

# Love Story

Erich Segal

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# Love Story

## 1

What can you say about a twenty-five-year-old girl  
who died?

That she was beautiful. And brilliant. That she loved Mozart and Bach. And the Beatles. And me. Once, when she specifically lumped me with those musical types, I asked her what the order was, and she replied, smiling, 'Alphabetical.' At the time I smiled too. But now I sit and wonder whether she was listing me by my first name – in which case I would trail Mozart – or by my last name – in which case I would edge in there between Bach and the Beatles. Either way I don't come first, which for some stupid reason bothers hell out of me, having grown up with the notion that I always had to be number one. Family heritage, don't you know?

\* \* \*

In the fall of my senior year, I got into the habit of studying at the Radcliffe library. Not just to eye the cheese, although I admit that I liked to look. The place was quiet, nobody knew me, and the reserve books were less in demand. The day before one of my history hour exams, I still hadn't gotten around to reading the first book on the list, an endemic Harvard disease. I ambled over to the reserve desk to get one of the tomes that would bail me out on the morrow. There were two girls working there: one a tall tennis-anyone type, the other a bespectacled mouse type. I opted for Minnie Four-Eyes.

'Do you have *The Waning of the Middle Ages*?'

She shot a glance up at me.

'Do you have your own library?' she asked.

'Listen, Harvard is allowed to use the Radcliffe library.'

'I'm not talking legality, Preppie, I'm talking ethics. You guys have five million books. We have a few lousy thousand.'

Christ, a superior-being type! The kind who think since the ratio of Radcliffe to Harvard is five to one, the girls must be five times as smart. I normally cut these types to ribbons, but just then I badly needed that goddamn book.

'Listen, I need that goddamn book.'

'Wouldja please watch your profanity, Preppie?'

'What makes you so sure I went to prep school?'

'You look stupid and rich,' she said, removing her

glasses.

‘You’re wrong,’ I protested. ‘I’m actually smart and poor.’

‘Oh, no, Preppie. *I’m* smart and poor.’

She was staring straight at me. Her eyes were brown. Okay, maybe I look rich, but I wouldn’t let some ‘Cliffie – even one with pretty eyes – call me dumb.

‘What the hell makes you so smart?’ I asked.

‘I wouldn’t go for coffee with you,’ she answered.

‘Listen – I wouldn’t ask you.’

‘That,’ she replied, ‘is what makes you stupid.’

Let me explain why I took her for coffee. By shrewdly capitulating at the crucial moment – i.e. by pretending that I suddenly wanted to – I got my book. And since she couldn’t leave until the library closed, I had plenty of time to absorb some pithy phrases about the shift of royal dependence from cleric to lawyer in the late eleventh century. I got an A minus on the exam, coincidentally

the same grade I assigned to Jenny’s legs when she first walked from behind that desk. I can’t say I gave her costume an honor grade, however; it was a bit too Boho for my taste. I especially loathed that Indian thing she carried for a handbag.

Fortunately I didn’t mention this, as I later discovered it was of her own design.

We went to the Midget Restaurant, a nearby sandwich joint which, despite its name, is not restricted to people of small stature. I ordered two coffees and a brownie with ice cream (for her).

‘I’m Jennifer Cavilleri,’ she said, ‘an American of Italian descent.’

As if I wouldn’t have known.

‘And a music major,’ she added.

‘My name is Oliver,’ I said.

‘First or last?’ she asked.

‘First,’ I answered, and then confessed that my entire name was Oliver Barrett. (I mean that’s most of it.)

‘Oh,’ she said. ‘Barrett, like the poet?’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘No relation.’

In the pause that ensued, I gave inward thanks that she hadn’t come up with the usual distressing question:

‘Barrett, like the hall?’ For it is my special albatross to be related to the guy that built Barrett Hall, the largest and ugliest structure in Harvard Yard, a colossal monument to my family’s money, vanity and flagrant Harvardism.

After that, she was pretty quiet. Could we have run out of conversation so quickly? Had I turned her off

by not being related to the poet? What? She simply sat there, semi-smiling at me. For something to do, I checked out her notebooks. Her handwriting was curious – small sharp little letters with no capitals (who did she think she was, e. e. cummings?). And she was taking some pretty snowy courses: Comp. Lit. 105, Music 150, Music 201 –

‘Music 201? Isn’t that a graduate course?’

She nodded yes, and was not very good at masking her pride.

‘Renaissance polyphony.’

