

**Bedtime Stories for Grown-Up Girls**  
**A Novel by Ethel Gordon**

**Part One: Now and Then**

**Chapter 2: Art Deco**

**...and Then:** May 1982, Boston, Massachusetts.

*The Board of Directors of Taylord Mills  
invites you  
to a gala fundraiser in honor of  
Robert H. Bretton  
in his quest for nomination as Republican Candidate  
for US Senator from Massachusetts.  
The Cabot Center for the Performing Arts,  
7:00 in the evening, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1982.  
Performances by The New England Ballet,  
The Cambridge Conservatory Orchestra, and The  
Newbury Cantata Singers.*

When Lillian and Mark Kupersmith, married for five years and the exhausted parents of David and Jonathan, born 18 months apart, arrived downtown at the Cabot Center for the Performing Arts, 20 minutes after leaving their barely gentrified four bedroom Victorian in Newton Corner, they were ready for an evening of Tchaikovsky presented in a guest performance by The New England Ballet. Despite the bizarre disappearance of her grandfather and a sizeable inheritance, Lillian was determined to relax. Two glasses of scotch helped. So did being able to fit into the one and only long dress she owned. It was black and showed a lot of cleavage, which she still had because Jonathan was just weaned. Lillian was exhausted from three years of pregnancy, nursing, toilet training, house hunting, daycare searching, ear infections, and the frantic pace of the hotshot advertising agency where she was barely hanging on to her job.

Plus, her water phobias were getting worse; she could barely cross a bridge without her heart jumping into her throat -- a dangerous place for a heart to be when the throat begins to dry-heave. It wasn't easy living in a city on a major east coast harbor with two rivers running through it if you refuse to cross a bridge, and Lillian routinely spent an extra 45 minutes every day going out of her way to avoid water. Ridiculous, she

told herself often enough. Especially if you consider that she once spent 18 months working on a cruise ship right after college and loved it. At that time and long after she prided herself on never getting seasick, being able to hit the midnight buffet and snarf down three desserts even when the ship was rolling so badly that the table had to be strapped down so it wouldn't pitch itself right out the upper deck's dining room windows.

Back then she roamed witless like some Shakespearean fool between Hong Kong and London through the Panama Canal, up and down the Alaskan Inside Passage, along the hypotenuse of the Bermuda triangle: back then the world was wide. Now she could barely get from Newton to Cambridge without detouring through Watertown or Waltham where the Charles River was narrow enough so that she could cross a bridge with her eyes closed. But not when the kids were in the car. She wasn't that far gone. Yet. But far enough gone to have dropped a fair amount of money she didn't have on a hypnotist who proved useless, and had borrowed even more against her imminent inheritance in order to start her own business.

Now the inheritance was gone, tied up in the mess that her ferociously eccentric and wealthy grandfather had left behind in competing claims on his estate, and Lillian had debts to repay quickly to a bank she suspected wasn't really a bank. Maybe a front for a bank, she told herself. Although the location in the North End, Boston's Little Italy, while charming and filled with window displays of cannoli, was also filled with large guys named Vinnie and big Mannie Manfredo, the latter with hands the size of small hams. Lillian had not mentioned the Italian connection to her husband as the source of the \$100,000 loan to launch the fledgling Baby Grand Company with her new partner Cydney Mallone. And Mark, about to become partner in his law firm did not need to know anything about his wife's involvement with loan sharks. She wasn't that stupid.

When they arrived at the recently refurbished Cabot Center, the magnificent lobby was packed. The senior partners at BYO Advertising, where Lillian was an account executive, were thrilled that they had sold out the 1,500-seat house for their client, Taylord Mills and its CEO, Robert Bretton, as a political fund-raiser. It was unusual for the arts, business, and social worlds to come together behind a virtually unknown political candidate -- especially a Republican candidate in the land of Kennedy -- and had Lillian been able to see past her own problems she would have been far more enthusiastic about finally meeting the elusive Mr. Bretton after the performance.

"What do you call someone who's running for Senator?" she asked Mark as they settled into their red velvet seats. The orchestra was tuning up, sounding like an autistic child humming to itself. "I don't want to make a faux pas."

"Just wave your boobs at him and gush. That's what these guys like. Don't shake his hand; he probably has to ice it down every night. Go for the eye contact and call him Senator. He'll love it."

"He may love it but his wife may not be too thrilled."

Mark rolled his eyes. "Have you seen his wife? Behind every successful man is a woman with big bucks and balls of steel. Only, in her case, she's a knockout to boot. Sort of that mid-sixties Jean Shrimpton look with the big gold hair, you know? And a little too much make-up..."

People on either side of them were putting fingers to pursed lips in exaggerated slow motion.

"Are they trying to tell us something?" Lillian whispered.

"Yes, we're the only loud-mouthed Jews in the whole place," Mark answered, just loud enough to be overheard. "So shut up and don't give us away."

