

GOODBYE, MOLLY BUCK

(L'ultima diva dice addio)

by

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English samples

“And Matilda asks the sailors
‘Are those dreams or are those prayers?’
So close your eyes, son, and this won’t hurt a bit.”
Tom Waits, *Time*

“A story is a gift, Madame, and you are welcome.”
Monique Truong, *The book of salt*

I keep forgetting the things I have decided to remember: endings to great classics, names of the most important women in history; the nights I reckoned to be the best of my entire life and the deadlines for the payments of debts.

I forget the heretical truth that the best road has already been travelled by someone else, so maybe we should just learn to stay quiet and imitate those who have been more far-sighted than us. I forget that the dreams we dream are nothing more than happenstance, and that we end up inflating them with meaning and expectations they often had no intention of suggesting in the first place.

We blame those dreams and their false promises for our every disappointment, and when I try to put a face to those reveries and delusions, I can't help think of all the girls who are combing their hair in their American bedrooms, at this very moment, with a slowness that feels like intimate accuracy.

Once upon a time – a very distant time, one could say – Molly Buck was definitely one of them.

Because, when it comes down to it, we all do the same things. We grope around in a dark room, looking for the switch; before we leave home, we check our bags to see if we took everything we need. When we fail to open a jar, we wrap a cloth around the lid and, gritting our teeth, we twist with all our might. And yet, when it came to Molly Buck doing all of this, it always seemed as if you were witnessing a miracle. One could never picture her doing something so ordinary: instead, you would imagine her shooting a commercial, standing on a plastic skyscraper to show a pearl necklace to the camera, or stiffened in her best smile to thank the audience for the umpteenth prize she was being awarded with.

Watching her make a cup of tea had the same eccentricity as a nun lifting her frock and pulling down her knickers before sitting down to pee.

When Molly Buck came into my life, I wasn't forced to decide: she was there and no effort was required in order to remember. It was then that I understood how, if what they say is true and everyone has been placed in this world with a purpose written in the stars, mine had the shape of her name.

That was the only decision I didn't force myself to make, and it changed the very course of my life.

The truth is that some details are epiphanies. Since I can't keep track of my own, because memory is weak and even the most feeble or less compelling life can be immense and last so long, I fixed my gaze on the vanishing point of a different perspective: to try and give meaning to this vastness of straight lines that match, I dedicated the last four years religiously organizing every little detail about Molly Buck's existence. And if I keep on doing this, I know that not everything will fall into oblivion like a victim of fleeting time.

She used to recount as I wrote down everything she was saying, without ever casting doubt over the purity of her words and dodging the discomfort that came over me when the work's bulk seemed impossible to overcome; she used to recount and I still chase her in that backwards journey, careful never to catch her so that she can still have the advantage she needed for a proper reenactment of the past.

It is all about respect, one could say. Molly Buck told me one night that memory is a matter of respect and prospective, and if I chose to believe her, it is for the same reason one can't help but believe to what bowls them over: no reason at all.

Our first meeting was nothing more than a coincidence, even though it ended up as something that looked like an obsession to those who weren't in the right position to understand. Still, that encounter shaped my future: it was an overwhelming substance that filled my life and put everything else in its shadow, a shadow that is now embracing all the things, all the same, a shadow that promises and denies at the same time. It has the same loop that only fixed ideas can achieve, like songs trapped in your brain all day long, and only those who have known Molly Buck can understand what I am trying to say with all the good-natured desperation that I am capable of.

I built up a calendar of epiphanies long as only years can be long and deep as the cobalt blue in her raccoon eyes. Because that is what I thought when I first laid eyes on her: a beautiful raccoon, fingers interlaced on the belly and legs crossed with a strenuous elegance, sitting still and waiting for the interlocutor to talk first.

The waves of her bob and those long fingered hands did the rest, while her body covered in jersey Chanel bewitched me to a point of no return.

