoped to find you again. But maybe it's the only way. Death always makes me want to make sense of things. I want to understand my mother's life. I want to understand my own.

Perhaps this all feels too raw, too real, too intimate. If so, I'm sorry. But I just had to take the chance that you'd still be there for me the way you once were. I can't begin to tell you how much it would mean for us to reconnect. Even after—especially after—all these many years.

Valerie

.....

**TO: VRUDMAN@webworld.com**  
**FROM: LSTONE@dotnet.com**  
**DATE: APRIL 7, 2000**  
**SUBJECT: RE: HELLO AGAIN**

Dear Val,

I honestly don't know what to say....

I'm so sorry about your mother. I hope you find some solace in the knowledge that she loved you and was proud of you. I hope you can carry that with you, along with her smile and that wonderful, raucous laugh that always surprised everyone.

Regards to you. And to your family.

Lilly

.....  
**TO: VRUDMAN@webworld.com**  
**FROM: LSTONE@dotnet.com**  
**DATE: APRIL 7, 2000**  
**SUBJECT: A THOUSAND PARDONS!**

Forgive me for that awful version of a ten-cent drugstore sympathy card and let me start all over: Val, hearing from you has shaken me to the very core. I'm reminded of all we once had and lost. Twenty-six years of silence—and then, at long last, you appear!

When I got your e-mail I cried out loud. There you were, or the essence of you, in your brief words. So very palpable. I mean, Christ! Thanks to cyberspace, you were almost here with me in these beloved mountains.

Oh, nuts. I'm not very good at this. What I'm trying to convey, in a clumsy way, is that I've spent a lot of time and energy (not to mention thousands of bucks on therapy) convincing myself that our fight was just one of life's many painful lessons. People change, they go different ways. Even the best of friends. I told myself, so be it. "Move on..." to quote

Sondheim. (The very song I once used to open my act.)

But the truth is, Val, I can't tell you how many times I've whispered to myself, tonight I'll look out into the audience and she'll be there. I can't tell you how many times I've pretended that somehow, you will just turn up. That somehow we will find a way to be friends again. Look, it's all just a long-winded way of saying: yes, Val, I'm still here for you. Honestly, sweetie, you can count on that.

I know when we last spoke, so many moons ago, the problems between us—I mean *all* of us—were insurmountable (at least they seemed that way to me). Which is why I think you'll find it amazing, if not unbelievable, that at long last my father and I are becoming close. I recently moved back home to live with him. It's temporary. And though it's been good for each of us, it's also been, as you might imagine, less than easy. In fact, right now I'm taking a break at the cabin. (Yes, the family still keeps the place, complete with outhouse and NO PHONE! Can you believe it? So, to get my e-mails I have to trek all the way to Lake Placid, almost forty-five minutes from Keene Valley, to an Internet cafe—which I thank the techno-goddesses for.)

Anyway, at your mother's funeral, you may have noticed my father is a changed man. The infamously *stony* Isaac Stone is much more vulnerable these days. Your mother's death hit him surprisingly hard. It's the first time I've seen him weep. It must have something to do with all the losses he's facing: a recent retirement. Failing eyes. A broken heart—he's unable to let go of my mother, who's no longer with us.

Which brings me back to the real question: why didn't I just reach out to you once I heard about your mother? The truth is, I got scared. I found myself hoping, with all my heart, that you would be the brave one to

break our icy silence. And I thank you for that.

I've been a coward. Maybe I just didn't know how to express the simple thing you said: I can't begin to tell you how much it would mean for us to reconnect.

I won't trouble you with the details of my life right now. In summary: deep love, despair, deeper love, deeper despair, and now...well, a sort of limbo place thanks to a lover who can't commit and my own confusion about intimacy. I'm trying to figure it all out, even though that's a bit like trying to lasso the moon.

My heart goes out to you. My thoughts are with you, and your family. Despite the sad reason for your e-mail, I am extremely happy to hear from you. (Do you remember what loyal correspondents we were when we were kids?)

Write again, if you have the time and the interest.

Much love,

Lilly

P.S. How is "Golden Boy"...Ben? Please send him my love.

.....