Later -- after the performance and before dinner -- while cruising the crowds in the elaborate lobby and balconies, Lillian thought this was entirely possible: It looked like WASP mating season -- a blonde hair on black velvet stampede. Groups formed around grand matrons with steel-wool hair and steel-blue eyes calling to each other in crow voices, dragging behind them heavily accented, hand-kissing friends just in from London and Paris. The daughters of the grand matrons, marriageable women in their 20s who had once been little girls in tutus with fat, dimpled knees, were all dressed up in black taffeta and white diamonds. They were escorted by proper Bostonians in black tie, with a smattering of academic types in patch-elbowed jackets and threadbare corduroy. These sons and daughters of money and local power draped themselves over marble balconies and white lined café tables, plastic champagne glasses held aloft; eyeing one another over crystal vases filled with roses and waving gaily.

Lillian almost tripped over Marcie, a secretary from BYO Advertising, wearing a silver nylon flight suit with about 20 zippers, many of them unzipped, and matching spike heels. Her hair was moussed into a pile of what looked like Styrofoam on top of her head.

"Have you seen him?" Marcie asked Lillian, grabbing her wrist.

"Seen who?"

"Robert Bretton!" she said, almost panting.

"No. Actually I'm trying to find Mark. He must have gone to the men's..."

"He's gorgeous!" Marcie squealed, shuddering visibly. "The posters don't even begin to do him justice..."

But Lillian did not hear her because coming down the grand staircase to polite -- even enthusiastic -- applause was Robert Bretton, beaming, in a navy blue Italian silk suit, fresh from a half hour in a tanning booth which set off his bright blue eyes and very white teeth against his dark skin and just graying black hair. He seemed quite reserved for a politician, even shy, as he nodded gently to well wishers, and raised two fingers in a half salute to recognized faces in the crowd.

"Well, I don't know that he's gorgeous," Lillian began, startled that he looked very familiar. Where had she seen him before? "I didn't expect him to be so short..." and then she almost choked on her own saliva at the sight that followed.

Marjorie Bretton accompanied her husband at a distance of several yards, walking with regal bearing in his wake. Like her consort, Marjorie was in her early and very well preserved forties. They were the same height, which may have been why she walked

behind him, so as not to overwhelm with high heels and hair spun up in a golden beehive. Marjorie beamed at the crowd, as though she were the candidate, extending an elbow-length gray kid-gloved hand to various patrons. She had a dazzling smile with perfect white teeth (which must have been bleached), and large eyes that turned down slightly at the outer edges, giving her a sorrowful -- even mystical -- look. The look was reinforced by unnaturally dark eyebrows that were, in fact, tattoos.

As she strolled triumphantly through the freshly painted gold-leaf columns to appreciative murmurs and a smattering of applause, small explosions of light flared up from the cluster of jewels at her long neck, made longer by an off the shoulder gray satin number with plunging décolleté. From a distance, they made a handsome couple, which was exactly what people were turning to each other at that moment and saying:

*Don't they make a handsome couple?*

*I'm told she's very bright.*

*Really? I understand she's quite wealthy.*

*Well, he could do worse -- beauty, brains and money.*

Such was the murmur through the crowd until Lillian let forth a shriek that could have parted the waters.

"MY BIRDS!!!"

As if on cue, everyone looked up to search the ceiling painted with puffy white clouds and trumpeting cherubs against a blue and gold background.

No birds.

The birds in question nestled at Marjorie Bretton's throat, part of a rare set of Art Deco jewels including three lifelike ruby and baroque pearl hummingbirds shimmering amongst emerald-encrusted inlaid flowers and cloisonné leaves. The necklace had long ago graced the cover of *Vanity Fair*, in March 1933, and was a prized possession of Lillian's recently deceased grandmother, Lady Alice Kuper, wife of a British Baronet and from whose safe deposit box the priceless necklace with matching earrings (and Lillian's sole inheritance) had mysteriously disappeared.

"How did you get them?" Lillian demanded, pushing her way to the front of the crowd and reaching for the necklace at Marjorie's bejeweled throat. A stocky man in a dark suit jumped in between, ready to tackle Lillian if she got any closer. Just then Mark's head burst through a cluster of graying women who were assembled in sensible shoes and thin, determined lips. He elbowed his way furiously through them like a marathoner in the home stretch until he reached his wife's side. Lillian, who was at least 5'11" in heels, looked like she was having an out-of-body experience. She stood stock still with her head thrust out, hands clutching her throat, eyes bulging.

The crowd hushed for half a second and then broke into a babble of low-level concern.

*My goodness!*

*What's going on?  
Who is that person?  
What's her problem?*

Robert Bretton had circled back several feet to stand between Marjorie and Lillian with a look of detached amusement that actually masked a good deal of fear. Lunatics on the campaign trail were not something he had anticipated. In the meantime, Lillian had managed to regain some of her composure. She took a deep breath.

"I believe, Mrs. Bretton, that you are wearing a piece of family jewelry of some sentimental and monetary value. Perhaps you are unaware of its origins, but it's stolen."

Marjorie gestured vaguely to her throat as though waving a chiffon scarf of minimal importance. "Oh, surely there's been some mistake," she oozed in her most seductive voice, looking around with affected helplessness.