‘What’s polyphony?’

‘Nothing sexual, Preppie.’

Why was I putting up with this? Doesn’t she read the *Crimson*? Doesn’t she know who I am?

‘Hey, don’t you know who I am?’

‘Yeah,’ she answered with kind of disdain. ‘You’re the guy that owns Barrett Hall.’

She didn’t know who I was.

‘I don’t own Barrett Hall,’ I quibbled. ‘My greatgrandfather happened to give it to Harvard.’

‘So his not-so-great grandson would be sure to get in!’

That was the limit.

‘Jenny, if you’re so convinced I’m a loser, why did you bulldoze me into buying you coffee?’

She looked me straight in the eye and smiled.

‘I like your body,’ she said. Part of being a big winner is the ability to be a good loser. There’s no paradox involved. It’s a distinctly Harvard thing to be able to turn any defeat into victory.

*‘Tough luck, Barrett. You played a helluva game.’*

*‘Really, I’m so glad you fellows took it. I mean, you people need to win so badly.’*

Of course, an out-and-out triumph *is* better. I mean, if you have the option, the last-minute score is preferable.

And as I walked Jenny back to her dorm, I had not despaired of ultimate victory over this snotty Radcliffe bitch.

‘Listen, you snotty Radcliffe bitch, Friday night is the Dartmouth hockey game.’

‘So?’

‘So I’d like you to come.’

She replied with the usual Radcliffe reverence for sport:

‘Why the hell should I come to a lousy hockey game?’

I answered casually:

‘Because I’m playing.’

There was a brief silence. I think I heard snow

falling.  
 ‘For which side?’ she asked.

*Oliver Barrett IV Senior*  
*Ipswich, Mass. Phillips Exeter*  
*Age 20 5’ 11”, 185 lbs.*  
*Major: Social Studies*  
*Dean’s List: ’61, ’62, ’63*  
*All-Ivy First Team: ’62, ’63*  
*Career Aim: Law*

By now Jenny had read my bio in the program. I made triple sure that Vic Claman, the manager, saw that she got one.

*‘For Christ’s sake, Barrett, is this your first date?’*  
*‘Shut up, Vic, or you’ll be chewing your teeth.’*

As we warmed up on the ice, I didn’t wave to her (how uncool!) or even look her way. And yet I think she *thought* I was glancing at her. I mean, did she remove her glasses during the National Anthem out of respect for the flag?

By the middle of the second period, we were beating Dartmouth 0–0. That is, Davey Johnston and I were about to perforate their nets. The Green bastards sensed this, and began to play rougher. Maybe they could break a bone or two before we broke them open. The fans were already screaming for blood. And in hockey this literally means blood or, failing that, a goal. As a kind of noblesse oblige, I have never denied them either.

Al Redding, Dartmouth center, charged across our blue line and I slammed into him, stole the puck and started down-ice. The fans were roaring. I could see Davey Johnston on my left, but I thought I would take it all the way, their goalie being a slightly chicken type I had terrorized since he played for Deerfield. Before I could get off a shot, both their defensemen were on me, and I had to skate around their nets to keep hold of the puck. There were three of us, flailing away against the boards and each other. It had always been my policy, in pile-ups like this, to lash mightily at anything wearing enemy colors. Somewhere beneath our skates was the puck, but for the moment we were concentrating on beating the shit out of each other.

A ref blew his whistle.

‘You – two minutes in the box!’

I looked up. He was pointing at me. Me? What had I done to deserve a penalty?

‘Come on, ref, what’d I do?’

Somehow he wasn’t interested in further dialogue.