**TO: LSTONE@dotnet.com**

**FROM: VRUDMAN@webworld.com**

**DATE: APRIL 15, 2000**

**SUBJECT: I FORGOT TO TELL YOU SOMETHING...**

Lilly,

I've slowly been going through all of Mom's possessions (which has been very painful, but that's another story). Anyway, among her many things I found a gorgeous flowered hat box—filled with your Recipe Club letters to me!

Remember? They date all the way back to the beginning, when we were about ten years old. They were just as I had left them—a little yellower and crunchier for age, but still organized (even in the infancy of my anal-compulsive style) in chronological order, wrapped neatly in blue and white satin ribbons.

Glancing at the postmarks makes me think that a bunch may have gone AWOL. Perhaps they're in a box I haven't yet uncovered.

I've been reading them, laughing and crying. I realize now that they were truly my first love letters. You, dear Lilly, were the first friend I ever loved, and who loved me back, and whom I continue to love even after all this time apart.

I just had to tell you that I found them. Just like I found you.

xxx

V.

.....





Part Two: 1964-1973

NOVEMBER 15, 1963

Dear Val,

Do you want to start a real Recipe Club? We could trade recipes in every letter.

I think your mom's right. If your father could invent a quiet garbage truck, then you really would be rich. Oh, and know what? I forgot to tell you we just got one of those new telephones with the buttons instead of the dial. Too bad your father didn't invent that!

That's all for now. My fingers hurt from the pencil. (Maybe your father can invent a pencil that writes its own letters!)

Love,

Lillypad

P.S. My mother has a friend from Paris. He made this fancy meatloaf, which he called a "patay." I guess his English isn't so good.

.....

# Jacques' Fancy Meatloaf

SERVES 6

1-1/2 pounds ground beef	FOR THE GLAZE:
1 cup breadcrumbs	3 tablespoons ketchup
3 eggs	2 tablespoons Dijon mustard
3 tablespoons milk	1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1 celery stalk, finely chopped	
1 garlic clove, finely chopped	
1 medium onion, finely chopped	
1 teaspoon dried thyme	
1 teaspoon salt	
Ground black pepper	

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Then lightly grease a 9 x 5 x 3-inch loaf pan.
2. In a bowl, mix the meatloaf ingredients together until well combined. Press the mixture evenly into the prepared loaf pan. Bake until cooked through, 45 to 55 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, whisk together the ketchup, mustard, and Worcestershire sauce. Generously brush the top of the baked meatloaf with the glaze. Bake for 5 minutes more. Let cool slightly before slicing and serving.



NOVEMBER 19, 1963

Dear Lilly,

YES!! I would like to join the Recipe Club! And I can definitely sleep over next week. But not on a school night.

It's my turn for the Recipe Club, right? So this is Mommy's Macaroni and Cheese. The one she made last time you were here.

XXXX

Valerie



# Mommy's Macaroni & Cheese

Serves 4 to 6

## FOR THE BREADCRUMBS:

- 2 to 3 slices cheap white bread  
(airy, not dense), crusts removed
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter

## FOR THE MACARONI:

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 (8-ounce) package elbow macaroni
- ½ pound American cheese, cubed
- ¼ cup milk
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper

1. To make the breadcrumbs, rub the bread vigorously between your palms until coarse crumbs form. The crumbs will be unevenly shaped.
2. Melt the butter in a medium pan over medium-high heat. Add the crumbs and cook, stirring, until the crumbs are coated with butter, but not browned (the butter keeps the crumbs from burning, browns them nicely, and makes a great crunch). Transfer the crumbs to a bowl.
3. To make the macaroni, preheat the oven to 375° F. Grease a ½-quart casserole dish with 1 tablespoon butter.
4. In a pot of boiling water, cook the macaroni according to the package directions. Drain and return to the pot.
5. Place the cheese, milk, remaining 2 tablespoons butter, salt, and pepper in the top of a double boiler or bowl set over a pot of boiling water. Cook, covered, until the cheese is melted, 3 to 5 minutes. Simmer the mixture uncovered, stirring, until smooth, about 1 minute more.
6. Add the cheese to the pot of cooked macaroni and stir to coat. Transfer the macaroni to the prepared casserole. Top with the breadcrumbs. Bake 15 to 20 minutes, until the top is golden brown.



