

Escaping
FATE



*Tracy
New*

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Escaping Fate

by

Mardee Lousie Prynne

It was a damp Sunday afternoon. I had put off studying for exams to go the main library at the end of the park. From there to the art museum a few yards along the parkway. I made it in time to find a seat for the free chamber music concert. The first half was to feature some twentieth century twelve tone music that was still radical and controversial. I had no idea what twelve tone meant nor what it would sound like. Classical music was new to me, something I discovered on my solitary rambling explorations of the city. It was also something that my family discouraged; they didn't want me going 'high hat' they said. "Just go into the family trade. You won't fit in with such people. They'll look down on you... If you must go to college learn to be an accountant or something useful so you can at least take care of the business... Forget all that art and music stuff Wasting your time... Ballet! Just for fags. Modern dance? Even worse, it's so crazy"

My family and I compromised when I finished high school. I was learning the business and planning to college at night while deciding how far I wanted to go with Gina, the bookkeeper in our office. That was two years ago and things hadn't changed much.

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Working in the family tile business wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be especially with Gina still sending signals that she's available. I was willing to answer her signals only so far. Not that she wasn't really sexy but I knew once we did the deed she would get a ringing in her ears in the form of wedding bells. Like most girls in our neighborhood she had a strong urge to get away from her parents, get out of their house. The only acceptable way to do that was to marry.

It was that afternoon I learned firsthand why so many people despised the twelve tone scale. A lengthy composition by Alvin Berg was on the program. I thought it was awful and a waste of time. I stuck it out but my annoyance must have shown. There was this one kid who was seated nearby who glanced at me with a tolerant smile. I felt a strange stirring each time our eyes met. I was studying the program, grateful that the second half would be early twentieth century music, music I fell in love with and that I could understand. For reasons I couldn't understand I was glad that the girl who smiled at me had returned to her seat as the intermission ended.

That made no sense to me. She was medium height, very slender, and small on top. Older than she appeared at first glance, she was at least a high school junior, maybe even a senior. Not too young for me considering I had just finished high school a few months earlier. Where was my sense? We came from different worlds. What would a kid like that want with a mug like me? Besides, she was the sort of girl that the women in my family would think has 'a condition,' their term for a chronic but non-fatal disease of any kind. Her hands were graceful, delicate even. No makeup nor did she need any. Bermuda shorts, knit polo shirt with what was probably a prep school emblem on the breast, saddle shoes over white ankle socks. A small watch fastened to her wrist by a narrow black suede band and a simple birthstone ring were all the jewelry she wore. Her hair, brown with auburn highlights, was cut short and parted on the left side with bangs that

swept across her forehead highlighting her cat green eyes. The back of her hair barely brushed her collar. This girl was clearly comfortable with all kinds of music including hyper-modern twelve tone. It shook my self-confidence but I had to admit that her smile meant my discomfort was amusing her.

She was definitely a class act who had every right to be snobby when confronted with a guy like me, a guy, who despite his pretentiousness, was going to spend his life in the family tile business. I couldn't explain to myself why I was taking such careful mental notes of everything about this little doll seeing how obvious it was that we came from different worlds. I wondered if I would use her as a yardstick against which to measure the gum chewing blue collar girls from my own neighborhood, girls whose academic aspirations were to be good enough to get into the steno pool somewhere or do the bookkeeping in a small business. It's not these girls couldn't be attractive or desirable nor was it a matter of not having money. Some of the local families did very well financially by working with their hands but they were complacent. Lacked imagination and so remained stuck their own narrow world.

It was weird in an other way that I found myself attracted to this skinny little snob when I had no more than a casual interest at all in Gina nor any other of the truly curvaceous neighborhood girls who would have done almost anything to go steady with me as a prelude to getting married to a nice guy who was going to come into a very good business. It occurred to me that it might not be such a bad thing at that. A good looking wife like Gina who would appreciate a husband with a steady income and give me everything I needed was not without a certain appeal. The problem was me; I had ruined things for myself by learning to appreciate and even need culture and the arts. The girls who wanted me weren't able to share that kind of stuff with me and the girls who could would sneer at me like this kid was doing. I felt I had made a fool of myself. Worst of all, my family's advice was turning out to be right.

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The concert over, I started to walk up the aisle when I felt a hand grasp my elbow.

