



*Reluctant Press* presents:

# Musical Genius

Briana Vermont



ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID McKINLEY

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A 'HER TV' E-BOOK

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# Musical Genius

**By Briana Vermont**

Illustrations by David McKinley

## Chapter 1

The end of university is the beginning of a new stage in life. It's a transition to a whole new world. For almost twenty years you've been studying, learning all you can about the world around you. For four years, you've studied your particular area of interest. Now it's finally time to leave the classes and studying behind. It's time to enter the world, and to find a place for you in it. With a twenty-year running start, you finally make that leap. There's just one catch: you have to get a job.

It wasn't that Christopher Collins didn't want a job. On the contrary, he had always known what he wanted to do. His passion had always been music, but he realized that becoming a professional musician took as much luck as it did skill. He had never been particularly lucky. So he had studied music, but he realized that was not enough. He had seen too many people study for years, expecting to land a dream job, only to find themselves unemployable anywhere except Clown Burgers.

Christopher didn't want that to happen to him. So in addition to a music degree, he made sure that he graduated with a teaching certificate. No matter what else happened, the world would always need teachers. And with a music degree to back that up, he should be able to find a position easily. Christopher wanted nothing more than to pass his love of music on to a new generation.

That was his plan. It had seemed perfect, up until graduation. That had been four months ago. His résumés had sparked some interest, and he had some interviews with schools around town, but somehow he never got the job. Now the schools had been open

for a month, and had their teaching staff in place. No one seemed interested in his offers of private instruction either. Christopher's life plan had been seriously derailed.

Christopher sat in his empty apartment and considered his situation. He had some serious thinking to do. Unfortunately, he couldn't even do this. Someone in the apartment next door was playing his guitar at top volume. Christopher had sold most of his furniture, and the music echoed through the empty rooms. He pounded on the wall for the fifth time.

Finally, he couldn't stand it any more. Christopher left his apartment, walked down the hall and pounded on the door of his noisy neighbor. He wasn't in a mood to ask nicely either; this guy was going to turn down the music or step outside.

The door opened, and Christopher looked up into the face of his neighbor. It didn't bother him that the guy was taller, a lot taller, than he was. Christopher was used to that; at five foot six, most guys were taller than he was. No, what shook Christopher was the fact that the guy next door was actually the girl next door. And not just any girl; he could say without a doubt that this was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. She had the face of an angel, and was wearing a camisole with very short shorts that revealed a body and legs to die for. Christopher's plans for a confrontation had to be rethought quickly.

Christopher just stood there, staring and unable to speak. Eventually the girl said, "Yah? What's your problem?" Christopher was not the type of person she had to spend time on. He was short, and not particularly good looking. In fact, he had a sort of greasy, unkempt look to him that was distinctly unappealing.

Christopher snapped out of his trance, and found himself able to speak again. "Oh! Hi. I live next door. I was just wondering, do, you ..."

His voice trailed off as the second and third most beautiful girls he had ever seen joined the first. In actual fact, they were all probably tied for first place; he didn't really want to have to choose at this moment. One was wearing a very small T-shirt and shorts, the other a bikini top and short skirt. Christopher lost the ability to speak again. He seemed to have no ability to form coherent thoughts at all.

"Do I what?" the girl said in a surly manner.

"Do, you, what?" said Christopher.

"Look, asshole," said the girl. "We're busy, okay? We don't have all night. If you want something, spit it out."

When Christopher continued to stare, but now with a confused look on his face, the girl tried again. "I live next door, I was just wondering, do you ...?" she said in a perfect impersonation of Christopher's unique, nasally voice.

Christopher suddenly remembered. "Oh! Hi. I do live next door. I was just wondering, do you think you could keep the music down?"

The girl got the sweetest, most apologetic look on her face and said, "Oh, now why didn't you just say so?" Then she dropped the act, looked at Christopher as if he were something she'd found on the bottom of her shoe and said, "No. Goodbye, asshole."

The girl stepped back into the apartment and slammed the door in Christopher's face. Fortunately, her sudden rudeness brought Christopher back to his senses, and he stuck his foot in the opening. So she was one of those girls who thought being beautiful meant she could do or say anything to anyone. Well, he wasn't going to let her get away with it this time.

"Just a minute," he yelled at her. "I live in this building. I pay my rent. And I'm entitled to a little quiet."

The girl looked at him, sizing him up. The she asked, "You live next door?"

"That's right," he told her.

"Then you don't pay rent. You're two months behind, and you're probably not going to be around much longer."

Christopher was completely flustered by her comment. After stammering a few moments, he eventually managed to say, "Who told you that?"

The girl smiled down at him. "The superintendent talks," she said.

Christopher realized she had no reason to do anything he asked. Still, he said, "Look, it's a reasonable request. Just turn down the music."

"It's not like we have a stereo on or something," she said. "We're a band, and we're practicing for a gig this weekend."

Christopher glared back, insulted. "I know the difference between live music and a stereo," he shot back. "I'm a trained musician myself. And I know that you don't have to practice at full volume. This is a one-bedroom apartment, not a concert hall."

Something Christopher said seemed to get the girl's attention. She stopped arguing, and stepped back. For a moment, she seemed to be looking him over, appraising him. Eventually she said, "You're a musician?"

"Yes," said Christopher, not sure if he should still be arguing or not.

"So what instrument do you play?" she asked.

Christopher thought about this a moment. He was never sure how to answer this question. Finally he said, "All of them."

The beautiful girl snorted. "What do you mean, all of them?" she asked.

"All of them," Christopher answered.

"Saxophone? Trombone? Flute?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"Xylophone? Harmonica?" she tried.

"I can play any instrument," he said again.

"So you can play a bass guitar?" she said. The two girls behind her looked at each other oddly.

"Sure," answered Christopher.

The girl looked at her two friends. The three appeared to have a silent conversation, conducted with their eyes alone. After her two friends shrugged their shoulders, the girl turned back to Christopher.

“Look, I’m really sorry,” she said with sugary sweetness and an apologetic smile. “We really got off on the wrong foot. We’re neighbors; of course I’ll turn down the music for you.”

“Oh, well, thank you,” said Christopher, suddenly wondering what had happened.

“I’m Sandra, by the way,” the girl told him as she offered her hand. “These are my friends, Ashley, and Natalie.”

Christopher accepted her hand. “Sandra, nice to meet you. My name is Christopher.”

“Christopher, what a great name!” she said, and smiled at him. “I’ve always loved that name. Look, Christopher, we were just going to take a break. Why don’t you come in and have a beer with us?” Sandra wandered off in the direction of the kitchen.

“No, thanks,” he replied, watching Sandra’s shoulder-length blonde hair swing across her shoulders, her hips swiveling as she walked away. “That’s not necessary, but thank you for the offer.”

“Don’t be silly,” said Ashley as she and Natalie took his hands and led him into the living room. “We were rude. Sit right here.”

The two girls sat him on the couch, then they sat on either side facing him. Sandra returned with a beer and handed it to Christopher. He was never very good at drinking; maybe it was his small size, but alcohol seemed to go straight to his head.

“Thank you, thank you very much,” said Christopher. Sandra sat on the floor at his feet and smiled up at him. He could see right down her top if he wasn’t careful. The tiny blue dots on her bra were almost hypnotic.

The three girls talked with Christopher while he finished his beer, asking him about his musical experience and laughing at all his stories (even the ones that weren’t funny).

“So Christopher,” said Sandra, “if you’re so talented, why don’t you play something for us?” She indicated the musical instruments in the middle of the room.

Christopher rose unsteadily, and crossed over to the keyboard. Without sitting, he played a few bars of Bach’s Cantata No. 147, all signs of any drunkenness gone as the music flowed from his fingers.

The three girls smiled, and applauded enthusiastically. Then Sandra gushed, “That was so good! Do you play other styles? Like, can you play rock and roll? And you said you could play bass guitar,” she added, indicating the bass sitting in the corner.

Christopher picked up the bass guitar and placed the strap around his shoulders. He played a few chord progressions, then followed this with an amazing bass riff. The girls were sincerely impressed, and they applauded and shouted their appreciation.

“Christopher, that was amazing!” said Sandra, actually meaning it this time. “I think I told you before, we’re a band. I play lead guitar and vocals, Ashley is keyboard and backup vocals, and Natalie is on drums.”

"You'll have to tell me where you're playing," said Christopher. "I'd like to come see you."

"Well," said Sandra, turning just slightly sad and pouting her lower lip, "you see, the thing is, we're supposed to play at this club downtown on Saturday, but we may have to cancel."

"Yes," said Ashley as she turned on the sad routine. "We had a bass guitar player, but she quit on us."

"Got pregnant, got married, moved away," said Natalie. "That old story."

"But Christopher," said Sandra, suddenly brightening, "you're such a fantastic musician! How would you like to join the band? It would be such a big favor to us!"

Christopher really wanted to help these girls, but he just wasn't sure if he could. "I don't know," he said. "I'm an instructor, not a performer. I'm not good with crowds."

"Don't worry about crowds," said Natalie. "We never get that many people."

"It's a paying job, too," Sandra added with a look at Natalie. "Not much, only \$100, but I know you can use the money," she said, thinking of his overdue rent. "Only for a couple of shows, until we find a replacement. It would be such a big help to us!"

"Yes, but still," Christopher said with some hesitation.

"Don't make up your mind right now," Sandra told him. "Sit in with us and play a couple of songs. Stay right here, I have the music for bass guitar in the next room."

"Oh, I don't need it," said Christopher. "Let's see, it goes something like this..."

Christopher reached over to the piano, and with one hand played the opening to the band's song. "Then I figure the bass line would come in with something like this," he said as he improvised on the bass guitar.

The three girls just stared at Christopher. "Okay, now that was spooky," said Ashley.

"How do you know our song?" asked Natalie.

"I told you, I heard it all through the wall," Christopher told them.

"Yes, but you *learned* it through the wall? Well enough that you can play it back, and improvise a bass line?" asked Sandra.

"Sure," said Christopher. "It's catchy," he added.

The three girls had a quick, wordless conversation with their eyes. The vote was unanimous.

"Now you have got to join us!" said Sandra. All three moved in close to Christopher. They jumped up and down enthusiastically, saying "Please?" until he relented.

"Alright," he laughed, "I'll do it! I'll play with you!"

"Oh, thank you Christopher, you're the best!" enthused Sandra. She magically pulled another beer from somewhere and handed it to him. Christopher took a drink from the bottle.

"Christopher, you play great, and I really think you're going to fit in so well," said Sandra. She waited until he had finished another swig from the beer. "There's just one more thing you'll need to know. You see, we're a girl band."

"Yes, I noticed," laughed Christopher. The beer was starting to loosen him up.

"The name of the band is 'Pritee Gurlz', and our hook is that we're all, well, pretty girls," added Ashley.

"You don't have to tell me," Christopher laughed again. "I noticed the moment you opened the door."

"The thing is," said Sandra, "if you're going to be one of the Pritee Gurlz, you're going to have to be, a pretty girl."

Christopher was in the middle of another swig, but he put the bottle down as he thought about this. The look on his face said that he didn't quite understand what she had said, or at least he hoped he didn't.

"You wouldn't have to do much," Sandra assured him. "We'll put a little makeup on you, you can wear a skirt and stand at the back. No one will even notice you. Just let your hair down from that ponytail and you'll look great."

"No, no, that's crazy," said Christopher, feeling awfully drunk but fully understanding what they were saying now. "You can have a guy, playing bass. That's me, the guy playing bass."

"I'm sorry, Christopher," said Sandra, "but we're billed as an all-girl band. That's who we are, and that's who we want to be."

"Well, now you're an all-girl band with one guy!" he yelled.

"Look," said Sandra, all pretense of the nice girl-next-door gone, "You've been in the band for two minutes, and already you're trying to change things! Let me tell you, this is my band, and we run things my way. Get it?"

"Change things?" he stammered. "I don't want to change anything, I want to leave it all the way it is!"

"Please, Christopher?" tried Ashley and Natalie. They poured on the cute little girl act as they stroked his arms and said, "We really want you in the band. It'll be fun!"

"I'll tell you what," said Sandra. "We can pay you \$150, because of the extra effort for you."

"I won't do it. It's degrading," said Christopher.

Sandra was silent for a moment. The smile dropped completely from her face, and she stared icicles at Christopher. When she finally spoke, she let into him with everything she had.

"Degrading?" she yelled. "You little shit. You think it's degrading to be a girl? You think you're better than us, just because we're girls?"

"That's not what I said," Christopher tried to explain.

“All this time, you’ve been looking at us – and we’ve seen you, don’t think we haven’t – staring at our chests and legs and hair, and we let you because we thought you were a nice guy. But all the time you were thinking you were better than us!”

“It’s not true,” Christopher tried to say.

“Please Christopher,” said Natalie, pulling him aside. “Just try it Sandra’s way. It’ll work out, you’ll see.”

The good-guy, bad-guy routine was starting to work on Christopher. ‘All I have to do is say yes,’ he thought to himself, ‘then everyone will be happy again.’ After all, how bad could it be to spend time with these three, beautiful girls?

He was about to agree, and looked up at the girls’ hopeful, expectant faces. He saw them in their sexy outfits ... and suddenly realized they didn’t just want him to join them, they wanted him to look just like them! There was no way he could do this!

“No, no way. I won’t do it. And if I don’t play, you’ll just have to cancel.” Christopher started walking toward the door.

“We won’t cancel,” said Sandra. “It’s only a bass player, we can go on without one.”

Christopher opened the door and stepped into the hallway. “Then good luck to you,” he yelled. “And keep the noise down!”

Christopher slammed the door and walked back to his own apartment. He fumbled with the keys, just a little drunk and having some difficulty. He didn’t notice that someone had followed him down the hall until he felt the touch of a hand on his arm. Startled, he turned to face the other person. “Oh, it’s you. What do you want?”

“Same as always,” said the superintendent. “The rent is long overdue. You’ve got to come up with some money.”

I still haven’t found a job, but I have some leads. I just need some more time.”

“Well, you don’t have any more time. The landlord told me to get you out if you don’t pay up. I’m sorry, boy, but you’re going to have to move out tomorrow.”

This sobered up Christopher immediately. Without even thinking he said, “No, wait. I’ve got a job, this Saturday. It’s not full time, just temporary, but I can pay you on Monday, I promise.”

The superintendent looked at Christopher for a while. Finally he shook his head and said, “I can’t believe I’m doing this. But you’re a good kid, and no one should hold it against you just because you’re having some bad luck. This job of yours better be on the level, and I better see some of that back rent on Monday morning!”

“It is, and you will,” Christopher told him.

The super looked at Christopher again, then shook his head. He wandered down the hallway, and left through the stairwell.

Christopher thought about what he had to do. He took a deep breath, then went back to Sandra’s apartment and knocked on the door.

“Well, look who’s here,” said Sandra as she opened the door. “Are you here to tell us more about why we should feel humiliated to be girls?”

"No," said Christopher. "I just wondered if you changed your mind?"

"Sorry," replied Sandra as she leaned against the door. "We have our artistic vision."

"I'll do it," said Christopher quietly.

"Sorry, what did you say?" asked Sandra. She honestly couldn't hear him, he spoke so softly.

"I said I'll do it," Christopher said a bit louder.

"You'll dress like I tell you, wear your hair and makeup as I say, no argument?" she demanded.

"Yes, no argument," Christopher replied.

"Well okay," said Sandra. "Welcome to the band!" Sandra let him in the door, and closed it behind him. "Ladies, look who's back! Christopher's in the band. We were just going to rehearse, go get your bass. I think there's still half a beer over there for you."

Christopher finished the beer. He was going to need it.

## Chapter 2

The next day started like any other for Christopher. He slept in late, since he had nowhere to go. To get ready for the day, all he had to do was run a comb through his hair and tie it back. He didn't even need to get dressed – he had slept in his clothes. He rinsed his mouth with some water from the bathroom, then left the apartment.

He had a bit of a hangover from the night before. He wasn't used to drinking; he hadn't been able to afford it for some time. It took him a couple of hours to walk it off. He had a regular routine where he would check all the posters he had placed around the neighborhood, to see if anyone had taken any of his address labels, or if anyone had defaced the posters. When this happened he had to replace them.

There was a local youth unemployment center a few blocks away that was a big help. Technically, he was a bit old for the center. They allowed him to use their facilities anyway, though. They generally weren't all that busy, and Christopher looked as young as any of the teenagers who came in anyway.

Christopher would spend a couple of hours at the center every day. They had a photocopier that he used to replace his posters at 5 cents a sheet. He used their phone to make calls, since his had been disconnected. And they sometimes had leads for him to follow on prospective jobs.

By noon, he had usually done everything he could. Then he would return to his apartment, and wait to see if anyone followed up on the address labels. If no one showed up, the afternoons would pass very slowly. Usually no one showed up.

Sandra had told him the band would get together at her apartment to practice every night this week. The other girls would get there around seven o'clock, but she would stop by Christopher's apartment at six to help him get ready. Somehow, having this to dread made the afternoon go more slowly than usual. At six o'clock, there was a knock on the door.

“Shit, Christopher,” said Sandra as she pushed past him and took a look at the empty apartment. “I like what you’ve done with the place. Very Spartan.” She dropped the blouse and skirt she had brought with her on one of the two wooden chairs in the room, and stretched out on the other. She was wearing a tube top and a pair of shorts that were even smaller than the ones from the previous night.

“Yes, very funny,” said Christopher without humor. “Let’s just get this over with,” he said as he reached for the clothes.

“Like hell,” said Sandra, slapping his hand away as she got a good look at him. “These are my own clothes, and you’re not touching them like that. Jeez, what the hell’s wrong with you? You haven’t even shaved, and you need a shower bad. Get going. And don’t forget to wash your hair.”

Christopher went into the bathroom, and removed his clothes. He shaved his face, and showered, and washed his hair as he had been told. All the while, Sandra explored his apartment, calling insults to him.

Sandra looked through the kitchen, noting the distinct lack of anything edible. “You know there’s nothing in your fridge except for an empty pickle jar?” she called to him. “So why didn’t you just throw it away?”

“I don’t know,” he called back. “The refrigerator just looked so empty.”

“So basically, you don’t eat?” she asked as she entered the bathroom.

“Hey!” he yelled, covering himself with his towel. “Get out! A little privacy, please?”

“Don’t get all excited, I’m not going to rape you,” she said. “I’m just exchanging these,” she said, indicating the pair of clean underpants she found in his room, “for these,” she said, picking up his old clothes off the floor.

Christopher watched her leave with his clothes. “You expect me to come out there wearing nothing but my underwear?” he asked.

Sandra turned and stared at him. “You are such an idiot,” she finally said. “Yes, come out in your underwear. I’ll dress you out here.” Then she took a good look at him. “Wow, you’re really thin. This not eating is really working for you. Keep it up.”

Christopher put on his underwear, in case she decided to come back. Then he finished toweling his hair dry, and ran a comb through it. Reluctantly, he went out to his living room, where Sandra was arranging her things. She turned and looked him up and down.

“What the hell did you wash your hair with?” she asked.

“Soap,” he replied.

Sandra shook her head, unable to come up with anything to say that could possibly express her disdain. “Okay, just put on these pantyhose.”

Christopher took the pantyhose, and attempted to step into them.

“Oh, my, God,” said Sandra. “You don’t have a single clue, do you? That’s not how you put on pantyhose. Just sit down, you idiot.”

“I’m sorry, this is all kind of new to me,” Christopher shot back.

Sandra showed him how to roll the pantyhose down to the toe, then stick his foot in, and roll it back up his leg. Christopher then rolled up the other side, stuck his toe to the bottom, and began rolling it up his other leg. There was a knock at the door.

“Damn it, always when you’re in the middle of something,” said Sandra as she walked over and opened the front door.

Christopher was sitting on a wooden chair, in the middle of an empty room, almost naked except for a pair of pantyhose tying his right ankle to his left knee. He couldn’t even walk, let alone run as he wanted. Yet somehow, he managed to hop, fall, and roll into the kitchen before Sandra got the door open.

“Yes?” Sandra asked the middle-aged woman at the door.

“I’m looking for Christopher Collins,” she said. “He gives music lessons, is this the right place? My daughter would like to take guitar lessons.”

Sandra turned around, and seeing the empty chair, turned back to the woman and said, “He’s not here right now.”

The woman looked past Sandra at the apartment, empty except for two wooden chairs and a small pile of clothes. “Maybe I’ll come back another time,” she said as she turned to leave.

“Get a phone number, and he’ll get back to her tomorrow,” Christopher called from his hiding place in the kitchen.

“No thank you, that’s not necessary. Thank you, goodbye,” said the woman as she hurried away down the hall.

“That’s just great. That could have been a paying client, and you had to scare her away,” said Christopher as he crawled back into the living room.

“What the hell’s the matter with you, are you nuts?” yelled Sandra. “You’re going to run your pantyhose.”

Christopher climbed off the floor and onto the chair, then finished adjusting his pantyhose.

Sandra got him to stand, and helped him into the blouse. It was black, with long sleeves to cover the hair on his arms. She helped him do up the buttons, as they were backwards to what he was used to, and since he fumbled with them pathetically. Then she helped him step into the short black skirt, and did up the belt for him.

“Excellent, you’re really starting to look like something now,” she told him as she pulled out her makeup kit.