He was calling to the officials' desk – 'Number seven,  
two minutes' – and signaling with his arms.  
I remonstrated a bit, but that's de rigueur. The crowd  
expects a protest, no matter how flagrant the offense.  
The ref waved me off. Seething with frustration, I  
skated toward the penalty box. As I climbed in,  
listening to the click of my skate blades on the wood  
of the floor, I heard the bark of the PA system:  
'Penalty. Barrett of Harvard. Two minutes. Holding.'  
The crowd booed; several Harvards impugned the  
vision and integrity of the referees. I sat, trying to catch  
my breath, not looking up or even out onto the ice,  
where Dartmouth outmanned us.  
'Why are you sitting here when all your friends are  
out playing?'  
The voice was Jenny's. I ignored her, and exhorted  
my teammates instead.  
'C'mon, Harvard, get that puck!'  
'What did you do wrong?'  
I turned and answered her. She was my date, after  
all.  
'I tried too hard.'  
And I went back to watching my teammates try to  
hold off Al Redding's determined efforts to score.  
'Is this a big disgrace?'  
'Jenny, please, I'm trying to concentrate!'  
'On what?'  
'On how I'm gonna total that bastard Al Redding!'  
I looked out onto the ice to give moral support to my  
colleagues.  
'Are you a dirty player?'  
My eyes were riveted on our goal, now swarming  
with Green bastards. I couldn't wait to get out there  
again. Jenny persisted.  
'Would you ever "total" me?'  
I answered her without turning.  
'I will right now if you don't shut up.'  
'I'm leaving. Good-bye.'  
By the time I turned, she had disappeared. As I stood  
up to look further, I was informed that my two-minute  
sentence was up. I leaped the barrier, back onto the ice.  
The crowd welcomed my return. Barrett's on wing,  
all's right with the team. Wherever she was hiding,  
Jenny would hear the big enthusiasm for my presence.  
So who cares where she is.  
Where is she?  
Al Redding slapped a murderous shot, which our  
goalie deflected off toward Gene Kennaway, who then  
passed it down-ice in my vicinity. As I skated after the  
puck, I thought I had a split second to glance up at

the stands to search for Jenny. I did. I saw her. She was there.

The next thing I knew I was on my ass. Two Green bastards had slammed into me, my ass was on the ice, and I was – Christ! – embarrassed beyond belief. Barrett dumped! I could hear the loyal Harvard fans groaning for me as I skidded. I could hear the blood-thirsty Dartmouth fans chanting.  
‘Hit ’em again! Hit ’em again!’

What would Jenny think?

Dartmouth had the puck around our goal again, and again our goalie deflected their shot. Kennaway pushed it at Johnston, who rifled it down to me (I had stood up by this time). Now the crowd was wild. This had to be a score. I took the puck and sped all out across Dartmouth’s blue line. Two Dartmouth defensemen were coming straight at me.

‘Go, Oliver, go! Knock their heads off!’

I heard Jenny’s shrill scream above the crowd. It was exquisitely violent. I faked out one defenseman, slammed the other so hard he lost his breath and then – instead of shooting off balance – I passed off to Davey Johnston, who had come up the right side.

Davey slapped it into the nets. Harvard score! In an instant, we were hugging and kissing. Me and Davey Johnston and the other guys. Hugging and kissing and back slapping and jumping up and down (on skates). The crowd was screaming. And the Dartmouth guy I hit was still on his ass. The fans threw programs onto the ice. This really broke Dartmouth’s back. (That’s a metaphor; the defenseman got up when he caught his breath.) We creamed them 7–0.

If I were a sentimentalist, and cared enough about Harvard to hang a photograph on the wall, it would not be of Winthrop House, or Mem Church, but of Dillon. Dillon Field House. If I had a spiritual home at Harvard, this was it. Nate Pusey may revoke my diploma for saying this, but Widener Library means far less to me than Dillon. Every afternoon of my college life I walked into that place, greeted my buddies with friendly obscenities, shed the trappings of civilization and turned into a jock. How great to put on the pads and the good old number 7 shirt (I had dreams of them retiring that number; they didn’t), to take the skates and walk out toward the Watson Rink.

The return to Dillon would be even better. Peeling off the sweaty gear, strutting naked to the supply desk to get a towel.

*‘How’d it go today, Ollie?’*



*'Good, Richie. Good, Jimmy.'*

Then into the showers to listen to who did what to whom how many times last Saturday night. *'We got these pigs from Mount Ida, see . . . ?'* And I was privileged

to enjoy a private place of meditation. Being blessed with a bad knee (yes, blessed: have you seen my draft card?), I had to give it some whirlpool after playing. As I sat and watched the rings run round my knee, I could catalog my cuts and bruises (I enjoy them, in a way), and kind of think about anything or nothing. Tonight I could think of a goal, an assist and virtually locking up my third consecutive All-Ivy.

*'Takin' some whirly-pooly, Ollie?'*

It was Jackie Felt, our trainer and self-appointed spiritual guide.

*'What does it look like I'm doing, Felt, beating off?'*

Jackie chortled and lit up with an idiot grin.

*'Know what's wrong with yer knee, Ollie? Diya know?'*

I'd been to every orthopedist in the East, but Felt knew better.

*'Yer not eatin' right.'*

I really wasn't very interested.

