

## Greek Drama

Harvard Square, in early June, is an inspiring haven. The traditional brick buildings of classical Federalist style are trimmed with crisp, white moldings that outline the perfect proportions of windows and doors. It is not a coincidence this architecture reminds one of the glory that was Greece. It is not the white marble of the Parthenon but the design scheme is the same. The golden ratio is the measure that was used designing these buildings of, so-called, divine proportion. These ideal, traditional buildings are clustered with blooming trees and freshened by light breezes from the wide Charles River with its arched bridges, recalling the Arno. The picture pulls at the heartstrings, for those among us who believe in lofty ideals. Is it all a myth?

The cafeteria in Harvard Square sports the style of the fifties with the mid-century American functionalism. They are practical; no sentimentality. Built with plate glass windows lining the sidewalk, the proportions and materials are commercial. The windows seats are full with working-class townies, misfits, and oddballs. They are crowded with men who argue about socialism and religion and who chase incoming Harvard summer school girls.

The females rush by, serious and alone, or stroll, laughing in cliques, excited by the adventure of Harvard. The romantic girls are consumed by the exaltation that is Harvard's fantasy. The girls imagine, a handsome prince, a young doctor, or a brilliant writer.

As the song says, "you can't go to jail for what you're thinking; matter of fact neither can I."

The girls slow down to admire and preen in plate glass windows. On the other side of the reflective glass, the hunters, sit hunched with coffee cups on Formica tables, in the cave of the Waldorf Cafeteria, in Harvard Square. The fauns watch the nymphs, commenting and choosing their prey.

Urn-shaped elms, fully leafed, arch in Gothic tracery high over the Harvard Yard. The temple of learning is now open for the lucrative summer term. Annually, high school graduates come to Harvard, from all over the country, for the summer, before attending other universities. As they

walk along these hallowed paths, they giggle and flirt in their pressed, bright, pastel-cotton sundresses. Their heads are full of the amorous escapades that wait this summer.

Connie is only fifteen. She is checking her ponytail in the window and tugs at the high waist of her turquoise toreador pants. Her mother clicks her tongue.

"Connie. I wish you hadn't worn those things. A skirt would be more respectable." Connie is very aware of the men, only inches away, as she turns around. She is envious of her sister Beth who gets to stay here.

"I want to come here too. Beth is so lucky." They came on the train. Beth's family, Jewish jewelers, are fifth-generation Philadelphians.

Lucky Beth is almost eighteen. Her brown, curly hair frames her laughing, dimpled face, and her pert nose, a natural. She needed no nose job. Dark, twinkling eyes send signals of a passionate sensuality pounding at the doors to be released.

Elliot spots Beth the first hour she is in Cambridge. Elliot is alert to her possibilities. He is an expert in captivating and pleasing women. Her firm, curving body, lightly dressed is a big turn on, sending chills through him. He believes in fate. He also believes in action. Elliot follows the family group.

The well-maintained beauty of Harvard fascinates Beth's father Ben Gentle. "They certainly keep this place in great shape. No small task. Upkeep on these old buildings costs a fortune. I'm impressed. Everything is freshly painted." The long, four-story brick buildings were designed to house students in an elite setting.

Elliot sees Beth enter Wigglesworth Hall, ahead of her family. They embrace in a ritual manner, hugging and kissing, waving goodbye. Beth stands on the pale granite steps, just inside the twelve-foot tall, iron spear tipped, gates.

Beth is so glad they are gone. Now she can have a taste of the freedom she'd craved. She doesn't see herself clearly. Who does at that tender age? She longs to look like Joan Baez. Nothing about her is like the singing

star. She's much more eager and sexual than the cool, controlled, gypsy tease of Joan.

Elliot waits across the street. He sits on the low brick wall, reading the paper and watching. He knows how these luscious, young things react. It is not his first hunt. In less than an hour, she emerges from her grove, passing through the forbidden gates and into the public way. She feels exhilarated.

Elliot folds his newspaper and strolls, about twelve feet behind her, up the uneven brick sidewalk. Beth walks toward the Harvard Coop. Her cool, handmade leather sandals make a slapping sound. She is window-shopping, stopping to inspect the international offerings. Elliot likes this. It means she has free flowing cash. Elliot stops in front of the window too. He knows this is it. He has to leap now or another man will capture this pretty thing in no time. If he hesitates, he will never touch that golden skin. He laughs and makes a wisecrack about "worth the wiggle". Beth laughs too. Success. A laugh is as good as you can do in a first encounter with the game.