“You know why you don’t have any clients, don’t you?” she asked as she applied some foundation over his beard. “You’re a creepy little guy, with a squeaky voice living in a disturbingly empty apartment. Would you leave *your* children with you?”

“I didn’t agree to let you insult me,” he said.

“Insult you?” said Sandra with a snort. “I’m not insulting you, I’m helping you. And boy, do you need help.”

Sandra did a quick job on Christopher's eyes, applying some eye shadow, liner, and mascara. A little lipstick and he was ready.

"Here are your shoes. Get them on, and let's take a look at you." She handed him a pair of sandals with three-inch heels. He fumbled with the straps until Sandra gave in and did them up for him. Then he stood, and walked to the bathroom for a look at himself.

"Pretty impressive, if I do say so myself," said Sandra, admiring her handiwork. Christopher had to agree. He did look like a girl, although maybe not as pretty as Sandra and the rest of the band. But, in the shadows at the back of the stage, he should be okay. "Come on, the others will be arriving soon," Sandra told him.

"Oh wait," he said. "I don't have any pockets. Where do I put my keys?"

"Just give them to me," Sandra told him. "We'll get you a purse at my place."

They left Christopher's apartment, and walked the short distance down the hall to Sandra's. It was almost seven o'clock; the others would show up any time now. Christopher paced awkwardly and self-consciously.

"You need to learn how to walk. You look like a horse the way you clomp around," said Sandra helpfully.

"Do you think you could maybe stop insulting me, please?" asked Christopher.

"You're such a baby," said Sandra.

Ashley and Natalie arrived together, at a little past seven. They were both wearing halter-tops and Capri pants, but Natalie in orange and Ashley in lime green. Christopher would have liked to admire them, but it seemed everyone wanted to look at his outfit instead.

At first, they were excited and complimentary. But it didn't take long for them to look more closely, and start spotting problems.

"She looks good," said Natalie, "but you can already see beard showing through under the foundation."

"And the hair on her legs really shows through her pantyhose," added Ashley.

"She's totally flat-chested, didn't you even give her a bra?"

"I can see chest hair sticking out of her blouse."

"What did you do to her hair? It's totally flat and lifeless."

"Her eyebrows need some serious shaping."

"I see what you mean," said Sandra. "I thought we could get away with just a few minor changes, but I didn't realize how bad she would be to start. I can see that tomorrow, I'll have to give her a serious makeover."

"Hey!" said Christopher. "Can we please stop with all the 'she' and 'her' talk? I'm still a guy!"

"No," said Sandra. "That was my mistake today. From now on, no more half-measures. From now on when you're with us, you are a girl. You'll act like one of the

girls, and we'll treat you like one of the girls." She thought for a moment and asked, "Does anyone ever call you Chris?"

"Sometimes," he answered. "But I prefer Christopher."

"Then from now on, your name is Chrissy. And tomorrow, you get the full treatment."

"Don't worry, Chrissy," said Ashley as she took her aside. "Sandra takes a little getting used to, but I can tell she already thinks of you as one of the Pritee Gurlz."

With that, the girls got down to business, and rehearsed their act.

Sandra showed up at Chrissy's apartment at four o'clock the next afternoon. "Hey, Chrissy," she said. "You ready to get started? I've been shopping, and I can't wait to try some of these things out!"

"Hi Sandra," Chrissy greeted her at the door. "You're early, I wasn't expecting you for a couple of hours. I was just going to shave."

"Then it's a good thing I got here. You're not going to shave today. And I'm early because we have a lot of work to do. We'll be lucky if we finish by the time the other girls get here. Now get into the bathroom, and strip to your shorts."

Chrissy knew better than to protest. He took Sandra at her word – yesterday Sandra told him to act like a girl, and he would be treated like a girl. Sandra was a lot nicer to girls, so being treated like one was a good thing. He just kept thinking, "Only a few more days of this, I'll get paid, I can pay off some rent and keep my apartment." Chrissy went into the bathroom, and stripped down to his briefs.

"So you don't want me to shave?" Chrissy asked, slightly incredulous, as Sandra joined him in the bathroom.

"That's right," Sandra told him. I have something better. She reached into a plastic bag, and pulled out what looked like a can of shaving cream. Sandra shook the can, and sprayed some into her hand. Then she bent down, and tried to put the cream on Chrissy's legs.

"Hey, whoa! Slow down!" yelled Chrissy. "There's no way I'm letting you shave my legs!"

"Would you just relax?" Sandra told him. "I'm not going to shave your legs, and this isn't shaving cream. It's a depilatory." Chrissy calmed down, and allowed Sandra to spread the cream up and down his legs.

"I was on the Internet today," Sandra explained. "I looked up some drag websites to see what they do about their hair problems. It recommended this stuff. It's called, 'Hair Today'. Here, take some and start spreading it over your beard." Sandra sprayed a small amount into Chrissy's hand, and he began spreading it over his face, on his cheeks and chin, and under his nose.

"So what does it do?" Chrissy wanted to know. He looked into the mirror, making sure his face was coated thoroughly and evenly.

"Do you realize you even have hair on your toes?" said Sandra as she finished off the first leg, now covered completely from Chrissy's hip to his toes. Sandra sprayed some more into her hand, and started spreading it down Chrissy's other leg.

"It lightens the hair, and thins it," Sandra explained. "Then it just sort-of dissolves and falls out."

Chrissy jumped away from Sandra. "What do you mean, it falls out? I don't want it to fall out!"

"Damn it, Chrissy, you almost kicked me! It's just hair, who the hell cares? It grows back."

"I don't want people to see my legs hairless!" Chrissy yelled.

"So who ever sees them anyway? You wear pants all day, don't you? Don't be such a baby girl."

"People see my face," Chrissy tried, realizing he had just covered his own face with the cream.

"So what? You shave your face anyway. So are you going to let me do the second leg now, or are you so stubborn that you want to keep the hair on one leg only?"

Chrissy relented. Sandra continued applying the cream up and down the second leg, all the way to the toes.

Chrissy turned around, so that Sandra could finish off the back of his legs. Sandra stood when she was finished, and rubbed her hands over Chrissy's back. The back rub felt nice, so Chrissy let her continue.

"This will be better," Sandra told him. "We'll get rid of this back hair too."

"What!" shouted Chrissy. "You put that stuff on my back? Without asking?"

"Settle down, it's just back hair," Sandra said. "It's gross, have you ever seen it? Trust me, you want to get rid of it." Sandra finished rubbing the cream all over Chrissy's back, then had Chrissy turn around.

"You forgot to do your throat when you did your face," Sandra reminded him. "Here, let me get it for you." Sandra put a little more cream in her hand, and applied it to Chrissy's throat. Chrissy looked up to make it easier for her. This also made it easier for Sandra to sneak some onto Chrissy's chest.

"Hey, no!" said Chrissy, covering his chest with his arms and backing away from Sandra. "That's my chest hair. Mine, understand? I'm keeping it."

"Are you sure?" tried Sandra. "Guys with smooth chests look so sexy," she said seductively, as she tried to rub her cream-covered hands over Chrissy's chest.

"You're thinking of muscular guys," said Chrissy, fending her off. "Guys like me, we need the hair."

"Okay," said Sandra, giving up and looking resigned. I wouldn't ask if I didn't think it was absolutely necessary, so no one would spot you on stage as a guy, but I understand. I know, none of this is easy for you." She thought for a moment, then said, "I tell you what, I could pay you \$150, to compensate you for your trouble."

"You're already paying me \$150," Chrissy told her.

"I am? Damn, let me think," said Sandra. She thought for a minute, doing some math in her head.

“Okay, I can pay you \$200, if you let me finish your chest. I know you need the money. And it’s in your own best interest; you don’t want anyone to find out you’re not a girl.”

Chrissy thought it over. He actually owed a lot more than \$200, and had been worried that \$150 wouldn’t be enough to keep the apartment. \$200 would be better, and Sandra had a point about not wanting to be caught dressed as a girl.

“Okay, go ahead,” he relented.

“Excellent!” said Sandra. “You are going to look so good,” she said as she spread the cream all over Chrissy’s chest and belly. Then she grabbed Chrissy’s arm, and spread cream all up and down.

“Fine, go ahead, get it all,” Chrissy said in resignation as he raised his arms. Sandra spread the cream up and down both arms, including Chrissy’s armpits.

When Sandra finally finished, Chrissy looked ridiculous. He was covered in cream from his cheeks to his toes.

“Now wait right here,” said Sandra as she rinsed her hands. “I need something from my apartment. I’ll be right back.”

“What should I do?” said Chrissy from beneath all the foam.

“I don’t know, just work the cream in, rub it around. Give it a chance to work.”

And then she left. For over half an hour Chrissy waited, standing naked and cream-covered, trapped in his own bathroom. He rubbed the cream into his skin, as Sandra had told him. He had a lot of time, and managed to do his entire body twice, feeling his own hair swirling around as it dissolved and fell out.

When Sandra finally returned, Chrissy was just a little put out. “Where have you been all this time?”

“Just next door. I got a few things for you. Why’ve you still got the cream on?”

“You didn’t tell me I could take it off!” said Chrissy.

“What am I, your mother? Do I have to tell you everything? Just get in the shower and wash it all off. It should have worked really well after all this time. And here, these are for you. ‘Country Garden’ shampoo for oily hair. After you get the cream off, wash your hair, twice, then use the cream rinse.” Then she repeated for emphasis, “Twice! And don’t forget the cream rinse!”

“Okay, I get it. I’m not a child,” Chrissy said as he stepped into the shower. Sandra left to give him some privacy.

The cream had worked incredibly well. Chrissy watched as the stream of water from the shower head washed away the cream, along with every hair from his body. He finished with soap, making sure the cream was completely gone. Then he washed his hair, twice, using the Country Garden scented shampoo. The floral scent was a nice change from the fumes given off by the ‘Hair Today’ cream. Then he finished with the Country Garden cream rinse and conditioner.

Chrissy toweled himself dry, finishing up by drying his hair. Sandra walked in unannounced, and Chrissy quickly covered his naked chest with the towel. Realizing his mistake, he moved it lower.

“Wow,” said Sandra as she touched Chrissy’s chest. “You look great. That stuff is amazing. I think I’ll try it later on my legs.” She touched his face, seeing that it was pink and completely stubble free. “You’ll probably want to put some on your ass later; it probably looks like you’re wearing a fur bikini.”

“These underpants are completely creamed,” said Chrissy, feeling very self-conscious. “Do you think you could get me another pair from my room?”

“Not necessary. Ta da!” said Sandra as she pulled her hands from behind her back, revealing a pair of black panties in one and a black brassiere in the other.

“These are women’s underwear,” said Chrissy. “I can wear my own underwear. No one is going to see them.”

“Uh, uh,” said Sandra, wagging her finger at Chrissy. “No half-measures, remember? You’re going to be a girl completely, right down to your panties. Trust me, this is the best way. And I bought these for you today. You’re not refusing a gift, are you?”

Chrissy looked closely at the panties. “They don’t look new,” he said.

“Okay,” said Sandra, miffed that she had been caught. “I kept the new ones for myself, these are a pair of mine. Still, I’m giving them to you. I’m spending a lot of my own money on you; is it too much to ask that I get just one new pair of panties for myself out of the deal?”

“Just turn around while I put them on,” said Chrissy. Sandra turned her back, and Chrissy stepped into his new panties, Sandra’s old panties. He put on the bra, and Sandra helped him to do up the clasp on the back.

“This is great, you look so cute,” said Sandra, stepping back to admire Chrissy in his panties and bra. “I always wanted a little sister, who I could teach all about clothes and hair and makeup. Today, you’re my little sister!”

Chrissy’s face turned red, as he blushed from embarrassment. Sandra looked in her bags for more bottles. She pulled out a tall, thin can and showed it to Chrissy.

“This is ‘Country Gardens’ mousse and styling agent.” She sprayed a small amount into her hand, then started working it into Chrissy’s hair. “It will make sure your hair stays in place once we’ve styled it.”

Sandra continued working the mousse into Chrissy’s hair. When she was finished, she rinsed her hands and pulled out a hair dryer. She set about drying Chrissy’s hair, working at it with a brush to get some fullness into it.

When she finished, Sandra let Chrissy see himself in the mirror. Chrissy was shocked at what he saw. He was not just a girl, but an amazingly pretty girl. His cheeks were pink, and his hair was full, falling softly on his shoulders and continuing down his back. The black bra suggested demure, round breasts. Chrissy was getting turned on just looking at himself.

“Not bad,” said Sandra. “And we’re just getting started. Follow me for clothes and makeup.”

Chrissy followed Sandra to the living room. He sat in one chair, while Sandra sat in the other. He was no longer self-conscious about wearing nothing but a bra and panties; he decided it was best to really be another girl, maybe even Sandra’s little sister Chrissy, learning about makeup for the very first time.

“We need to tidy up these eyebrows,” said Sandra as she got out her tweezers.

Chrissy knew this was going to happen no matter how much he protested, but he tried anyway. “Please, not real thin, okay?”

“Don’t be stupid,” said Sandra. “Nobody has thin eyebrows any more. They’ll look like mine, okay? I’m just going to remove your uni-brow, and get rid of some strays.”

Chrissy looked at Sandra’s eyebrows, and had to agree that they weren’t overly thin. He sat still for the whole operation, although it seemed to be more than just a few strays.

“There,” said Sandra finally. “All done. You look great. And I guarantee, if you ever go out as a guy again, this will make you look a lot less creepy.”

Chrissy took this as a compliment, although a typical Sandra-type compliment. He also wasn’t quite sure how to take the ‘if’ comment, but then he wasn’t given a chance to think about it. Sandra was already moving on to the makeup.

“This is foundation. You shouldn’t normally need any; you have great skin now. You certainly don’t need the globs of it we used yesterday. But if you’re going out, you might want to use this to make sure your skin tone is even.”

Sandra applied the foundation lightly to Chrissy’s face. She continued with eye makeup, choosing colors to suit Chrissy’s natural coloring, and explaining how everything was to be applied. “You have fabulous lashes,” Sandra told him as she finished with Mascara.

Then she applied lip liner, and finally a glossy lipstick. She explained what Chrissy would need to keep in his purse, and what he could leave at home.

“That’s everything, little sister. I can’t believe how beautiful you look!” gushed Sandra, truly meaning it for once. “I am truly awesome,” she admitted modestly.

“Oh, let me see!” asked Chrissy, remembering how excited he got seeing himself before the makeup.

“Not yet,” said Sandra. “First you need to get dressed.” She handed Chrissy a pair of pantyhose.

“You don’t have to tell me, I know what to do with these,” said Chrissy. He rolled the pantyhose down to the toe, and slipped in his foot. They slid easily over his smooth, hairless legs. He was tingling with anticipation to see what he looked like.

“You’re going to wear a dress today,” said Sandra as she handed Chrissy a purple slip. She helped him to put it over his head and slide it down over his body and finally his hips. As Chrissy stood with his hands at his sides, the slip reached just to the end of his fingertips. The silky material clung to his body, giving the appearance of soft, feminine curves.

The deep neckline revealed the smooth skin of his chest, and the bra hinted at pretty, feminine breasts.

Sandra handed Chrissy the same sandals he had worn the night before. He was getting better at things, and so was able to do up the straps by himself. Then he stood and looked expectantly at Sandra.

"Well?" asked Chrissy anxiously. "Where's the dress?"

"What do you mean, where's the dress? You're wearing it. You're finished!"

Chrissy looked down at himself. "Oh no," he said. "This is a slip, not a dress. This is way too revealing! I'm not going anywhere in this."

"Would you please, just, relax," said Sandra, as if she were dealing with a child for the tenth time today. "Would I let my little sister go anywhere dressed inappropriately? I wore this same dress on stage two weeks ago, and it's longer on you than on me. Believe me, you look amazing in it."

Sandra handed Chrissy his purse, and Chrissy placed his keys into it. Sandra led him to the door.

"Don't I get to look at myself first?" Chrissy asked.

"No time. It's after seven; the others will be here in a minute. You can look at my place, in the full length mirror."

The two girls had hardly entered Sandra's apartment, when there was a knock at the door. Sandra opened it, and then Natalie and Ashley came in.

"Natalie, Ashley, meet our new bass guitarist," Sandra said.

Natalie and Ashley walked into the room and looked at Chrissy.

"Hi, I'm Ashley," said Ashley as she took Chrissy's hand. Then she turned to Sandra. "So, you found a replacement for Chrissy, did you?"

Natalie looked at Chrissy, with a questioning expression on her face. "Sandra, isn't that your purple slip she's wearing?" Then she looked a little more closely. "Chrissy? Is that you?"

Chrissy smiled. Then she laughed. Natalie and Ashley shrieked, and hugged her, jumping up and down with excitement.

"What can I say?" said Sandra, admiring her work. "I'm good."

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Chrissy woke the next morning, late as usual, and blinked the sleep out of his eyes. As he sat up, he noticed an unusual red smudge across his pillow. On closer inspection, he realized it was lipstick. No one had told him to take off his makeup before bed. Some things he would just have to figure out for himself.

Chrissy made his way to the bathroom to wash his face. He usually slept in his clothes, and was still wearing the black panties from the night before. Fortunately, he had had the sense to take everything else off before crashing for the night.

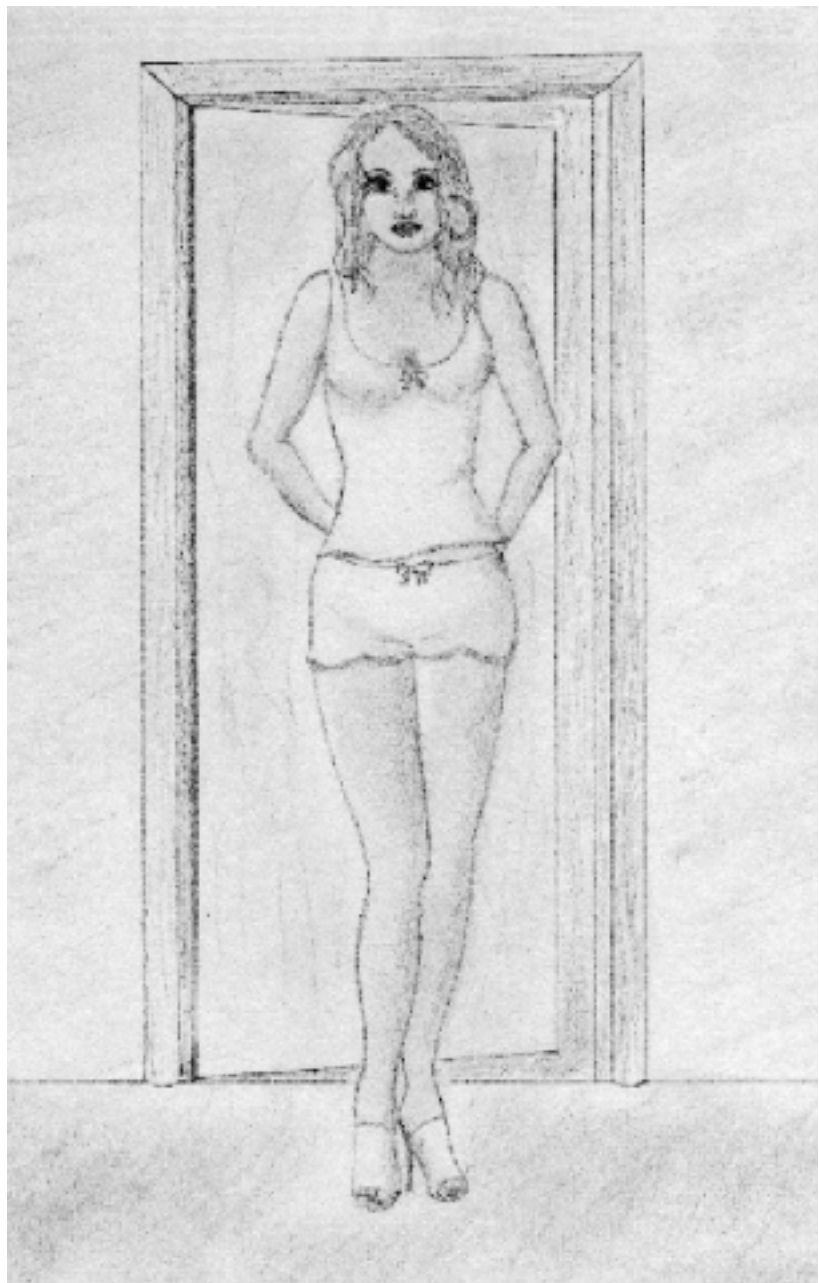
Chrissy looked at himself in the bathroom mirror. His lipstick was smeared across his face, but it was his eyes that caught his attention. They were still perfectly made up, and made him think back to the night before. When he had finally been able to see himself in the mirror, he couldn't believe what Sandra had done. He had looked amazing, unbelievably hot. He was the kind of girl that had always been way out of his league. Those legs were incredible.

His legs! Chrissy looked down, and saw his bare, hairless legs. Not a single hair on his chest, stomach, or arms, either. Chrissy groaned, and turned back to the bathroom sink. He filled the sink with water, and scrubbed his eyes, mouth, and face with soap, getting rid of the last traces of makeup.