MARCH 19, 1966

Dear Val,

*My mother and father just had another fight.*

*We were at the dinner table. He was showing us the galleys of his new book. He looked up and noticed she was wearing a bracelet. He asked where she got it. You could see from the look on his face that he was already hurt. She shrugged and told him it was a gift from the “smashing new choreographer” of her show. No other explanation. As if that was enough. But it wasn’t. He got really mad. He said with all her experience, it was probably her teaching him the moves.*

*I didn’t like hearing that. I don’t want to know about their business. But it’s really hard not to listen when it’s right in front of you.*

*They started screaming. It was like I didn’t exist. She threw his book on the floor. He threw the bowl of potatoes against the wall. Splat! Potatoes everywhere. I yelled for my parents to stop and that’s when they realized I was still there. I ran into my room and slammed the door. I wanted to cry but the truth is there’s no point crying about something that’s never going to change.*

*An hour later my parents came into my room. They apologized. For two seconds I thought everything was better. But then my mom said she had a great idea. From now on I should call them both by their first names: Katherine instead of Mom, Isaac instead of Dad. My father turned purple in the face. He said that’s just wrong. He says children should respect their parents and not talk to them like they’re friends. It started all over again. They argued through the night.*

*This morning my father said if I call him Isaac he won’t talk to me. So he’s Dad and she’s Katherine.*

*You can call me by my new name: Sad. But at least something came out of this mess—a recipe for “smashing” smashed potatoes. But use a potato masher, not a wall.*

**Daughter of Katherine**



## “Smashing” Smashed Potatoes

SERVES 2

2 teaspoons salt, plus additional, if necessary  
2 large potatoes, peeled and cubed  
1 cup sour cream  
5 tablespoons unsalted butter  
1/4 cup finely chopped chives  
Black pepper, to taste

1.

Fill a medium pot with water; add 1 teaspoon salt and the potatoes. Bring to a boil and cook until fork-tender, about 20 minutes. Drain.

2.

Using a potato masher or fork, break up the potatoes. Add the remaining 1 teaspoon salt, sour cream, butter, chives, and pepper, and mash to the desired consistency. Taste and adjust the seasoning, if necessary. Serve immediately.



MARCH 5, 1967

Hi Lilly,

Last night my mother was in the mood for Chinese food, so she sent me and Ben to get it. But she said we could eat in the restaurant first before bringing home the food. So just the two of us had dinner at Fong's Village. For a minute I pretended we were on a date when people looked at us sitting there.

We actually had fun! We rated each other's friends. When we got to you, he said, "Lilly? Oh, on a scale of one to ten, your friend Lilly is a definite thirty-four!" When I looked shocked, he gave one of his stupid laughs. But I could see he meant it in a really nice way. He definitely goes ga-ga for you. Obviously!!! (And so do I, of course!!)

I can't really answer your questions about how I act and feel about all that making out and feeling up stuff, except that even talking about it in a letter makes me uncomfortable. (Which I know you know, but you always seem to forget so I have to tell you again. Or do you just pretend to forget?)

Reminder number 62 zillion: I still never even kissed a boy yet. I haven't even hugged anyone, except to close-dance a couple of times. And the only "date" I've been on has been a fake date with my fake brother.

Do you think they let Jewish girls join convents?

Love,

Sister Val

## Ga-Ga-Gai Pan

Serves 2 to 4

### FOR THE MARINADE:

- 1 tablespoon finely chopped, peeled ginger root
- 2 teaspoons sesame oil
- 2 teaspoons oyster sauce
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- ½ pound skinless, boneless duck breast, sliced crosswise into ¼-inch strips

### FOR THE SAUCE:

- ¼ cup chicken stock
- 2 teaspoons oyster sauce
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 1½ teaspoons soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- ½ teaspoon lemon juice
- Pinch sugar
- Pinch salt
- Ground black pepper

### FOR THE STIR-FRY:

- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoons minced, peeled ginger root
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 5 ounces sliced mushrooms (about 2 cups)
- 6 ounces snow peas, trimmed (about 2 cups)
- ¼ cup bamboo shoots, drained
- ¼ cup water chestnuts, drained
- Cooked rice, for serving