Elliot is not a boy. He is thirty years old. He has grown up in Cambridge...in foster homes. He is clever and possesses a vast, encyclopedic knowledge about Cambridge and Boston. Elliot is hungry for the kind of warmth Beth's eyes promise to any man who is willing to overlook the fact she is not Joan Baez. They walk off together. Elliot charms Beth as surely as if he played a forked flute.

He calls her Wiggles. He enchants her with funny little tales that are common knowledge to the townies. They eat ice cream cones as they sit on the unused, steep steps in front of the medieval Lampoon tower. The conical roof, clever placement of the bright-colored door and high, round windows complete the likeness of a clown. It is oddly tasteful, nearly gothic, but comical simultaneously. It is the original office of the Harvard Lampoon magazine he points out. There could be no more light-hearted, friendly place to tell funny stories and lick ice cream cones. Both cast the nets of seduction into the twilight.

Elliot knows every cozy spot where couples could couple in the Charles River basin. He and Beth enjoy the

delights of a June night at Harvard. Beth makes it back to her dorm just minutes before curfew.

Whatever her parents had spent, a small fortune, for her to study that summer is wasted. Her summer program is being taught by Elliot. She is a quick study at Harvard night school.

Elliot brings her to the Gardiner Palace. He tells the story of Isabella better than the guide. Isabella was inspired by Venice to build on the swampy outskirts of Boston. This unused wetland was, for the heiress, a rebellion against Brahmin snobbery. The great Harvard scholar Berenson, who gathered most of the Venetian palace's collection, is nowadays suspected, Elliot observes, as a thief, or at least a fence, on a grand scale. His academic, elite mask is his only protection beyond the greed of those who would reveal the true provenance of these treasures. The entire population is complicit, as often is the case, with communities where great pirates heap their hoard. The extreme beauty of the Palace is its protection.

They stroll the Fenway. The Fen is a natural swampy area transformed into a jewel in the Emerald necklace--a connected string of parks that ring Boston, by the great designer Olmstead Law. Elliot points this out as though it is his own vast estate. After admiring the roses in the twilight, and the Chinese bell, as night moves in, Elliot brings her to his phragmites hide away.

The invasive, giant reeds that line the Fens are carved into hallways and rooms by creative privacy seekers. The floor is dry, even in the marshy mud. The crushed reeds weave a clean surface. They make love in the reeds, and again, in the thick, wide-oak arms of Mother and Father, the trees that Elliot named and reveres. These trees are a sacred grove to him. Elliot is quite the professor of classics. Boston has become Arcadia. They enjoy such delights together that they wed at the Universalist church in Back Bay. She is a bride in August, just as Beth turns eighteen in late July.

Her parents are stunned. They learn via telephone, that Beth is now a married woman. Her Harvard days over. Her mother groans, "they hadn't even begun." Beth skipped

out on every boring class, all summer, to learn about real life from professor Elliot in the Classics Department, down by the river.

Cambridge cronies think that Elliot is really lucky. Not only is she always ready for sex, she is fun, and best of all, rich.

Beth's mother Barbara, wears her mental Demeter mask, with Ben as driver. They race up to Cambridge to rescue Beth. "An annulment, that's the answer. That beast is going to ruin her life."

No rescue is going to happen. It is too late. She has, as did the young Persephone, Goddess of spring, when trapped in Hades, eaten three pomegranate seeds. Beth is happily ensconced in the classic, yellow, clapboard, Greek revival cottage on Athens Street. She is pregnant.

Scandalized, Barbara hates Elliot. She sees him as a low life, a fortune hunter. She has harbored bigger dreams for Beth. Barbara always criticizes Beth for giving into her provincial appetites. Barbara is a sophisticated woman and discipline is vital, she believes. She always watches what she eats, with an occasional chocolate X-Lax. She is very trim and her hair is always styled and sprayed. She married Ben Gentle, a nice, sweet, plump, rich, jeweler had his two plump daughters. She knows, you marry for wealth. What she does with her friend Fortunato, known as Lucky, is her own business, she reminds Beth, when Beth lashes out.