I turned to see Miss Snob smiling up at me. “Hi, I’m not usually this forward but you seemed put off when I smiled at you. I guess you thought I was having a laugh at your expense. I wasn’t, not really. It’s just that I feel so vindicated when that kind of music puzzles people. It may be all clever and very new but art, all art including music must be accessible.” Heavy thinking, I noted to myself as she paused for breath. “I just want you to know that I wasn’t making fun of you.”

That stirring I felt and thought I pushed way was definitely back. I was at a loss for words. Even if Miss Snob had let me get a word in edgewise, I could think of nothing to say.

“Let me make it up to you by buying you a soda or a cup of coffee or something in the cafeteria...No, hey? I guess you have to get on with your day. Anyhow, I just wanted to say I’m sorry for acting like a jerk. You don’t have to say a word. That look on your face says your not interested in...”

“No, please. I really am interested. You weren’t a jerk at all. It’s just that I was kind of surprised that a really classy looking girl like you would even think of talking to someone like me. Anyhow, I’d love to have a cup of coffee with you but only if I treat. I was always taught that the gentleman treats the lady.”

“Maybe we should go Dutch. I’m not at all sure I qualify as a lady.”

“Come on. You’re a really swank kid. Why would you say you’re not a lady?”

“I’ve got my reasons.” Her voice had taken on a solemn tone as a fleeting look of sadness clouded her bright green eyes. “Just let it go for now. Okay?”

I didn’t think she really wanted me to answer. Maybe she went too far with some guy or else someone got too pushy and she felt bad because he said she was a cock teaser. She looked up at me as we slowly made our way along the crowded aisle toward

the exit to the museum galleries. The sadness cleared from her eyes as our fingers brushed. She pressed my hand in hers and let it fall. I was glad we were moving so slowly because I wanted the moment to last.

“By the way, my name is Maddie.”

“Really nice to know you Maddie. I’m Mitch. Say, is Maddie short for Madelyn?”

“Madison. It’s Mummy’s maiden name.”

We made our way down to the basement level cafeteria was located so that we had to passing through the gift shop on the way. Maddie stopped to look at some reproduction jewelry, particularly a bronze pendant. The figure was alluring but bizarre. It was a small female figure; a female with large breasts, rounded tummy and full hips. What made it so bizarre was the very obvious penis!

Maddie pointed at it through the case. “Fascinating, isn’t she? Her name’s Bast.”

“Well, different, anyhow,” I agreed. “Maybe even unique.”

“Do you really think so?”

“I don’t know. Suppose I do. It’s just that she’s too different from anything I’ve ever seen. I can’t even imagine such a girl with... a girl like that.” Somehow I couldn’t bring myself to say penis, let alone dick, in front of this very attractive girl.

“Don’t you know anything about myths?” She sounded almost accusatory. “Oh, I’m sorry. That came out wrong. Do you know anything about myths?”

“I’ve been trying to teach myself about the ancient Greek myths. Maybe I’ll move on to Roman stuff when I’m done with that.”

“Good. Then there’s hope for you.” Her voice was playful now. “There are other bodies of myth, though. Bast here is Egyptian.” She concluded her brief lecture by smiling at me. She squeezed my hand, and went back to looking at the little brass figure.

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I know I should have been annoyed at her superior attitude but I was finding it more than a little sexy. Then, as we kept looking at the image of Bast, a really weird thought came to me. Suppose there were girls with pricks; that would weird, weird but kind of interesting.

Maddie took a tray and handed it to me. After we selected a couple of pastries, she got a hot chocolate for herself and a coffee for me. She was too quick for me when we reached the cashier. Much to my annoyance she paid before I could pull out my wallet.

“I thought I was going to pay or we were going Dutch.”

“You said that. I didn’t, so there. Just sit down and let’s enjoy our chat.”

And enjoy it we did. Her voice, surprisingly mellow for a girl so young and petite, had a musical lilt to it. Maddie had this marvelous way of tilting her head as smiled. A tingle went through me every time she reached across the table and touched my hand with her finger tips. What was perturbing was that she would suddenly pull her fingers away as if she had touched something that was hot, so hot that it burned her.

We stopped in the lobby so Maddie could get her coat and bag from the check room. I held the coat for her as she slipped it on. It was on off white, plaid lined rain coat that was just so in with prep school and ivy league types back in the fifties. She had a bag that she referred to as her dance bag.

