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## A PHOTO OF SOME ITALIAN WOMEN

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*New York, NY*

AS I MOVED A FAMILY ALBUM from one shelf to another, a photo slipped out. I was familiar with it and remembered when it was taken on Mott near Prince Street. That was the heart of Little Italy in the 1960s. There they were—the ladies of the block. They'd be together every day, in front of the building where they lived or in Sally Jap's luncheonette. They were always well-dressed and looked busy, but they never seemed to actually do anything.

The one leaning on my Uncle Jimmy's car is Rosalie. She married Sally Poof, a lug of a soldier and built like an ape. Her hand is in her jacket pocket. She's afraid the outline of her Beretta might show. She always carried it, knowing that something could happen to her husband at any time. She wanted to be able to protect him. She always said, "If anyone is going to kill my Sally, it's going to be me."

The short one standing next to her—that's Rosalie's older sister Marietta. She was a shrew. She never married, and she lived with her sister and Poof. I don't know how he put up with her.

Next is Camille. She and Rosalie were friends since before kindergarten. Camille was her maid of honor, even though Rosalie's future mother-in-law wanted her daughter to play that role. I heard some guys say that Camille might have more than just feelings of friendship for Rosalie. None of them said it too loudly.

The tall one with the red hair, she was my favorite. Because our families were close, I knew her real name. She was her grandmother Arcangela's namesake. But her friends called her Angel. Although known in the neighborhood as being "very dignified" she knew I used to have a little-boy crush on her, so she always acted flirty with me. This photo was taken on her father's block. As made man in charge, it was Augie Hat's block as surely as the Rockefeller Estate belonged to the Rockefellers. And it was one away from my Uncle's Charlie's block. They were associates and as I said, our families were close.

You can just about see that someone's standing behind Angel, blocked from the camera. That's Helen, Angel's younger sister. She was beautiful. Everybody said so. When you spoke with her, you couldn't concentrate on what she said, her beauty being so distracting. But what she said was never too important anyway. She wasn't very bright and got through school using her cuteness and charm to beguile the nuns. You hardly ever saw her alone. She was either with Angel or someplace she'd be safe where everyone knew she was Augie Hat's daughter.

And that fat guy—he's talking to Helen behind her big sister's back. He might have been taking a chance doing that. But maybe it's all right. He was sure to know her fa-

ther would make him disappear if he ever stepped out of line with Helen.

The last one, the one with the cigarette, is Teddy. She's a waitress in the luncheonette and one of the ladies too. But she couldn't always hang out with them because she had a job. Sometimes, if there weren't too many customers, she'd help me with my homework. She was so smart that people wondered why she was a waitress and not something that paid more. I knew that she worked at the luncheonette to make sure some of her cousin Augie's pick-ups and deliveries went smoothly. And for that, she was paid generously.

The ladies of the block, I was happy to see them together again, even if it was only in a picture. They weren't all great beauties, but they each had a striking elegance. They were tough and still remarkably feminine. They were what the younger girls on the block wanted to grow up to be. And what most of the guys would end up marrying. I knew them all and what they were. But to anyone else who saw this picture, it would just be a photo of some Italian women.