1. Whisk together the marinade ingredients in a bowl. Add the duck pieces and toss to coat. Cover with plastic and refrigerate for 30 minutes.
2. In a separate bowl, whisk together the sauce ingredients.
3. In a wok, heat 2 tablespoons vegetable oil until it just begins to smoke. Add the ginger and garlic and cook 30 seconds. Add the mushrooms and cook, tossing, for 30 seconds. Add the snow peas, the bamboo shoots, and water chestnuts. Cook, tossing occasionally, for 2 minutes. Transfer the vegetables to a plate.
4. Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons oil in the wok until it just begins to smoke. Add the duck breast and the marinade. Cook, tossing, until just cooked through, about 2 minutes. Add the vegetables and cook for 1 minute more. Add the sauce and cook until the mixture thickens, 30 seconds to 1 minute more. Serve hot, over rice.



OCTOBER 27, 1968

Dear Val,

Look, no matter what you say, and I appreciate that you're trying to make me feel better, last night with Luke was a total disaster.

Just the same, it helped to talk to you. Except that when I hung up I felt even more alone.

So, how do you fix a broken heart? Maybe with ricotta cheese. That's why I just spent the whole afternoon making lasagna. Believe it or not, my father even helped. And you know the only thing he knows how to cook is martinis.

He called what we made "Lovelorn Lasagna." I guess he figured out something was wrong even though I didn't exactly tell him about me and Luke breaking up. He probably guessed because of how I was sighing and singing sad songs in a fake Italian accent.

At first my father tried to be helpful in his usual unhelpful way. You'd think I was some textbook case he was studying. He said something like, "Classic melancholia is often sublimated rage. What are you really angry about?"

He stared at me, waiting for an answer. I had no idea what he was talking about, and at the same time I hated that he was kind of right. I am angry. Of course at Luke. But it's more than that. I feel trapped. Why can't anybody see I'm not a child anymore? I got so furious I threw down the oven mitt and started to cry.

Then my father did something so unlike him—completely honest and real. He said, "Sometimes people we love can't love us in ways that we wish to be loved. Not because we aren't worthy of that love, but for other reasons, beyond our control." He put his arms around me. I wanted to stay there forever.

Your sad and lovesick friend,

Lilly

## Lovelorn Lasagna

SERVES 8 TO 10

### For the Sauce:

3 tablespoons unsalted butter  
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
1 medium onion, finely chopped  
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped  
1 teaspoon dried oregano  
1 pound ground beef  
1 pound Italian sausage, removed from its casing and crumbled  
3 tablespoons tomato paste  
2 (28-ounce) cans whole peeled tomatoes  
1 cup beef stock

2½ teaspoons salt  
½ teaspoon black pepper  
1 bay leaf

### For the Lasagna:

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
¾ pound lasagna noodles  
12 ounces fresh ricotta cheese (3 cups)  
6 ounces grated mozzarella cheese (1½ cups)  
6 ounces grated parmesan cheese (1½ cups)

1. To make the sauce, heat the butter and oil in a medium pot over medium heat. Cook the onion, garlic, and oregano until the onions are translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the beef and sausage, and cook, breaking the meat up with a fork, until well-browned, about 10 minutes. Add the tomato paste and cook 1 minute. Add the tomatoes, stock, salt, pepper, and bay leaf. Simmer, uncovered, until thickened, for 1 hour.
2. Meanwhile, add the oil to a large pot of salted water. Bring the water to a boil. Add the noodles, and cook until al dente, 8 to 10 minutes, or according to package directions; drain.
3. Preheat the oven to 350° F. Ladle some of the sauce on the bottom of a 9 x 13-inch baking pan. Arrange a layer of pasta over the sauce. Top with a layer of the ricotta, a layer of the mozzarella, and a layer of the parmesan. Repeat until all of the ingredients have been used, finishing with a generous layer of mozzarella and parmesan.
4. Bake, uncovered, until golden and bubbling, 45 minutes to 1 hour. Let cool 5 minutes before slicing.