“I had class before I came here...” She blanched as she stopped speaking. I turned to look over my shoulder and saw a large neatly dressed man. There was something really tough, even menacing about this guy. Was the hard guy look he projected what upset her or was there more to it than that?

I turned back to Maddie, took her arm and leaned close to her as I spoke. “I’m seeing you home. That is I’d like to see you home.”

“Mitch, you don’t have to. I can take care of myself. There’s really nothing to be concerned about.”

“Look, I know we’ll probably never see each other again ‘cause we come from different worlds and a really swell kid like you doesn’t need a mug like me. It’s just that I won’t feel right if I didn’t see you home. And don’t tell me otherwise, but that big guy over there, you know something about him and it isn’t anything good.”

“Okay, Mitch. You’re right. Promise me one thing though. If I let you see me home, I want you to promise to stop selling yourself short.”

“Okay but tell me one thing. Did you know that hard looking man in there?”

“Oh, him. I didn’t realize it showed on my face. He just reminded me of someone I once knew.”

That ended any illusion about me being gallant in seeing Maddie home. No reason to complain. My bad read of the incident motivated me enough that I would be spending a little more time with this classy little doll.

We exited the museum onto Eastern Parkway. The sun was starting to burn away the clouds. Maddie reached into her dance bag and took out a beret with a sewn on emblem that matched the one on her polo shirt. That made it clear she did go to some kind of private school.

“I’m sorry I can’t drive you home ‘cause my car’s in the shop.” I managed to say it but it came out with awkward hesitation.

“You must think I’m some sort of spoiled brat who can’t ride a bus or subway... Here hold this.” She thrust her dance bag and pocketbook into my hand. “Be a dear and hold that while I fix my laces.”

I watched as she knelt to retie her shoes. Her Bermudas pulled taught over her cutely curved tush to show me some panty

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lines. No curved seam of the gusset showed. Guess you can't win them all. Get real, Mitch, I told myself. Don't get too attracted to this little lady because she'll only hurt you.

"We can even walk to my house from here. It's not all that long. It'll give some more time to get to know each other but only if you feel up to it. It isn't exactly what you would call a short walk but then again, it isn't too long at all."

Her tone was both playful and challenging. I was about to accept her challenge despite my instinct telling me that the better we got to know each other, the more hurt I would be when it ended which, I was certain, would be pretty close to the start of what little would ever be between us. A moment later the rumble of thunder and a sudden wind made walking a foolish option.

"We're going to be soaked if we walk. I'll take a taxi home." She flagged down a passing taxi and was about to give me a good-bye kiss, so I hoped. Like the gentleman I was aspiring to be, I opened the door of the cab and she threw her dance bag onto the seat and turned to face me. I could just about taste that kiss when I felt her hand on the small of my back. It led me to expect more than a simple good-bye peck on the cheek. It turned out to be a bad assumption, at least for the moment. "Get in the cab...just get in, now."

Maddie's hand on my back half guided me, half pushed me into the cab.

"Just relax. You're not being kidnapped. There's no need for you to get soaked when I can drop you at any subway station. Why do you look so surprised?"

"I dunno. I can't figure you out. First of all a real classy girl like you even bothers to talk to a guy like me, let alone have coffee with me and pay for it on top of everything else. Next thing I know, I'm walking you home and now you say you care that I might get soaked. I just can't understand why an elegant girl like you..."

"Listen, Mitch," she interrupted. "You're good looking,

well spoken and attractive. I think it's wonderful that you're getting into the finer, more beautiful things of life on your own. It's just so neat to find a nice guy who is out to find the stuff that makes life special." She pressed my hand in hers before she continued. "And besides, maybe I'm not the girl you see me as. So don't try to figure me out just relax and enjoy the ride."

"Thanks for trying to make me feel better about myself... To be honest... Well, I thought you decided to take a cab because you had second thoughts about me walking you home"

Maddie threw herself into the corner of the cab and glared at me.

"Mitch, the only thing I might have given me second thoughts is how hurt you would feel if you were ever to realize how totally different I am from that 'classy young lady' you think you're seeing."

She paused as a wry smile crossed her features.

"Just for that, Mitch. I'm not dropping you anywhere. You are going to see me home."

I was dumbfounded as she smiled warmly at me. To my further surprise, Maddie put her foot on my lap. Her heavy saddle shoe didn't lessen the thrill as she provocatively stretched her leg.