"I never wanted the life you live Mother! You lie and cheat. I hate it. I want my real love to be my husband. I married the man I want to fuck. You fuck over the man you married."

Ben has left. He stands on the brick walk, closes his eyes, and hums his joyful Mozart. Barbara, her face crimson, turns to Elliot, "I understand you have pretended to love my daughter. She believes you. I don't. I know what you really want. You should believe me. You won't get a penny of her inheritance. I can stop it and I will. You are very much mistaken if you think you will ever win against me." Elliot's eyes meet Barbara's. He has won, for the moment. She will bide her time. She calculates, "this won't last six months. It's just a youthful folly."

Elliot has lots of male friends. Most of his friends have wives and they all live in the vicinity of the Square. Some of Elliot's friends are artists or poets and Young Socialists. Everybody smokes grass whenever they can, which is not too often. This is Cambridge not New York. Most everybody sleeps with everybody.

Tim is a longtime friend. He always is hanging around the house on Athens Street. He is pale. His is translucent complexion frighteningly delicate. He has masses of bushy palest-blond hair. His skin is like the aftermath of a disaster...a cloud of steam and smoke. Tim is not handsome. He looks like a fading ghost made of ectoplasm.

Elliot explains, "Tim is an unhappy person. His father is a big shot at the Divinity School, Head of the National Alliance of Churches. Tim can't take the scrutiny. He knows his Father hates him. He's a junkie, the worst kind, a morphine addict." He adds, "s person has to have good connections with docs to be strung out on morphine. Tim's got very good connections."

Tim is, hopelessly, carrying a torch for Ellen. This cool academic has a habit too, Elliot. She's had an ongoing Wednesday affair with Elliot for years and years. The affair didn't stop with the wedding. Why would it? Aren't mistresses a necessary evil? Every civilized man has a mistress. A wife is a very great office to hold, but a mistress, well, she is basic to happiness.

Tim is usually slumped in a corner of the parlor, nodding-out while everyone else eats spaghetti, drinks cheap wine, and smokes pot.

Besides the strangler, the big news in Boston is from the Museum of Fine Arts, out on the Fenway, just around the corner from the Gardner Palace- actually in the strangler's neighborhood. The "art theft of the century", it is called.

The Greek Earring had been stolen during regular museum hours...right in front of their noses. This was a really fabulous earring, all pure, ancient gold. It is a realistic miniature of a chariot with two horses pulling it. The goddess Nike stands in the chariot, her wings spread. It is considered the best example of goldsmithing from the Golden Age of Greece. The earring

is perfect in every detail--even the wheels on the chariot are said to turn. The whole thing, Goddess of Victory and chariot, horses, is less than two inches high.

As the mountain red wine flows in the parlor, and the spaghetti is piled into the bowl, and the sauce is poured, Beth and the other wives arrange the dinner.

"As a woman, why is it that everyone always loses only one earring?" This single piece is worth immeasurable amounts of money. Where is the other one? Lost at some fabulous, wine drenched feast in the second century B.C. A courtesan must have worn it, as no Greek wife could wear this elaborate ornament. "Oh no, my earring fell into that crevice! Can you reach it? Can you imagine the panic?" Beth stacks the plates. She tosses the salad.

Elliot sets aside his jelly glass, empty now. He picks up the glossy, large magazine and reads, "this is Boston's news. The Museum of Fine Arts posts a huge reward for the recovery of this wonderful possession. There is a double-page, color photograph of the earring, right here. This week in *LIFE* magazine, look at that, a huge center photograph of an earring!" The whole world is absorbed and fascinated by the dramatic theft of this extraordinary object. "The thief brought a simple screwdriver and wrench into the classical section of the Museum. He simply dismantled the glass case. Where once the golden earring had been suspended against blue velvet, it is now empty. This wing of the massive building is so quiet and out of fashion these days. Besides, all these enormous marble statues and memorials are the majority of exhibitions. Who could steal anything? There was only occasional walk-throughs of semi-sleepwalking guards. Someone had measured the case, observed routine surveillance, and just walked out the door with the tiny treasure. There were no electronic devices to alarm the staff." Elliot has a note of respect in his voice. His friends agree; it is a daring theft.