*'Yer not eatin' enough salt.'*

Maybe if I humor him he'll go away.

*'Okay, Jack, I'll start eating more salt.'*

Jesus, was he pleased! He walked off with this amazing look of accomplishment on his idiot face. Anyway, I was alone again. I let my whole pleasantly aching body slide into the whirlpool, closed my eyes and just sat there, up to my neck in warmth.

Ahhhhhhh.

Jesus! Jenny would be waiting outside. I hope! Still! Jesus! How long had I lingered in that comfort while she was out there in the Cambridge cold? I set a new record for getting dressed. I wasn't even quite dry as

I pushed open the center door of Dillon.

The cold air hit me. God, was it freezing. And dark.

There was still a small cluster of fans. Mostly old hockey faithfuls, the grads who've never mentally shed the pads. Guys like old Jordan Jencks, who come to every single game, home or away. How do they do it? I mean, Jencks is a big banker. And *why* do they do it?

*'Quite a spill you took, Oliver.'*

*'Yeah, Mr Jencks. You know what kind of game they play.'*

I was looking everywhere for Jenny. Had she left and walked all the way back to Radcliffe alone?

*'Jenny?'*

I took three or four steps away from the fans,  
searching desperately. Suddenly she popped out from  
behind a bush, her face swathed in a scarf, only her  
eyes showing.

‘Hey, Preppie, it’s cold as hell out here.’

Was I glad to see her!

‘Jenny!’

Like instinctively, I kissed her lightly on the forehead.

‘Did I say you could?’ she said.

‘What?’

‘Did I say you could kiss me?’

‘Sorry. I was carried away.’

‘I wasn’t.’

We were pretty much all alone out there, and it was  
dark and cold and late. I kissed her again. But not on  
the forehead, and not lightly. It lasted a long nice time.  
When we stopped kissing, she was still holding on to  
my sleeves.

‘I don’t like it,’ she said.

‘What?’

‘The fact that I like it.’

As we walked all the way back (I have a car, but  
she wanted to walk), Jenny held on to my sleeve. Not  
my arm, my sleeve. Don’t ask me to explain that. At  
the doorstep of Briggs Hall, I did not kiss her good  
night.

‘Listen, Jen, I may not call you for a few months.’

She was silent for a moment. A few moments.

Finally she asked, ‘Why?’

‘Then again, I may call you as soon as I get to my  
room.’

I turned and began to walk off.

‘Bastard!’ I heard her whisper.

I pivoted again and scored from a distance of twenty  
feet.

‘See, Jenny, you can dish it out, but you can’t take  
it!’

I would like to have seen the expression on her face,  
but strategy forbade my looking back.

My roommate, Ray Stratton, was playing poker with  
two football buddies as I entered the room.

‘Hello, animals.’

They responded with appropriate grunts.

‘Whatja get tonight, Ollie?’ Ray asked.

‘An assist and a goal,’ I replied.

‘Off Cavilleri?’

‘None of your business,’ I replied.

‘Who’s this?’ asked one of the behemoths.

‘Jenny Cavilleri,’ answered Ray. ‘Wonky music type.’

‘I know that one,’ said another. ‘A real tight-ass.’

I ignored these crude and horny bastards as I untangled the phone and started to take it into my bedroom.

‘She plays piano with the Bach Society,’ said Stratton.

‘What does she play with Barrett?’

‘Probably hard to get!’

Oinks, grunts and guffaws. The animals were laughing.

‘Gentlemen,’ I announced as I took leave, ‘up yours.’

I closed my door in another wave of subhuman noises, took off my shoes, lay back on the bed and dialed Jenny’s number.

We spoke in whispers.

‘Hey, Jen . . .’

‘Yeah?’

‘Jen . . . what would you say if I told you . . .’

I hesitated. She waited.

‘I think . . . I’m in love with you.’

There was a pause. Then she answered very softly.

‘I would say . . . you were full of shit.’

She hung up.

I wasn’t unhappy. Or surprised.

### 3

I got hurt in the Cornell game.

It was my own fault, really. At a heated juncture, I made the unfortunate error of referring to their center as a ‘fucking Canuck’. My oversight was in not remembering that four members of their team were Canadians – all, it turned out, extremely patriotic, well-built and within earshot. To add insult to injury, the penalty was called on me. And not a common one, either: five minutes for fighting. You should have heard the Cornell fans ride me when it was announced! Not many Harvard rooters had come way the hell up to Ithaca, New York, even though the Ivy title was at stake. Five minutes! I could see our coach tearing his hair out, as I climbed into the box.