"Mitch, I really meant what I said about you being hurt if I were to disillusion you. I'm really flattered that you find me so attractive and I'm really attracted to you, too. Don't say it. I can guess what you're thinking. We're from different worlds and opposites attract but it can never work out. You're probably right but that shouldn't stop us from ending our afternoon on a friendly, happy note. Let this be an afternoon we remember as a chance encounter that gave us a few pleasant memories?"

She swung her feet to the floor, slid closer to me, gave me a peck on the cheek and leaned against me. The cab wove its way through a warren of narrow, winding streets through the one of the older sections of town. I stared out the window at some of

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the older town houses that spoke of old money or at least of new money with taste. Some of the streets had a few businesses that seemed upscale even if they were as ordinary as groceries or pharmacies.

“A penny for your thoughts.” Maddie’s soft voice drew me out of my reverie.

“Nice neighborhood.”

“It has its points.”

The cab stopped in front of what once must have been a very regal townhouse but which had since been divided into apartments with commercial space on the ground and first floors.

“Be it ever so humble...” I began.

“Come off it, Mitch. That’s mean and it’s not worthy of a really nice boy like you.. That’s Mummy’s store,” her voice took on an air of pride. As she nodded toward the two shops on the ground level. I wasn’t sure which store she was referring to. One was a used book store and the other seemed to sell artifacts and antiques of different kinds. The two businesses on the first level were a dance supply store and something I couldn’t quite figure out. There were no large signs, just simple, discreet brass plaques.

The cab pulled away and left us lingering on the sidewalk. She entwined her fingers in mine as she faced me.

“At least come in the vestibule so we can say good-bye and stay dry. Or haven’t you noticed its still raining. Of course you can put off the inevitable by having some cold supper with us before you head home.”

I nodded although I was unsure what I meant to say by that simple gesture. I was positive that her use of the word ‘inevitable’ meant that she was brushing me off, that despite what she was saying about me she never wanted to see me again.

“Just remember, Mitch. It’s just for today. Something sweet we can both remember with no bitterness, no recriminations and no remorse.”

“Damn it, Maddie. Why do you keep thinking that this could get to be some big deal forever romance between us? Don’t tell me it’s not because you’re a really high class girl, a real lady and I’m just a blue collar slob...”

“Don’t tell me what I am. I’ve already told you that things aren’t always what they seem to be. Just believe me that you’d be really hurt if you got to know anything more about me. I think it would be better if you left now.”

I stared at Maddie waiting for something to happen.

“Just go, Mitch. If you must know, I’m sorry I ever smiled at you, sorry I ever struck up a conversation with you. It’s nothing you did, nothing you said, nothing about you at all. It’s about me so just go now and promise me you’ll never try to see me again.” She dropped her dance bag, put hand behind my head and pulled my face to hers as she kissed me. I wanted to get out of there, get away from this crazy bitch but I responded to her kiss as her tongue found its way into my mouth. My hands were on her butt as she wrapped her legs around me. Then, as if by mutual agreement, the kiss ended.

I glanced back at Maddie as I walked out the door. Tears were running down her cheeks.

The taxi pulled up in front of the house. “Hey, pal. Your lady friend forget her little hat.” I slipped him a buck for his trouble and looked at the emblem on the beret. Now I knew where she went to school. Not that it meant anything to me but the emblem had the name of the school and a town in Connecticut on it.

It had been one hell of an afternoon. I learned why twelve tone music was so controversial and I learned a lot else. One was how easy it is to be attracted to someone who’s totally wrong for you. The main lesson was that I was going to stick with my own kind of girl. Then why was I working so hard to memorize the name of the school Maddie attended and how to find that out of the way street on which she lived?

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It was time to find my way back to a subway station and begin the return ride out of this strange neighborhood with all its galleries and avant garde shops, back to a world where people understand who they are and don't play mystery games about not being what they obviously are and how you'd be hurt if you understood them and all that other stuff. Then I realized I was still holding Maddie's beret in my hand. I stopped in my tracks and all but started to run back to return her silly little hat before I thought better of it. I resumed my walk to the subway.

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My first stop after getting off the subway was a corner cigar store where I called Gina from the phone booth.

"Gina, it's me, Mitch."

"Yeah, like I might not recognize your voice."