Chrissy dried his face, and looked at the mirror. His face was so smooth, not a hint of stubble. Where a dark shadow of beard should have appeared on his cheeks and chin, there was nothing but pink skin, undoubtedly made even more pink by the scrubbing he had given it. The face staring back at him was the girl from last night, unmade up, and looking just as pretty as ever.

Chrissy took a brush, and worked on his hair. It still held some of the shape from Sandra's styling the day before. He tried to brush it flat, but a shake of his head was all it took to give it the wild, textured look Sandra had given it. Chrissy snapped an elastic on it, holding it back in a ponytail. "I don't believe this," he said as he left the bathroom.

Chrissy removed the black panties, and threw them on the bed. He put on his own underwear, jeans, a T-shirt and sneakers. He had things to do. He knew he was just over-reacting; the idea that he still looked like a girl was just in his head. He



just had to get out of the apartment, do a few normal things.

Chrissy went through his regular routine. He checked his posters, taking down one that needed replacing. He went to the student job center, where he made some photocopies and checked the job postings. But he couldn't stop thinking about that girl from the night before, the one in the mirror. He knew it was ridiculous, but he wanted to see her again.

It was too early to go home, so he sat at one of the center's computer terminals. The terminals were intended for activities like writing a résumé or job-related research. Chrissy got onto the Internet. Sandra had mentioned she had looked on some drag websites. Chrissy looked at a few, hoping to learn a few more tricks. He looked at websites meant for women as well, reading up on how to style his hair and fix his makeup.

Chrissy printed off a few pages, and went to the counter to pay. He knew the middle-aged man at the counter quite well; he was in almost every day. "Hi," he said in greeting. "Let's see, I've got six pages today."

The man looked at the pages on hair and makeup, counting them. "You must be getting ready for an interview," he said as he looked up at Chrissy.

Chrissy didn't know quite what to say. "Um, yes," he felt was a good response.

"It's a good idea to try to look your best. That will be 30 cents."

Chrissy paid with a few coins, then turned to leave as quickly as he could. "Good luck on the interview, sweetie," the man called after him.

Chrissy practically ran out of the center. The man hadn't even recognize him. And he thought that Chrissy was a ...

Chrissy went straight back to the apartment. He went into the bathroom, and looked at himself in the mirror. He didn't look that much like a girl, really, did he? He was wearing a T-shirt and jeans, nothing feminine about that. He had no makeup on, and his hair was tied back, not loose. When you got right down to it, he didn't look much different from two days ago. It was still the same face, right?

Chrissy continued to look in the mirror for a long time.

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There was a knock on the door just before six o'clock. Chrissy checked through the peephole to make sure who it was, then opened the door for Sandra.

"Hey, Chrissy," said Sandra. "Wow, you've been busy. Looking good, little sis!" she added after she looked him over. Chrissy had already washed and styled his hair, and done his makeup, but was still in his black panties and bra.

Sandra looked more closely, to see how well he had done without her. "Not bad," she had to admit. "I came over to help you, but it looks like you're getting the idea. Hey, have you done this before?" she teased.

Chrissy blushed. "No, but I got home early today. I was looking at myself in the mirror, and decided to practice a bit with the makeup you left. You know, just try a few

things. Then I had a shower, worked on my hair like you showed me, and did my makeup for real.”

Sandra picked up a brush, and worked on Chrissy’s hair. “You want to brush more from the underside, to give it more lift,” she said. Sandra stepped back and took a good look at Chrissy. Then she noticed something.

“Hey, wait a minute,” she said. “Where’s your, um, ‘bulge’?” she asked, pointing at Chrissy’s panties.

Chrissy blushed again. “I was on the Internet, and a website explained how to hide it completely. I was just trying it out.”

Sandra laughed. “I read that too. I just couldn’t think of any way to convince you to do it. You know what, this gives me an idea. Put on your pantyhose and I’ll be right back.”

Sandra left, and Chrissy sat down to put on his stockings. He was still working on fixing the waistband when Sandra returned, carrying a skirt, blouse and shoes.

“With your smooth panty-front, your clothing options have just widened considerably.” she said. “I figured you’d only be able to wear loose clothing, but I want to see you in this!”

Sandra helped Chrissy into the blouse. It was black, and nearly sleeveless. What sleeves it did have were little more than a bit of lace on Chrissy’s shoulders. The neckline plunged so deep, it stopped just short of Chrissy’s bra. Then he stepped into the black skirt. The skirt zipped up the front; Chrissy fastened it and tightened the belt. With his arms at his side, the skirt barely reached the tips of his thumbs. It was very tight, but looked great.



“Hey, you’re thinner than I am!” said Sandra, noticing that he had pulled the belt an extra notch. She handed him the pair of black pumps, and dragged him to the door. “Come on, we can wait for the others at my place. It’s a whole lot nicer than this dump.” Chrissy hopped down the hallway to Sandra’s apartment, as he tried to keep up while putting on the pumps at the same time.

Sandra and Chrissy sat in Sandra’s kitchen, talking and laughing like best friends. At least, the way Sandra talks to her best friends. Chrissy was learning not to take the insults personally. Sandra was always blunt, but still had a lot of insight to pass on.

“Sandra, what do you think of my voice?” asked Chrissy.

“I hate it. It’s really awful. Have you ever actually listened to yourself?”

“No, I mean, do you think it’s a good voice for a girl? Can I get away with it, or should I try to speak higher?”

Sandra thought this over. “You don’t have a girl’s voice. But it’s so unusual, I don’t think anyone would think it was a guy’s voice either. You have this strange, nasal thing going on, you know? And a weird lisp. All your L’s and R’s sound like W’s.”

Sandra thought about it some more. “When I first met you, your voice drove me nuts. You know what, I take back what I just said. You could raise it, just a little, not too much, but your voice really suits you as a girl. It’s different, but it works. It’s actually kind of cute.”

The two girls continued talking, and Chrissy tried to raise his voice just slightly. He knew if he got it wrong, Sandra would let him know, but she didn’t say anything.

Sandra continued to think about Chrissy, and his voice. “You know, your voice isn’t the only thing wrong with you,” she said. “Your mouth is too big, your eyes are too wide, your whole face is crooked, your shoulders are too narrow. When you’re a guy, all these things are emphasized, and you just look like a creep. But somehow, as a girl, it all works. It all comes together, and instead of being revolting, somehow it comes off as sexy.”

“Gee, your compliments will make a girl’s head spin,” Chrissy said sarcastically, but playfully.

“There’s more,” said Sandra.

“Oh, please, do go on,” laughed Chrissy.

“Chrissy, you are a great musician, maybe the best I’ve ever known,” said Sandra. “But, do you know, when you’re playing you hop in time to the music? Then you’ll stop, then start rocking your shoulders, and twisting your foot? As a guy, it was really icky to watch. But last night when you were playing, it all looked, somehow, right. Like you were really enjoying yourself, and moving with the music.”

“But that’s exactly how I feel,” explained Chrissy. “I’m just enjoying myself so much, I just have to move.”

“Well, now you know how it looks. Somehow, as a girl, all these things that normally work against you come together. They shouldn’t, but they do.”

There was a knock at the door. Sandra went to open it for Ashley and Natalie.

## Chapter 3

Chrissy woke early Saturday morning. He normally had no trouble sleeping in as late as noon on a Saturday, yet here it was only 6:00 AM, and he was wide awake. He couldn't stop thinking about the performance that night, only a few hours away. He wasn't good in front of crowds; for some reason crowds did not respond well to his performances. He knew that he could play, but somehow, polite applause was the best he had ever achieved in front of an audience.

And tonight wasn't just any performance. He was a member of an all-girl band; he had to play, as a girl, at a downtown club, in the tiny dress Sandra had picked out for him last night. Chrissy could see the dress hanging in his closet; it made his stomach hurt to look at it. This could go so very badly, in so many ways.

Chrissy drifted in and out of sleep for a few more hours, but mostly he lay on his bed, wide-awake, looking at that dress. Any thrill he may have felt over the past couple of days was gone completely. The only emotion he had room for was dread.

By 11:30, Chrissy couldn't stand it any more. He had to get up, and get out of the apartment for a while. Chrissy sat up in bed and rubbed his face, with hands slightly shaky from anxiety, then got up. He found his pants and a shirt, washed his face, brushed his hair and teeth, then headed for the front door.

In the living room, Chrissy passed by the bass guitar and amplifier Sandra expected him to bring to the club tonight. He wasn't quite sure how he was going to manage everything. He wasn't particularly strong, although he figured he could carry them. But somehow he would also have to carry the dress, heels, pantyhose, panties and a bra, makeup. All that without wrinkling the dress. "Just one more thing to look forward to today," he thought.

Chrissy left the apartment and closed the door behind him. That's when he saw the note. It was written on a sheet of pink writing paper, with 'Chrissy!' in big letters across the top. It was taped to his door.

"Oh, great," he thought. "Right where everyone passing by will see it. Why not just spray paint, 'The guy in this apartment is now a girl' on the wall?" Chrissy pulled down the letter and read:

***Chrissy!***

*Hey, little sis, good morning sleepy head!*

*I tried to wake you, but you wouldn't come to the door. Good dreams? Tell me later!*

*Don't forget to bring the bass guitar and the amplifier tonight, or else you won't have much to do ;-)*

*It's at 'Here, Kitty, Kitty', just off Main on Charles. You can't miss it; it has a big neon cat-girl dancing out front. We're on from 8:00 until 10:00, but try to get there early.*

*The club doesn't have a change room for us, so come ready to perform. It's lady's night, so we all get a free drink!*

*Love and Big Kisses,  
Sandra.*

Chrissy was thinking about how he would carry everything all the way downtown, on a long bus ride and then the subway, and almost didn't notice the line 'come ready to perform'. But then the implications of these few words struck home.

"She can't possibly mean this!" he said out loud. "Out on the streets, at night, in that dress? In lipstick, eye shadow, and mascara, on the subway? Carrying that heavy amp, in heels?"

Chrissy walked down the hall to Sandra's apartment and pounded on the door. When she didn't answer, he tried again. She obviously wasn't home, but he tried a third time, calling, "Sandra? Please be home!" Then he leaned against the door, and in a defeated tone said, "I really need to talk to you." Suddenly, Chrissy didn't feel like going out any more. He went back to his apartment to sit, and wait, and dread.

It was 4:00 PM. Sandra hadn't come home all day, and so Chrissy had no other choice. Resigned to his fate, he began the long process of becoming one of the 'Pritee Gurlz'. He stepped into the shower and washed his hair, including the cream rinse. He toweled off and changed into white panties and a bra. He applied mousse to his hair, styling it with a brush and hair dryer. He did his makeup, including a bit of foundation and powder to even out his skin tone, and of course lipstick, eye shadow, eyeliner and mascara. He placed the lipstick and a few other things in his purse, in case he needed a touch up later.



Chrissy put on a new pair of ultra-sheer pantyhose that Sandra had given him. Then he went to the closet, pulled out the dress, and slipped it over his head. It was a pale shade of mauve, and very short (of course). The silky fabric gathered at the waist, then flowed loosely over his hips. The V-neckline plunged deep into his bosom, drawing the eye almost involuntarily. The sleeves were long, a bit longer than his arms in fact. They were gathered just above the elbow, then slit along the forearm so that they flowed from his elbows like lacy scarves.

Chrissy looked at himself in the mirror. This was the most beautiful dress he had ever seen, and he looked amazing in it. The dress, the makeup, his hair were all stunning.

If he were just going to Sandra's apartment, everything would have been fine. He was used to that now. Except he was expected to go alone, out on the street, catch a bus, get onto the subway and go downtown to a singles bar dressed like this. He wasn't ready for that!

Chrissy still had an hour before he had to leave. He sat on his bed for five minutes. Then he got up, and checked his makeup one more time to see if there was anything he had forgotten. The only thing in his makeup kit that he hadn't used was a bottle of nail polish Sandra had given him, mauve to match the dress. "Okay, why not?" he said to himself. Chrissy painted his fingernails as he waited.

When it was finally time to leave, Chrissy did a quick inventory of his clothes and accessories. He put on his heels, picked up the bass guitar and amplifier, took a deep, calming breath, and left the apartment. He struggled down the apartment steps with the heavy objects, then out the front door and onto the busy street. Chrissy felt the wind through his loose hair, and over his smooth, naked legs, right up to his panties. He wished it was dark, but unfortunately it was still quite bright out.

Chrissy made his way to the corner, where he waited for the bus. At least he could put down the guitar and amp, resting his arms, and feet. The extra weight pushed his feet into the narrow high-heeled shoes, making them quite painful. The wind whipped the loose skirt around his legs, to the delight of passers-by. Guys in the cars that were stopped at the busy intersection stared at the gorgeous girl. Some tried to call him over, others made rude comments or asked for kisses.

Where the hell was that bus!

He had finally made it. The nightmare of the subway was over. Chrissy walked through the club, looking for Sandra. He just might have to kill her. His relief at finally being off the street was ruined to a large extent by the attention he received, being dressed as a stunningly beautiful girl in a nightclub full of horny single guys. Every man in the place wanted to stop him and try some lame line on him. Chrissy finally found Sandra and Natalie at the back of the club, near a narrow stairway.

"Sandra, you ... ewhhh!" yelled Chrissy, unable to say the words that came to mind.

"Chrissy, looking good, little sis!" Sandra told him.

"You never told me I'd have to get here, dressed ... like this! Do you have any idea what I just went through?"

"In that dress, on the subway, I know exactly what you went through," Sandra said.

"There was a guy standing over me, he kept trying to see down my top. And the guy sitting across from me kept staring at my legs. I had to keep my knees clamped tight together to keep him from looking all the way up."

"You should sit that way anyway," said Sandra, helpful as usual.

"Guys are such pigs," said Natalie. "You know what you should do? Stare right back at them. They look away every time."

"You know it's different for me!" yelled Chrissy, fighting back tears. "I don't want guys looking at my chest, or up my dress, or 'accidentally' rubbing against my ass on the bus!"

"It's not different for you," said Natalie. "None of us want any of that. It comes with the uniform, girlfriend," she said as she stroked her hands down Chrissy's sides to her waist, and coming to rest on her hips.

"And anyway," Sandra added, "the attention's not all bad. I notice you're not carrying your bass and amp. You want to tell me what happened?" she asked knowingly.

Chrissy blushed. "I couldn't lift the amp over the subway turnstile, so a guy helped me."

"There must be more to the story than that, if he carried it all the way here for you. You didn't encourage him at all, did you? Use a little feminine persuasion?"

"Okay," admitted Chrissy. "So I talked to him nicely, and smiled a bit. But that was all. It was heavy, and my feet were sore, okay?"

"And then he said he'd like to see the show, and you got him in for free. And said



you'd have a drink with him after," Sandra said, as if she knew it to be true.

Chrissy looked completely mortified. "Yes," she admitted in barely a whisper, her head low.

"It's okay, we've all done it," Natalie comforted her. Just then, Ashley arrived.

"Ashley, you're not dressed yet!" said Chrissy.

"I know, I'm running really late. I'll change in the manager's office," she said as she raced up the stairs.

Chrissy stared at Sandra, her mouth open wide, unable to speak she was so angry.

"He really doesn't like us to use his office," Sandra said. "Nice job on your nails," she added.

"Ladies and guys, put them together for 'Pritee Gurlz'!"

There's no thrill in the world like coming onto a stage to perform before an eager crowd. The club's advertising had billed them as 'The Hottest Chicks in Rock and Roll!', and the crowd was prepped for just that. The all-girl band did not disappoint them either; the crowd cheered and yelled all the time the girls were on stage.

The stage itself was just a raised platform, barely six inches off the floor, at the end of the dance floor. The crowd was dancing literally inches from the four girls, surrounding them in front of and to either side of the stage. This made the dancers feel like they were part of the show, and the performers feel like they were part of the audience.

Chrissy still expected to be kept in the dim lighting at the back of the stage, but Sandra pushed him all the way to the front. Between songs enthusiastic audience members would reach out to him, and he would give them exuberant high-fives.

During the songs was something different entirely, however. When Chrissy played, she was in her own world. It felt to her as if she weren't just making music, but rather as if she actually was the music. When the beat was quick, Chrissy would hop to the melody, with a laugh on her lips. When it was slow, her shoulders would rock and her hips would sway, her lips pouting. The audience loved it. It looked to them as if she weren't just making music, but rather as if she actually was the music. Many of the girls on the dance floor tried to imitate her quirky – but somehow sexy – movements.

The girls were to play for two hours, ending at ten o'clock. They actually played until eleven, everyone was having so much fun. Every 45 minutes they would take a short break, and would usually end up at the bar, there being no place for performers to go in the small club. It was lady's night, so each of the girls in the band was entitled to a free drink, just like any other girl. However, the bartender never charged them for any of their drinks. "A wink and a smile are payment enough from the band," he told them. By the end of the night, Chrissy was getting fairly intoxicated. By his 10:30 drink, he was even able to pay the bartender with a wink, without feeling self-conscious (although he did giggle).

After their final song, the girls walked off stage to applause, cheers, hoots, and whistles. As they walked through the crowd, they grabbed hands with enthusiastic fans. A quick-thinking bouncer, who realized they might need a little help, was nearby and

cleared a path for the girls. Chrissy followed Sandra, not quite sure how he would get home but figuring staying close to Sandra would be the best way. He sure didn't want to try the subway alone again.

The bouncer led them to the corner with the narrow stairway. Ashley and Natalie waited at the bottom, talking to some fans, while Sandra climbed the stairs with Chrissy not far behind. Sandra walked into the manager's office, leaving Chrissy unsure what to do. She finally decided to wait outside.

"Great show tonight. Amazing show," said the manager.

"Thanks," said Sandra. "We *were* amazing, weren't we?"

"Here's your payment, \$400." Sandra quickly counted the money, then put it in her purse. "That new girl is something else. I hope you're planning to keep her."

"That's the plan," Sandra told him. "My plan, anyway. She may have other plans. She's a musical genius, some kind of freak. She's totally the reason we were so good tonight."

"You were all good," the manager told her. "You've really improved, getting it together."

"Chrissy did that," said Sandra. "She affects everybody."

Chrissy heard every word, and didn't want to get caught. The conversation sounded like it was wrapping up, so he turned and quickly descended the narrow stairs. As he waited at the bottom, he thought about everything he had overheard. Sandra was paying him \$200, which meant Sandra wouldn't earn anything for tonight. And Sandra thought Chrissy was a musical genius?

Sandra came down the stairs, and joined the other girls. "I'll pay you guys later," she told Chrissy. "Right now, let's get out of here."

The bouncer was still with them, and began clearing a path for the girls. Sandra and Natalie followed closely behind him, with Ashley and Chrissy a bit further back. That bit stretched into quite a bit, until the two girls were hopelessly mired in the crowd. Someone grabbed Chrissy's arm, and spun her around. Through his drunken stupor, Chrissy thought he recognized the man.

"You're not leaving before we have our drink, are you?" he asked. It was Steve, the guy who had helped him carry the amplifier earlier. "I want to tell you how amazing you were."

"Oh, hi," said Chrissy. "That's my ride," he said, pointing at Sandra. He turned and waved across the room to Sandra. When he had Sandra's attention, Chrissy pointed at Steve. Misunderstanding, Sandra gave him the O-K signal, and left.

"She left me," said Chrissy, unable to believe it, and thinking about the subway, alone. "She left me here alone."

"I'll stay for a while, Chrissy," Ashley told him.

"So, how about that drink?" asked Steve.

"Sure, why not?" said Chrissy. At least it was better than the subway, for now.

“What are you drinking?” he asked.

“What’s that drink Sandra kept ordering for me?” he asked Ashley. Chrissy was more than a little drunk, and was having some trouble keeping his balance.

“A Pink Lady,” Ashley informed him.

“Pink Lady,” repeated Chrissy as he fell into a chair at Steve’s table. He giggled.

Chrissy was awake, but didn’t want to open his eyes. He had too much to drink the night before, and his head hurt. His head hurt, and his feet hurt from standing all night in high heels. His head hurt, and his feet hurt, and the covers were all wrapped tight around his chest.

Chrissy tried to adjust the covers, still refusing to open his eyes. He tried several times, until he figured out that he didn’t have any covers. He had apparently fallen asleep in his bra. He finally realized, he would have to open his eyes to straighten out this mess.

Chrissy opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was his dress from the night before, laid out neatly on a chair in front of him. His pantyhose were balled up on the seat beside his purse, and his pumps were scattered across the floor. Suddenly Chrissy realized; he didn’t have a chair in his bedroom.

Chrissy sat bolt upright, looking around the room. He was in a strange living room, sleeping on an unfamiliar couch, wearing nothing but a bra and panties. A million questions ran through his mind, but no answers. However, most of the questions were multiple choice, and none of the options looked good.

The last thing he could remember was being at the club. That guy – Steve – had bought him a drink, and then ... nothing. He had no idea what happened next. “Oh, God no,” he said to himself, holding his head against the pounding hangover.

Chrissy heard noises from the next room. Cupboards opening, dishes rattling. Someone must be making breakfast.

He had to get out of here. He thought about throwing on the dress, grabbing his things, and bolting out the door. Better yet, maybe he could steal this guy's clothes, then leave.