The day I met her she had celebrated seventy-two birthdays, which weighed down on her shoulders because of the struggle she had experienced. *The price of fame*, some might say; but if fame truly has a price, I have every reason to believe that Molly Buck did not mind settling that debt squandering words, attentions, small talks and a large part of her wealth frittered away for parties to which those who mattered craved to attend.

I can see them even now, those rooms in her house on via Maggio, as they slowly fill with smoke while the hours while away, back when she was still young and beautiful, full in her form and audacious with the slits in her skirts, entertaining guests of honor and work colleagues – decrepit marvels of that mid-century Florence, a town persuaded to be the cherry on the cake and the favorite destination for people of a certain class.

No one, or at least no one who survived those years of unchecked vice, deigned to come and greet old Molly Buck on this last, sad day.

And now she's laying there, in a pale room of this private clinic, surrounded only by some relatives who know her much less than I do. Her hips are swollen, while her breast have given into exhaustion and now rest on her wrinkled belly.

I wasn't allowed to witness her last hours of sufferance, so now I am sitting on a wooden bench just in front of the café, supervising the walkway as I wait to watch her sailing for the last time from what we call the world of the living, with no chance of coming back again.

Who knows who will inherit that old house with all the silent splendors hidden in every nook and cranny of her rooms, the unveiled secrets and the drunken nights that so many people have enjoyed during the golden years. Molly Buck claimed to have chosen it because it was the only palace in the old city centre that didn't have to give up the luxury of balconies.

I remember one time that, as we were gracefully dragging ourselves through the streets of her beloved town, she stopped all of a sudden and, still holding my arm, she said: "Look, my dear. Look how she is ruling us, high in her harmony, like an old whore who seems to have enjoyed everything in her life. The city without balconies, how enchanting. It is as if she's saying *Come, climb all you like to cherish me all you want, but only by sticking your heads out of the windows, because you must not overdo this. You don't need those two steps ahead to understand how this is the only place in the world where it is worth living your best years and then come to croak.*"

Her usual sarcasm flavoured those words – a hint of polite and subdued irony but a bit invasive nonetheless – and that sarcasm filled most of her opinions while the vowels still showed the uncouth softness of her Southern accent, that she never lost right up until the end.

I followed her nose upwards and I found myself, almost thirty at the time, totally fascinated by a different shade of perspective to which I had never paid the slightest attention before.

Only few people would have the proper sensitivity and tact to grasp how astonishing her words were and all the signs that she hung up to dry in her house: the mirrors that swallowed her youth, year after year; the groove in the coffee table that held her favourite cup for so many long nights.

Her ignorant, careless nephews will see no value in the breakfast tablecloth with its macramé border: looking at their reflections in the mirrors, all they will see is their own faces blurred by the dust, and this is nothing short of a crime.

That painting by Modigliani, left leaning against the wall, will be sold at auction to a jackal full of pride for his insincere good taste, while her birth certificate, the only document with her real name on, will become a highly desired relic for the worst type of fetishists.

I am certain that the deck of cards, the only remedy to insomnia that Molly Buck acknowledged (at least until I met her), will slip to the bottom of a cardboard box and be left to rot on a fence's market stall.

All of these things will lose their immensity, and this immensity will be emptied of any beauty.

It was when that deck of cards couldn't help her anymore that she used to pick up the telephone, because she knew I would come running to her. In the end, the only thing we truly had in common was our insomnia – an affliction which only defect is not being deadly – and yet I have to thank that sentence if I am able to write down these words. I see it as a burden to be endured with quite a relief, since it allowed me to gain the confidence of a woman like Molly Buck.

She would welcome me into her living room, with the curtains thrown open and every lamp lit because the darkness suffocated her but she also loathed the lights that arrogantly hang from high ceilings. She would ask me if I too wanted a mint tea and I would politely decline, as always. She would pour a little vodka into the cup and sit down on that pale rose damask armchair in front of the window. I would pull out my notebook and she would start talking.

