

A NEARLY PERFECT SUMMER

Travels Through Old-Money Newport

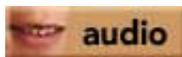
•Chapter Three

7.4.2000

Midsummer Nights

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It's eight o'clock on Saturday night, July 10, and women in evening gowns and men in tuxedos are streaming into Eileen Slocum's Bellevue Avenue residence. Eileen greets her guests in the front hall and introduces them to her granddaughter, her granddaughter's fiancé, and the fiancé's mother. I proceed down the receiving line and on through the drawing room onto the crowded south terrace, where I order champagne.



Eileen Slocum talks with G. Wayne Miller about conflicts created this season by too many parties, not enough time.

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Ruth Orthwein



Aeriel Frazer Eweson has accepted the invitation of her old friend Eileen, and I spot her sitting under the canopy. We chat for a few minutes and then I move along to a lovely older couple I met recently at Bailey's Beach. This older woman's daughter once was an actress, and we are discussing the difficulties of making it in Hollywood when a middle-aged man I've not met joins us. He acts pleasantly tipsy -- animated and eager for an audience. Hearing us discuss Hollywood, he feels compelled to confide that his mother, who would be in her 90s if alive, once told him that she had slept with both Douglas Fairbanks Sr. and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. We all laugh, nervously.



Lorraine McMurrey, whose son will marry Eileen Slocum's granddaughter later in the summer, at one time dated Ted Turner and is known in Houston for her lavish parties.

At nine o'clock, word ripples through the crowd that it's time to be seated. My wife and I recheck our place cards and confirm that we are indeed at different tables. Eileen personally determines the seating at all her dinner parties, sometimes laboring hours to get it just right -- and always observing the rule that spouses should never dine together, for spouses presumably know each other intimately and much of the adventure of a dinner party derives from new partners. Still, a good hostess must never be too presumptuous, and thus while Eileen endeavors to place a fresh face on one side of every guest, she also strives for a familiar (albeit unrelated) face on the other. "I try to put one they know very well on one side in case they haven't approved of my choice on the other side," Eileen explains. Nothing ruins a dinner party like cold-shouldered disinterest.

Parting company with my wife, I find my table in the main dining room, one of three rooms pressed into service for tonight's nearly 100 guests. I know neither of

**Hugh D.
Auchincloss III**

the women to my left and right -- but I recognize the man across from me: former Rhode Island Gov. Bruce Sundlun, a friend of Eileen's.



**Laurence
and Judy
Cutler**

Sundlun is absorbed with the ladies next to him, and so, as uniformed waitresses with Irish accents serve a cold cream soup and a waiter offers red or white wine, I introduce myself to the middle-aged woman on my left. Her name is Maureen Donnell and she arrived in Newport relatively recently, although she has long been a fixture in Palm Beach and Ohio, home of Marathon Oil Company, source of her husband's considerable wealth. Maureen is a terribly attractive woman, as Eileen would say -- a formidable conversationalist and hostess as well. Where other outsiders have floundered, Maureen has prospered not only because of her money but because she entertains so well.

To my other side is Louise Grosvenor, an equally attractive woman of about Maureen's age whose family and husband's family have much deeper roots in Newport and also ties to New York. Like Maureen, Louise is endowed with charm and wit, and before my wine glass requires refilling, I am deeply engaged in three-way conversation. For the three of us, at least, Eileen has created a bit of chemistry, which of course is why she labors so on her guest list and seating.



**Eleanor
Young**

Coming from the world of journalism, where the art of small talk is uncelebrated, I am surprised at how smoothly the evening progresses. My new companions listen raptly to stories of my journey so far through their shuttered world, and I in turn entice them to share something of themselves. I find myself laughing when appropriate and serving up witticisms that draw laughter in return. I make a mental note to write letters thanking Maureen and Louise for the pleasure of their company -- and soon enough, the tenderloin of beef with roasted vegetables has been served and eaten, our wine glasses have been refreshed several times, and we are admiring the peach chiffon.

