

## PROLOGUE

On a bench in Washington Square Park, two women sat arm to arm, hip to hip, thigh to thigh. One, called Neddie, a diminutive of Benedetta, the Sicilian name she despised, was hatless. Her companion, Linda, sat with a pile of text books on her lap. They endured a December wind that forced debris against full garbage barrels and wired tree trunks. In a few weeks, 1950 would be upon them.

## Saturday Night

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“If it snows on us, we’ll get clitoral pneumonia,” nineteen-year old Neddie said. The upturned collar of a pea-coat she slouched into left exposed black curls cut very short. “Are you sure your roommate is home?”

“Someone always comes home,” Linda, said. Her buttoned camel hair coat, matching scarf and cloche, handmade by her Nordic, mid-western mother, gave her a proper air. “What’s the point of having money for your own apartment,” Neddie said, “if the place doesn’t buy you any privacy.”

Working since high school, Neddie had not accumulated enough money to move from her parents’ home. She would never bring Linda or any outsider home to see the disapproval she faced there. “If we don’t find a way to be together,” Neddie said, “we’ll be cranky and take it out on each other.”

“We will?”

Neddie puffed on her cigarette to avoid smiling. She waited tables at a Greenwich Village café where she had met Linda, so knowing more than Linda about their feelings was the only edge she had on her friend. Linda was not only older by five-years and self-supporting, but soon to graduate with a master’s degree from the university she had always dreamed of attending.

## Saturday Night

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Linda's apartment near New York University housed three other women, all of whom Neddie referred to as *your roommate* as though there were only one. Late at night on Linda's single bed, only a few feet from another occupied bed, they had tossed and turned unable to cool the desire they felt for each other. Neddie had never denied it. Now Linda could not deny it either.

"What did you do with other girls?" Linda asked.

Neddie hated to think about that because whatever petting and kissing she had managed with others felt shabby. It had been hurried and secretive. "It wouldn't be right for us," Neddie said. "You're not like that."

"Believe me. I'm like that."

"You want to make love standing in an alley or a doorway?" Trusting that she looked like a boy with her short hair and winter clothes, Neddie looped her arm through Linda's arm and put her ungloved hand into the pocket of Linda's coat. "Worrying about someone seeing you is not sexy. Just the opposite."

"We can do it standing up?"

Neddie discarded her cigarette, stalling. "Do what?"

"Whatever it is we do."

## Saturday Night

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Neddie wagged her head. “You’re honesty gets me. My experience embarrasses me, but my inexperience is more shameful. For you experience and inexperience are just facts.”

“Answer me,” Linda said. “Can we do it standing?”

Neddie took her hand out of Linda’s pocket and waved to show the possibility.

“Come on,” Linda said, standing. “I know where we can go.”