Sometimes, often on Wednesdays but never on the weekends, we used to go out for some fresh air, walking the narrow streets that surrounded her apartment. We would occasionally cross the bridges that separated us from the world beyond the river, and that is how her greatest revelations came to me: her hand wrapped around my elbow, the best sign of intimacy that I could possibly imagine.

It was thanks to her that I saw for the first time how Florence really appears at night: the beauty of the sparkling streets after a drizzle, the half-light of the crossroads and the cabs splintering the darkness for a few moments. Piazza della Repubblica seems enormous, with its arch that mimics the ones in Paris and the sign of the Giubbe Rosse café on the side. And the river, always the river, running beneath your feet and giving the impression it is flowing in the opposite direction.

My nights in Florence had become victims of a habit with no space for wonder, but when I met Molly Buck the anguish of boredom retreated and together we would wait for the dawn, watching the first blue silhouettes of Piazzale Michelangelo's hills from the window of her living room on the third floor. The day would break and everything was young again.

"My dear", she said to me one July night, "all this sleep we aren't getting, maybe it's just a debt we have to pay. Some kind of atonement, that is more or less the same thing. But what our sin was, well, that I couldn't tell you."

I replied that our missed rest was a good opportunity, and this is why I am certain I have retrieved the truth, or at least the closest thing to it – a version of the facts that all those who are now dead are unable to contradict.

An entire life that no encyclopaedia could summarise without losing the lion's share of its greatest spectacles, despite the fact that at times it is best to give in to the temptation of approximations, if only to avoid looking unprepared.

Therefore, let it be known that this was Molly Buck: twenty-nine movies and one biographical documentary recounting the years at the Titanus; a scholarship in her name for young people who showed the right qualities and a favourite nephew who came to lunch every Sunday. Two dinner parties at the President's, various friends in the armed forces and three voluntary associations to whom large sums were donated every year. One hundred and twenty-one articles in gossip magazines, nineteen covers and one Academy Awards nomination. Two official partners, a dozen lovers who can be mentioned without causing a scandal, no husband.

Only one episode of her extraordinary life remains a mystery to me: the love affair with a Mr. Edward Windmill.

It started at some point during their years at university, and who knows where it ended up.

Now that all is said and done and the dead have left to walk their own paths, I believe that this aspect of the affair will stay buried forever, hidden in the corners of those rooms I did not have the honour and fortune to frequent during her birthday parties.

I have managed to glean only vague details about the whole thing: insinuations made with false nonchalance, snippets of conversations overheard from afar. But the bigger picture remains incomplete, as if the horizontal line needed to connect all the dots couldn't come to life and its coordinates kept being unclear.

I have never met Mr. Edward but I have imaged our encounter so many times that I can see him clearly before me, as if I had known him always: he walks into a room and one instantly sees that he is one of those men who looks good with an ascot, regardless of age.

Despite my encouragement during our phone calls, Mr. Edward always managed to elegantly avoid talking to me about his private matters. As for Molly Buck, even the slightest hint at the question was enough for her to wave her hand about, declaiming that all she needed was a cup of boiling water, and that was it.

All I know is that those two believed they could beat the end together, but the end had somehow beaten them to it and then the remaining years closed in on themselves, as only years are able to do, and everything was shattered into miniscule details dispersed between gossip and letters filled with ciphered confidences.

A part of me is not so very upset by this missing piece: it is the part that doesn't happily bend to chit-chats about love and sordid details of broken hearts, but having such a white edge in the perfect picture I have been drawing is a painful misfortune, a dishonour that I have been unable to tolerate for a long time.

I am now aware of how, despite all of my efforts and even if I have devoted my life to the memory of another human being, something about the prodigious existence of Molly Buck fails to be under my control. It is a terrible defeat, but what can I say? I am bound to think that there are worse accidents in this world.

I have to trust the little I have discovered, so I can hope that, hidden among the connections and the folds of the intimate stories I have brought to the surface, I will be able to give an account of the facts that is as close as possible to the truth.