OCTOBER 5, 1973

*Dear Lilly,*

*Hello? Anyone there? Have you secretly joined the Weathermen? Joined a cult? Run off to Hollywood?*

*I'm getting worried. Ben says you're not answering his calls, either. And that he never sees you at the clubs. He said he thought you might be pissed that he didn't make it to your showcase, but I said you had disappeared off the face of the planet. He told me to relax, you're probably just doing your own thing.*

*But I can't relax.*

*Do me a favor and respond. Even a postcard will do. And you know how I feel about postcards.*

*Love,*

*Val*

.....

DECEMBER 31, 1973

*Dear Lilly,*

*Happy New Year. You know I'm thinking about you tonight.*

*I've given up on hearing from you, but I can't, I won't, let you go.*

*To send you more words feels meaningless and hollow. So I'm sending you a recipe instead. It's something I know you'll love. It uses olives—an ancient symbol of faithfulness, patience, and peace.*

*Lilly, I love you and I always will. And I will wait a million seasons for you to find your way back home to me.*

*Until then, no matter what else happens in our lives, we'll always share the delicious secrets of the Recipe Club.*

*Valerie*

.....

Part Three: 2002





## Isaac Stone, 83, Psychiatrist, Author, Expert on Phobias

Dr. Isaac Stone died of heart failure yesterday, at his home in Manhattan. He was 83 years old.

A noted psychiatrist and author of 20 books and countless scholarly articles, Dr. Stone was known chiefly for his best-selling book, *The Fear Impulse*, a controversial look at the etiology and treatment of phobias.

Dr. Stone was widely praised for his pioneering work, which advanced the medical awareness of phobias. But he was equally

criticized by some factions of the mental health community, who questioned the efficacy of his methodology.

Dr. Stone is survived by his wife, stage designer and director Katherine Stone, and their daughter, Lillian.

Funeral services will be private. A memorial tribute will be held at the New York Institute for Psychodynamic Interrelations, March 7, 2002, at 2 p.m.

Val looked up at Jeff, sitting across from her at the kitchen table. She put down her mug and pushed the newspaper toward him. The color had drained from her face. "Isaac's dead."

Jeff scanned the obituary and shrugged. "Well, he lived a good, long life. Long enough to screw up everyone around him."

"Don't say that, Jeff. Even if it's true. You have no right."

Jeff raised an eyebrow. He didn't need to do anything else to remind Val that he'd been the one she'd turned to every time she and Lilly had a fight about Isaac. In fact, Isaac had deeply affected his life, too.

"Okay, okay," Val agreed, "you do have a right. I'm sorry."

"Don't be, I get it." He walked around the table to give her a hug. Val let herself be wrapped in his arms and closed her eyes. She needed a minute to collect herself, to somehow absorb the unwelcome news. Slowing her breathing, she turned her attention to the familiar sounds of her early-morning world: the determined tapping of a red-headed finch at the feeder just outside the window; the hiss of steam forcing its way through sixty-year-old pipes; Jeff's heart beating steadily against her ear, pressed to his chest.

"Isaac was a big part of your world for a really long time," he whispered. "This has to hurt."

Valerie could tell Jeff wanted to protect her. He looked into her eyes as if waiting for tears, but there weren't any. In truth she felt strangely empty. Glancing at the clock above the sink, she gently withdrew from his embrace. She stood up, smoothing the wrinkles from her black woolen trousers. "I've got to go to work." Her voice was tight and controlled.

"Valerie, honey, don't do that thing," Jeff said. "It's okay to have feelings about him. Even about her."

Val sighed. For two years she and Jeff had avoided talking about Lilly, at Val's request. Which didn't mean Val had ever stopped thinking about Lilly—or had ever stopped struggling with the decision that their last goodbye was

goodbye for good.

Though it was barely snowing outside, the slate path leading from the house to the driveway was slippery. Val secured the top button of her shearling coat, and clutched a brown cashmere scarf tightly around her neck. It occurred to her that the chill she felt was as much about Isaac as it was about the weather.

She figured the halfhour drive to work would calm her down. No music, no news, just the sense of moving forward. Instead, her anxiety increased along with the speedometer.