Coffee has been served when we hear the tinkle of myriad spoons on glass. Someone is proposing a toast -- the stepfather of Eileen's granddaughter Sophie Trevor, in fact. The stepfather is followed by Sophie's mother, artist Marguerite Slocum Quinn, whom friends call Margy. Now comes Sophie's fiancé, Louis Girard, who wells up describing how he fell for his bride-to-be virtually the moment he set eyes on her, during a Texas debutante party. And now comes Louis's mother, Loraine McMurrey, whose family's fortune was made in gas and oil: tall, blond, and perfectly proportioned for the décolleté outfits she fancies, Loraine counts Ted Turner among her ex-suitors. She certainly knows how to host a party: her awe-inspiring extravaganzas rated a glowing tribute in the 1990 tell-all, *Texas Big Rich*. Loraine looks around this room filled with authentic New England blue bloods and jokes about these Texans "steppin' up," what with her son marrying so well. Laughter fills Eileen's house.

The final toast belongs to Eileen, who presides over the head table, as befits the matriarch. Standing, her glass uplifted, Eileen pays tribute to loved ones, singling out family and three old friends: Aerial, Jane Pope Ridgway and Betty Brooke Blake, whom friends still call Betty Boop. Former Glamour Girls all, and all here

tonight.

Unbreakable commitments have kept several friends from joining Eileen at her resplendent black-tie dinner party.

Candy Van Alen would have come but for tonight's International Tennis Hall of Fame enshrinement dinner honoring John McEnroe. The dinner is the crowning event of Tennis Week, a sentimental favorite of Candy's by virtue of her late husband, Jimmy Van Alen, whose long support of the game earned him a bronze statue outside the hall of fame's entrance. Among Candy's houseguests this week are noted sportswriter and broadcaster Bud Collins and his wife. In a brief telephone conversation, Candy (who has just returned from an overseas visit to her friend Princess Tassilo von und zu "Titi" Furstenberg, a noted Picasso collector), reports feeling somewhat "swamped" by the demands of Tennis Week -- the many matches and parties, not to mention the presence of houseguests, who, no matter how welcome, require the ongoing attention of staff and hostess.

And Dodo Hamilton and Oatsie Charles might have attended Eileen's party -- but this weekend, the busiest so far of the young summer, finds them at the Newport Flower Show dinner. Last night was the show's Preview Cocktail Party, held at Rosecliff and open to the public. I attended.



Bettie Pardee, above, television personality and columnist for Bon Appetit, recently built a French country-style house on Bellevue Avenue. Below is Ruth Orthwein, who had planned to throw a roaring '20s birthday party for her daughter on July 10, but canceled when the date became overbooked with other parties, most importantly, Eileen Slocum's black-tie dinner.

Events such as this that allow the masses to mingle with the more socially advantaged are enormously popular in Newport, and a line of expectant commoners who paid \$125 apiece extends into the mansion. I enter, stopping briefly to exchange pleasantries with Dodo, dressed all in yellow and receiving guests in her official capacity as show chairman. Then I walk through Rosecliff to the lawn out back, crammed with display booths and tents sheltering champagne bars and tables with all manner of hors d'oeuvres.



I chat with Oatsie, then Bettie Bearden Pardee, co-chairman of the flower show's Artistic Entries committee whose new French country-style house on Bellevue Avenue is nearly finished. Judging took place earlier today, and Dodo takes the podium to announce this year's winners. I recognize the names of only two: Bettie,

who took second place in an artistic category, *"Dinner at 8," circa 1980, a functional dinner tableau for 6 guests* ; and Dodo herself, who won the Green Animals Topiary Award and the Preservation Society of Newport County Award. Hard work reaps rewards.

Dodo and Bettie are surrounded by admirers, and so I drift back to one of the tents, where I run into Laurence and Judy Cutler.

In Newport only a few months, the Cutlers are causing a bit of a stir. They have bought Vernon Court, one of the grand old Bellevue Avenue mansions, and they are refurbishing it with the intention of opening a museum for their extensive collection of art by famous American illustrators, such as Norman Rockwell and Maxfield Parrish. Judy, a Manhattan art dealer who counts George Lucas and Steven Spielberg among her clients, and Laurence, an architect, businessman, and former Harvard professor, expected Newport would welcome them -- and the community at large has. But citing fears of increased traffic and the presence of a "commercial" enterprise in a largely residential neighborhood, a small group of Bellevue Avenue neighbors disapproves -- and has hired lawyers to try to stop the Cutlers. Among the opponents are Bettie Pardee and her husband, Jonathan, whose new house is a block from Vernon Court.