And yet, if I think about the truth, I feel a lump in my throat because no guarantee would ever be enough to verify what I have in my hands. Everything was born out of a sheer coincidence and everything is ending in this very moment, but the end is filled with too many words and dirtied by occurrences, so I find myself believing that I have to subtract in order to survive and to not drown under the rolling uncertainties.

And if telling the tale is necessary to remember, if it is the only way to understand, then it must really be a tale by subtraction, swimming against the flow like the river at night, towards the beginning where there is no guilt and no distortion; where hindsight hasn't flooded the ditches yet and we possess only a pure knowledge of the facts, just as they are given to us.

It is precisely as I struggle with these considerations that I lift my gaze from the notebook and meet a figure stumbling towards me, another gaze that is blending with the pine shadows as it slowly crosses the large inlaid gate of the clinic where Molly Buck decided she had had enough of being old.

There are lamps which are barely illuminating the bench I am sitting on, and all of a sudden they seem to tremble; perhaps it is just the branches of the trees that surround me, allowing themselves to be shaken by the freezing December air, while that gaze keeps moving closer.

Although I realize that I have never met it before, a strange voice seems to rise from the streets onto my chest, as to tell me that this is the moment all the other moments of my life were aiming for.

02. THE SHOES THAT WILL CARRY ME AWAY

I keep forgetting the things I have decided to remember: the plot of a Greek tragedy, a commercial catchphrase that I judged brilliant. The borders of Alabama and the years of Persian Wars.

I forget that the dreams we would like to keep for posterity become faded shadows at the breaking of day, and so we end up believing that those dreams – freed from censorship and obligations – retained all the answers that we were looking for but we lost along the way.

We blame those dreams and answers for our every failure, but if I think about dreams and their defeats I can't help but picturing all the girls sitting behind the windows in their American houses, politely combing their hair as they imagine a better world.

Once upon a time – a time so long ago that it seems I am the only one left to work out its profile and coordinates – Molly Buck has definitely been one of them.

Molly Buck, which arrived out of the blue to give a new name to the habit that my life had become, changing its shape and telling me everything she wanted to save from oblivion, as a victim of fleeting time.

Molly Buck, which used to call me in the middle of the night and that one time, in spite of all good manners and demeanor, asked me to go with her to the front door of the old brothel at via delle Terme, in order to check that the name on doorbell was still the same so that she could put her mind to rest.

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More or less, these were the first words Molly Buck told me that day. No formality, no need to warm up the atmosphere: I was there and she was used to acting, and I assume that ours was the most important challenge of her life, because it had come full circle.

If I keep going back until the beginning of time, will I ever discover the first words of history? We will never know them, as I will never know those of Molly Buck. All I can do is remember the first words she said to me, words loaded with such an innocence that no other words could ever accomplish, an innocence as bold and measured as all things that are perfect. And just as all perfect things, those words wanted to put the truth in order.

Since the very start, it has been clear to me how it was not from her words that I would learn the truth, but rather in the wigwag between her brief silence and those open vowels. Is it possible to write down the story of that silence? Maybe that would be a good compromise to observe Molly Buck's aversion to literature. But could an attempt like this make some sense? And is that silence hiding the truth about Mr. Edward as well, about the end that has beaten them to it and about everything that this ending has caused? At first, I couldn't say if Molly Buck had been a happy woman, whether in her youth or during all those years before her spiritual retreat to the third floor.

Happiness has never been of any interest to me, after all; mood swings and sadness that follow a moment of pure bliss, those are the things I care about, because they tell every aspect of the story and Molly Buck, too, held them in such high regard.

Now I understand that my opinion has no value: all that really counts is how Molly Buck was firmly sure she had had a life filled with satisfactions, so much that she would have never risked for someone to believe otherwise. And that is what she kept telling me since our first encounter.

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[...]

“What do you expect people will think about me?”, she asked once she got permission to treat me like a friend.