By 80 miles per hour, long-buried feelings began to surface.

*Isaac, she thought, now what? We'll never have a chance to get things right, to fix what went wrong.*

The heat in the car was blasting, so Val was surprised when she unexpectedly shivered. She had the eerie sensation she was no longer alone. She checked to be sure the doors were locked. She glanced at the empty passenger seat, and nervously eyed the back of the car through the rearview mirror. She couldn't shake the feeling Isaac was right there with her.

*Superstitious me.*

But rational thinking didn't help. Val needed to speak to Isaac—and she knew, against reason, he needed to hear from her.

*Oh, Isaac, no more anger. We had enough of that.*

She paused, biting her lower lip, only to remember how Isaac would always tell her to stop. "It's unbecoming," he would say, reproachful words softened by an affectionate tone.

*You see? Every little thing reminds me of you. You're part of me, whether I like it or not.*

In frustration, Val smacked her fist against the steering wheel. The horn hit a strident note, but Val didn't notice.

*You died thinking I hate you! But it's so much more complicated than that. I love*

*you. Despite your faults, despite the many ways you are...were...so imperfectly human.*

Fat, wet snowflakes melted against the windshield of Val's car. The repetitive rhythm of the wipers was soothing. She slowed down and tried to focus on her driving. It was dangerous out there.

*Be here, be now, she told herself. Breathe.*

But nothing could stop the flurry of memories and emotions. In her mind she was no longer behind the wheel, but once again sitting beside her father in the front row of the funeral parlor, staring at her mother's simple pine casket. Beside them was Isaac, old and frail, his familiar hands—fingers still long and strangely youthful—gripping the carved handle of his cane. She felt his eyes on her, but she could barely look at him. Forget making amends. She'd had no sympathy, just a bottomless well of anger. It didn't sink in that time was slipping away.

*I guess I never really believed you would die.*

Death was a sad but inevitable part of Val's professional landscape; as a doctor she had learned to cope. But in her private life all bets were off. Even now, several years after her mother's death, Val still expected to hear Kitty's concerned voice on the phone every Sunday night. When Val visited her father's house, she still looked for her mother at the kitchen table.

And then there was Lilly. Lilly. Always Lilly in the shadows of Val's unspoken thoughts and dreams. As if Lilly, too, were a ghost.

*I should call her.*

The thought of contacting Lilly made Val's heart race. She pressed harder on the gas pedal. Eighty-five miles an hour and counting. The snowy fields became a blur.

More than anything Val wanted to break through her self-imposed wall of silence...more than anything she feared doing just that. She began composing a letter to Lilly in her mind. She wanted to say something kind and generous. And real.

*Lilly, I'm so sad for you. But I know even in your grief you must see the gift you*

*and Isaac ultimately gave each other: you allowed your love to bring you together, rather than letting your anger keep you apart. At the end, your father knew he had a caring, loyal, beautiful daughter. He knew you loved him.*

That felt right. At least so far. But Valerie worried about what to say next. How to reach out and keep her distance at the same time.

*I hope these thoughts bring you peace.*

*Lilly, I also hope you'll receive this in the manner in which it is intended: not as an overture to renew our friendship, but simply to say how truly sorry I am for your loss.*

Deep in her reverie, Val didn't hear the siren or see the flashing lights. It wasn't until the trooper had pulled up beside her car that she realized he was signaling for her to stop. As she slowed, her car skidded onto the icy shoulder.

The trooper stood beside her door, motioning for her to roll down the window. It took Val a moment to shake off the fog. To realize he was asking for her license and registration.

"What's your hurry, ma'am? There's black ice on the road. Do you realize you were going almost 90 miles an hour?" He stared coolly into her eyes.

"I'm sorry...really, so sorry...." Valerie looked down, surprised to see herself clutching the steering wheel so hard her hands were shaking. "I just...."

There were no more words. No explanations. Nothing to hold back the torrent of uncontrollable tears.

The wind was whipping snow into the car. But the trooper wasn't done with his scolding.

"Sorry doesn't cut it, ma'am," he said sternly, handing her a ticket. "You could have killed someone. Then what good would sorry do you?"