I have met the Cutlers, and found them to be intelligent, funny, and determined to have their nonprofit museum -- which, they claim, would attract only small numbers of well-heeled patrons. Self-made people who have amassed a collection worth many millions, the Cutlers would seem an attractive if unobtrusive addition to Bellevue Avenue, home to Preservation Society mansions that draw hundreds of thousands of tourists every year, far more than the Cutlers desire. And yet in my travels I hear an undercurrent of suspicion regarding these ambitious newcomers. What's the real purpose of this nonprofit corporation of theirs? What are their true intentions -- a museum or something intolerable, a commercial bed and breakfast or hotel?

The Cutlers bring me up to speed on the legal battle, which so far is going against them (but which they ultimately will win). This only energizes Laurence, who is perplexed by the fuss.

"I still don't understand it," he tells me later. "I had these guests from overseas -- three different couples from three different countries -- and all said if it was a collection of such import in their countries, the head of state would be demanding it be in the national capital." Adept in the public arena, Laurence has won the strong editorial endorsements of the local and statewide daily newspapers.

I wonder if his penchant for publicity lies at the bottom of things: Laurence disdains the rule of only three newspaper appearances per lifetime. Perhaps it's his stubborn resolve, or his self-made status, which qualifies him as new money, or maybe it's his seeming indifference to such distinctions as membership at Bailey's.

"The food's terrible," Laurence says. "I belong to a lot of clubs and I don't need

any more clubs, to tell you the truth."

By this point in the summer, someone is hosting a lunch, cocktail party or dinner virtually every day. Although it might seem some master scheduler determines the calendar after carefully assessing everyone's desires and needs, in truth, dates are grabbed on a catch-as-catch-can basis.

And the choicest dates, such as July 10 this year, go very early, as Ruth Orthwein, ex-wife of brewery heir James Busch Orthwein, must surely know.

"I love to give roaring '20s parties," says Ruth. This spring, for example, she decided to give one at the Clambake Club for her daughter's 40th birthday.

"I thought, 'We'll put this all together. It's July 10, it's my birthday and her birthday's the eighth -- we'll just do it, no problem.' There was so much going on, as you know, that week that I could not have a party. And I started a couple of months ahead."

Stymied, Ruth had to reschedule.

"I had to cancel the orchestra, I had to cancel the Clambake Club -- I said, 'I'm so sorry, but I won't be able to get a soul.' It's insane."

After the date and the guest list, food is the paramount consideration for anyone planning to host a lunch or dinner. Large gatherings usually require an outside chef, even for those with a cook on staff -- few cooks, no matter how talented, can single-handedly feed 100 or more in style. And like the choicest dates, the best outside chefs are booked well ahead.

Eileen Slocum prefers Newport's Michael Dupre, the man behind her July 10 black-tie dinner.

"He's just simply wonderful," Eileen says. "I feel he must have made a fortune because many people have Michael booked up two or three months in advance -- I mean, practically from where they are in winter they will call him up and ask him if he will save the night before the Fourth of July or something. He makes the most beautiful desserts anybody has ever seen."



Louis Gerard, above, heir to Texas gas and oil money, fell in love with his bride-to-be, Sophie Trevor, at a Texas debutante party. Below, his fiancée is the focus of attention throughout the summer.



While some leave the menu to a secretary or professional party planner, Eileen entrusts it to no one. Even in daily living, Eileen's maid cooks -- but Eileen sets the menu and buys the ingredients herself, "every single loaf of bread that comes into the house." When I ask why, she says: "Because it's the most important part of my house. I don't want the shelves to get clogged up with things like corn starch that I feel shouldn't be in menus."

For her black-tie dinner, Eileen had to take into account her tastes, Michael Dupre's strengths, and the enormous Vulcan stove in her massive kitchen where the meal was actually cooked.