Jackie Felt came scampering over. It was only then I realized that the whole right side of my face was a bloody mess. ‘Jesus Christ,’ he kept repeating as he worked me over with a styptic pencil. ‘Jesus, Ollie.’

I sat quietly, staring blankly ahead. I was ashamed to look onto the ice, where my worst fears were quickly realized: Cornell scored. The Red fans screamed and bellowed and hooted. It was a tie now. Cornell could very possibly win the game – and with it, the Ivy title. Shit – and I had barely gone through half my penalty.

Across the rink, the minuscule Harvard contingent

was grim and silent. By now the fans for both sides had forgotten me. Only one spectator still had his eyes on the penalty box. Yes, he was there. *'If the conference breaks in time, I'll try to get to Cornell.'* Sitting among the Harvard rooters – but not rooting, of course – was Oliver Barrett III.

Across the gulf of ice, Old Stonyface observed in expressionless silence as the last bit of blood on the face of his only son was stopped by adhesive papers. What was he thinking, do you think? Tch tch tch – or words to that effect?

*'Oliver, if you like fighting so much, why don't you go out for the boxing team?'*

*'Exeter doesn't have a boxing team, Father.'*

*'Well, perhaps I shouldn't come up to your hockey games.'*

*'Do you think I fight for your benefit, Father?'*

*'Well, I wouldn't say "benefit".'*

But of course, who could tell what he was thinking? Oliver Barrett III was a walking, sometimes talking Mount Rushmore. Stonyface.

Perhaps Old Stony was indulging in his usual selfcelebration:

Look at me, there are extremely few Harvard spectators here this evening, and yet I am one of them. I, Oliver Barrett III, an extremely busy man with banks to run and so forth, I have taken the time to come up to Cornell for a lousy hockey game. How wonderful. (For whom?)

The crowd roared again, but really wild this time.

Another Cornell goal. They were ahead. And I had two minutes of penalty to go! Davey Johnston skated up-ice, red-faced, angry. He passed right by me without so much as a glance. And did I notice tears in his eyes?

I mean, okay, the title was at stake, but Jesus – tears! But then Davey, our captain, had this incredible streak going for him: seven years and he'd never played on a losing side, high school or college. It was like a minor legend. And he was a senior. And this was our last tough game.

Which we lost 6–3.

After the game, an X ray determined that no bones were broken, and then twelve stitches were sewn into my cheek by Richard Selzer, M.D. Jackie Felt hovered around the med room, telling the Cornell physician how I wasn't eating right and that all this might have been averted had I been taking sufficient salt pills. Selzer ignored Jack, and gave me a stern warning about my nearly damaging 'the floor of my orbit' (those are the medical terms) and that not to play for a week would be the wisest thing. I thanked him. He left, with

Felt dogging him to talk more of nutrition. I was glad to be alone.

I showered slowly, being careful not to wet my sore face. The Novocain was wearing off a little, but I was somehow happy to feel pain. I mean, hadn't I really fucked up? We'd blown the title, broken our own streak (all the seniors had been undefeated) and Davey Johnston's too. Maybe the blame wasn't *totally* mine, but right then I felt like it was.

There was nobody in the locker room. They must all have been at the motel already. I supposed no one wanted to see me or speak to me. With this terrible bitter taste in my mouth – I felt so bad I could taste it – I packed my gear and walked outside. There were not many Harvard fans out there in the wintry wilds of upstate New York.

'How's the cheek, Barrett?'

'Okay, thanks, Mr Jencks.'

'You'll probably want a steak,' said another familiar voice. Thus spoke Oliver Barrett III. How typical of him to suggest the old-fashioned cure for a black eye.

'Thank you, Father,' I said. 'The doctor took care of it.' I indicated the gauze pad covering Selzer's twelve stitches.

'I mean for your stomach, son.'

At dinner, we had yet another in our continuing series of nonconversations, all of which commence with 'How've you been?' and conclude with 'Anything I can do?'

'How've you been, son?'

'Fine, sir.'

'Does your face hurt?'

'No, sir.'

It was beginning to hurt like hell.

'I'd like Jack Wells to look at it on Monday.'

'Not necessary, Father.'

'He's a specialist—'

'The Cornell doctor wasn't exactly a veterinarian,' I said, hoping to dampen my father's usual snobbish enthusiasm for specialists, experts, and all other 'top people'.

