



Reluctant Press presents:

The Queen of Rock & Roll

Philippa Peters



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A 'HER TV' E-BOOK

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The Queen Of Rock & Roll

By Philippa Peters

I. ONE BLIND MOUSE

"You said, if we did this tour, we'd be on Easy Street," said Jimmy Tarleton bitterly, throwing partly eaten fried chicken on the mustard-colored bedclothes.

"The recording contract?" asked Lee Alvis, our squeaky-voiced, frenetic drummer, rattling the chair on which he was sitting.

"Yeah!" sneered Jimmy, suddenly kicking the bucket with our evening meal in it, across the room and against the far wall.

I scrambled for some edible pieces as the other members of Blind Mice, a 'promising' rock band in the review of our last concert in Cleveland, screamed at our manager, Steve Holloway.

"Ted's gone!" Holloway shouted again, pushing Jimmy as our bass player came off the bed. "Kane is recording in LA tomorrow and they want him as lead singer. Stacey," Jack Stacey, our keyboardist and songwriter, "has gone with him. You can't do your gig at Peck, can you? So you guys are done."

I didn't blame Jimmy and Lee for trashing the hotel room. I would have joined in with them if it hadn't been my room; the one Jack and I were supposed to share. Steve screamed at Jimmy to stop and swung at him. Lee jumped on Steve's back then and the table went crashing into pieces.

I tried hauling everyone apart but it took a while before I got a shaking Jimmy Tarleton, bleeding from the mouth and nose all over my bed sheets, away from Steve, his eyes still bulging, being held back by Lee.

"Oh, frig it," snapped Lee, suddenly letting Steve go. Steve just stood there, looking at him stupidly. "I'm gone. I've had offers from the Jokers and Don Berry and I'm gonna take one of them."

That stunned Jimmy and he looked at me in shock. It was Lee's frenzied drumming that gave us our distinctive sound. He was impossible to replace.

"I don't need any of this crap," said Steve, kicking over the only erect armchair in the place. The cushion fell into a mess of coffee welling from an overturned cup. "I'm getting out while I still got the price of breakfast."

Lee was first out of the door, meeting the irate hotel manager on his way in. He grabbed hold of Lee and another argument began over who was paying for the damage. The manager grabbed my acoustic guitar and the radio-CD player I had just bought in Cleveland. I tried to grab them back but he took off in a run; the others also took off and left me.

"Call the police," sneered the manager, as the elevator doors closed behind him and my things.

I was left in the ruins of my room. I tidied it as best I could and went out looking for my so-called buddies and fellow band members.

Lee's room was open and emptied of his and Ted's clothes. I looked out of the window to where we had parked our van; it was gone, too. All our instruments and sound equipment, most of which was unpaid for, were gone, as well.

Jimmy was packing when I got to his room. His lip was swollen and there was still caked blood on his upper lip from the fight.

"What are you going to do now?" I asked him anxiously.

He almost snarled at me. "We are supposed to be playing at Peck in the festival tonight," he said curtly. "Twenty-five bands in three days," he went on sarcastically, viciously strapping his suitcase shut. "Make that twenty-four. Look, Alan, grab your bags quick before that manager guy grabs them. I'm going on up to Peck and see what I can find. Don't follow me. I don't want no wimps lousing up any more chances for me."

He charged out. I took his advice and barely got out of there and down the stairs with my duffle steps ahead of a bunch of loud-voiced people going into the room I had just left.

The next bus out went through Peck and so I took it. I didn't have anywhere else to go. The manager of our last hotel had my only valued possessions and, though I was sick about that, I knew they were gone. I'd never get them back even though none of the damage to my hotel room was my fault. I had a few bucks and I could have paid cash for my stay in my room. But if they had my guitar and my boom box, they could whistle for that. Besides, I was sure the other guys had walked out on their bills, too. I wasn't going to be called on to pay those as well as my own.

I got off in Peck and kept my eyes open for Jimmy, to avoid him. Jimmy had never liked my lead guitar playing. He wanted me to play tougher, louder, and more punk. 'Wimpy' he called my style, while I thought of myself as subtle and creative.

“What do you do for a living, Mr. Markham?” asked the manageress of the cheap motel I found to stay in.

I ignored the drab settings as I gave her forty for the room for one night. “I play guitar in a rock band,” I said.

“What! A fresh-faced kid like you!” laughed the old, fat woman at me. “No way! No way!” She was shaking her head as she waddled out the door. I wanted to slam the door after her hard enough to take it off its hinges. I didn't but I wanted to.

I hadn't slammed the door on my father when he'd laughed at me as I left home 'to follow my dream', as I prosaically put it. He'd told me not to come back if I went off with a bunch of druggies like Ted Shelley to play rock and roll. We'd never gotten along, my father and me. He'd always said I was as useless as my long-dead mother who had loved music, too. He didn't know that it was only in music that I felt any relief from his constant criticisms of my friends and me.

