

## Chapter 1 excerpt

At eighteen, two things pressed down upon me with extravagant urgency: to be a great artist and to lose my virginity. Of the two, the first seemed far less daunting, such being the optimistic years of my youth. As to the other, more pressing challenge, a girl like Maggie Joslin, the blonde jewel of my high school days, was the ideal goal but, during calm reflection, overly ambitious. My father had a better line on how things would work out for me. "You'll fall like a pile of bricks for the first girl you date," he told me soon after my high school graduation. He liked to make such pronouncements and, my father being an obstinate man, the safest response was simply to smile and nod. And I saw no reason to change the habit for that dire prediction.

I'll avoid the fashionable contrivance of jumping back and forth in time as if guided by some absent-minded time traveler and start at the beginning, February of '72, five months after I became a proud Scarlet Knight. There was never any question as to what college I would attend; it would be the one I could afford and, being a resident of New Jersey, that meant Rutgers. After a semester of commuting from my parent's house in Trenton, I put in for a room on the south side of campus, but a last minute snafu delivered me to her dorm complex on the north side. If not for that foul-up it's likely we never would have met. Turns out it was fate. "It had to be!" she would later tell me. "What else could it be?"

I had barely settled in when some genius on our floor decided a keg party was needed to start the semester off right, an idea which even Brian Leahy, our resident teetotaler, quickly approved. "After all," he said, "I don't drink, but I never swore off girls." A meeting was held, the usual questions were raised: what night, how to pay for it, who would print up flyers and how to attract as many coeds as possible to the shindig. Several of the more optimistic promised a lounge overflowing with girls. With everyone's appetite whetted, a sense of urgency ensued. "So how about this Friday night...all in favor?" It was unanimous.

The big day showed up mild, yet looking as if it might snow. There were a few rumbles of thunder in the afternoon but no rain. A strange day. A little before eight, I headed for our lounge. The party was barely under way when my roommate started in on the Looby twins.

"What's the matter, couldn't get a date tonight?" Craig teased Len, the eldest Looby by ten minutes. "So, ya decided to bring your brother as your date?" Not having a date himself didn't deter Craig, and to their credit the ginger-topped twins took his ribbing in stride. They sat in a corner with matching smirks but seemed to be enjoying themselves nonetheless. When not tormenting the Looby's, Craig regaled us all with tales of Pericles, Charlemagne, the Hundred Years War--you name it. A history major, he liked every century but the one he was living in.

Steve Buffone joined the party, boring the hell out of anyone who would listen, and making a brief appearance was Doug Lynch. The affable, Eric Clapton look-alike oozed confidence, and, because of it, scored more than anyone else in the dorm, and, because of that, had the undying admiration of everyone on the floor. Unfortunately, our little social wasn't attracting too many of the opposite sex, so Doug cut out early. At first the only girls bold enough to venture into our little soiree were two freaky hippies who only intimidated me. Some others wandered in and out, and, after twenty minutes or so, I was thinking about ducking out myself. I gulped the last of my beer, put the cup down and turned to find her standing in front of me. Her eyes never yielded but rushed boldly at mine, but without intrigue, without demands and without a bit of self-consciousness.

"I haven't seen you before."

Buffone jumped in before I could get a word out: "This is Nick. He's new on the floor."

She held out her hand. "I'm Minna."