"I usually start by saying, 'Michael, I do have in mind rare roast beef and corn pudding for this dinner. How does that suit you?' And I have to suit him because the stove is 120 years old. . . . They have to be very good chefs who know how to work the little thermostat."

Just about everyone except Judy and Laurence Cutler is invited to Jonathan and Bettie Pardee's housewarming four days after Eileen's black-tie dinner. I turn off Bellevue and proceed up the Pardees' long, curved drive, leave my car with a valet, and step into more than 5,000 square feet of new splendor. Only the finest fabrics, tiles, wood, stone, stucco and slate have gone into this house, built over the course of two years on one of the last available lots (almost three acres) in this enclave of high-society Newport.

I meet Jonathan, a venture capitalist, only today -- but I have already lunched with Bettie, who (with Jonathan and another couple) owns an 800-acre game reserve in Georgia. Born in Arkansas and raised in Beverly Hills, Bettie is multi-talented -- a floral designer, television personality, contributing editor for *Bon Appetit*, and author of books, including *Great Entertaining: 1001 Party Tips and Timesavers (Pardee Guide)*, described by her publisher like this: "Writing in a breezy, accessible style, seasoned partygiver Bettie Pardee incorporates tips, shortcuts, and timesavers for anyone who wants to entertain more confidently." I envision Bettie as Newport's own Martha Stewart: attractive and blond, a gifted conversationalist, she is decades younger than Eileen Slocum but every bit the hostess.



Loraine McMurrey, center, has been the houseguest of Eileen Slocum, right, for much of the summer as her son and Eileen's granddaughter will be wed in September. At left is Loraine's niece.

Although finishing touches remain on the Pardees' French country house, they decided to host a housewarming without waiting; they wanted their party on July 14, Bastille Day, when France celebrates its independence from the monarchy.

Even Bettie's invitations struck the French motif: long and narrow like a loaf of French bread, they arrived in an envelope labeled "French 'Bred' " and urged guests to wear "festive blue, white and red," the colors of France's flag. Feeling less adventuresome, I stick to the basic Newport blazer, button-down shirt, slacks, and loafers, sans socks.

Inside the house, guests circulate through the first-floor salon, sunroom and library, and on into Bettie's pantries and kitchen (where, for today at least, caterers and not the lady of the house hold court). In the backyard, bartenders serve drinks, servers bustle with trays of hors d'oeuvres, and a four-piece band plays. Bettie and Jonathan are too busy mixing with their more than 200 guests for extended repartee, so I talk with Helen and John Winslow, Eileen Slocum, and Hugh D. Auchincloss III, son of one of Newport's oldest families. Bespectacled and fond of tweed, Auchincloss, 71, brings to mind a favorite uncle.

Auchincloss is a rarity in this world: like his friend Eileen, an outspoken Republican, he does not scorn the public eye. Yusha, as he's known, ran unsuccessfully for state Senate several years ago as an independent, and he has just announced his candidacy for Newport City Council ("A vote for Hugh is a vote for you.") Educated at Groton and Yale, a Middle East diplomat and then a New York management consultant before retiring, Yusha has been a board member or trustee of many nonprofit organizations, including Save the Bay, the Naval War College Foundation, and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Newport County.

Yusha's public prominence nettles some in Newport who take refuge in their monied anonymity, but Yusha has long bloodlines and the courage of conviction and thus cannot be dismissed. Believing in civic-mindedness, he admires Bettie Pardee, a board member of the Boys & Girls Clubs whose vigorous promotion of her cause has been pooh-poohed in certain drawing rooms.

This puzzles me. Why should goodness engender criticism?

"You have to understand the mentality of the more insecure sort of hostesses in this town," Yusha says. "They think it's pushy."

But virtue in this case was rewarded: when the Pardees' candidacy for membership in Bailey's encountered inside resistance, Yusha (a former Bailey's governor and son of the club's ninth president) came to the rescue, helping win acceptance for the Pardees. And so he is pleased at the wonderful turnout at their Bastille Day housewarming -- and the notable presence of Bailey's president and his wife, the Winslows. Bettie and Jonathan have arrived.