I said that it was not a decision for me to take, but she replied “O, no”, shaking her head slightly, “This is totally yours for the taking”. In that moment, I realized how my role wasn't going to be an accessory one, like a simple part of the machine with no actual free will. Molly Buck had appointed my name with a unique power and that is how we embarked on our shared mission.

There is a kind of melancholy which is detached from the world's things, but there is another kind that remains vigilant on what is happening all around. That was Molly Buck's melancholy, and even though it moved backwards it was also bringing everything back to life, like an everlasting present. Some might call it happiness, after all, and that is the reason why it must be remembered.

On that same day, Molly Buck said to me: “People are often inclined to preach that spending your time remembering is a sad fate. Actually, my dear, it's a blessing, because they say that out of ignorance of how things really work. Truth is, I'm happy to have all the time that I need to remember how happy I've been before.”

And that is the only way one can learn what beauty is: with a piece of art worthy of the life it is set to tell.

[...]

She leaned with her back against the windowsill, looking at the youth that was filling up the streets as their laughter echoed and reached her third floor.

“The world is a strange place indeed, my dear, and it gets fed up with shortages. It goes on trying to make up for what it doesn't have, and sometimes someone earns a reputation out of this. But other times, well, everything just seems so stupid.”

I didn't drop the subject and I asked her what she reckoned to be the secret of success, if a secret existed in the first place. She forgave me for the triviality of the inquiry because she knew that some questions were part of the job and they simply had to be made.

When she began to talk again, it seemed as if she had been waiting her whole life to answer that question, so much so that I thought she might have read it somewhere instead of coming to that conclusion by herself.

She said you had to look for the answer in the stride between your steps when walking the streets: the right amount of steps per minute, so that one would have had the time to see the world and the world would have been given the time to see who was walking in that moment. Not too many steps, because they would have been tedious, but not so few to risk of not leaving a taste in the mouth of the others who were watching.

I asked what was the right amount but that question seemed to bother her somehow, because she simply said: “At one point, I just gave up counting and being careful”.

[...]

Once out of the shop and back in the street, she leant closer and held me by the arm, as if she was preparing to share a secret.

She said she had been highly amused when that poor clerk decided to show her a pair of colt gloves in peach.

“Such poor taste, but they reminded me about Lidia. Lidia Hayfield, to be precise. She was American as well and we lived together in the ‘20s, when we were trying to get some gigs. We had a shameful little apartment in Borgo San Lorenzo, two moldy rooms facing a yard which was always in the dark.

Lidia was quite short but with such a perfect shape. She had one of those heads the French call *tête à chapeau*. Someone had said so to her while she was auditioning for something, and she was very proud of it. God knows why she was wearing a furry-pink beret all the time. It was so ugly that it almost scared me, because I’ve always been afraid of furry things, but Lidia loved it. Poor darling, movies weren’t her cup of tea. I know she eventually married some fellow and she must have been very happy, but we lost touch completely.”

She suggested to go back home because she was in the grip of nostalgia for the early days.

We were sitting in her living room as the day withered outside the windows, the light turning into that vibrant shade of ochre which reflects on buildings and embellishes the contrast in people’s faces.

“On the first night we spent together in that house, we were too anxious to sleep. So we walked to Piazzale Michelangelo, because it seemed unreal that we really had made it and were there. That was the first time I looked at Florence from above, and I could easily tell you that it was the first time that I saw the beauty

of the world. A photographer was standing nearby, and he saw it too, because that night was born to become a postcard. There was the moon, popping out through the clouds, and everything else in the right place. It was enchanting. My dear, do nights like that even exist anymore? I'm asking you, because you're the one who's still out and about. Maybe they do, or maybe nights like that exist only in your twenties. But anyway, in a couple of months our house had turned into a constant bustle. It wasn't unusual for a party to run late, no one in the building cared, and so people put camp wherever it suited them best. I met my first beau when I was living there, but everytime he spent the night he preferred to sleep on a little sofa beside the stove, so that he could feel protected. Now that I think about it, I really couldn't say what it was that he needed to protect himself from. Oh, poor darling. But it doesn't matter now anyway, does it?"