Over the ubiquitous spaghetti, Elliot explains, "the Greeks are really pissed off, for good reason. All

the best loot from Greece sits in London, Paris, New York, and Berlin. They were ripped off and they want it back. Years ago, it was put out, into the underworld, that should a person show up in Greece with a treasure, one would be given the price of the piece and asylum, permanently. I guess an earring is perfect, if one never wants to see the USA again." He shrugs and takes a drink of mountain red. "It makes sense. To hell with the museums. Fuck them. If you steal from a thief, is it theft? Those museums all hang together, citing their rights as owners. Honor among thieves, indeed. They all protect each other. It was a big free for all... Napoleon, Lord Elgin. It was all state against imperial state, grabbing as much plunder as they could. It was a transparent trick to add the grandeur of the ancients to their own, rather recent, attempts to govern. Stealing the genius of the ancient civilizations to add to their claims of authority...pigs."

"Who would have the balls to take apart a case in the Museum...during museum hours with guards, visitors, milling around? It would take a lot of research. The habits of the Museum, the traffic patterns of the public. Either, one would be a genius or a lucky fool."

Elliot is coming home to Athens Street for a quick lunch, and a little loving, before he spends the afternoon with Ellen. The weather is ideal, warm with a light breeze. The neighborhood is so silent, he can hear the golden, dry crunch of wide maple leaves shattering as he crosses the old cement paving. Somewhere, someone is burning leaves. He pushes open the screen door. "I've got to change that out to the storm door." It's going to get chilly soon as Indian summer is over," he muses. "Beth you here?" No answer. "She must be in the Square," he explains to himself, as he crosses the old, cracking linoleum floor. He climbs the painted stairs to the bathroom to take a leak.

"Jesus Christ!" Shock and disbelief. He is panicked.

"Oh my fucking God! You fucking, crazy, son of a bitch!"

Tim lay in his white, claw-footed bathtub nude, covered in blood, with his penis cut off. It is laying on his thigh. The straight razor clutched in his blood-covered left hand.

Elliot runs to the phone. The ambulance comes along with the police. Elliott is holding the penis in a towel like a sacred relic. "Can you sew it back? Oh my God. Can you hurry?"

Elliot is taken to the police station. Voices sound far away. He sits in the wooden chair beside a desk. Of course, the uniformed police woman writes down everything he says. There is also a detective, who is not friendly, in his brusque interrogation. Elliot doesn't care. He's in shock, still. He can't believe what he has seen. All of his senses are untrustworthy.

"First, Elliot, I want you to know that we know you have been in trouble before. You have a record."

"A record...petty shit...when I was a kid. That stuff is supposed to be sealed." Elliot's heart is pounding.

"When something like this happens, the seals are opened Elliot. So, you found Mr.Gosling in the bathroom. Describe his condition when you found him."

"How long was he in this condition? Take a guess. You must have some idea."

"Was anyone else in the house?"

"When did your wife leave the house?"

"Where were you just prior to your return home?"

"Are there any witnesses to your whereabouts this morning?"

"How long were you home before you found him?"

"Are you sure you had nothing to do with this?"

"How long have you known Mr. Gosling?"

"Did he have a key?"

"How did he get into your house? You do not think it is strange to leave doors unlocked? Why would your wife do that?"

"We know you are not innocent, you never were."

"Why would he do this?"

"Why would he choose your bathroom to castrate himself...if, that is indeed, what happened?"

"Do you want to see him castrated?"

"Did you do this to him?"

"Why you? Why did he choose you to find him? Why here?"

"Did you expect to meet him here? Had you arranged a meeting?"

"Have you two had a disagreement?"

In the hospital Tim is sewn up. His missing parts would remain missing but the plumbing is surgically dealt with. During this surgery Tim made some strange comments about his injury. He was under the influence of the anesthesia. The surgeon reported this to the authorities. The police ordered sodium pentothal to be administered...truth serum.

The police have harbored their suspicions about the nature of Tim's accident. There was something fishy about this story. Elliot just looks like a felonious man with thick, dark hair, low hairline, bushy eyebrows with darting eyes that saw too much, strong jaw that always needed a shave...fishy. Also, he was defiant. They know him.