Of the many people I have met this summer, no one tells a story surpassing Yusha's. Since spring, I have visited him several times in his house on the periphery of Hammersmith Farm; we sit in his study, which features a fireplace, an abundance of books, and cozy old furniture -- and many framed letters and

photographs of his stepsister, Jackie Kennedy Onassis, and her first husband, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Jackie and JFK held their wedding reception at Hammersmith after marrying in a Newport church; later, as president, Kennedy used the estate as a summer White House.

During my visits, Yusha tells me about his own father, a lawyer, banker, statesman and son of an old Newport family; and of his mother, the exotic Maya de Chrapovitsky, who was raised in luxury in turn-of-the-century Czarist Russia. "She was a daredevil," Yusha says. "Adventuresome. Typical sort of Russian excitable person. Very emotional." Maya gave Yusha his nickname, supposedly a Russianization of "Hugh."

Maya almost died when Yusha was a baby. "She got out of this small plane and ran around the front of it to congratulate the pilot," Yusha says. "She was just going around underneath the wing when the propeller started sputtering again. It kind of hit her head, but she fortunately had a jewel -- the old Russians, they had big jewels all over the place -- on her hat. The propeller hit the jewel so it went into her head but didn't go through." But Maya was forever changed -- moody and more excitable still. A few years later, Yusha's parents divorced, and his father wed Nina Gore, mother of novelist Gore Vidal. That marriage ended, too, after less than six years.

Raised by a French governess, the boy Yusha cherished his visits to Hammersmith's main house, a shingled, nine-bedroom cottage set on some 95 acres of gardens and fields overlooking the scenic mouth of Narragansett Bay. Built by Yusha's great uncle during 1887 and 1888, Hammersmith was owned by Yusha's grandmother, who passed it on to Yusha's dad when she died, in 1942. That was the year Dad married his third wife, Janet Bouvier, mother of Jackie.

Yusha and his new stepsister drew close almost immediately, and they remained dear friends until Jackie died, in 1994. On one of my visits, Yusha takes me to Hammersmith's main house, which is across a field from his smaller residence (and which is now owned by investment banker Peter D. Kiernan III). Yusha leads me through history, his own and a piece of America's: the bedroom where his father was born; the dining room where a young president ate with his wife and two children, Caroline and John-John; the simply furnished third-floor bedroom where Jackie slept when she and Yusha were young teens; and Yusha's own room, adjacent to Jackie's.

"When she became part of the family," says Yusha, as we stand in the teenaged Jackie's room, "and my stepmother moved up here in the summer of 1943, everything got moved around. I moved up from the room downstairs. Since I was the eldest in the family, I had the first pick of the rooms. . . . Jackie was the second oldest so she got the second-best room, which is this room -- with its view of the Bay at sunset. She was always the room next to me."

Long after they left childhood behind -- after Jackie died -- Yusha sat by his fire, sipped Scotch whiskey, took pen in hand, and let his memory run free. He was

writing an article about his famous stepsister for Groton School Quarterly, and he called on letters he'd saved from their youthful correspondence.

"Her letters are a portrait of a sparkling, bright, amusing, talented, and mischievous teenage girl," Yusha wrote in that article. "They are perceptive, touching, original and caring. Some special qualities of hers that come out in these early letters and were especially evident at the close of her too short life, are her courage, sense of duty, selflessness, and patriotic spirit. No matter how much pain she might feel -- from a fall off her horse, a wisdom tooth operation (her decision was to have all removed together) -- she wanted those around her to feel comfortable."

Still ahead on the summer calendar is Coaching Weekend, a high-society pageant held but once every three years -- and of course Eileen's granddaughter's wedding. I have much to look forward to.

But the past still beckons, and so one lazy afternoon I call on Betty Blake -- forever Betty Boop -- at her estate, Indian Spring, which is near Dodo Hamilton's place and around the corner (as corners go in this part of Newport) from Candy Van Alen's Avalon.

Patron of the arts, Christian Scientist, and teetotaler, Boop possesses an easy humor. She married five times, losing one husband through early death from alcoholism, and the others through divorce. Still attractive, like all the surviving former Glamour Girls I've encountered, she walks stiffly and is hard of hearing but neither condition saps her vital essence; one need spend but a few minutes in her company to confirm this is one of those vibrant young women in that photograph on the wall at Bailey's, more than half a century ago. She has, however, no plans for husband number six.