The door to the kitchen swung open. It was too late to run. Chrissy sat there in his bra and panties and watched in horror, then bewilderment, as Ashley entered the room. She was wearing a short pink nightgown and white panties, and had obviously been here all night as well.

“Ashley, what are you doing here?” he whispered.

“This is my apartment,” she whispered. “Why are we whispering?”

“Is there anyone else here?” Chrissy said softly, glancing to the kitchen and bedrooms.

“No,” whispered Ashley. “I brought you coffee,” she added quietly, holding out a mug.

“Oh, okay,” said Chrissy, working up to a regular conversational level. “Thank you, I really need this.” He took a sip, and the coffee started to clear his head. “So, Ashley, I was wondering. Could you maybe tell me how I got here?”

"You really don't remember?" Ashley asked.

"We were having a drink, after the performance," he said.

"Right. We were at a table with some guy named Steve, and you were drinking a Pink Lady. Then you kind of zoned out. So Steve offered to take you home, but I said I'd take care of you, so he left. He was nice, are you going to see him again?"

"No, I don't think so," said Chrissy.

"So, the manager asked Jim – he's the bouncer – to see that we got home safely, and he drove us here. I thought it was best that you stay here with me, so that was all that happened. Oh, except he carried you up the stairs, and you giggled a lot."

Chrissy had never been so embarrassed. "Well, thanks Ashley," he said, completely mortified. "That was really nice of you." He drank some more coffee.

"I helped you get undressed, but then you sat down and I couldn't get you to the bedroom, so you slept on the couch."

"I shouldn't have had so much to drink," admitted Chrissy. "If I ever do that again, please stop me. Hopefully that will be easier than carrying me home!"

"I promise. So, do you want to hang out here for a while?"

"Gee, I'd like to, but," said Chrissy, looking at his mauve evening dress, "I'd better go home and change. I can't wear this all day."

Ashley laughed, suddenly realizing. "Oh my gosh, I hadn't thought of that! Of course, you'd look ridiculous." Chrissy was glad that Ashley understood how he felt. "You know what they say about girls who wear their evening dresses in the morning." Well, maybe she didn't fully understand.

Ashley grabbed Chrissy by the hand. "You can wear something of mine. Come on, let's look in my closet!" Ashley helped Chrissy up from the couch, then dragged her to the bedroom.

"I have the cutest little sun dress," said Ashley. "It will look absolutely adorable on you."

"Gee, I was hoping I might be able to borrow a pair of pants, and a shirt?"

"Oh, okay," said Ashley. She went to her dresser and looked in a drawer. "Let's see, I have these white satin shorts. They look really cute with my red halter top."

Chrissy looked in horror at the tiny scraps of cloth. "Why don't you set out the sun dress for me? I'll go have a shower."

Chrissy stood in the shower longer than usual, as the hot water washed away the smoke from the club, and the steam helped to clear his hangover. Once out of the shower, he put some mousse in his hair and styled it with a brush and blow dryer. Wrapping himself in a couple of towels, he returned to Ashley's bedroom.

Ashley had gone back to the living room, but had laid out the sundress for him on her bed, along with a clean pair of panties and sandals with low cork heels. He put on the panties, then placed the sundress over his head and straightened it. The dress was pink, and hung straight from tiny pink cords that he had to tie over his shoulders. It looked like

a dress that a little girl would wear. He strapped on the sandals, and went back to the bathroom to fix his makeup. A little lipstick and mascara was all that he needed.

Ashley came into the bathroom behind him. She was wearing the white satin shorts and red halter top that Chrissy had turned down. He was glad he had turned them down, because that meant he could see them on Ashley. She looked at him in the mirror. "You see, I told you this dress would be perfect for you! Now turn around." Chrissy turned to face Ashley, and she fixed a couple of big, yellow butterfly barrettes in his hair.

Chrissy looked in the mirror. He was dressed like a four-year old girl, ready to play in the park. He had seen other young women dress like this, but wasn't sure it was the look for him and said so.

"Don't be silly, you look so precious," Ashley told him. "This is a great look for you, with your baby-doll face. We just need to change your nail color to match your pretty dress." She got out a bottle of pink nail polish and some polish remover, then went to work removing the mauve polish from Chrissy's fingers. "So, I just had a look in the kitchen and there isn't a thing to eat in the house. After we're done your nails, let's go out for lunch! We can go to the park later."

"Sure, let's do that," Chrissy said with resignation, knowing it was going to happen whether he liked it or not.

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You might not believe this, but Chrissy had a great day. After painting his fingers and toes, Ashley took him to an outdoor café for lunch, where they ate in the sun and fresh air. Chrissy couldn't remember the last time he had a friend who he could talk to so openly, about anything. Ashley was a friend with whom Chrissy could truly just be himself. By the time lunch was over, he had almost forgotten that he was dressed like a little girl.

After lunch they walked along the street, window-shopping. Ashley was two inches taller than Chrissy, and the difference in their heels made her even taller, so she looked like she was spending the day with her little sister. She took him to the park, where they ran up and down the hills. They took off their shoes and walked in the stream. They chased each other around the playground, and Ashley pushed him on a swing. In short, they did all the things two fun-loving best friends are supposed to do on a warm, summer afternoon.

Before they knew it, it was time for Chrissy to go home. Ashley walked Chrissy to the subway.

"I should go back to your place and get my things," he protested.

"You've got your makeup and apartment keys, right?" Ashley said. She had lent him a yellow plastic purse that suited his outfit to carry his things. "That's all you need. I'll take care of everything else."

"Thanks, Ashley. I had the best day ever."

"Me too. I hope you come back for another play date real soon."

Ashley bent down and kissed Chrissy on the forehead. Then she put a token into the turnstile, and saw Chrissy through. Chrissy ran toward the stairs. "Don't forget a transfer," Ashley called.

"I won't," he said, as he ran back and picked one up from the transfer dispenser.

A woman who had just emerged from the subway watched the scene, and spoke to Ashley. "She's so cute," she said. "Is she going to be okay all by herself on the subway?"

"Yes," replied Ashley. "She'll be just fine."

When Chrissy got home, he ran into Sandra in the hallway. Sandra paid him his \$200, which meant he could keep his apartment. And she didn't insult him, or tease him about his dress. It really was a great day.

## Chapter 4

Chrissy woke the next day, and sat up in bed. He walked to the bathroom, and took a good look at himself in the mirror. His thin, hairless body looked ridiculous to him. How could he have let Sandra do this? It was almost a week, and there wasn't a sign of a single hair growing back.

Chrissy was determined not to be mistaken for a girl today. He worked on his hair, flattening it as well as he could before tying it back. He scrubbed his face of all traces of makeup. He chose the most masculine clothes he could find, jeans and a long, plaid, flannel shirt to cover his hairless arms. Chrissy looked in the mirror, and noted he looked less feminine than usual. Unfortunately, there was nothing he could do about his lack of beard, soft features, or sculpted eyebrows (or his pink-polished nails!) But this would have to do.

There was a knock at the door. Chrissy went to answer, hoping it might be Sandra, or even Ashley.

"Christopher, I'm glad I caught you before you left," said the superintendent as he stepped into the apartment. "You're supposed to have some rent money for me this morning."

"Yes! I do, I was just coming see you," Chrissy lied. He reached in his pocket, and pulled out the money Sandra had given him the night before. "I worked on Saturday, just like I told you," he said as he handed over the \$200. The super gave Chrissy's pink fingernails an odd look, so Chrissy quickly shoved his hands in his pockets.

The super counted the money, and looked at Chrissy. "There's only \$200 here," he said. "You know that you owe \$1200 for two months' rent," he added.

"I know," Chrissy explained, "but there will be more where that came from. I have a regular thing on weekends. I can pay you more next week."

"Son, a part-time weekend job isn't going to pay for this apartment," the super told him. Chrissy had nothing to say to this. After a bit of awkward silence, the super told him, "Look, I'll speak to the landlord. I'll tell him that you've paid this much, and that you'll have more next week. I'll let you know what he says."

This was as good an answer as Chrissy was going to get for now. The super left, and Chrissy thought about his lack of options.

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Sandra opened the door and let Chrissy in. As usual, he was the first to arrive.

"Come on in," she invited. Chrissy entered, and she closed the door behind him. "You know, Chrissy, you don't have to dress like a girl for rehearsals anymore," she told him. The day had been far too hot for flannel and so Chrissy was now wearing tennis shorts, a baggy T-shirt, and white running shoes. And pink nail polish, of course.

"I'm not," said Chrissy, with a hint of anger in his voice. "These are my own clothes. And don't start with me, I'm not exactly happy with you at this moment."

"Jeez, don't get your panties all in a bunch," she told him. "I haven't done anything."

"Do you realize that not one hair has grown back since you used that stuff on me?"

"I know, isn't it great? I used it too, and my legs have been stubble-free all week."

"Great for you," said Chrissy, "but not for me. You said it would all grow back! I'm completely bald from my cheeks to my toes!"

"Speaking of cheeks, did you ever put any on your ass?" Sandra wanted to know.

Chrissy looked down at the floor, hiding the shame on his face. "Yes," he said quietly.

Sandra snorted. "Now that's funny!"

"I looked that stuff up on the Internet," Chrissy told her angrily. "Do you know what it said? It said that 'Hair Today' isn't even legal in North America."

"It's hard to get," Sandra agreed. "If you need more, I can get it from a guy who sells it out of his trunk, down in Rainbow Village."

"It says to leave it on a maximum of five minutes. It actually works its way down to the root, and if you don't get it off in time the roots can be damaged – permanently! You had every inch of my body covered in that stuff for half an hour! I may never have hair again!"

"You're such a whiner," Sandra said. "Were you really such a big fan of shaving every day? I did you a favor."

"A favor?" yelled Chrissy. "Everywhere I go, everyone thinks I'm a girl!"

"So maybe you should stop wearing pink dresses and nail polish," Sandra suggested.

Chrissy was about to yell again, but decided he really didn't want to fight. "It doesn't matter what I wear, people still think I'm a girl," he said despondently. "And I don't have any polish remover. Can I borrow some of yours?" he asked.

"Sorry, I'm all out too." There was a knock at the door.

Chrissy opened the door for Ashley. "Hi, Chrissy!" she said with a hug and a quick kiss. "That's a cute outfit! Sometimes when it's hot like this, I don't wear a bra either. Except you really need some lipstick. Here ..." Ashley found a tube of glossy pink in her

purse, then held it out toward Chrissy expectantly. Chrissy let out a small sigh, then puckered his lips and allowed Ashley to paint them.

Natalie arrived a few minutes later, and the four girls got down to the business of making music. Chrissy was starting to take a real interest in the band, and helped the others with their parts.

"Ashley, can you play the piano while standing? You'll be able to sing better, and the audience will see you better as well ... Try playing these bars like this. See, moving your fingers over your thumb, then move your thumb out and under, it's much smoother ..."

"... Sandra, those chord progressions are really tricky. Try this, move your hands up to the seventh fret of your guitar. Now you can play those same chords like this, and the fingering is so much easier, see? It also looks really cool ..."

"... Natalie, you're holding your drumsticks too tight. Loosen up a bit, see, you get more bounce ... Try this rhythm, doesn't that suit the music better at this point? In fact, we should work this into a drum solo ..."

The four girls were having a great time. Chrissy was showing Ashley how she should play a key-change he had suggested for one of their songs, when there was a knock on the door. Sandra went to answer, leaving the three other girls laughing in the living room.

It was the superintendent; Sandra let him into the entry. "I was just wondering if you've seen the guy from next door. Evening, ladies," he said with a nod to Chrissy and the other two girls.

Sandra looked back at Chrissy, who had a look of panic on his face. He shook his head at her. Turning back to the super she told him, "Sorry, haven't seen him all day. Why, what's up?"

"I told you the landlord's not happy with him, right? He owes \$1200 back rent. So today's his last chance, and he gives me \$200. Only \$200, and the first of the month is this Thursday. He's going to owe another \$600 then. The landlord says that's it; he's out of here tomorrow morning."

"Gee, that's too bad," said Sandra.

"Yes, it is," agreed the super. "He's not a bad guy. I used to think he was creepy, but lately he's just odd. Like this morning I went to see him, he was wearing nail polish." Chrissy involuntarily pushed his hands into his pockets.

"Well, sorry I can't help you," Sandra said as she opened the door for the man. "If I see him, I'll say you're looking for him."

"Thank you. Goodnight, ladies," he said, looking Chrissy up and down admiringly.

Sandra shut the door. No one said a word. Chrissy sat down on the couch; his knees were too wobbly to stand. He felt like he couldn't breathe, and had to gulp some air down into his lungs. He wanted desperately not to cry, but everything had gone so wrong. Big drops started filling his eyes, flooding his lower lids, barely held back by his lashes.

Ashley and Natalie sat to either side of him. "Oh, Chrissy, I'm so sorry," said Natalie. Chrissy blinked, and the backlog of tears splashed all the way down his cheeks.

"Everything's just gone so wrong," he cried. Sandra handed him a box of tissues, and he cried into one for a while. "All I wanted to do was teach music, but I've got no job, and no money, and now I have no place to live."

"Don't be silly, Chrissy," Ashley comforted her. "We're not going to let you live on the street. You can come stay with me." Sandra and Natalie gave Ashley an odd look, which she missed entirely.

"You would do that for me?" said Chrissy.

"Of course," said Ashley. "What kind of a friend would I be otherwise? Besides, I prefer to have a roommate. Our old bass player was my roommate, and I've been alone since she left. I could really use some help with the apartment, too."

"I don't have any money for the rent," Chrissy explained, wiping her tears.

"We'll work it out," Ashley said. "It'll be fun, just like Sunday!"

Chrissy smiled through her remaining tears, then laughed as she gave Ashley a hug. "Ashley, you're the best friend ever."

Sandra waited until they stopped hugging. She wasn't sure if she should say something or not. Finally, she said, "So Chrissy. You gave him the whole \$200, and *then* you got kicked out?"

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Chrissy was up early the next morning, eager to get out of the apartment. Suddenly, it seemed to represent all his failures. He had to move out, and move on.

Chrissy had a suitcase, and a backpack. After choosing some pants and a shirt to wear, he stuffed most of his other clothes into the backpack. He had a number of dresses, skirts, and blouses now, though, that he felt deserved better treatment. These, he folded neatly and placed in the suitcase. Bras, panties, pantyhose, and shoes went into the suitcase as well. He went through the apartment, and emptied the medicine cabinet of makeup and shaving equipment. He found other odds and ends as well, like his shampoo and conditioner in the shower, and his purse that was almost forgotten in the hall closet.

His few remaining pieces of furniture weren't worth the effort to move. He'd be lucky if he could get \$10 for the lot of it. Chrissy carried his luggage into the hallway, threw his keys back into the room, and closed the door. He lifted the backpack over one shoulder, picked up his suitcase, and headed for the bus stop. He might still have a girlish face, but at least he was wearing pants this time!

Ashley had called in to work sick, so she could help Chrissy move in. She opened the door eagerly when Chrissy arrived, with a big smile and a kiss for him, before he could even put down the luggage.

"Chrissy, I can't believe you're here! This is so great. Those look heavy, here, give me one. Ouch, it is heavy. Come on, bring everything back here."

Ashley led Chrissy down the hall, to a second bedroom right beside her own. "This was Sharon's room, you know, our previous bass player? She decorated it, and I've just been storing some of my things here since she left. I hope you like it."

Chrissy looked around the room. The walls were papered with a pastel flower print. There were lace curtains on the window, and a big pink comforter on the bed. The bed frame was white, with matching dresser, both with delicate pink roses and curlicues painted with a feminine flourish. The dresser was designed to also be used as a desk, and had a large makeup mirror attached. A delicate white chair sat in front of the desk. There was a Raggedy Ann and Andy doll sitting up against the pillow on the bed, and a small chair in the corner was covered with dolls and stuffed animals.

"It's nice," he said, wondering how he'd be able to stand living in such a feminine room. "Is it okay if I change a few things?"

"Sure, no problem," said Ashley as she lifted the suitcase onto the bed. "Feel free to make it your own."

Ashley opened the suitcase, and started removing things and finding places for them. She wanted to talk about every item. "Oh look, here's your pink sun dress. Let me hang this in your closet."

"No, that's yours," objected Chrissy.

"After it looked so fantastic on you? No, I wouldn't dare wear it. It's yours now." Ashley continued to look through Chrissy's things. "Where did you get this?" she asked, holding up a short, cotton nighty with teddy bears on it.

"Sandra gave me some of her old things last week, mostly stuff she doesn't like any more. That was in with everything else. Don't worry, I won't be wearing it around the apartment!"

"I think you should. It's cute."

The two worked together hanging up the blouses and dresses; Ashley had a special hanger for skirts that she gave to Chrissy. The panties, bras, and pantyhose went in the dresser, and the makeup was placed in a desk drawer.

Ashley picked up Chrissy's razor and shaving cream. "I cleared a shelf in the bathroom for you. I don't know if this can will fit, though."

"That's okay," Chrissy laughed. "I don't know if I'll ever shave again. It's been a week since Sandra used that cream on me, and my beard is showing no signs of growing back."

"Your beard?" said Ashley.

Chrissy dumped out the backpack on the bed, and started sorting through the items. "I guess I can keep my regular underwear in the same drawer as my panties, do you think?"

Ashley looked at Chrissy, with his hands full of men's underpants, and left the room quickly. Chrissy wasn't sure what was up, so he shrugged his shoulders and put the last of his things away. The he went out to the living room, where he found Ashley sitting on the couch.

"Ashley, is everything okay?" he asked as he sat beside her.

Ashley jumped from the couch, and took a step away, refusing to look at Chrissy. "Ashley, please. What's the matter?" he asked. Ashley looked at him, and started to cry. She ran to her room and closed the door.

Chrissy followed her, and spoke to her from the hallway. "What did I say? I'm sorry, please, just tell me what happened." When she didn't respond he said, "I'm going to the kitchen. I'll make us a cup of tea, okay? You come out when you're ready."

Chrissy went to the kitchen, and made the tea, wondering what it was that had bothered Ashley so. Ashley came out of her room by the time the tea was ready. Chrissy sat at the kitchen table, but Ashley remained standing. Her eyes were red from tears.

"Ashley, are you okay now? Do you want to tell me what's wrong?" he asked.

Ashley's voice trembled as she spoke. She still had trouble looking at Chrissy. "You'll think I'm stupid," she said.

"I promise you, I'm not going to think anything like that. Please Ashley, I just want everything to be okay between us. Please tell me what happened."

Ashley let out a big sigh. "When I asked you to stay here with me," she began, "I thought you were a girl."

Chrissy thought about this. "No you didn't. You knew I was a guy. I was a guy when you met me, just last week."

"I told you, you'd think I was stupid!" she sniffed.

"I don't think that at all. I just don't understand," said Chrissy.

"After all the practices, and the concert, and Steve, and playing in the park, and ... you're just so pretty I forgot, okay?" she yelled.

Chrissy didn't know what to say. "I never tried to deceive you," he tried.

"I know."

"I just want us to be friends," he told her. "I just want this to work. Please, Ashley, can we make it work?"

Ashley looked down into his face. She tried to picture it working, but couldn't. She started to cry, and ran out the front door. Chrissy let her go, and sat with his tea, wondering what to do.

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Ashley was gone all afternoon, but she had to come back eventually. This was her apartment, after all. When she returned, she put her head in the door and called nervously, "Chrissy? Are you still here?"

"Yes," he replied as he came out of his bedroom and into the living room.

Ashley entered the apartment, but stayed near the front door. She looked at Chrissy, and asked, "Why are you dressed like that?" Chrissy was wearing a red mid-thigh skirt with a yellow, short-sleeved blouse. He had fixed his hair and makeup as well.

"I thought maybe you'd be more comfortable seeing me like this, you know, as Chrissy?" he explained. "Please come in. I'd really like to talk to you."

Ashley closed the apartment door, and crossed the living room. Chrissy sat on the couch, and Ashley sat hesitantly at the opposite end.

"Ashley, if you ask me to leave, I'll go. I mean it; you're a good friend, and that's so important to me, I don't want to spoil it. But I hope you'll hear me out first."

"I'm listening," she said, her trepidation eased slightly by Chrissy's approach.

"Ashley, I know you wanted a girl to move in with you. I never meant to trick you, and I'm so sorry it happened. But I really believe we can work this out."

Chrissy took a deep breath. The next part was going to be difficult. "I'm going to have to be a guy during the day, to find a job. But if you need a girl for a roommate, then I'm willing to be her. I'll try to get home before you, and be a girl by the time you get here. We can be best friends again, just like on Sunday. Please, Ashley, you forgot that I wasn't a girl once, and we were such good friends, maybe you can forget again?"

Ashley had listened intently to Chrissy's words, her eyes red from holding back tears. When he had finished, a single tear rolled down her cheek. She sniffed, then laughed, and looked at Chrissy. "Oh Chrissy, it's already forgotten."

Ashley moved across the couch and the two girls hugged. "You know," said Ashley, "your nail polish is the wrong shade for that outfit."

"Actually, I've been trying to take it off for a couple of days now, but I never have any polish remover," said Chrissy.

"I have some," said Ashley, leading Chrissy to the bathroom. "Why don't you take off that polish?" Chrissy was relieved that he would finally be able to display his hands again. "I'm sure I can find the right shade in my room."