Tim's family wants to find who was actually responsible. They resent the public shame this horror has brought to their family. Being an influential Harvard professor certainly helps. The enquiry was extended. An ordinary crime inspection would have been closed by now.

While under the influence of the drug, Tim starts talking with the detectives witnessing. He isn't talking about his self-castration but his museum thefts. He says things that implicate others in his heists.

"I took the Corot." The Cambridge police have no information about a missing Corot painting. "Nobody appreciated it. It wasn't even reported in the papers."

"Tim, what do you mean?"

"I mean, nobody really loved it...nobody cared or ever looked at it."

"Tim, where did you get this unloved painting?"

"The Museum of Fine Arts."

"Tim, did you sell the painting?"

"No, no, I gave it to my friend."

"Who's your friend, Tim?"

"I don't want to tell you. She might get mad at me."

"You gotta' tell us...we'll find out. You know that, right? Now, things will go much better for your girlfriend if you just tell us."

"I took the exquisite little Corot; the still life. I gave it to Ellen. I wanted to give her something really good."

"Tim. What's Ellen's last name?"

"Newsome. Ellen Newsome at 44 Arrow Street, top floor."

"Thank you Tim. This will make things much better for everybody." The policewoman, who is writing everything down, nods to the other policeman who is standing by the door. He opens the door and slides out soundlessly.

"That's good Tim. Did you give Ellen any other presents?"

"No. No more presents. She's an ungrateful bitch! I really loved her but she refuses me. She only screws Elliot. He doesn't love her...not like I do. I fucking hate him."

"Did you give Elliot anything? You used to trust him, right? He was your best friend. Did he keep anything for you?"

"I know what you want me to say. I can't tell you. Elliot will beat me up."

"Tim. Trust me. You don't have to be afraid of Elliot ever again. Elliot isn't going to get close to you. Believe me. If he has any thing to do with this, he's not going to be close to anybody for a long time."

Beth and Elliot are sitting in the kitchen with Liza, their six-month old baby, when the police show up. They have a search warrant.

"If you think, they rip your place up when they think you have pot, you should see what they do when they think you have the most valuable piece of missing art in the world in your house." Beth told Justine the next day.

"They opened every container of food, all the canisters, and emptied them out in the sink. They tore apart the stove. They removed all the woodwork around windows. They took apart the TV. They ripped up all our

books. They cut our mattress open and our pillows. Clothes are ruined, slashed. Everything is ripped open. They even took apart the refrigerator...not just the food but the door and motor." She was crying.

"Even Liza's things...nothing is sacred...her toys and baby powder." Beth looks desperate and sad. They sit in the Waldorf drinking coffee. Liza is in her stroller sleeping with bright pink cheeks and a runny nose.

"What happened with the painting? My curiosity is killing me." Justine is transfixed by the tragic story. They had a pretty good marriage, she thought.

"Ellen. I hate that bitch. She's so duplicitous and aloof. The FBI, the Boston Police, The Cambridge Police, all descended on her. She was, it seems, or she would like everyone to believe, completely unaware that she was in possession of this valuable painting. She said Tim gave her this kind of boring still life. She looked at the signature and it said Corot but who ever saw a still life by Corot? He's a Barbizon painter. He painted landscapes. She thought it was a fake, of course. Who hands you a painting worth hundreds of thousands of dollars...even if a man is dying to make love to you?" Beth wipes the baby's nose, then her own eyes full of tears, then wipes her nose as she goes on. "Eventually, Ellen remembered the painting. It was in the trunk of her VW bug, under her laundry basket."

"Of course, the cops believed her. They all fell for her too. Men are powerless in her presence. She's like a witch or something. Men have no power in her presence. It's so weird...she's mesmerizing. They all think they might get into her pants too. Dream on!"

Beth looks into her coffee cup as she speaks. "Things are going really badly with Elliot and me. There is a team of FBI agents, who sit in our house twenty-four hours a day. They watch everything we do. My mother wants me to come back to Philadelphia. I can't go, even if I wanted to. The police wouldn't let me leave town. See that guy over there? That guy in the drip-dry suit and skinny tie? He's one of them. I want to kill Elliot for screwing Ellen and hanging around nuts like Tim...for getting us into this mess. I can't say a word. I can't even write a note

that's private. The cops know it too. They know that I want to scratch his eyes out, take the baby and leave. They take great glee watching us squirm under their heel." She is staring into space. "Elliott lost his job at Cambridge Sound. So, on top of everything else, we are broke."

