



Source: Ewen MacAskill, 'US accuses Saudis of telling lies about Iraq', *Guardian Unlimited*, 28/07/07.

Tags: [France](#), [food](#), [streets](#)

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Lily lifted the cup from its saucer, staring at the surface of the large café crème as small bubbles popped and the foam settled, took a sip and set it back down on the table. She was the first one here this Sunday morning, and the café being empty, she chose her favourite table, the one that was half inside and half out, one step up, and where she could benefit from the warmth of the interior as well as the view that encompassed the entire street. The waiter, who knew her by now, brought her café crème automatically, with a discreet nod of the head. She set the unopened letter beside the cup, address facing up, the familiar handwriting with its flourishes and curlicues echoed in the filigreed balconies above her head on the buildings across the street. She wanted to do something with these balconies, draw them on large sheets of paper, perhaps cutting them out later, all the while musing on the history of their design and fabrication, which she knew nothing about.

They had known each other in this café where the rue Sainte Croix de la Bretonnerie dead-ends into the rue Vieille du Temple, in the Marais, but back then it had a different name. She preferred the old Marais, with its crumbling hotels particuliers, Jewish bakeries and restaurants along the rue des Rosiers, and a sense of potential that no longer existed. When she had arrived two weeks ago at her rental apartment on the rue Sainte Croix, she noticed that the buildings were now clean, most of them newly renovated, and the streets full of well-dressed young professionals with their upscale baby strollers as well as thousands of tourists. The café had become l'Etoile Manqué. Appropriately enough for her, she mused the first time she sat there, although she wondered at the somewhat unusual moniker for a commercial establishment. Whose missed star? Perhaps the owner had aspired to something grand and then, in his disappointment, had bought this café. There were lots of them on the streets that crossed the rue Sainte Croix. Paris would always be the city of cafés she supposed, but this one, because it was situated right at the end of street, afforded a particularly interesting and unique view of the corner.

Lily took another sip of the coffee. It was getting cold and losing its flavour. Usually she started her morning with an espresso at the counter with the workers but today, seeing that she was the first customer, came right to this table with her letter. She had to make the coffee last as long as she could. At almost four euros a cup one was all

she could afford and although she knew she could sit here all day without ordering anything else, she had never felt comfortable doing that. Not quite French enough, she guessed. She took another sip and looked up the street. A woman was coming out of a building two doors up with her shopping cart and Lily wondered if she was making her way to the market on Boulevard Richard Lenoir. A bit far to go but not for a Sunday morning, and it was such a wonderful market that Lily contemplated ambling over there herself later.

She picked up the letter and studied it for another moment. It had arrived yesterday, with the late afternoon post, and she had left it untouched on the hallway table until she picked it up this morning on her way here. It was large and cream-coloured, carefully addressed, and she couldn't keep from opening it any longer. She turned it over and carefully separated the flap from the back of the envelope, tearing it slightly, as the glue was strong. She slid out the sheet of heavy manuscript paper, folded in half, opened it and began to read the beautifully formed letters: My dear Lily, I am so sorry that...suddenly, before she had read any more, and surprised at her own spontaneous gesture, she grabbed the top and bottom of the page simultaneously and ripped it in half. She took each half and systematically tore each subsequent piece, over and over again and again until the tiny shreds formed a small mound on the table. With one last gesticulation she cupped her hand and swept the pile into the open envelope, losing a few fragments onto the sidewalk under the table. She folded the flap back into the envelope, picked it up and stuffed it into her bag, took four euros from her wallet and set them next to the coffee cup, grabbed her bag and walked away from the café on the rue Vieille du Temple towards the river. When she arrived at the Pont Marie she leaned over as far as she could and dropped the pieces, one by one, into the turbid water, watching them as they fluttered or floated away. Her mission accomplished, she turned to make her way home, walking up the quai toward the Hotel de Ville. As she neared the rue de Rivoli she felt suddenly woozy, stopped and clutched her chest with a sickening doubt. Shouldn't she have read the entire letter? What if she had been too hasty in her conclusion, too rash in her destruction of its contents? And what could she possibly do about it now?

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Myrel Chernick.*