## Chapter 5

Ashley and Chrissy's arrangement settled into a pattern within a couple of weeks. Ashley worked during the day as an assistant manager at the local branch of a bank. She would get up at 7:30, in order to be ready and at work by nine o'clock. While Chrissy was living alone, he had fallen into the habit of sleeping late. However, he looked at this change as an opportunity to clean up his act. Since he wasn't working, his role became that of running the home, starting first thing in the morning. He would get up with Ashley, and basically do anything for her that needed doing. This always included fixing breakfast, clearing dishes, and making beds, but could also include things like spot cleaning her clothes or ironing a blouse. He would always see her to the door, saying, "Good luck today!" as she left. The two friends would smile and wave as Ashley stepped into the elevator.

After Ashley had left each morning, Chrissy would get down to the business of finding work. He would change out of his nighty into a pair of pants and a shirt, and head out onto the streets. He found the neighborhood library had a lot of useful facilities, including computer terminals for updating his résumé and for Internet access, as well as printing

and photocopying. He was hoping that having a working phone number and a nice apartment might help attract a few more students, but it was still too early to tell. For now, he was resending his résumé to schools in the area with his updated telephone number and address, and placing flyers around the neighborhood offering music lessons.

While Chrissy was out in the mornings he would run errands for Ashley, or pick up things needed around the apartment. Things like light bulbs, shampoo, soap and toilet paper. And Ashley was always asking him to pick up pantyhose. He became a regular at the local dry cleaner.

Ashley never had any food in the apartment, and so liked to go out to dinner every night. Chrissy always had to go along, naturally, but was reluctant to do so for a number of reasons. First and most obvious, of course, was that he always had to go as a girl. When you went out with Ashley, this always meant short skirts, skimpy tops, and high heels, and that was the best-case scenario!

But Chrissy had other reasons for not wanting to go out every night. He had no money, and this meant Ashley always paid. She had a well-paid job and didn't mind, but Chrissy felt it wasn't right. He was already staying rent-free, and didn't feel it was right that Ashley should also pay for all his meals as well. The final reason for not wanting to eat out was that, after starving himself for so long, he simply couldn't eat that much.

After a few days of this, Chrissy decided something had to change. Chrissy asked Ashley for \$100 out of the household budget, then went grocery shopping to restock their refrigerator and kitchen cupboards. Now every night, he would have a hot meal waiting for Ashley when she came home to the apartment. He wasn't a bad cook, but his repertoire was a bit limited. Lately he had been reading recipe books in the library, working some of the dishes into his meal lineup.

In the afternoons, Chrissy was always busy around the apartment. He took care of the laundry, the dishes, the cleaning. He wanted Ashley to enter a beautiful home after her long day.

Ashley usually arrived home by 5:30 each night. This meant that by 4:30, Chrissy was very busy. He could have simply thrown on shorts and a T-shirt, and Ashley would have accepted him as her girlfriend, but Chrissy always wanted to look his best for Ashley. He would change into a bra and panties, and sit at his makeup table, brushing out his hair and fixing his makeup. Then he would slip on a pair of pantyhose, a pretty dress, and heels.

When Ashley arrived, Chrissy was usually cooking, and the apartment smelled wonderful. Chrissy would always greet her at the door, usually still wearing an apron. If Ashley tried to hug or kiss her, she would always say, "Careful, you might get spaghetti sauce on your nice clothes." Ashley would go into her bedroom and change into the clothes Chrissy had laid out for her. By the time she was ready, Chrissy would have the meal on the table, and the two girls would sit down to dinner.

After dinner they would do the dishes together. They would talk, and laugh, and tell stories about their day. Ashley would always take some soapsuds and stick them on Chrissy's nose, saying, "That's a good look for you!" Chrissy would always giggle and tell her, "Don't do that!" with a smile.

If there was a practice session at Sandra's, they would head out on the subway after the dishes were done. But they only practiced once or twice a week now, and so had time to spend together most evenings. The two girls would sometimes go out for a walk, just to spend a little time together outside the apartment. They would walk down the street window-shopping, or go to the park and smell the flowers and green grass.

As the light grew dim they would go home, and change into their nighties. They would usually sit together on the bed in Chrissy's room, or sometimes Ashley's. Chrissy had decided not to redecorate her room after all, and it was actually the perfect place for the two girls. They would talk, and laugh, and do each other's nails, or play with the dolls and teddy bears, all the things that two best friends do.

Neither of them ever wanted to go to sleep, but eventually, of course, they would have to. The girls would wash up and brush their teeth together. Ashley would kiss Chrissy goodnight, and they would go to their separate rooms. Then Chrissy would curl up under her big, pink comforter, and think about how she had never been so happy.

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Chrissy and Ashley finished dinner. Ashley moved to the living room, where Chrissy always served tea after the meal. Chrissy was just sitting down, when there was a knock at the door.

"You stay there," Ashley told her, "I'll see who it is. You deserve a break." Ashley stood and went to answer the door while Chrissy rested, probably for the first time that day, and sipped her cup of tea.

Ashley opened the door to find a nicely dressed woman, in her mid-thirties. "Yes, can I help you?" she asked.

"I hope so," said the woman. "I'm looking for Christopher Collins. Is this the right apartment?"

"Yes, of course," said Ashley. "Please, come in."

Ashley showed the woman into the living room. "Chrissy, this woman would like to speak to you."

It would be difficult to say if Chrissy was more startled, or the woman was more confused. Chrissy stood, and faced the woman. The woman spoke first.

"I'm sorry, maybe this is the wrong apartment. I'm looking for Christopher Collins. He offers music lessons in the building."

"That's me," said Chrissy, eagerly extending his hand as he realized this was a potential customer. When he saw his own sculpted, painted fingernails, he suddenly understood what the problem might be.

"Forgive me, but I was expecting a man," the woman said.

"I ... get that a lot," answered Chrissy, blushing slightly. When the woman didn't respond, he thought quickly and added, "My mother had some strange ideas about feminism. Please, call me Chrissy, everyone does."

The woman took another couple of moments to take everything in, but came around eventually. "Chrissy, my name is Emily Davison. I wanted to speak to you about your flyer offering music lessons. I saw it downstairs, on the bulletin board by the lobby."

Chrissy was just a little annoyed, although he couldn't let it show. "The flyer says to call ahead," he said as pleasantly as he could.

"Oh, I understand. I shouldn't have disturbed you at home. However, I live in the building, and since we're practically neighbors I thought I would drop in and introduce myself."

Mrs. Davison obviously didn't understand. How could she know that Chrissy wanted a phone call, so he could change into men's clothes before meeting her? Now if she became a student, he would have to give every lesson dressed as a girl. "That's so nice of you," Chrissy lied, picturing what he would have to endure to have this woman as a student. "Please, sit down," he added, offering Mrs. Davison a chair. "So, are you interested in music lessons? Oh, this is my roommate, Ashley."

Ashley had gone into the kitchen, and had just returned with a cup of tea for Mrs. Davison. She handed her the cup, then sat on the couch opposite with Chrissy. "Thank you, Ashley," said Mrs. Davison. "No, I'm not interested in music lessons. At least, not for myself. This would be for my daughter, Rose."

"Has she studied music before?" asked Chrissy, sipping her tea.

"Yes, she's been taking group lessons at a studio downtown for a number of years now, but she's become bogged down in Grade Level 3. She's taken the test three times now, but just can't seem to get past this stage."



"Sometimes, a girl just needs a different approach," Chrissy suggested. "Group lessons are good to get her started, but a few private tutoring sessions may be needed to give her the attention she needs to move ahead. I'd like to meet Rose. Is this Thursday too early for her first lesson? Say, seven o'clock, here in our apartment?"

"Timing is difficult, we have two girls and they always have appointments and activities. Your flyer said you were available during the day. Rose has a long lunch period on Wednesdays; do you suppose you could fit her in on Wednesdays at noon?"

"I suppose that will be alright," said Chrissy. She had really wanted this to be an evening appointment, since she would be dressed as a girl already. Now she would have to be dressed like a girl by noon on Wednesdays. "Have her come up at noon."

"It would be easier to fit in her lunch, and get her back to school in the afternoon if you were to come downstairs to our apartment."

Chrissy smiled as sincerely as she could, not feeling happy at all. Now she would have to traipse all over the building this way! "Fine, tomorrow, at noon, in your apartment."

"Number 705," Mrs. Davison told her.

Chrissy and Ashley stood, and saw Mrs. Davison out the door. Then Ashley turned to Chrissy, grabbed her hands, and squealed. "Chrissy, this is so fantastic! Your very first student. I'm so happy for you!"

Ashley hugged Chrissy with delight, happy at her friend's good fortune. Chrissy wasn't so sure at first, but as Ashley hugged her, she started warming up to the idea.

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The next day, after Ashley left for work, Chrissy spent the entire morning deciding what to wear. He wanted to look nice, and make a good impression on Mrs. Davison, who would expect him to dress professionally. However, he also wanted to make the right impression on Rose, who would respond better to a teacher who looked and dressed young. It was now twelve o'clock, and he was standing outside the Davison's apartment dressed in a short print skirt, with a conservative short-sleeve blouse, pantyhose, and three-inch heels. He had styled his hair, wore lipstick, eye shadow, eyeliner, and mascara, and had never been so nervous. He didn't like being out of the apartment, alone, dressed like a girl. If Ashley was with him, he knew people would be looking at her. He was all alone, about to spend an hour with total strangers. His heart beat so loud he could hear it as he knocked on the door.

A pretty, teenage girl opened the door. "Hi, you must be Miss Collins," she said.

"And you must be Rose," answered Chrissy.

"My Mom didn't say you were so pretty," said Rose as they shook hands.

Chrissy laughed. "You've just made a friend for life!"

"Rose, don't make your new teacher stand in the hallway," said Mrs. Davison as she arrived at the door. "Come in, Miss Collins."

Mrs. Davison brought Chrissy into the living room. Rose sat at the piano, but her mother wanted to tell Chrissy all over again about Rose's previous group lessons, her troubles passing Level 3, how difficult it was to make her practice, and more. It was all Chrissy could do to get away from the woman. Rose just seemed to shut down as her mother went on.

"Let's just start the lesson, and see where we go from there," said Chrissy, cutting Mrs. Davison off in mid sentence and sitting at the piano with Rose. "Are these your books? Why don't you play something for me that you've practiced."

Rose's mother sat nearby. "She hasn't practiced at all in two weeks," she added.

Rose opened her book, and fumbled her way through one of the pieces. She obviously knew the song, but it was also obvious that she hadn't practiced it for a while.

"You see," said Mrs. Davison. "She's never going to pass this level if she doesn't practice."

Chrissy tried to ignore the woman. Rose already was. There was a knock at the door, and Mrs. Davison left to answer. Chrissy was relieved to see that Rose's mother had a guest, who she invited into the kitchen. She could finally talk to Rose without interruption.

"Do you like this song, Rose?" she asked.

"It's okay, I guess," Rose answered.

"I don't," Chrissy admitted. "All the songs in this book are meant to teach you something about playing the piano, but no one ever expected anyone to like them. To tell you the truth, they are terrible music."

Rose stared at Chrissy. She had never heard anyone say anything like this. It was so honest, she didn't know what to think.

"To me, playing the piano is about making music, and having fun. If you're not having fun, what's the point? Do you have any songs you like to play, Rose?"

"Sure," said Rose enthusiastically. She opened the piano bench, and got out a book. "My cousin gave me this book for Christmas last year."

"April Lapin," read Chrissy. "I like her too. Play your favorite for me." Rose opened the book to a well-worn page, and played a very nice rendition of April Lapin's hit, 'That Guy in Home Room'.

"Wow, that was great," Chrissy said enthusiastically. "See this part here," she continued, pointing at the music, "Watch my fingering. Can you play it like this?"

Rose repeated the bars, playing the notes as Chrissy suggested, and smiled at how much easier it was and better it sounded. The two girls went through the book together, trying different songs. Chrissy made suggestions, and Rose would incorporate them.

After an hour, Rose had to leave quickly to get back to school. Chrissy made a few notes in Rose's book, suggesting songs to practice and points to remember. Rose gave Chrissy a big smile as she ran out the door, saying, "Thanks, Chrissy! I'll see you next week!"

Chrissy went into the kitchen to speak to Mrs. Davison. She was still sitting with her guest, and neither of them looked pleased. They had likely been discussing Chrissy's music lesson, and obviously disapproved.

"Rose has a lot of talent," Chrissy told her.

"I didn't hear much teaching going on," said Mrs. Davison. "Just a lot of 'pop' music."

"She needs to practice," Chrissy told her, "but she needs to enjoy her music as well."

"So when is she going to pass Level 3 if all she does is enjoy herself?" Mrs. Davison demanded.

"Oh," said Chrissy. "She just passed."

"Mrs. Davison stared incredulously at Chrissy. "She hasn't practiced that song in two weeks. It wasn't good enough to pass."

"No," admitted Chrissy, "but the other songs she played were easily at Grade Level 5. She demonstrated everything she needs for Level 3, so I'm promoting her."

Mrs. Davison was speechless, but soon smiled, and changed her tone. "She passed! I didn't even know you were going to test her."

"She needs to pick up a couple of things from Level 4, but I'd like her to start next week on Level 5. Could you take her to a music store before next week; you'll need to pick up the books for Level 5. And let her pick out a music book that she likes. It's important that she have something to play that she really enjoys, to bring her back to the piano every day."

Mrs. Davison was overwhelmed. "Level 5, already! Thank you so much, Miss Collins!"

Mrs. Davison's guest was smiling as well, and offered her hand. "Hello Miss Collins, I'm Emily's sister, Elizabeth Peters. Emily tells me you teach other instruments?"

"Yes," she replied. This 'Miss Collins' business was really going to take some getting used to! "Did you have something in mind?"

"My son is in the music program at Ruskview High. He plays the trumpet in the school band. Do you give trumpet lessons?"

Chrissy discussed arrangements with Mrs. Peters, and agreed to be at her home at three o'clock the following afternoon. She left the Davison's apartment, and was so pleased about helping Rose, winning over Mrs. Davison, picking up another student, and getting her first pay check (\$200 for a whole month in advance!), she was half way home before she realized: She would have to go out tomorrow afternoon, to another appointment, several blocks away, by herself, dressed as a girl.

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"So, Eric, how long have you been playing the trumpet?"

It was a scorching hot day, and even though Chrissy needed to dress like a girl, he had been determined that he would not wear pantyhose or a bra. He had searched his closet,

and Ashley's, trying to find something that would work. That was why he now found himself at the Peters' home, dressed in a pretty, short, white cotton halter-top dress. There was very little material above the waist, and not much below it either. There were just a couple of inches of material in back before it curved up and around to the front, covering his chest before it became thin strips that tied behind his neck. The skirt barely allowed for modesty when he sat. His legs were bare, and looked very long and lovely in the high-heeled sandals he had borrowed from Ashley. To keep his hair off his shoulders, he had twisted it up on the back of his head and held it with a clip, the way he had seen Ashley do with her hair a dozen times. He wore minimal makeup, just a little mascara and blush, giving him a fresh and youthful look. It was a daring outfit, but he didn't care. He had never felt so comfortable in the summer heat.

"I'm, just, um ... what was the question?" Eric replied.

Chrissy smiled. She hadn't considered the effect her outfit could have on a teenage boy like Eric. He was definitely having trouble concentrating, and his 'youthful exuberance' was showing. Chrissy had noticed him having to adjust the front of his jeans a couple of times since she had arrived.

"For how many years have you been playing the trumpet, Eric?" she repeated.

"Oh, this is my third year," he managed to answer.

Chrissy looked through his music. "This is all marching band music," she said. "Do you like marching music?"

Eric shrugged his shoulders, and shifted his hand around in his pocket in a way he considered surreptitious. "I guess so," he said without conviction. "I mean, that's what we play at school."

Chrissy tried another approach. "In grade seven, you could have chosen any instrument. Why did you choose the trumpet? Had you ever heard trumpet music before?"

Eric thought back. "I used to listen to some old tapes that belonged to my Grampa. The trumpets were really cool. I guess I picked the trumpet because of that."

"Do you still have those tapes? Where are they?"

Eric searched around his room, and found the tapes buried in a box of CDs and computer games. Chrissy looked through the collection.

"Harry James, Louis Armstrong, oh wow, the Tijuana Brass! These are amazing, do you ever listen to them any more?"

Chrissy took one of the tapes, and bent down to place it in Eric's tape player. As they listened to 'Tijuana Taxi' playing over the speakers in his room, Chrissy watched a smile come over Eric's face; the first one today that didn't seem to have anything to do with her short skirt. Eric played with the valves on his trumpet, keeping time to the music. When the song finished, Chrissy bent down and turned off the tape.

"You look like you'd like to play that, am I right?"

"Oh, yah, you know it!" exclaimed Eric.

Chrissy took out a music pad, and quickly wrote down three lines of music. "Here, try this," she said.

Curious, Eric looked over the notes, then tried to play them. After the fifth note, he realized what it was. "Hey, this is the same song!"

"That's right. For next week, I want you to listen to these tapes, and practice the lines I've written for you. Then see if you can figure out the next line."

"I don't think I know how to do that," Eric said.

"Just give it a try. Try to guess each note, then play it, and decide if the right note is higher or lower. When you have the right note, write it down. I'll give you a hint, the next note is an A." Chrissy and Eric worked on the piece for the rest of the lesson. Occasionally Chrissy would play a part for him, showing him how to smooth over some rough edges and make the song flow more naturally. When it was time to leave, Chrissy stood and collected her things.

"What about my band music?" Eric wanted to know.

"Concentrate on this part right here," she said, pointing out a few bars in the middle of the piece. "This is the only part you had any trouble with. Don't waste your time on the rest, it's so easy you could play it in your sleep. Maybe ten minutes a day on band, twenty minutes on your new piece, and another half-hour listening to the tapes. And don't forget to try figuring out the next line of the song."

Eric followed Chrissy to the door, and stood by as his mother spoke to her and showed her out.

"Eric is highly motivated," Chrissy told her. "You shouldn't have much trouble getting him to practice."

"Yes," said Mrs. Peters. "I can see. He would probably do anything for his teacher right now."

Poor Eric. He didn't even seem to know they were teasing him. When Chrissy had been young, she had had a crush on a pretty teacher, Miss Gibbson. She hoped that she hadn't been this obvious about it!

Chrissy walked down the Peters' driveway to the sidewalk, and turned to see Eric still watching her from the door. "Goodbye, Eric," she called.

"Goodbye, Miss Collins ... Chrissy!" he called back.

Chrissy continued walking down the sidewalk through Eric's neighborhood. The day had cooled off considerably, and it was the perfect temperature for a stroll through the park on her way home. Chrissy smiled as she thought about how everything was turning around for her.

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"Good afternoon. Can I speak to Christopher Collins, please?" asked the voice on the phone.

"I'm Christopher. How can I help you?"

“Mr. Collins, I’m looking at a copy of your résumé. We’ve had a sudden vacancy in our music department for a part time teaching assistant. We were wondering if you would be interested.”

“Very definitely. Maybe you could tell me a bit about your requirements. My day is beginning to fill with private lessons, so timing may be a concern.”

“You would be required to be here primarily in the early mornings. We have three bands, two marching and one concert, and there are practices scheduled every weekday morning from eight to nine o’clock. You would be responsible for overseeing those practices. We would also like you to cover the occasional music class, but these times would be flexible, and you could negotiate the timing with our music teacher, Mr. Fleming. In addition, you would be expected to supervise the bands on the occasional field trip, usually after school or sometimes on weekends or evenings.”

“That sounds perfect for me. Would it be possible to schedule an interview for some time this week?”

“We’re actually in a bit of a hurry to fill the position. You see, the previous teaching assistant left very suddenly, this morning, in fact. She had an unfortunate tromboning accident, I’m sure I don’t have to say any more.”

“Oh, that’s terrible. I hope she’s alright.”

“She’ll be fine, but she did hand in her resignation after the incident. Which is why we’re hoping you can fill in tomorrow morning. Mr. Fleming will be on hand to watch how you conduct the class, and if he approves we’ll do the paperwork to hire you straight away. So, can we count on you for tomorrow morning? You would be working with the junior band.”

“Absolutely. Oh, you’d better tell me what school!”

“Of, course, I’m so sorry. I’m calling from Ruskview High ... Mr. Collins? Are you still there?”

“... Um, yes, sorry, just ... never mind. Ruskview High, 8:00 A.M., junior band. I’ll be there.”

“Thank you for helping us out on such short notice, Mr. Collins. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Chrissy hung up the phone. Ruskview High! Of all the schools in the city, why did it have to be Ruskview High? Chrissy now had three music students, two of whom went to Ruskview High. Both were in the junior band, and both knew Chrissy as a girl. He had really wanted to have a job where he could wear pants, without makeup, and just generally be accepted as a guy.

Not only that, but now he had to be dressed as a girl first thing in the morning, every day. With his other appointments throughout the day, plus his commitment to Ashley that he would always be a girl in the evenings, Chrissy didn’t know when he would be able to dress as a guy, ever again!

Chrissy went to tell Ashley about his new job. He was going to need her help finding appropriate clothes, makeup, and hairstyle for school in the morning.