She is proving to be a lot tougher than any one would have guessed two years ago, when she first walked through the Square.

A lot of their friends have abandoned them. There are no more jolly spaghetti dinners. No one wants to hang out with FBI agents watching every move. Beth feels very isolated. Liza is eighteen months and asserting her power. Beth feels like she's almost drowning in this nightmare. She can't blame the baby. Liza is the only normal thing in Beth's life. Liza is having fun ripping pages from newspapers and pushing them around the kitchen in the empty cardboard boxes that are stacked, or were stacked, beside the screen door.

Beth sits at the kitchen table thumbing through a recent magazine, with stacks of magazines and newspapers piled neatly on the kitchen chairs. Beth works at home for a clipping service. She cuts out every reference in these publications to Andy Warhol's Brillo Boxes. The publicist sends her boxes of newspapers and magazines, from all around the world, and Beth scans them for "Andy Warhol" references.

Once again, elm leaves are gold and the maples are scarlet in the smoke-scented air on Athens Street when the news breaks. The little brown radio announces, "the Greek earring has been found." Beth looks up at the FBI agent "Yep. It's over, they found it."

He sits, legs crossed, flashes his Zippo, looks into the curling plume of smoke, slowly enjoying a cigarette. He never apologizes. Neither Beth nor Elliot smoke tobacco. Their eyes meet. He rises, leans closer to the radio, he smiles, walks to the door, replaces his hat, winks at Beth and leaves.

Elliot comes home. He lifts Beth into the air and kisses her angry face. He bends down and kisses Liza, after wiping her nose.

"An archeological class from Boston University found the earring. It was buried, not awfully distant from the museum in the Fenway, in a Campbell's soup can...how Andy," Beth tells her mother. Her mother is thrilled that now Beth and Liza can come to Philadelphia.

The following week, the Museum puts on a huge show of thanks to the FBI. The earring is displayed in the lobby of the museum, far from the lower level's distant wing, where it had hung unvisited for so long. The FBI agent who had lived with Beth and Elliot is standing beside the new glass case where the earring is now displayed against Holbein-green velvet. The earring is now, the belle of the ball. Thousands of visitors are now informed of the storied adventures of the fabulous golden trinket. They admire, indeed worship, the tiny Nike, Goddess of Victory. The chief agent who had lived with Beth and Elliot for three months stands guard, a different post now. He always believed that Elliot was a sex freak and guilty as sin. In fact, many of the men in the Waldorf cafeteria still believe Elliot was somehow guilty.

"Maybe he's the strangler? Him or Tim...maybe they work together."

"Nobody. I mean nobody, knows those Symphony Road alleys and fire escapes better than that junkie."

Justine, on her way home from work, at the Museum School, walks down Huntington Avenue, past the fabulous equestrian statue, *Appeal to the Great Spirit* by Dallin. The Sioux Chief sits astride his horse arms spread wide and his heart open to heaven. She always pauses, in honor of her ancestors, for a moment.

Justine spots Elliot, dressed in a slim, Italian-style, dark gray suit, a silk tie, and a fashionably narrow brimmed hat, balancing on his abundant Brylcreemed dark hair. He is tripping lightly down the wide, shallow, steps of the Museum in his freshly shined shoes. The gigantic Doric columns supporting the portico, frame him. He waves.

"I just went in to see it...the fucking Greek earring. Wow! It is really great. Have you seen it?"

"Yes. I love that little thing, but I'm not going in there today; too many people. I hate the public. When I

look at art, I like to be alone. I'll see it again, when they return it to its gallery and everyone forgets about all this, in a more secure case I hope." Justine touches Elliot's hand lightly. "I'm so glad this is over for you and Beth. It is so crazy. Tim certainly has good taste. The earring would have done it for him...if he were not totally insane. No one would ever believe it if you made it up. More evidence that truth is stranger than fiction. No one could invent this story."

Elliot smiles broadly. "The FBI agent, the bastard who bugged us for months, he's guarding the earring in there. Taking bows like a prima-donna. He's standing next to the case. I had to go and rub it in. I told you I didn't take it. Dig it, you fink."