



Pain, Parties, Work: Sylvia Plath in New York, Summer 1953 (P.S.)

Elizabeth Winder

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"I dreamed of New York, I am going there."

On May 31, 1953, twenty-year-old Sylvia Plath arrived in New York City for a one-month stint at "the intellectual fashion magazine" *Mademoiselle* to be a guest editor for its prestigious annual college issue. Over the next twenty-six days, the bright, blond New England collegian lived at the Barbizon Hotel, attended Balanchine ballets, watched a game at Yankee Stadium, and danced at the West Side Tennis Club. She typed rejection letters to writers from *The New Yorker* and ate an entire bowl of caviar at an advertising luncheon. She stalked Dylan Thomas and fought off an aggressive diamond-wielding delegate from the United Nations. She took hot baths, had her hair done, and discovered her signature drink (vodka, no ice). Young, beautiful, and on the cusp of an advantageous career, she was supposed to be having the time of her life.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with fellow guest editors whose memories infuse these pages, Elizabeth Winder reveals how these twenty-six days indelibly altered how Plath saw herself, her mother, her friendships, and her romantic relationships, and how this period shaped her emerging identity as a woman and as a writer. *Pain, Parties, Work*—the three words Plath used to describe that time—shows how Manhattan's alien atmosphere unleashed an anxiety that would stay with her for the rest of her all-too-short life.

Thoughtful and illuminating, this captivating portrait invites us to see Sylvia Plath before *The Bell Jar*, before she became an icon—a young woman with everything to live for.

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