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Chrissy woke at 6:30 the following morning. She had a quick breakfast, some tea and toast, then went to the shower. Ashley wouldn't be up for an hour, so she had the bathroom all to herself. She washed her hair in the shower, then dried and styled it as she and Ashley had worked out for her the night before.

Chrissy put on a white bra and panties, then went to her dressing table to fix her makeup. This was appropriately conservative; just some eye enhancements, and no lipstick, in case she had to play any of the instruments. Ashley had picked out what she considered a conservative blue skirt for Chrissy to wear on her first day. To Ashley, any skirt that extended beyond her fingertips was conservative. Fortunately for Chrissy, their height difference usually gave her an additional inch whenever she borrowed Ashley's clothes. Chrissy dressed in pantyhose, a simple white short-sleeve blouse, the blue skirt, and open-toed shoes with a two-inch heel.

Chrissy checked herself in the full-length mirror. Convinced everything was perfect, she picked up her portfolio case and headed for the front door. Ashley was barely awake, but came to the door to give Chrissy a hug for luck. Then she stood at the door in her kimono, smiling and waving as Chrissy got on the elevator, just like Chrissy always did for her.

Chrissy arrived at Ruskview High just before eight o'clock. It was a big place, and she wasn't just sure where to go. She noticed someone in the office, so knocked on the glass door.

"Yes?" said the woman as she unlocked and opened the office door.

"I'm hoping you can direct me to the music room," said Chrissy.

"I'm going up there in just a minute, if you can wait. You're lucky I'm here; I came in early today to meet our new teaching assistant for the music department."

"But that's me," said Chrissy.

The woman gave her an odd look. "I'm sorry, miss, but we're hiring a man by the name of Christopher Collins."

"That's me. I'm Christopher." Some further explanation was obviously necessary and so she added, "My Dad really wanted a boy. You can call me Chrissy, everyone does."

"Yes, that would simplify things," said the woman as she continued to look closely at Chrissy. "I guess we'd better get you up to the music department, then."

The woman led Chrissy through the halls until they arrived at the music room. Once you were close it was easy to find, by the sound of every instrument in the band playing a different piece of music at once.

Chrissy entered, and every instrument was quickly silenced as the students noticed her. She spied Eric pointing in her direction and whispering to his friends. She smiled, as she had a good idea what he was telling them. Chrissy went up to Mr. Fleming and introduced herself.

"I'm sorry, miss, I was told to expect a ..."

“A man. I know. The nurse put my father’s name in the wrong field when I was born. Call me Chrissy, everyone does.”

Mr. Fleming gave Chrissy a few instructions, introduced her to the class, and turned the group over to her. Chrissy led the band through the piece they were working on, occasionally stopping to give direction to individuals, or groups of instruments.

“... Okay, stop, everybody stop. At bar 88, I want all the brass instruments quiet, immediately. Not one peep, understand? Then the flutes take over ...”

“... Euphoniums, this is your big moment! Your chance to shine! So you want to hit these notes out of the park ...”

“... Karen, you’re playing a B, but it should be a B-flat. No? Well what does your sheet music say? Then it’s wrong, change it to a B-flat ...”

An hour went by very quickly, and the band members left for their homeroom classes. Chrissy waved and said goodbye to Eric, causing him to stumble into the door. She had managed to make a great first impression on everyone. Chrissy brought a sense of fun and playfulness to the department that, truth be told, had been previously lacking. It was obvious to everyone that she was having the best time of her life. It was impossible to be in her class and not enjoy yourself as well.

“Chrissy, that was excellent,” said Mr. Fleming. “You really got them motivated. I think I can safely say that the job is yours.”

Chrissy smiled her biggest smile. “Thank you, Mr. Fleming. You don’t know how much I’ve wanted this!”

“If you have time,” he continued, “I’d like you to stick around for the rest of the day. Meet some of the other students, see the regular classes in action.”

“I think they want me to fill out some forms in the office, but after that I’m all yours!” she said.

Chrissy spent the rest of the day at Ruskview. She sat in on all the music classes, mostly observing, but helping where she could. If a student was having difficulty, she would take her aside for some individual coaching, so Mr. Fleming could continue with the rest of the class. At lunch she was taken to the teachers’ lounge, where she was introduced to the rest of the teaching staff. The women quickly pulled her aside into one of their small groups, but she noticed that the men had difficulty taking their eyes off her!

At 2:30, school was over, and Chrissy set off for home. She had a couple of things to pick up at the grocery store, then she hurried home to get some laundry done and dinner started. She couldn’t wait to tell Ashley about her day!

## Chapter 6

After a couple of weeks, Chrissy became a regular fixture at Ruskview High. She showed up every morning for one or another of the band practices, but was finding she was increasingly in demand as a substitute teacher. She supervised on average two or three music classes a week, but that wasn’t the end of it. One of the school’s math teachers had taken ill, and as Chrissy was there every day anyway, she was asked to fill in for one

of his classes. She had taught the class every day this week, although her grasp of math wasn't all that far ahead of her students'. She was reading the textbook whenever she got a chance, and was barely managing to stay a few pages ahead of the class. Instead of being a drawback, however, her students loved her approach. Her enthusiasm for learning showed in her teaching, and was infectious. The students loved to see her at the blackboard working out a problem, and having one of her frequent "aha!" moments when she would laugh as she figured out the answer. The boys especially loved to see her stretching to write at the top of the board, but that really had nothing to do with her teaching!

She only had one problem since starting at Ruskview. The office had written to her former college for her transcript. When it arrived, she was called to the office to explain why her college, where she had spent four years, thought that she was male. Chrissy was used to these questions by now, however, and simply told them that, "I've tried to get those computer records changed so many times, but somehow it always gets changed back, so I've given up. If it will help, I'll wear pants and you can list me as male here at Ruskview." Chrissy hoped they might just take her up on the offer, but they said that, no, that wouldn't be necessary.

With all the money she was making from the school, plus her increasing number of private students, plus almost weekly engagements with 'Pritee Gurlz', plus an arrangement where Ashley paid for the food as long as Chrissy did the shopping and cooked the meals, Chrissy found she was finally getting ahead financially. She was still wearing Sandra's hand-me-downs, or things she had borrowed from Ashley's closet. Chrissy decided that her first priority for her newfound wealth would be a whole new wardrobe. When she mentioned this at a practice session, Sandra jumped at the chance to go shopping with her, to "bond, with a little girl time" as she said. They both had Friday afternoon free, and so Chrissy and Sandra met at the mall.

Chrissy was really glad to have Sandra along. Sandra could be a lot of fun, when she wasn't all in-your-face. In fact, when she was in someone else's face, it could be hilarious. The two girls walked through the mall, visiting almost every store, with Sandra providing a running commentary on everyone and everything they passed. Chrissy couldn't remember ever having laughed so much in her life.

Sandra was also a big help in the shopping. She knew everything there was to know about shopping for women's clothes, which wasn't surprising. Since Chrissy had never shopped for women's clothing in her life, she was grateful for all the help. It would have been very difficult to ask questions about brassieres at her age.

Sandra took her to a specialty underwear store first, with the unlikely name of 'Sheila Down Under' (apparently, an Australian owned it). This was where Sandra taught Chrissy that there are special bras and panties for every occasion, and they all come in every color of the rainbow. They picked out a dozen pair of panties, four bras, and Sandra insisted that she also buy 'bra inserts', artificial breasts made from some kind of gel that would give her more shape and bounce. "It's about time you faced facts, little sis. You're not getting any bigger up top!" she told her.

Sandra also introduced Chrissy to the store's extensive line of full slips, half slips, and camisoles. Chrissy didn't want to spend her entire budget on underwear, so she limited herself to two of each. Finally, she bought six pair of stockings (four plain, one fishnet,

and one with flames up the sides! Sandra had insisted), and two pretty nightgowns before moving on to the next store.

Sandra took Chrissy to have her colors professionally done at a shop that specialized in cosmetics. All of Chrissy's makeup was hand-me-down as well, so it was going to be nice to have some brand new cosmetics that were all her own. The store gave her a complete makeover for free, and she had to admit the result was perfect for her. She bought one of everything, and the two girls moved on down the mall.

Skirts, blouses, and dresses were more difficult to buy. Sandra told Chrissy that no woman would ever buy anything without trying it on first, so Chrissy ended up modeling every outfit. Usually Sandra would say it was no good, and have Chrissy try on something else. Sometimes she liked it too much, and forbade Chrissy to buy it, since Sandra planned to buy it for herself. Chrissy also found that Sandra's tastes were slightly more exotic than her own. Sandra wanted to find something that would look good with flaming pantyhose, whereas Chrissy wanted something that wouldn't completely distract her male students. She also soon found that every skirt or dress she bought had to be exactly fingertip length, since she refused anything shorter, and Sandra refused anything longer! The one exception was a sleeveless silver evening dress she bought for their club performances, which Sandra insisted she buy no matter how Chrissy objected. "Don't forget, we have to go back for the silver bra and panties now," Sandra told her.

In the end, Chrissy had so many bags she could barely carry them all. Sandra took her into a shop with miscellaneous items, and selected various bracelets, necklaces, and hair ornaments for Chrissy. Sandra apparently felt that Chrissy didn't wear enough jewelry. Chrissy was looking at a pair of earrings.

"You should buy those. They're really cute," Sandra told her.

"I can't. They're for pierced ears," Chrissy replied.

"So? Get them pierced. Honestly, Chrissy, you're such a pussy."

"I am not. It's just ... it's a big step. I don't think I'm ready for something so ... permanent."

"You really are a complete idiot. Would you just look at yourself? You're ready."

Sandra turned Chrissy so she could see herself in a full-length mirror. She was wearing a long-sleeve red satin blouse, with fingernails to match, and a very short, tight, white skirt. Her hair was styled with large, bouncy curls that reached to the middle of her back, and it floated over her shoulders as she turned her head. Her gel inserts moved realistically in her red brassiere at the same time. Her makeup was perfect, literally right out of a salon. Her high-heeled shoes emphasized her perfect calves, and she was wearing ultra-sheer pantyhose, the ones with the flames up the sides.

Chrissy didn't say a word; her face was completely without expression. She simply walked to the back of the store, and sat down to have her ears pierced.

Chrissy struggled into the apartment with her purchases, then took everything back to her bedroom. Shopping for new clothes had turned out to be a much bigger task than she had ever imagined; now it looked like putting everything away was going to be just as formidable.

Chrissy kicked off her shoes, and took off her new clothes so she could work in comfort. She even took off her new flaming stockings; everything down to her red bra and white satin panties. She took a moment to smile at herself in the dresser vanity mirror. She had to admit, her new makeup looked beautiful, and her ears with the new tiny stud earrings were adorable. She wondered why it had taken her so long to get her ears pierced!

Chrissy went to the kitchen, and came back with a pair of scissors. Then she unwrapped all her purchases, carefully snipping all the tags. For now, she simply stacked everything on her big, pink bed, organizing it all before finding places for everything and putting it away. She continued to steal peeks at herself in the mirror as she worked, admiring her feminine shape. It was kind-of fun having breasts, seeing and feeling them move; the new gel inserts were great! When she was done, she had a mountain of paper and plastic wrap. Chrissy stuffed it all into a couple of the larger plastic bags, and tossed these into the hallway to be dealt with later.

Chrissy looked at the mountain of clothes on her bed. For the first time, she realized: she had no room for all these things in her drawers and closet. She had really gone overboard, and bought way too many things. It was almost embarrassing how extravagant she had been. Of course, they were all things she needed. For school, for her lessons, for club appearances. And the solution was obvious: she just had to throw out some of her old clothes.

Chrissy went through her drawers, and pulled out the things she wore the least. She found old underwear and socks, T-shirts and pajamas. She piled everything neatly on her bed beside her new clothes; all the old clothes could be taken to the clothing-recycling bin at the supermarket later. She went through her closet as well, free-



ing up space and hangers by getting rid of old jeans and shirts, jackets and sweatshirts. Getting rid of old shoes that were lined up on the floor would make room for new. Everything was folded neatly, and lined up on the bed.

Chrissy was finally ready to put her new things away. She turned to pick up the first items, when she caught sight of everything lined up on her bed. To the left were her new things: lacy panties and colored bras, pretty skirts and sexy dresses, blouses and camisoles and high-heeled shoes. To the right were the things she was getting rid of: pants, shirts, socks, underwear – all her men’s clothing.

Chrissy felt faint; she had to sit down. She sat at her makeup table, wondering how this could have happened. She had been about to throw out every piece of male clothing she owned, without even thinking about it. She had only been dressing as a woman for a couple of months, full time for only a couple of weeks since she started working at the school. This was supposed to all be temporary. When had she given up on ever being a man again? When had she started thinking of herself as “she”?

Chrissy looked at the girl in the mirror. She was so beautiful. Her makeup was perfect, her hair was sexy, and her curves were amazing. That girl had some serious thinking to do.

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“Hi, Sandra. It’s me, Christopher.”

“Hey, Chrissy.”

“No, not Chrissy, this is Christopher.”

“Yah, right. Whatever. So what can I do you for?”

“I thought you might like to go out tonight.”

“I just spent all day with you Chrissy. Isn’t that enough?”

“You spent all day with Chrissy, this is Christopher.”

“So you keep saying.”

“I thought it might be fun if you and I went out, on a date. We could go to a club or something.”

“And do what? You want to pick up guys or something?”

“No! You and me, on a date. You’ll be the girl, and I’ll be the guy.”

“No offense, Chrissy, but I think it would work better the other way around.”

“I’m serious, Sandra.”

“So am I!”

“I haven’t been out as a guy for a long time. I’m asking you out for a date. So, do you want to go out with me?”

“Tell me first, what are you wearing right now?”

“That doesn’t matter.”

"You're sitting at home wearing a bra and panties, aren't you?"

"I'm going to change! Are you going to be my date or not?"

"Okay, don't have a hissy-fit. Of course, I'd love to go out with you, *Christopher*. In fact, I'm really looking forward to it. This should be one interesting evening."

"Can I pick you up at eight?"

"I'll be here."

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'Christopher' soaked his fingers in nail polish remover, and scrubbed them to get rid of the red polish he had so carefully applied the night before. He had a shower, washing away every trace of lipstick, eye makeup, and perfume. He couldn't take out the new earrings while his pierced ears healed, so he dried his hair with a towel, then left it long and straight to cover his ears, rather than his usual ponytail.

He went to his bedroom to dress. In the pile of men's clothes, he found underwear, a pair of gray dress pants, and a white shirt. Christopher quickly ironed both the shirt and pants before dressing, adding a black belt to the outfit. He used a rag to polish his black shoes, giving them a bit of shine, then put them on with black socks. For the final touch, he wore a tie. Christopher checked himself over in the mirror. He wasn't wearing a single feminine thing (except for the socks, which were actually black stockings. He didn't have any black socks). He took his wallet, keys, and change out of his purse, and put them all in his pockets. Pockets, it was so great to have pockets!



Christopher left the apartment, and ran down to the subway. He just had time to make it to Sandra's by eight.

The date was going great, everything as perfect as Christopher could have imagined. He had arrived at Sandra's apartment precisely at eight o'clock. Sandra answered the door, wearing a pair of red pants, high-heeled sandals, and a long-sleeve white blouse. Christopher had hoped that she would wear one of her sexier outfits, but then he took another look. The pants hugged her hips, and emphasized the length of her incredible legs. The blouse was not as low-cut as Sandra normally wore, but it gave her a cultured and feminine look. She wore her hair up, and although she hadn't finished her makeup, Christopher knew the effect she would go for would be an intelligent, sophisticated woman on the town. As Christopher admired Sandra's outfit, he realized that his earlier thoughts had been immature. The woman before him was the perfect woman.

Sandra laughed when she first saw Christopher, but quickly suppressed the outburst. "Christopher, you look, very ... handsome," she had said. She bent down and kissed him, then invited him into the apartment. Sandra often kissed him when they met, but Christopher hoped that this time, perhaps it meant a little bit more.

"Wait here, I just need to finish getting ready," she said, as she went back to her bedroom. There was music playing on the stereo; Christopher turned this off, and picked up Sandra's acoustic guitar instead. He played some soft jazz pieces while he waited.

"That was beautiful," said Sandra when she emerged, fixing her earrings. She had changed her blouse, and apparently decided to wear her hair down after all. She wore minimal makeup, and somehow she was even more beautiful than she had been twenty minutes earlier. Any guys seeing the two of them tonight were going to be green with envy! "What's the name of that song?"

Christopher put down the guitar and stood. "You Made Me Love You," he said.

"I know that," said Sandra with a wry smile. "I asked you what's the name of that song." Then she walked over to Christopher, grabbed his tie, and pulled him in close for another quick kiss. He noticed that Sandra had changed her heels for flat shoes, and was now only an inch or two taller than him.

Still holding his tie, Sandra headed for the door. "Come on, let's get going!" she encouraged him.

The pair had then headed downtown on the subway, and were now at one of the city's most popular dance clubs. Christopher had never been here before; he doubted he would have gotten past the front door on his own. That was just one of the advantages of being with a girl like Sandra, though. Doors opened for her.

Christopher noticed that this date had none of the awkwardness usually associated with first dates. A lot of this had to do with Sandra's natural exuberance. Sandra had probably never experienced an awkward moment in her life. However, there was more to it. Maybe it was the fact that they were already good friends. Whatever it was, the two were able to talk and laugh as if they had always been together. Sandra's normal level of abusiveness didn't bother Christopher at all.

“So, what’s the game plan for tonight?” Sandra asked when they were settled at a table. She smiled, “I know guys, and there’s always a game plan.”

Christopher smiled back at her. “A couple of drinks, a little dancing. Then we’ll see what happens.” He looked around the club at the other patrons. They were mostly single men and women, with very few couples like Sandra and him. Many of the single men were glancing at their table; the looks of admiration for Sandra were unmistakable. Christopher couldn’t help smiling at his good fortune.

Christopher and Sandra had been waiting a few minutes now, but no one had taken their drink order. Christopher waved a couple of times, trying to attract the attention of a waiter, but they all appeared to be busy. Eventually a waiter approached their table.

“Hi, we’d like to order some drinks, please,” Christopher said.

The waiter set down his tray on their table and removed two drinks, placing one each in front of both Sandra and Christopher. “From the two gentlemen at the bar,” he said. Christopher looked over at the bar, where two guys in their late twenties were sitting, raising their own drinks toward them.

Christopher was shocked, and more than a little distressed. “No, there’s been some mistake. Please, take these back,” he managed to say, not even wanting to consider what this meant.

“Nonsense,” said Sandra. “It would be rude to send them back. Please, send them our thanks.” Sandra raised her glass to the guys at the bar and smiled.

The waiter left, and Christopher turned to Sandra. “Sandra, how could you accept these drinks? We’re together tonight. Those guys must think we’re both girls!” he said in a hushed but troubled voice.

“Never turn down free drinks,” said Sandra. She turned to Christopher, and saw the look of worry on his face. With an exasperated tone she told him, “Would you relax? It’s only drinks. Try it, it’s a Zombie. Very expensive, lots of alcohol. Those guys must like us a lot!”

Christopher was about to say something unkind, when he noticed someone had approached their table. “Hi, I’m Greg, and this is Brett,” the man said. Oh, dear God, they were the two guys from the bar. “May we join you ladies?” Before Christopher could say anything, the guys pulled over two chairs and sat. Greg sat close to Christopher, and Brett sat very close to Sandra. Christopher wasn’t sure which bothered him more.

“Thank you so much for the drinks. I’m Sandra, and this is my friend ...”

“Chris,” said Christopher, finishing Sandra’s sentence for her, as he was not at all sure what she was about to call him. It was humiliating enough to be mistaken for a girl, but it could be much worse to be revealed as a guy. However, he wasn’t ready to be ‘Chrissy’ to these guys, either.

“I pointed you two out to Greg the minute you walked in the club,” said Brett. “I said to him, those are the two girls we’re here to meet. I told him, if we don’t meet those girls, we’ll regret it the rest of our lives.”

Chrissy expected Sandra would tell them to take a hike, but for some inexplicable reason, she didn't. Instead, she laughed, as if those lousy pick up lines were the height of refined wit. "You are so sweet," she told him.

"I think you should know," said Christopher, hoping to pour some water on the spreading flames, "we're not interested in meeting anyone tonight."

Greg laughed, as if Christopher were joking. "Two beautiful women, in this club, not interested in meeting anyone. You're funny." He moved his chair even closer to Christopher, and put his arm around him. "But seriously, you should get to know us before making any decisions. We're not a bad couple of guys." Greg picked up his glass, and held it up toward Christopher. He moved his face close to his and said, "To new friends?"

Christopher was mortified, but didn't know what else to do. He picked up his Zombie, and drank with Greg. Sandra said, "To new friends," and she and Brett joined in the toast.

The four of them sat at the table for a while, ordering more drinks and talking. Three of them laughed a lot, and had a wonderful time. With his arm around Christopher, Greg didn't seem to notice that his girl was perfectly miserable; Sandra was outgoing and vivacious enough for the both of them.

"So are you ready to dance?" Brett asked.

"You know it!" Sandra responded, jumping out of her seat and dragging Brett to his feet after her.