"Wanna have dinner with me? Dinner tonight, I mean."

"That'll be swell but it's Sunday and you know what that means."

"Yeah, family dinner. Sorry to have bothered you."

"Say, how about we go for a walk and get a soda later."

"That'd be super. I'll come by for you."

"Oh, my cousin's here. Could Patsy come with us?"

Shit, I thought. It was those few painful hours with Maddie, fraught with promise but delivering only frustration had motivated me to make up for lost time with Gina. How the hell could I push myself to get something started with Gina if her cousin Patsy was tagging along.

"Mitch, make up your mind. Either we don't get together tonight or Patsy comes with us."

"Sure, Patsy can come with us. Why not?"

A couple of hours later I walked over to Gina's. She and the cutest kid were coming down the porch steps as I walked up.

It wasn't the same Patsy I remembered. That was a pain in the butt boy named Pasquale. (The diminutive for Pasquale is Passy but it is often shifted to the more American sounding Patsy.) No one seemed to notice that outside of the Italian neighborhoods of Boston and New York Patsy was a name usually reserved for girls.

Patsy was small with hazel eyes that contrasted with her dark hair. A swan like neck was emphasized by a French sailor shirt that was loosely draped over a narrow body. A hint of breasts pushed against the soft fabric. A wave of anxiety swept over me as I responded to this graceful sylph-like being. Patsy was adorable but there was something familiar about the kid and that disturbed me.

"Mitch, you remember my cousin Patsy... Got out of high school a year ago and finally found the right college." Gina wasn't too keen over the way I was looking at her little cousin.

"Really? Can't say I remember meeting her before."

Whatever I said brought a knowing grin to their faces. Gina was about to say something when Patsy nudged her. Whatever I said apparently touched on some sort of insider joke.

"Say, Mitch, I bet you thought I was just beginning high school or something. Everybody does." Patsy's voice was a velvet smooth alto that made the short hairs on the back of my neck stand up.

"Well..." I tried to avoid answering. "So where you gonna go to college?"

"It's a small school called 'Tiresias Academy.' Almost no one's ever heard of it; least no one I know, no one around here."

"Sounds kind of familiar. I know that name from somewhere."

Patsy gave me this look that was half smile, half smirk.

"The name I mean, not the school," I added by way of explanation.

I mulled over the name Tiresias in my mind. This is

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where, thought I, my poking around in *culture* was going to pay off. It took a minute but I finally remembered where I had come across the name.

“Sophocles, he was a Greek guy along time ago. He wrote this play I saw about a guy called Oedipus. He went to see a blind prophet named Tiresias who told about this weird stuff that was going to happen to him. Oedipus tries to beat fate by leaving his home town to get away from his father and mother but he doesn’t know that they’re not really his parents. He gets into a fight with these guys on the road. He kills them and but he doesn’t know one of the guys he kills is his real father. Later on he outwits a sphinx in this other city and as a reward he gets to marry the queen who’s his real mother.”

“Gross!” commented Gina. “Mitch, that is sick, really, really sick...”

“Gina, it may be sick; it may be gross but it’s a famous ancient Greek play.” Patsy cut off Gina in mid-sentence. “The point of the play is that Oedipus couldn’t escape his fate no matter what he did. Mitch, I think it’s swell that you know about that stuff. Most boys around here are such jerks when it comes to that kind of thing.”

We sat around on Gina’s back porch talking about all kinds of things. Gina kept trying to bring the conversation back to the Brooklyn Dodgers while Patsy and I discussed how Oedipus, despite trying to run away couldn’t escape his fate. Gina finally joined in.

“You see, Mitch, this ought to tell you that you can’t help taking over your father’s business. Maybe it’s about time you noticed there’s someone who thinks your fate and hers go together. Now just stop talking about that disgusting play. It’s making me feel sick.”

I’m sure lots of people don’t like plays about incest but Gina’s outburst seemed extreme.

Her shoulders heaved slightly as a sigh punctuated her

softly spoken declaration. The moonlit night glinted off the tears that rolled down her cheeks. May be she's right I thought to myself. Could be we are fated to be together but she might deserve better than me. Patsy smiled at me, walked to the back door, blew me a kiss and left me with Gina.

“Night, Patsy.” Gina smiled up at me. We didn't make eye-contact right off because I was busy watching Patys disappear down the back hall of Gina's house.