

AN INCIDENT IN SUTTON SQUARE

Music by Martin Hennessy

Libretto by Stephen Kitsakos

An apartment near Sutton Square, New York City, in the present. A large window framed in elegant drapery. Danny is standing nervously peering out. He is in his late-twenties to mid-thirties, of average build and appearance.

DANNY

If I hadn't gone back three times
to see if the door was locked,
four times to check the burners on the stove.
I would not have had to wait so long
for the elevator to arrive.

If I had not fretted so much
about wearing the red shirt,
the one I wore the day my Cooper died.
I would not have had to wait so long
for the elevator to come.

Things get in my way.
Daily obstacles.
They hold me back,
they push me out.

So, there were two
in the carriage already.
A bovine lady with a tangy perfume,
holding a Bichon *frisée*.
(He was nothing like my Cooper)

And a toothpick-shaped man
with a homburg, whose eyes
darted like flies.

"Are you new to the building?" he asked.
I replied, "if you pardon me, please,"
I have lived here a *veddy, veddy* long time,
pronouncing the "r's" in the *very* like "d's".

I'm not sure why I did that.
I mean, if you're going to lie,
at least make it
interesting.

He crosses to a chair and sits.

I used to shop for groceries in
an upscale market on the Upper East Side.
And passed a woman one day
I thought was Yvonne DeCarlo.
The one Sondheim wrote the song for,
the one who was Lily Munster on TV.

She wore dark glasses. Indoors!!
Her hair was piled atop her head
with a black sable wrapped around.
"Aren't you Yvonne DeCarlo?" I asked.
But she turned to me and said with a smile,
"I do believe Miss DeCarlo is *dead*."
Then picked up her jar of Spanish capers
and continued down the aisle.

But I knew it was her.
A fucking stupid lie.
But ...
an *interesting* one.

He gets up and goes to the window.

Then I was out on the street
and south into the Square
admiring the houses of the *veddy, veddy* rich.
Looking more like Bel-grah-via
then the streets of New York.

Over there — where the now-dead
Onassis children lived with their *yiayia*,
where the Dead End kids kicked ass.
And the spot where Woody Allen placed
that famous bench and got a great shot
of the Fifty-Ninth Street Bridge.

I started counting, as usual.
in multiples of five.
Ten steps forward,
then touch your face.
Then another twenty.
Never go back.
1,2,3,4,5 - 2,2,3,4,5
1,2,3,4,5 - 2,2,3,4,5

I looked up and there she was.
crossing the corner
of East Fifty Eighth street,
in the shadow of a tawny villa.
She was tall and lithe with
nut-colored hair,
like whole wheat spaghetti,
her hands holding the reins of
four long leashes,
twisting them like the strings
of a street marionette.

She passed to the left of me,
unaware I had my eye on the beagle.
The little boy with the brown and tan
who looked like Cooper and smiled.
A midday walk? Thirty bucks a leash?

"Stop pulling, Marco," she yelled
at the handsome black lab,
which, in itself wasn't bad.
But the tone. The tone.
I caught something in the tone
that disturbed me.

The other dogs stopped short, not
daring to go into battle.

A plucky Norwich Terrier,
and a bleached white poodle with
salmon bows of Bengal stripes and *frufu*.
No rescue dogs in Sutton Square.
No shelter dogs at thirty bucks a poop.

But the beagle, who met my gaze
knew how I had suffered.
the day I wore the red shirt.
The day my Cooper died.
They both shared the same eyes.

"Stop pulling, Marco," she yelled.
Marco, I thought? Marco?
He doesn't understand.
He's Italian.
Smettere di tirare, Marco.
Smettere di tirare, Marco.
Speak to him in his own *lingua*.

I had been counting quickly, 1-2-3-4-5
but the beagle begged me to slow down.
He knew what was coming.
He wanted a witness.

"Stop pulling, Marco," she yelled.
"I told you to stop pulling."

Then the cars on East Fifty Eighth Street
came to a halt, as a cloud got in
the way of the sun.

And she lifted her strong, brown hand
and brought it up against Marco's face,
Whack.
Whimper.
Flesh against fur.
"You listen when I talk to you!"

Run. Run away.
Bite the bridle, Marco. Bite the bridle.
Run away from her. Run to me.
But it was too late.
He jerked his neck against the leash
in submission. He could not break free.

The clouds revealed the sun
and they were all gone,
further down the street.

I thought I should chase them.
Chastise her. Censure her.
Slap her myself.
But I knew I could not.

I had already started to move away
and you simply *cannot go back*.
You cannot go back.
You've already counted the steps.
In multiples of five.
And you touched your face.

Remember. Remember.
You didn't count the day
you wore the red shirt.
You tried to stop the counting.
You tried. You tried.
And look what happened then.
Look what happened then!

He returns back to the chair.

Things get in my way.
Daily obstacles.
They hold me back.
They push me out.

I couldn't look back until I
had reached Fifty-Seventh Street.
Forty steps away, and I turned
to see their tails beating like the
wipers on a rain-soaked windshield.

And I knew, for sure,
I was on a leash, too.