"Come on, Chris!" said Greg. Christopher wasn't given a choice; Greg almost lifted him out of his seat in his rush to the dance floor.

Christopher watched Sandra dance with her new date. She looked so happy, so vibrant and full of life. She danced with Brett the way Chris had pictured her with him. Sandra touched Brett, pulling him close, then pushing him away, in the teasing way she used so effectively. Christopher shuffled his feet as he danced with his own date. The song ended, and went straight to a slow dance. Christopher watched as Sandra pulled her date close, wrapping his arms around her. He barely had time to register this before he found his face pressed to Greg's chest.

"Brett always wants the party girl, the outgoing one with the big chest and lots of makeup," Greg said into his ear. "Me on the other hand, I like a girl who's less obvious. I like a quiet girl with a nice face, and a tiny waist," he said as he held Christopher's chin in one hand, and slid the other around his waist, emphasizing how narrow it was. Oh God, it was worse than Christopher had thought! Sandra was the pretty friend, and he was the plain one. These guys had probably flipped a coin to see who would be stuck with him.

"You know, there's no reason you couldn't be every bit as beautiful as your friend. Just a little makeup, and some pretty clothes. This tie has got to go," he said as he stroked a finger down Christopher's throat, then deftly pulled the tie loose and off from around his neck with one hand.

Christopher was held tight against Greg, barely able to move. He put one hand up in protest, using it to grab Greg's arm. He may as well have tried to bend steel, however. Greg undid three buttons on Christopher's shirt, then ran his hand down Christopher's breastbone and over his stomach.

"You see how pretty that is now?" he told him. Greg pulled Christopher tight against him, holding Christopher's petite waist in his fingers of both hands. Then he slid his hands down over Christopher's hips, and around to grab his butt.

"Of course, there's no improving this feature. The minute I saw you, I fell in love with this tight ass."

The song ended. With Greg's arms extended downward, Christopher was able to get his hands between their bodies and break away from Greg's grip. "I'll be right back," he said as he made his way off the dance floor to the washrooms.

Christopher was leaning against the wall by the sinks when Sandra came in. "A couple of drinks, some dancing, then what was next? Oh yeah, we'll see what happens! Some game plan," Sandra said with a laugh. Then she looked more closely at her friend.

"Chris? Chris, are you okay? Are you crying?" She asked.

"No, I'm not crying," said Christopher, his eyes reddening, but he was telling the truth; he wasn't crying, not yet.

"It's okay if you want to cry. I saw what happened. Some guys are just like that; they buy you a drink, then they think they own you."

"This was supposed to be *our* date," he said in frustration, tears forming. "I'm dressed like a guy, I am a guy, why can't they see that?"

"You know that you ran into the ladies' room, don't you?" Sandra told him.

Christopher didn't say anything. Sandra watched as a big tear began to roll down his face.

Sandra took pity on him. "Oh, you poor, pretty baby," she said soothingly as she held his head to her chest. "Maybe this date wasn't such a good idea. Hush, now, am I still your big sister?" Chrissy nodded, without saying a word. Sandra held him at arms length, and looked into his face affectionately. "Don't I always take care of you, baby sis?" Chrissy looked down to hide the tears, but nodded just the same.

Sandra looked through her purse, and found a lipstick. She handed it to Chrissy, and he automatically looked into the mirror and applied it. Sandra dried the tears with a tissue, then handed Chrissy her purse. "You fix your eyes, and you'll feel better."

Chrissy spent a few minutes going over her makeup. The routine calmed her, and she started to feel a little better. "See now, everything's going to be okay, isn't it?" Sandra asked. Chrissy nodded again, still without much conviction. "That's my pretty girl. Are you ready to go home? Now where's your tie?"

"I think Greg still has it," said Chrissy.

"You go to the front and wait for me," Sandra told her. Chrissy left the ladies' room and walked to the front. Standing at the front door, she turned around in time to see Sandra take her tie from Greg, toss a drink in his face, and say, "So long, assholes." Chrissy laughed, and started to feel better. Her big sister really did take care of her.

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Sandra and Chrissy entered the apartment. Ashley was home, watching TV in her nightgown. "Hi, Sandra. Hi, Chrissy ... Chrissy? Is everything okay?"

Chrissy's eyes were still a little red. "She's fine," said Sandra. "We just had a long day. She's tired, that's all." Sandra turned to Chrissy, looked into her face and said, "You go change, okay? I'll be here for you when you come back."

Sandra sat on the couch with Ashley, while Chrissy went to her room to change. She took off her pants and shirt, her underwear, stockings and shoes, and placed them all (except the stockings) in the pile of old clothes. She looked at the pile for a minute, then picked it up and dropped it in the corner of the room. She changed into the yellow baby doll nighty and panty set she had bought earlier that day, and then sat at her makeup mirror to brush out her hair. After fixing her makeup, she went out to join the other girls.

"I like your new earrings," Ashley told her. "They're so cute, they really suit you."

"Thanks," replied Chrissy. She sat on the couch, joining her two friends.

"I feel totally over-dressed," said Sandra, looking at Chrissy and Ashley in their nighties. "I really don't feel like going all the way home alone tonight. Can I borrow something to wear and crash with you guys?"

"Sure," said Chrissy. "You can change in my room. Wear anything you want."

Sandra went to the bedroom, and came back a few minutes later wearing a lace burgundy camisole, with matching panties. Ashley made some popcorn to eat, and the three girls curled up under a blanket on the couch to watch an old chick flick starring Meg O'Neil.

Ashley left to go to bed about halfway through the film, but Sandra and Chrissy sat up together to the very end. Sandra made jokes about the ridiculous plot line, and Chrissy repainted her nails. When it was over, the girls got ready for bed together. They washed their faces, and Sandra borrowed Chrissy's toothbrush.

"It's okay if I sleep with you, isn't it?" asked Sandra.

"Sure, of course," said Chrissy, wondering where else Sandra would sleep. She wasn't going to make her friend sleep on the couch!

The two girls got into Chrissy's bed, and straightened out the big pink comforter over them both. Sandra snuggled up behind Chrissy and put her arm over her; there wasn't a lot of room in the single bed. Chrissy felt Sandra's breasts pressed up against her back, and found it a very comforting sensation. The two girls closed their eyes, and waited for sleep to overtake them.

"Chrissy, are you awake?" Sandra whispered a few minutes later.

"Mmmm," said Chrissy dreamily.

"When I go on a date," Sandra continued to whisper, "I always have a good idea early on if I'm going to go to bed with the guy or not. I've got to admit, I didn't see this coming."

Chrissy giggled, then made another sleepy noise. The girls were quiet for another couple of minutes.

“Chrissy? Are you awake? If you’re in the mood, I would really like to have sex with you right now.” Sandra waited for a reply, but there was none, except for the slow, steady rhythm of Chrissy’s breathing.

“It’s probably for the best,” Sandra said quietly to herself. “Goodnight, baby girl.” Chrissy smiled in her sleep, and hugged Sandra’s arm tight around her chest.

## Chapter 7

The crowd was demanding an encore, and it was obvious what song they wanted. There was only one song the four girls could play that would satisfy them. The chants of “We want more!” turned into a cheer as Ashley played the opening bars that the crowd had only heard for the first time tonight. But when Natalie’s drums joined in, setting the beat for Sandra’s guitar riff, the crowd exploded. They didn’t let up through the entire instrumental opening; not until the beat slowed, the song mellowed, and Sandra began singing the words they all wanted to memorize, did they become still:

*I thought I was right, but I just wasn't wrong,  
I thought that life would move along,  
I thought I could see the world, and the place it held for me.*

*I couldn't fly, but I couldn't fall,  
I couldn't do anything at all,  
But still I felt it was the place for me.*

*Do butterflies remember,  
When they were safely in the leaves,  
Do they yearn to have their feet back on the ground?  
It's wonderful to soar, and fly, and be up in the sky,  
But sometimes I like to look back at the trees.*

All other instruments faded as Ashley repeated her keyboard opening, pounding out the notes this time and leading into a hard rock instrumental. The crowd cheered again, but they raised the roof when Chrissy put down her bass guitar and exchanged it for a saxophone. She played an extended version of the solo she had played for the crowd earlier, and they loved every second. The noise reduced to a few shouts of appreciation, as Ashley’s keyboard brought the song back to a slow, thoughtful pace, and Sandra sang:

*Sometimes it's hard to know,  
What's the path that you should follow,  
With a lifetime of misconceptions, leading you astray.  
I'm just glad, that I found,  
Someone to kick me, when I was down,  
And block the path where I would be today.*

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The crowd couldn't help screaming as they saw the song coming to its conclusion. Sandra sang the chorus one last time:

*Do butterflies remember,  
When they were safely in the leaves,  
Do they yearn to have their feet back on the ground?  
It's wonderful to soar, and fly, and be up in the sky,  
But sometimes I like to look back at the trees.*

Two bouncers moved to the stage, helping the four girls to make their way through the appreciative crowd. They touched hands with fans, and some of the women hugged them, but one look at the bouncers and the guys in the crowd knew better. Still, a high five or a moment of eye contact with one of these musical goddesses was enough for any guy. There were a few calls for more, but for the most part, the crowd realized that it just didn't get any better than this. Sometimes when something is perfect, you have to step back and savour the moment.

The girls were playing at 'Here, Kitty, Kitty' again. They had a couple of other clubs where they would appear now, but this was one of their favorite spots. Sandra headed up the stairs to the manager's office as usual, but the manager met her coming down. Chrissy and the other girls watched as the two had a quick conversation. Then, with a puzzled look on her face, Sandra motioned everyone to join her. Chrissy, Natalie and Ashley looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, then followed Sandra up the stairs to the manager's office.

The manager held the door for them as the four girls entered his office, but instead of following them in, he stayed outside, gave Sandra a 'thumbs up' and then closed the door. A man none of the girls recognized was sitting behind the desk.

The noise from the club below was coming through speakers mounted on the walls. The man flipped a switch behind the desk and the speakers were quiet, although the sounds could still be heard as a dull thump reverberating through the walls. Chrissy, Natalie and Ashley sat on a couch, while Sandra took the chair across from the desk.

“Ladies, my name is Howard Bell, and I’m a scout for Temple Records. I’ve seen your act a few times, and I have to tell you, you’ve come a long way in a very short time.

“I saw you for the first time a couple of months ago, and I’m sorry to tell you, at the time I just dismissed you as another girl band. Great looking women, perfect for some steamy videos, but Temple Records is about the music. If the music isn’t going to sell, we can’t use you. Your sound was good, but nothing we hadn’t heard before, so I moved on.

“Last week, I saw you at Club Courcelette, opening for another band I wanted to catch. Your sound has come so far in just a couple of months, I decided to come here tonight and ladies, you blew me away. You played this club like a concert hall. So tell me, who writes your music?”

“I’ve written most of our songs,” said Sandra, “but if you want to know who’s responsible for our sound she’s right here,” she added, pointing to Chrissy. “She does all our musical arrangements now. She’s rebuilt every song from the ground up. Chrissy is our own musical genius.”

“And that last song you played, about butterflies, who wrote that?” he asked.

“That was 100% Chrissy Collins. Words, music, instrumental arrangements, and stellar babe blowing jazz horn,” Sandra told him, smiling proudly at Chrissy.

“Until I heard that song,” continued Howard, “I still wasn’t convinced. Your sound is amazing; unfortunately, it’s not the type of music that gets a lot of airplay. But that song is going to be the key to your success. It has ‘hit’ written all over it. Ladies, Temple Records would like to offer you a recording contract.”

The four girls saw this coming, but the excitement of the announcement made them scream anyway. Natalie hugged Chrissy, and Ashley kissed her.

“Before we proceed, however, there are a couple of things we need to take care of,” Howard told them when they were finally calm. “First of all, I’m told you don’t have an agent. Before we can deal with you, you’re going to need professional representation. We can help you find someone, but it’s better if you find someone on your own.”

“That’s not a problem,” said Sandra. “I’ll contact someone on Monday and have them call you.”

“Second, you have enough music to fill an album, and we’ll release Butterfly as a single right away. But what we really need is another song that we can release in a few months, to keep you in front of the public. One hit makes you a one-hit wonder; two will get you rolling, keep you fresh for tours and appearances, and lead into your next album.” This guy was already thinking about their next album!

“So Chrissy,” he said, “when can you get us another song?”

All four girls were laughing and smiling; three of them continued as they turned to Chrissy expectantly. Chrissy suddenly realized; they were all counting on her. She felt very small and inadequate as she said, “I ... don’t know, sir. I mean, I was really inspired when I wrote Butterfly – and by the way, it’s called Caterpillar. But, I don’t know if I can just sit down and write another song. Lyrics aren’t usually my thing.”

Howard looked at Chrissy thoughtfully for a moment. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do," he told her. "I'm going to set you up with a professional songwriter. Jason Stark, he's a young, good-looking guy who usually works with our top talent, but I've got a feeling you two will hit it off."

"Okay," said Chrissy hesitantly. The other three girls were still smiling at her, although she was not at all sure about working with some guy she didn't know. She wondered what made Howard think she would be such a perfect match for this "young, good-looking guy"; she shifted uneasily on the couch and tugged her short silver dress down further over her hips. This exposed more cleavage than she wanted, and so she nervously tugged it back up. "Can I meet him at your office some time next week?"

"Jason doesn't come into the city too often," she was told. "He works out of his home. That's where he gets his inspiration, on the lakes up north, in the woods. We'll send you up there for a couple of days. You're going to love it, I'm sure."

Chrissy was not at all sure if she wanted to spend a couple of days in some remote area with a guy she didn't know. "Where exactly does this guy live?"

"I'm going to have to find out," Howard said cryptically. "He lives on a sailboat, and moves around a lot. He'll take you out, find somewhere secluded where you can work. Some place romantic; don't worry, you'll find your inspiration!"

And just how inspired was this Jason going to get, Chrissy thought with horror.

Chrissy sat back in his seat on the train. He was leaving the safety and anonymity of the big city, traveling toward a romantic rendezvous with a man he didn't know, who would take him out on his sailboat to some secluded cove so that his passions would be inspired. No matter how you thought about it, it just sounded completely wrong.

Chrissy was wearing a long-sleeve cotton shirt, with long wool pants and a jacket. The train was sweltering, as the air conditioning seemed to be broken. Chrissy thought about the conversation he had with Sandra before leaving. It made him angry to think about it, but that was fine; he wanted to be angry at something. As a drip of sweat rolled down his nose, though, he knew Sandra had probably been right.

"Chrissy, you can't wear any of these clothes on a sailboat," she had told him. "These sweaters and jackets are going to look ridiculous. And who wears pantyhose on a boat? You have plenty of nice tops and shorts to choose from. I've brought you at least a dozen bikinis, just choose *one!*"

Chrissy had arranged for Friday off, and the band had no engagements for the weekend. So he was spending three days with this guy – he was going to cover his girlish assets with as much clothing as he could! Chrissy wiped another drip of sweat from his nose.

Jason met Chrissy at the train station. He tried for a friendly kiss, as they had spoken on the phone a couple of times, but Chrissy fended him off by offering a handshake. The two shook hands; Jason surreptitiously wiped his now-damp palm on his shorts. He helped Chrissy into his Thunderbird convertible, and they drove to the dock. The breeze was wonderful, but every time they stopped the humidity settled on Chrissy like a hot towel.

When they arrived at the sailboat, Chrissy had to admit he was impressed. He didn't know much about sailing, but he knew big and expensive when he saw it. Jason told him it would sleep six quite comfortably, although curtains provided the only privacy he would be getting for the next three days.

Jason took Chrissy down below, where he showed him how to use the shower (without his even asking). Then Jason left him to shower and change, while he went up top to set sail. Chrissy locked the door after he left.

Chrissy took off his jacket, cotton shirt, and pants. His bra, panties, and pantyhose were so wet he was actually able to wring them out into the sink. Even though the shower was tiny, and the water pressure low, Chrissy had the most wonderful shower of his life.

Chrissy stepped out of the shower, refreshed and clean. He toweled himself dry, opened his suitcase to change, and was shocked to see that most of his clothes were missing. Instead, tossed on top were at least a dozen bikinis.

"God damn you, Sandra!" he shouted. "And thank you so much," he added with notable relief.

Chrissy sunned herself on the front of the boat in her white bikini, the one with the blue trim. Jason navigated the sailboat to a nearby island, admiring the spectacular view the entire way.

The island was beautiful, Chrissy hated to admit. Jason dropped anchor in a small, secluded bay with a sandy beach. It was late, but the couple took time for a relaxing swim over to the beach. Back on the boat a little while later, Jason prepared dinner, serving Chrissy on deck. It really was the most romantic evening of Chrissy's life, which he found a bit disturbing. He wore his silver dress, which had somehow appeared in the suitcase, and looked ravishing.



Jason wore black pants and a white shirt, and if Chrissy was any judge, he was a pretty good-looking guy (just *really* not his type).

After dinner they sat on deck, drinking wine and looking at the thousands of stars visible overhead. Jason was easy to talk to, and often carried the conversation. After a while, Chrissy announced she was tired. She went below to change, into her very non-romantic teddy bear nighty, and got into bed. Jason came in after a while, and pulled the curtain back to say goodnight. When Chrissy simply said, "Goodnight, Jason," he pulled the curtain closed. Chrissy heard him getting undressed behind the curtain, then get into his own bed. This had certainly been an interesting day. Chrissy wasn't just sure what kind of song she would be able to write about it.

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Chrissy woke late the next day, and found herself alone in the cabin. She quickly changed into a bikini (sky blue, with a palm tree pattern), brushed her hair, fixed her makeup, and went up top to find Jason. He had sliced some fresh fruit for breakfast, and the two sat down together.

After breakfast, Jason gave Chrissy a tour of the boat. He showed her the various winches and pulleys, and demonstrated how she could help him sail next time they were out on the water. Chrissy was excited, and really looked forward to that. They dove off the boat and swam to the beach, exploring the island for a while. They lay on the beach for a long time, enjoying the sun and the bright, warm sky. Chrissy relaxed, and Jason watched as she stretched out on the warm sand.

It was late afternoon by the time they swam back to the boat. Chrissy knew enough about the boat now to make a quick lunch for the two of them. She brought the plates up on deck, where Jason was relaxing with his guitar. "I suppose we have to work some-time," she said as she placed a plate of fruit, cheese, and bread in front of Jason.

"Yes, it's a rat race," Jason replied with a smile and a laugh. "So, what do we want this song to be about?" he asked. "A man, and a beautiful girl, alone on the ocean," he suggested, as he strummed the guitar.

"This is a lake," corrected Chrissy. "And if you knew our lead singer, I doubt you'd find that scenario appropriate. Unless there were sharks," she added.

"So, what's she like? Where do you see her?" he asked, changing from the soft melody he had been playing to some up-tempo chords.

Chrissy looked up, picturing Sandra. "In a bar," she said. "Late at night, on the road, singing in a small-town bar."

Jason continued to strum. "She's lonely, facing another night by herself," he said. "She looks out and sees a good-looking guy."

"Just like every other guy she meets on the road," said Chrissy. "Too good-looking, and no good for her."

The song had become a battle of wills for the two, Jason trying to arrange a romantic coupling, and Chrissy equally determined to prevent it. "Maybe this one is different," Jason said.

"But it's not something I'd bet," responded Chrissy.

"I'll dream of you tonight, ..."

"But that's as close as you're going to get!"

Jason laughed at Chrissy's parry and riposte. Then he looked thoughtful, and jumped from his seat. "Chrissy, that's it. That's the song!"

Chrissy stood as well. She thought about the words they had just spoken, and the tune Jason had played. Then she saw it too. Chrissy smiled, and laughed, and jumped up and down clapping her hands. Jason picked her up off her feet, swinging her around as she squealed and laughed with delight. Jason set her feet down on the deck, his face only an inch from hers. He looked into her eyes.

Chrissy saw what was coming. She looked away, then stepped back from Jason. "You're right, Jason," she said impassively. "This is good. The lyrics are a great hook. The tune needs some work though, to make it fit." She walked over to the edge of the boat, still refusing to look at him. "It's really hot out, I'm going to go for a swim."

Chrissy dove over the side of the boat. She swam under water for a while, thinking about the song, thinking about Jason, thinking about what happened, and what didn't happen. Chrissy could stay under water for a long time. She wasn't sure she wanted to come up again anyway.



Chrissy pulled herself along with an easy breaststroke, when suddenly a huge, green turtle appeared in front of her. Chrissy was so startled, she ...

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Chrissy woke, but couldn't face opening her eyes. She couldn't remember, but she must have been drinking; she had a terrible headache and the bed kept moving up and down. Something hard kept hitting her head. She opened her eyes, and saw Jason. He had his lips pressed tight against hers, and she couldn't breathe – Chrissy threw up.

Her breath came back in slow, startled gasps. Jason and Chrissy were in the water, and Jason was holding her against the ladder to the boat. That was what kept hitting her in the head. Chrissy looked into Jason's face, and saw the look of relief in his eyes. She pieced together what must have happened. He had resuscitated her, with mouth to mouth – she threw up again.

"Chrissy, thank God you're alright!" he said as he hugged her. Chrissy wasn't sure she was alright, though. She was still having trouble breathing, and began to cry as her small gasps took forever to fill her lungs. She wasn't able to climb the ladder, so Jason put her arms around his neck, then held her in one arm while he climbed with the other.