She raised her chin in the air, dropping the cigarette ash out of the window. She looked at my face for an answer, but she knew that I couldn't be of any help to her. And so she smiled.

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[...]

“If I had the power to go back in time, my dear, I really think I would choose those years”, she revealed as her eyes were getting lost in the past.

“Having success is an amazing affair but once can be quite enough, though I don’t know what I would give to relive a week of that kind, when I was only twenty and had just arrived in a city that was a whole new world, where everything was possible because nothing had happened to me yet. That is the real marvel, don’t you agree? Standing with both feet on the threshold, I mean, just a moment before walking through the door; to imagine all the possibilities without knowing their weight. O yes, I would go back to those years, despite the fear of failure.”

She paused for a while, as if she were deciding on the tone in which the statement had to be completed.

“You know, I often wonder if this is how the story goes for everyone and that, no matter how much one can be willing to admit it, we’ll all constantly look for an echo of those beginnings, and we’ll do so wherever we find ourselves. A pale reflection of those opening-night jitters, nothing more.

Truth is that, eventually, one gets lost under all the stuff that must be done, you know, tangled in unforeseen plans and temporary delights, which deserve our respect nonetheless but they also bring us to believe that something is always missing, because we have forgotten what astonishment feels like. And still, even when all is said and done, maybe we are simply building sand castles so that we won’t be taken for the fools that we actually are. Because, my dear, we would be contended with the illusion, even just for a little while, of going back to that moment in time when we were still a nobody. A time that left in our mouths a most savoury taste and the best discovery ever: all that we could have become.”

[...]

“I have never been a mercenary”, she said looking at me with a certain pride that was lighting up her eyes. “I never put necessity before duty, that’s all. It was my duty to keep on acting, it’s true, but only if I still wanted to do so. Necessity, well, that was another matter and I couldn’t care less. Do you know how many careers went down the drain out of desperate necessity? Think about Virginia Cherrill, she only succeeded in hustling Chaplin getting to sell flowers pretending to be blind. Everything she did after that was not worthy at all. And when sound arrived, well, that was the beginning of another collapse because not everyone had the dignity and honesty to understand that it wasn’t right for them. They gave

it a shot, yes, fair enough, but the outcome was so easy to predict. Truth is, my dear, that art is not a right, but so many exquisite minds seem unable to grasp this.”

She lit a cigarette to create the proper atmosphere for those people who had faded away from the spotlight.

“Grace Darmond, Harry Langdon, Anita Page, William Haines, all these names mean absolutely nothing today.

Or Edna Purviance and Mabel Normand, that we remember mostly for their unfortunate stories. They were old-fashioned stars and you can’t find the likes of them anymore. They all ended up God-knows-where, everyone in their own way. But I worked hard on my diction, because an accent is charming but a heavy inflection is so rude, and it’s only thanks to my own efforts that I made it.”

I heard something in her voice, like a hint of dissatisfaction, regardless of what she was trying to convey with all those faces who had disappeared from the present. I thought that maybe she was feeling at fault somehow, as if the glory of her career was hiding some failings on her part. I recall that I wanted to shut down those worries and tell her that all those charmless women and men with no virility left, they all lived only for a moment and they were dead even before they began to exist. Their name was not Molly Buck, with all the marvel that it brings along.

“Sometimes I think about Theda Bara and I get so annoyed, my dear”, she ruled as she was taking back the scene. “All of her strains, all the effort, and what do we have now? Just a few photographs and some footage which makes no fuss anymore, because everything else went up in flames during that fire in 1937. That was a real tragedy, there are no other words for it. And she was truly a pioneer. I met her only once, a few years before she died. She looked so disappointed, you know, as if all had been for nothing. I guess that scribblers from Babylon felt the same, or the gardeners of Alexandria, after the lowness of human kind had spit in their faces and destroyed the fruits of their hard work. Oh, poor people, that must have been a terrible feeling.”