"Perhaps we should talk about this privately," Robert interrupted, taking his wife by the elbow and leaning sympathetically toward Lillian.

"I'd be happy to, Mr...uh...Senator Bretton, because I'm sure we both want to clear up this matter before Interpol is alerted that my necklace has been found." Lillian said in a voice subdued enough to suggest that she was deliberately lowering the volume.

Robert turned around to stare at his wife's neck as though he had never seen it before. "Interpol...? I can't imagine what you're talking about." Suddenly, he appeared to be visibly startled, even angry.

"There's obviously been a mistake." Marjorie said in a voice as chiseled and precise as the diamonds that twinkled at her throat. But beneath the polish, it seemed to Lillian that husband and wife glared at one another with barely concealed rage. Lillian and Mark exchanged glances.

The four of them were at a complete standstill, brittle smiles stretching their faces, when a frantic young man in navy bowtie with blond hair falling in his eyes appeared at Robert's shoulder and whispered in his ear. Evidently, it was time to get the man of the hour to the head table and put this little embarrassment behind them.

"Well," Robert bowed slightly to Lillian, "as you can see we are very much here for the evening and I am completely at your service to assure that this matter is settled. Here is my card with my personal number; if we do not resolve this to your satisfaction tonight, by all means let us meet in my office tomorrow first thing." At that the bow-tied assistant pulled him firmly away, leaving Marjorie to fight her path past Lillian and through the crowd.

"I don't know how you got hold of that necklace Mrs. Bretton, but I intend to have it back before the evening is out."

"My husband is a man of his word, Miss...?"

"Kuper. Ms. Kupersmith, actually,"

"Yes, well, my husband will straighten this out. The necklace is on loan from one of his clients who happens to be a jeweler."

"Really?" Lillian brightened. "Which jeweler?"

"I believe the name is Tiffany's – have you heard of them? I'm sure you can take this up with Mr. Sidney in their estate department. Frankly," she fingered the hummingbirds, catching a nail on an enameled feather, "I think it's rather overdone -- ostentatious you might say-- and much too heavy to wear. Now if you'll excuse me, there are a great many people here who've paid a good deal of money to shake my husband's hand, and I really must get on with it." She turned abruptly and sashayed up to the head table where the hummingbirds with their rubied heads and cloisonné wings shimmered in the light of the chandeliers.

"Tiffany's!" Lillian wondered out loud, staring at the card Robert Bretton had given her. *President and CEO, Taylord Mills, Lawrell, Massachusetts*. She let out a long breath and collapsed against her husband. "Remember that, Mark. Mr. Sidney in the Estate Department. How the hell did Tiffany's get Lady Alice's necklace? Well, at least I know where it is; now it's just a matter of getting it off her neck. Oh God, I can't tell you what a relief this is!" Lillian felt dizzy and a little teary from the weight that was being lifted from her. Maybe the collateral for the \$100,000 loan from Hanover Savings and Loan, a.k.a. ham-fisted Manfredo, existed after all. She wiped her eyes on Mark's dark-suited shoulder until he handed her a tissue.

Lillian kept her sights glued to Marjorie's glittering collarbone all through the cream of carrot soup, endive salad, and chicken Kiev with new green peas. But when the lights came back up after the Corps de Ballet in harlequin black and white paraded through the lobby with trays of Baked Alaska ablaze, Lillian turned back to the head table and saw that Robert Bretton was sitting by himself. And no hummingbirds twinkled alongside.

She waited a long five minutes for Marjorie to return from what she assumed was the Ladies Room. How much make-up could one woman cram into her pores? Lillian was damned if she would continue working on the Bretton account after this evening even if it meant losing her job, if she hadn't already done so. No one from BYO Advertising had dared approach her since her little confrontation. They might as well fire her right then and there before she had a chance to rip the necklace off Marjorie's neck as soon as that woman slunk her silicone tits back into the banquet room.

Lillian felt herself slipping. The seconds on her fake Rolex collapsed into meltdown minutes. She stared hard at the watch and tried not to hyperventilate. Breathe fast? Pant? (No, that was childbirth). Breathe into a paper bag; that was it! She could just see herself calling over a waiter. *Pardon me, but could I have a paper bag big enough for my head?* So instead she concentrated on Robert Bretton's business card, turning it over repeatedly in her increasingly moist hands until it threatened to disintegrate. "That's long enough," Lillian said, standing up. "I'm going down to the bathroom after her, Secret Service or not."

But Marjorie was not in the bathroom, or indeed, within five miles of the Cabot Center for the Performing Arts. Instead she was in her Mercedes Coupe, driving at top speed up Route 93 toward Lawrell and casting furious spells at Cydney Mallone through

the magic wand of her new car phone. But one of the spells must have missed its mark because as Lillian sat paralyzed on the toilet in the basement of the Cabot Center, with her long black dress hiked up over her knees and mascara running down her face, she suddenly jumped up as though she had been stuck with a pin:

*Mr. Sidney at Tiffany's?*

"Cydney! Oh my God; you didn't!"

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