Jason set her in a lounge chair, and wiped her face dry with a towel. He stroked her hair, pulling the tangled mess away from her face. She was able to breathe again, and was also able to stop crying, although she was still coughing up a lot of water.

Chrissy was shivering, so Jason covered her with the towel. "Maybe we'd better go back to town. We should have someone look at you," he suggested.

"No, I'm just really tired," Chrissy said. She tried to get up, but found she was too weak. Jason picked her up, and carried her to the cabin, setting her on her bed.

"You change into something dry, then have a rest. I'll check in on you in a little while." Jason kissed Chrissy on the forehead, then left her. When he came back a few minutes later, she was changed into her teddy bear nighty, sleeping peacefully under the covers.

When Chrissy awoke, she changed into the white satin shorts and red halter-top she found in her overnight bag. When did Sandra find time to switch all these things into her suitcase, anyway? She brushed her hair, fixed her makeup, then went back topside. Chrissy was surprised to see that she was no longer at the island, but instead she was back at the dock in town. She was still weak, and so sat in a deck chair, letting the warm sun rejuvenate her.

Jason hopped up from the dock, heading for the cabin when he spotted Chrissy seated on deck. "Chrissy, what are you doing up here? Come on, I brought us back to town so we can have a doctor look at you."

Chrissy looked at him, truly touched by his concern. "That's okay, Jason. I'm fine now, really," she told him. "But I am very hungry."

"Hungry, I can do something about," he answered. Jason made dinner, while Chrissy continued to relax in the sun, thinking about the song. She needed another couple of

verses, but the melody was there. She had even worked in solos for everyone in the band. Chrissy slept lightly in the sun, until Jason woke her for dinner.

## Chapter 8

Natalie's drums slowed the pulsing beat of the song, and there were cheers from the studio audience as Sandra approached the microphone once more:

*He's sitting at the bar, just where I knew he would be,  
But he's too good looking, and no good for me.  
Maybe this one is different,  
But it's not something I'd bet ...*

*I'll dream of you tonight,  
But that's as close ... as you're going ... to get.*

Chrissy picked up the saxophone again as Sandra's voice trailed off. The sad, mournful cry of the instrument filled the studio, and Ashley's piano played the final, closing chords of the song. Everyone was silent until the very last note, then the audience erupted. The applause went on and on.

When it was obvious the audience had no intention of becoming quiet, the studio band was cued, and played a jazzy version of The Ledbetter Show's theme song. Dan Ledbetter walked out and said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, Pritee Gurlz! Yes, don't be so restrained, let them know how you feel! Come on over, girls." The audience laughed while the girls all shook hands with Dan, and the applause leveled off, reduced to a few wolf whistles. As lead singer, Sandra sat in the interview seat, while Chrissy, Ashley and Natalie sat on the couch.

"Wow," said Dan, "you girls were hot." Taking a good look at them, he added, "Are hot. Are ... wow!" The audience laughed at his feigned inarticulateness.

"So, that was your latest single, correct?"

"Just released this week, yes that's correct," said Sandra.

"So, you heard it here first, folks. Now, I noticed that one of you was playing two instruments."

Sandra pointed to Chrissy and said, "That's Chrissy, on bass and sax. But she can play any instrument. She's a musical genius." Chrissy just blushed, not knowing what to say.

"Wow, a musical genius. Is that what it says on your business cards?" Dan asked (laughter from audience).

"No, I try to play that down, actually," Chrissy replied.

“And who’s the spelling genius? You do realize, don’t you, that you have five spelling mistakes in two words?”

“Yes, well, unfortunately we’re stuck with it now,” said Sandra.

“Too late to recall the CDs, I guess,” said Dan, (laughter from the audience). “So Chrissy, are you telling me that you can, literally, play any instrument?”

“She really can,” said Sandra. “Honest to God, anything that makes noise.”

“Have you ever fooled around with a piccolo?” he asked.

“Yes, but I prefer something bigger,” Chrissy replied (laughter, wolf calls from the audience).

Dan always knows when it’s time to change the subject. “Okay, so ... your previous big hit, Butterfly. When I heard that song for the first time, it blew – me – away. The instrumentals are complex, and amazing, but there’s a lot of imagery in the lyrics as well. Can you tell me what was going on in your head when you wrote it?”

Chrissy sat forward. “It’s the story of my life, really. My life, my career were so far off track, I didn’t even know where to begin fixing them. Then I met Sandra, and she told me exactly the things I needed to hear.”

“So, she’s the one who ‘kicked you when you were down’?” asked Dan (audience laughter).

“What can I say,” Sandra joined in. “I like to help people,” (laughter).

Chrissy was laughing. “Yes, that line really is about Sandra. When I met her, she took one look at me and said, ‘You are completely f\*\*\*ed up. Every decision you ever made was wrong, why don’t you just give up and let someone else take charge of your life for a while.’”

“You’re paraphrasing, I assume,” suggested Dan.

“No, that’s pretty much what I said,” Sandra told him.

“And she was right,” said Chrissy. She stood, struck a pose and said, “And this is the result of her manipulation and interference,” (audience cheers, hoots, whistles).

“Another good reason to let Sandra abuse you. So Chrissy, when are we going to hear you singing one of your own songs?”

Chrissy laughed as she sat down. “Never! You must be joking. Sandra says I sound like a mule with a head cold. Trust me, no one wants to hear Chrissy Collins sing.”

“It’s an unusual voice, but it suits you. Very sexy, audience, am I right?” (audience applause, whistles, cheers).

“Okay, we’ve got to go sell some stuff. When we come back, we’re going to play ‘Baffle the Band’. Chrissy, you musical genius, do you want to stick around and help us?”

Chrissy was surprised by the offer, but managed to say, “What? Oh, sure.”

During the commercial, the other three girls wished Chrissy luck, then disappeared backstage. Dan led Chrissy over to the band, explaining the concept of ‘Baffle the Band’. “I’ll be in the audience, asking people for obscure song titles. If you know the song, just

play it, if you don't, pretend you do, and play something for laughs. Don't worry, if it's going badly, the band is there to help you out. Good luck!"

Dan ran out to the audience, since there were only seconds left in the commercial break. He didn't respond when Chrissy yelled, "What do you mean, 'if it's going badly'?"

"Okay, we're back," said Dan to the camera, "playing 'Baffle the Band' with our musical guest, Chrissy Collins. Here's our first contestant, do you have a song title for the band?"

Dan was standing with an elderly woman from the audience. "I'd like to hear, 'Sitting with my Baby in the Rumble Seat'."

"Chrissy, do you know 'Sitting with my Baby in the Rumble Seat'?" Dan asked.

"Yes, I do, Dan. What instrument do you want me to play?"

"Wow, what service. Choose any instrument, ma'am."

"Trombone?" said the woman.

Chrissy had a quick conference with the bandleader, and was handed a trombone. Chrissy blew the first four notes of 'When the Saints go Marching in', which were echoed by the trumpet section. They went back and forth until, on the third round, the entire band joined in, playing a swinging Dixie version of the song. They played two verses, with the trumpets taking the lead on the second, and Chrissy improvising harmony on the trombone. The audience burst into applause as they finished.

"I take it that's not your song, ma'am? Okay, you win \$100. Let's meet our next contestant. Do you have a song, and an instrument you'd like Chrissy to play it on?"

"I'd like to know if Chrissy can play, 'Bigfoot stole my Girlfriend', on the didjeridoo?"

Chrissy laughed, "I know that song, from my classical training of course, but I don't think I have one of those." A stagehand appeared from behind the curtain, and handed her a long tube. "Oh, I guess I do. Wait a minute, let me try this thing." Chrissy blew in the didjeridoo a few times.

"Chrissy, do you have any idea how to play that?" asked Dan.

"I think you're supposed to spit into it. Okay, here goes." Chrissy blew a few notes, each successive note sounding more and more like 'Danny Boy'. The flutes and clarinets joined in, helping Chrissy to play a beautiful and memorable version of the classic song.

After the applause Dan called to her, "Chrissy, I don't think you're really trying on these. You're costing me money here!" He turned to the audience member and said, "That obviously had nothing to do with Bigfoot, so here's your \$100. Okay, we have time for one more. Sir, do you have a song and an instrument?"

"I'd like to hear, 'My Grandma's Got a Headache', and I'd like to hear Chrissy sing it."

The audience applauded wildly. No one could hear Chrissy, but they could read her lips and body language as she thrust her hands down and said, "No! No way!"

The noise continued, until Chrissy turned her back and started walking away. "Chrissy, please come back, we're sorry. You don't have to sing," said Dan.

Chrissy turned around, her face stoic, and came back. "I know that song, and I'm going to sing it," she said, to great applause. "But it's not going to be pretty, and just remember, you asked for it! Give me a country rhythm, one, two, three, four ..."

The band played, and Chrissy sang:

*Well, Chrissy Collins was on the Ledbetter show, Oh yeah (Oh Yeah!)*

*They made her sing and it was really bad (so bad!)*

*They put it on the blooper DVD,*

*And sold it to me Grandma for  
\$9.93,*

*Now my Grandma's got a  
headache!*

The band continued playing, while the audience applauded. "That's our show, I'd like to thank our musical guests, Pritee Gurlz, and especially musical genius Chrissy Collins. Take it away, Chrissy Collins and the Ugly Boyz."

The bandleader handed Chrissy his baton, and she continued to conduct the band as they played her latest hit, 'My Grandma's got a Headache'.

Chrissy was taking a rare day off. It very seldom happened any more, but for today, there were no public appearances, no concerts, no interviews. She had no appointments with students, no classes, no studio sessions, no photo shoots. Whenever things slowed down, it seemed there was always a demand for her talents as a studio musician, or a guest appearance in another band's video (whenever they wanted a sexy girl playing an



instrument), but not today. For today only, the world was leaving Chrissy Collins alone.

The CD ended. She had just finished listening to one of her favorites, a compilation of Vivaldi concerti. The choice of what to listen to next was obvious, of course. Chrissy crossed the room to the stereo, and hit the play button, restarting the same CD. Before she could get back to her comfortable chair, however, the phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Chrissy? How are you? It's Jason."

"Jason? I'm fine, oh my gosh, it's so great to hear from you! I was just thinking about you the other day."

"I've been thinking about you as well. Of course, who hasn't been thinking about Chrissy Collins? You can hardly turn on the TV without seeing your beautiful face."

"Stop it, that's not true," said Chrissy blushing, but also fishing for more compliments.

"It most certainly is. In fact, the first thing I saw driving into the city today was a billboard of you, guest-conducting the philharmonic orchestra. I really love that about you, Chrissy. Any other girl in your position would be flogging perfume or jeans for huge dollars. As much as I would love to see you in tight jeans, it's nice to see you've stuck to your principles, supporting the things you believe in rather than selling for the highest bidder."

Chrissy giggled. "I bet you say that to all the media stars. So does that mean you're in town?"

"Just for one day. You know me; I prefer life outside the mainstream. I was hoping we could get together, though, for dinner perhaps?"

"Oh, Jason, I don't know ..."

"Just as friends, and colleagues," Jason backpedaled, not wanting to push her away. "I'd like to discuss another collaboration. Our first song has done fairly well, I'd say."

Chrissy laughed. "Oh, Jason. We're more than just friends, and way more than just colleagues. I'd love to go out with you tonight."

"Fantastic!" said Jason effusively. "Shall I pick you up at seven?"

Chrissy giggled like a schoolgirl as she said, "I can't wait! See you then!"

The two said their good-byes, and Chrissy hung up the phone. Ashley entered the apartment in time to hear the tail end of the conversation.

"What was that all about?" she asked.

"That," said Chrissy, as she sat on the couch with a smile of pure contentment, "was Jason Stark. We're going out tonight."

"What, like a date?" asked Ashley, a note of disapproval in her voice.

"Yes, like a date," Chrissy responded petulantly.

Ashley just looked at her for a moment. Finally she said, "I don't think that's a good idea." Then she left, going into her room.

Chrissy was taken aback, not understanding her roommate's reaction. "Well, no one asked for your opinion," she called after her. Ashley closed her door.

Chrissy sat, incensed by her short conversation with Ashley. It was a fight, wasn't it? She wasn't even sure what it was about. Unfortunately, not even Vivaldi could take away the sting.

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Chrissy didn't speak to Ashley all afternoon. She got ready for her date by herself, although she wished Ashley would come out and be happy for her. That's what friends do, isn't it? Ashley didn't even say anything when the bouquet of flowers arrived for Chrissy, with the card saying, "A symphony of color and fragrance. Love, Jason." Where was her best friend?

Ashley left the apartment with nothing more than a goodbye, just before seven o'clock, and Jason arrived a little while later. Chrissy was wearing the classic little black dress, sleeveless with delicate spaghetti straps. The skirt gathered at the waist, billowing out to emphasize her very feminine hips. She had clipped a single rose and some baby's breath from the bouquet, fashioning them into a corsage that she had pinned to the dress above her left breast.

Chrissy greeted Jason at the door with a hug and friendly kiss. He wore a dark blue suit, quite different from anything she had seen him wear on the boat! He was so handsome, and Chrissy felt so at home holding his arm as he escorted her to his car. The roof was closed, fortunately for Chrissy's hair, which she had worked on so hard.

Jason took her to Chez Pierre, a trendy restaurant in the city. As Jason helped her from the car, Chrissy noticed a flashbulb. The paparazzi were known to frequent this spot, waiting to report on who was seen with whom. Chrissy was pretty sure what tomorrow's papers would feature, but that was okay by her! She was happy to be seen on the arm of Jason Stark, by far the best looking man in the place.

Dinner was an elegant affair, with romantic candlelight and soft music. There was never a lull in the conversation; they just picked up where they had left off, so many months ago.

After dinner, Jason drove Chrissy to the beach. It was getting late, but they strolled along the well-lit boardwalk, talking and holding hands. Chrissy took off her heels and stockings so she could walk on the sand, running out to the water. Jason took off his shoes and rolled up his pants so he could chase after her.

Jason caught up to Chrissy, screaming and laughing, by the edge of the water. He held her from behind, as the waves washed over their feet in the sand. Chrissy turned, smiling and laughing to face him. She looked up into his face, smiling coquettishly, willing him to kiss her. Jason lowered his mouth to hers.

Suddenly, Chrissy turned her head, then took a couple of steps away from the water, and Jason. "Chrissy?" he asked.

She knew what he wanted to know. He wanted to know, "why?" She just didn't have an answer; she didn't know why herself. She had wanted his kiss so much, why had she pulled away like that? Instead of answering she said, "It's getting so cold. Maybe we

should go back.” Jason took off his jacket and placed it over her shoulders, and they returned to the boardwalk to retrieve their shoes.

Chrissy and Jason didn’t speak much on the drive to Chrissy’s apartment. Jason parked nearby, and walked her to her door.

“Goodnight, Jason. I had a wonderful evening,” she told him.

“Do you suppose I might come in for a coffee?” he asked.

“Oh, Jason, I don’t know.”

“Just coffee, I promise! I’m going home now, and have a long drive ahead of me.”

Chrissy relented, and took Jason into the apartment. He joined her in the kitchen, as she pulled down the coffee and set the water to boiling. Their conversation was again free flowing, as Chrissy wondered what had gotten into her on the beach. Chrissy left Jason in the kitchen as she left to change into something more comfortable.

Chrissy returned a few minutes later, wearing a pair of short-shorts and a loose sweat-shirt. Jason was seated on the couch, his coffee on the table in front of him; he had removed his jacket and tie. Chrissy sat on the couch beside him, and couldn’t resist snuggling up to his shoulder. Jason looked at her face, and placed his free hand against her neck. Chrissy closed her eyes, rubbing his hand against her neck with her shoulder. He rubbed her eyebrow with his thumb, then gently held her earlobe. Chrissy gave no signs of resistance, and so he kissed her gently, slowly building until ...

Ashley came in the front door. As she busied herself at the front door with her jacket, purse, and keys, the couple had a moment to separate on the couch. But instead of heading off to her room, Ashley came into the living room, sitting in the chair across from them.

“Hi, I’m Ashley. You must be Jason,” she said, offering her hand.

“Ashley, it’s nice to finally meet you. Chrissy talks about you all the time,” he told her.

Jason spoke pleasantly with Ashley, making the best of an awkward situation as Chrissy silently fumed. However, Ashley seemed to have no intention of leaving. After he finished his second cup of coffee, Jason made his excuses to leave.

Chrissy saw him to the door. “Thank you so much for everything Jason. I really had a beautiful evening,” she told him.

“So did I. I was wondering if you might like to come visit me again on my sailboat some time?”

“That would be wonderful.”

“I’ll give you a call next week.” Jason gave her a quick kiss, then left. Chrissy closed the door dreamily, then turned angrily to face Ashley. Ashley had moved to her usual place on the couch, but Chrissy remained standing.

“Ashley, you, ewhhh! How could you do that to me?”

“What, stop you from making the biggest mistake of your life? Isn’t that what I’m supposed to do?”

“Who are you to tell me what’s a mistake, where my life is concerned?”

"It looked like he was about to get under your bra. That's a pretty obvious, major mistake, if you ask me."

"And what if he had? I'm a big girl, and I can take care of myself!"

"No, Chrissy. You're not a big girl. You're not any kind of a girl. When a guy gets into your bra, he generally expects to find boobs there. The lack of boobs can really spoil the mood!"

Chrissy was about to fire another shot at Ashley, when she realized what she was saying. Chrissy collapsed on the couch beside Ashley, tears forming in her eyes.

"Chrissy, what were you thinking?"

"You'll think I'm stupid," she said through the tears.

"I would never think that," Ashley assured her.

"I forgot, okay? He asked me out, and sent me flowers. He was so handsome, and told me I was pretty, and I just got all girly. He saved my life, you know. And, I forgot."

"You shouldn't be dating at all," Ashley told her, suddenly angry again. She stood, and turned away from Chrissy.

Chrissy stood, and walked up behind Ashley. "It's not just my going out on a date, is it?" she asked, still on the verge of tears. "You've been acting weird for weeks. It's not working, is it? You want me to move out, don't you?" Chrissy's eyes were glistening as the first tears began rolling down her cheeks.

Ashley turned around, and faced her friend. All hints of anger were gone from her voice, as she told her, "No, Chrissy. That's not it, you're a great roommate. I love living with you."

"There's something wrong, though, isn't there?" Chrissy asked.

"It's just ..." said Ashley, unable to complete the thought.

"Please, Ashley. Whatever it is, we can work it out," pleaded Chrissy.

Ashley closed her eyes tight, trying to force the words out: "I'm attracted to you!"

Chrissy couldn't believe she had heard correctly. "To me?" she asked.

Ashley was silent a moment, then said, "I've never liked a girl this way before. I like guys."

"I am a guy," Chrissy said.

"I know that," replied Ashley. "But I like you, as a girl. I like to see you running around in the mornings, wearing a bra and panties, fixing your hair and makeup. When we sit around at night and you're wearing a tiny nighty, I know you're really a guy underneath. It makes me feel like I'm going to explode, I get so hot. Honestly, I've never been attracted to another girl in my life, but when I look at you I feel the kind of lust I imagine guys must feel."

Chrissy was standing only inches from her best friend. She didn't know if it was the right thing to do, but she moved closer, putting her arms around her. Ashley wrapped her arms around Chrissy, and they stood that way for a long time. Then Chrissy looked up

into Ashley's eyes. She put her hands to either side of Ashley's face, stroking her beautiful, long hair. Ashley closed her eyes, and Chrissy pulled her face downward into a kiss. They stood that way for a long time, until ...

Ashley opened her eyes, and pulled away from Chrissy. She ran down the hall to her bedroom, closing the door behind her. Chrissy followed, fearing the worst. "Please Ashley," she called, starting to cry again. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you, please!"

The door opened, revealing Ashley, wearing only her bra and slip. She handed Chrissy a tiny, baby blue nighty and said, "I've been wanting to see you in this for a long time. Put it on, and meet me in my room. Tonight, I am going to make you a woman."

## Epilogue

Chrissy climbed the ladder, Jason holding her hand as she stepped over the side and onto the boat. She was soaking wet from her swim, but neither minded as she hugged him tight.

“Oh Jason,” she sighed. “This has been the most wonderful weekend. Thank you so much for inviting me.” She let go and stepped back so she could look up at him.

“And thank you,” said Jason, “for inviting Natalie.” Natalie stepped around from behind Jason, sliding her arms around him. The two hugged, and kissed. They turned away from Chrissy, walking toward the stern.

“I had an idea you two might hit it off,” Chrissy said to no one in particular. Jason and Natalie certainly weren’t listening. Jason kissed Natalie one more time, then went below deck, leaving her above.

As Ashley reached the top of the ladder, Chrissy used both hands to help her up and over the side onto the deck. Ashley grinned down at Chrissy, who lowered her eyes and smiled shyly. They were both thinking about the hour that they had just spent alone, hidden away in a soft, grassy meadow at the middle of the island.

“It’s about time you two got back here,” Sandra called out. “You swim off, leaving me here with these two conversationalists, who disappear just as quickly. What the hell am I supposed to do; there’s only so many times you can look at sky and water!”

Chrissy laughed... then she, Ashley, and Natalie ran to join Sandra.

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