I was going to stop her and tell that she was mixing up her comparisons, but in the end I understood it was best to leave her reviewing the facts in her own way, undeterred on that peculiar boulevard of justice.

[...]

When I asked her to tell me something about that decision, I noticed that she was oscillating for a moment, as if a part of her was torn by the depth of confidence that our words were at risk of creating.

“I didn’t believe that I could make it, I assure you”, she declared when that part finally won out. “I mean

coming back here to live, in this city. Or maybe I was aware that I had no other choices, and I was just fooling myself. Who knows, my dear. It seems like ages ago.”

Her elbow was on the armrest and the knuckles of one hand were gently pushing towards her chin.

“On my first night back, I checked into a hotel, one of those holes in the alleys behind Santa Croce. I didn’t want to go home straight away, entering those rooms and all the rest. I was in need of a neutral zone where I could slowly readjust, or maybe I only wanted to try and pretend being a tourist like the others, without a single care in the world and free from all the weight of the coincidences on my knees.”

She paused for a moment, and it looked as if her silence was just adding itself to that weight.

“Truth is that I needed to make peace with this place, and when you’re fighting a great battle of that kind, to sleep in a nameless bed can be a lot of help. I had to dress the part to exorcise the demons, one at a time, with no heavy atmosphere, because I knew how this wretched city could be difficult. I was acting like a cat, when they move away from home to die, but I was doing it the other way around.”

She dared to raise a smile, but it was mostly a gesture of kindness towards me.

“What can I say, my dear, that’s who we are. We make do as best as we can. But, sooner or later, we all have to make peace with the places where we’ve been happy. Don’t you agree?”

She looked up as to inspect me, with no further care for words. I read something in her eyes, something like a signal of compassion, as if she were well aware that, sooner or later, I too would have to come to terms with this.

[...]

I keep forgetting the things I have decided to remember: my father's birthday, the frailty of some false myths. I try not to forget the nights I felt truly young and happy, but even good intentions have a margin of error.

Sometimes I think about West Virginia or New York, one of those places like NoHo or Silver Lake where there are more people than I will ever meet. I picture one of those people, an American girl behind a window: I build her room in my mind with the flannel sheets bought by her mother and the radio filling up the air. I can't give her a name, because you can't give a name to what you don't know. But I think of her when I am overwhelmed by the unreality of the present and so I am not that scared anymore, because among the endless possibilities in this endless world maybe there is someone that I haven't met but who could understand me. And that is the reason why I force myself to suppose that we all do the same things.

"You've got youth on your side, and that's quite an ace", Molly Buck told me one night with no sign of envy or recrimination on her part, and I chose to believe her as one believes the lessons learned as a child, before awareness arrives.

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And what about us, Matilda? What is it that we have been and what is separating us from what we will become? Is another revolution for our names really possible?

And what can remain?

Is it the life that is still waiting to happen, with its hindrances and chances, or is it the people we still have to stumble upon, and the choices we have to burden ourselves with, and lucky coincidences that will give our dreams the slow compromise they need to finally explode into the world?

Or perhaps this is just a variable in our tangled landscape of coincidences, and the true responsibility doesn't lie in great systems but under January's frost – the kind that keeps us locked inside for days –, or in the trains we missed and those we chose to overlook, or is it again in everything we forgot and all the things we cannot help but remember?

What is going to happen again before finding out where we will end up, and with whom, and doing what?

There is an edge to the experiences that we could rightfully collect before our curtain call, a maximum of first times, a sum of feelings beyond which we can't add anything anymore?

And please tell me, Matilda, is there really an ending before us?

I chose Molly Buck because it is not for everyone to wind up with a living room at the third floor, paying all those debts that old age drags along. Her name is not only a model of wisdom but also a luxury and a hope, consciously aware of how the imperfect tense must be used.

[...]