'Too bad,' remarked Oliver Barrett III, in what I first took to be a stab at humor, 'you did get a *beastly* cut.'

'Yes sir,' I said. (Was I supposed to chuckle?)

And then I wondered if my father's quasi-witticism had not been intended as some sort of implicit reprimand for my actions on the ice.

'Or were you implying that I behaved like an animal this evening?'

His expression suggested some pleasure at the fact that I had asked him. But he simply replied, 'You were the one who mentioned veterinarians.' At this point, I decided to study the menu.

As the main course was served, Old Stony launched into another of his simplistic sermonettes, this one, if I recall – and I try not to – concerning victories and defeats. He noted that we had lost the title (very sharp of you, Father), but after all, in sport what really counts is not the winning but the playing. His remarks sounded suspiciously close to a paraphrase of the Olympic motto, and I sensed this was the overture to a put-down of such athletic trivia as Ivy titles. But I was not about to feed him any Olympic straight lines, so I gave him his quota of 'Yes sir's and shut up.

We ran the usual conversational gamut, which centers around Old Stony's favorite nontopic, *my plans*.

'Tell me, Oliver, have you heard from the Law School?'

'Actually, Father, I haven't definitely decided on law school.'

'I was merely asking if law school had definitely decided on you.'

Was this another witticism? Was I supposed to smile at my father's rosy rhetoric?

'No sir. I haven't heard.'

'I could give Price Zimmermann a ring—'

'No!' I interrupted as an instant reflex. 'Please don't, sir.'

'Not to influence,' O.B. III said very uprightly, 'just to inquire.'

'Father, I want to get the letter with everyone else. Please.'

'Yes. Of course. Fine.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'Besides there really isn't much doubt about your getting in,' he added.

I don't know why, but O.B. III has a way of disparaging me even while uttering laudatory phrases.

'It's no cinch,' I replied. 'They don't have a hockey team, after all.'

I have no idea why I was putting myself down. Maybe it was because *he* was taking the opposite view.

'You have other qualities,' said Oliver Barrett III, but declined to elaborate. (I doubt if he could have.)

The meal was as lousy as the conversation, except that I could have predicted the staleness of the rolls even before they arrived, whereas I can never predict

what subject my father will set blandly before me.  
'And there's always the Peace Corps,' he remarked,  
completely out of the blue.

'Sir?' I asked, not quite sure whether he was making  
a statement or asking a question.

'I think the Peace Corps is a fine thing, don't you?'  
he said.

'Well,' I replied, 'it's certainly better than the War  
Corps.'

We were even. I didn't know what he meant and  
vice versa. Was that it for the topic? Would we now  
discuss other current affairs or government programs?  
No. I had momentarily forgotten that our quintessential  
theme is always *my plans*.

'I would certainly have no objection to your joining  
the Peace Corps, Oliver.'

'It's mutual, sir,' I replied, matching his own  
generosity of spirit. I'm sure Old Stony never listens  
to me anyway, so I'm not surprised that he didn't react  
to my quiet little sarcasm.

'But among your classmates,' he continued, 'what  
is the attitude there?'

'Sir?'

'Do they feel the Peace Corps is relevant to their  
lives?'

I guess my father needs to hear the phrase as much  
as a fish needs water: 'Yes sir.'

Even the apple pie was stale.

At about eleven-thirty, I walked him to his car.

'Anything I can do, son?'

'No, sir. Good night, sir.'

And he drove off.

Yes, there are planes between Boston and Ithaca,  
New York, but Oliver Barrett III chose to drive. Not  
that those many hours at the wheel could be taken as  
some kind of parental gesture. My father simply *likes*  
to drive. Fast. And at that hour of the night in an  
Aston Martin DBS you can go fast as hell. I have no  
doubt that Oliver Barrett III was out to break his  
Ithaca-Boston speed record, set the year previous after  
we had beaten Cornell and taken the title. I know,  
because I saw him glance at his watch.

I went back to the motel to phone Jenny.

It was the only good part of the evening. I told her  
all about the fight (omitting the precise nature of the  
*casus belli*) and I could tell she enjoyed it. Not many  
of her wonky musician friends either threw or received  
punches.

'Did you at least total the guy that hit you?' she  
asked.

‘Yeah. Totally. I creamed him.’  
‘I wish I coulda seen it. Maybe you’ll beat up somebody  
in the Yale game, huh?’

‘Yeah.’

I smiled. How she loved the simple things in life.