"You couldn't pay me to ever get married again," she says. "But then of course I have been married enough!"

Boop was raised on the Philadelphia Main Line by a father whose wealth came from steel and a mother previously married to William E. Carter, whose loathsome conduct during the sinking of the Titanic fueled a national scandal and earned him a lifetime of ridicule -- and a nickname, Titanic Bill. Even today, old-timers remember the infamous Titanic Bill, alone and more likely than not inebriated, staring out at the ocean off Bailey's Beach.

"When the iceberg hit," Boop tells me, "they knew the boat was going down. So Mr. Carter went down to the stateroom and said to my mother, 'Lucille, the boat is sinking. Get the children up and get the children into a lifeboat.' " And then Titanic Bill disappeared, perhaps to check on his precious dogs and horses, or the motor car he'd had custom-built for him in Europe -- or, more likely, to find a lifeboat before the ship went down.

Leaving his wife and two young children to their fate, he made his way on deck. Given the universal rule of women and children first, the scandal mongers believed that Titanic Bill must have dressed in women's clothing to secure his seat in a lifeboat. But according to Boop's mother, who managed to survive with her daughter and son (Boop's step-siblings), Titanic Bill escaped in his own clothes. Still, the women's clothing story stuck -- and regardless of what he'd worn, Bill had proved himself the worst sort of coward.

One can only imagine how Boop's mother greeted her husband when they were reunited on shore, but the net result was divorce. "I mean," says Boop, "I don't think you leave a woman to drown, with your two children -- they were his children. That's pretty low. I mean, you wouldn't do that. Nobody would."

I steer Boop toward Eleanor Young, fellow Glamour Girl.

"She was very beautiful," Boop says. "Long, long dark hair."

Like all of the Glamour Girls, Eleanor appealed to men -- and men desired her. And like her friends, Eleanor aspired not to college or career but to romance and marriage, so after a year in a Paris finishing school she returned to Newport for her debut, in 1936. The teenaged Eleanor dated, but failing to find the right match in Newport, New York, or Palm Beach, she embarked on a nearly year-long world cruise. And voilà -- in the summer of 1938, Eleanor met a wealthy Englishman in France.

"He has been so far a confirmed bachelor but I am hoping that he may weaken," Eleanor wrote to her parents. Less than three weeks later, the Englishman indeed weakened, and Eleanor accepted his proposal of marriage. Alas, he was insincere: Eleanor returned to America, planning her wedding, but the Englishman failed to join her. "The so and so hasn't even written me," Eleanor wrote to her mother when almost a month passed without word.

But Eleanor did not lack for suitors. Twenty years old, she had become a society-page fixture -- regularly photographed outside Bailey's in Newport, and inside such ritzy establishments as New York's Waldorf-Astoria hotel. Friends called her Cookie, a '30s' term for a vixen.

"She's a 'Glamour Girl' who is still surprised by it all, the only child of doting parents [whose] every wish is fulfilled in an Aladdin-like manner," one newspaper declared in November 1938. "Won't get her to take 'showers,' but when she bathes in the tub, Cleopatra in all her glory wasn't more luxurious . . . expects to be waited on and has a personal maid to attend to her comfort."

And this is when the no-good Robert Ogden Bacon Jr. arrived on scene.

Son of a steamship company executive who lived in New York's Plaza Hotel and

rented a summer place in Newport, Bunty Bacon bore a passing resemblance to a later movie star, Christopher Reeve. But Bunty was more than tall, tanned, and ruggedly handsome -- he knew how to charm the ladies. "Very, very sexy," Betty Boop tells me, "a very sexy and attractive man. And that's all he had." Bunty was divorced from one of Eileen Slocum's friends when Cookie fell for him, shortly before Christmas of 1938.

Robert and Anita Young strongly disapproved of their only child's choice: Bunty had a young child from his first wife, another child he'd fathered with her had died under mysterious circumstances, and he drank to excess.

"Really bad news," says Boop.

But Eleanor wanted him.

After vacationing with Bunty in Jamaica, she secretly married him, on April 5, 1939, in Warrenton, Va.

Soon, she was pregnant.

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