I took a wash and looked at myself in the grimy, bathroom mirror. Why did people always call me 'wimp' and things like that? Yes, I was thinner after the Blind Mouse 'tour'. My blonde hair was too long and needed to be cut back to the tops of my ears. But most rock musicians had long hair and mine wasn't long enough, if you looked at it that way. I couldn't help my thin features, or my long, agile fingers that already missed my guitar.

I was always asked for my ID. No one believed that I was even past nineteen and a full-grown man. I looked at myself critically. If this was full-grown, I thought sourly, then I was indeed a wimp, as Jimmy liked to call me. I was *so* thin, my arms and chest not thick at all. I sighed at the thin, blonde, fresh-faced kid looking at me. There are some things you just can't change, I thought miserably.

A Friday night-only ticket got me into the Peck International (there were some Canadian bands playing) Rock Festival. That is, it admitted me into a garbage-ridden farmer's field on which the air was thick with the sweet smell of marijuana.

I worked my way past screaming, zonked out teenaged girls and slam dancing punks trying to mosh miles from the stage, around, eventually, to the sound truck. There were thousands of people there but, still, it seemed a thin crowd.

The music wasn't much, either. Unlike Jimmy Tarleton, I knew few people in rock music. I couldn't just walk up to anyone and say I was looking for a job. They'd ask me who the heck I was and tell the roadies to get me out of there. I sighed and turned towards the refreshment area. Cutting between two trees, I nearly knocked over a dark-haired girl, sitting with her back against one of them, apparently absorbed in listening to a Dire Straits knockoff.

“Sorry,” I said as she jumped up, flashing me a look of real anger.

She had short, dark hair, cut in spiky, 'punk' fashion, her eyes vivid with the amount of eye makeup she had used. “S okay,” she said, her eyes narrowing as she glared at me. She gestured at the stage. “Nothing happening there anyways.”

“No,” I agreed. “Blind Mice could have played those guys right off the stage.”

Why did I do that? Was I going to be trying to impress every girl I bumped into with the fact that I was a rock musician?

"Blind Mice?" she asked, frowning. "They cancelled."

"Yeah," I said, taking a deep breath. Might as well finish what I started. "We broke up this morning in Allerton."

I started to move on then slowly and she grabbed my arm. "You play?" she asked, giving me a most searching look. I must admit I was pleased that my line seemed to be working for once. "Keyboard?"

"No, lead guitar," I said. "Can I get you something?" I pointed to the drink wagon just ahead of me.

"Coke," she said. "The drinking kind." She followed behind me through the crush.

I got her a bottle and we moved into an open space behind the trees where we could see the band thrashing away on stage.

She motioned to me and I put my ear down to her mouth. "Do you remember me?" she asked.

She looked like so many girls to me, all with that same look. I shook my head slowly. "We were at Burden on the same bill," she shouted into my ear. "I sing with the Purplehearts. I'm Donna Kelly."

I vaguely recalled the name from my travels and the many festivals we had played all summer. "Purplehearts?" I said, thinking. "Isn't that an all-girl group?"

"Right," said Donna. "We lost our guitarist yesterday. Took off with a sugar daddy in his big Caddy. Another friggin' bustup."

"Happens with all groups," I said, and we began to wander away from the band to a sort of picnic area, mostly deserted, but where you could at least hear yourself talk.

"We get to break in a new girl tomorrow," grimaced Donna. "Rehearse at nine and then play Sunday afternoon. I mean, it's so stupid."

"Not so bad if you've got most of your arrangements written down," I said as we sat on a picnic table and half-turned to the source of light and music. "Then it's easy if it's just a forty-five minute, one hour, slot."

"You read music?" Donna asked, giving me a quick glance. She even seemed to be impressed.

"Of course," I said. "I write a bit, too." Then I saw the expression on her face and realized she was putting me on.

"You play your own stuff in Blind Mice?" she asked, as an uproar announced the end of one band and the start of another.

"Mostly," I said with a shrug. We played Ted Shelley's music. I had found it painful to bring my own out when Ted was so sure what he wanted to sing.

"Where are you staying?" she suddenly yelled at me as the new band took off, thirty decibels over the limit, I'm sure, much to everyone's excited anticipation.

She grimaced as I told her my name and where I was hanging but I'm not sure she got it.

I think she said, "I'll drop you a free pass for Sunday," before she smiled, patted me on my old jeans, and then got up and sauntered away through the crowd. She didn't look back at me.

Ah well, you can't win them all. I listened to the music a while and moved about the outskirts of the crowd by myself. I was approached several times by dealers, one of whom thought I was a girl. I had to smile at the spaced-out moron but it did serve to remind me that I should probably get a haircut.

By the next morning, I was thoroughly bored with Peck, a small town with nothing to recommend it but the rock concert at its borders. I was back in my room, counting cockroaches in the so-called kitchen area, when there was an insistent ringing of the doorbell, followed by a heavy knocking, not once, but four or five times.

I half expected Jimmy Tarleton or Steve to say it was all a mistake yesterday. I released the rattling door lock but it was neither of those. Donna Kelly swept into my seedy room, followed by three other girls.

"Phew! What a dump!" said one girl, short and dark-haired, bouncy but the kind to fatten up in later life into a real butterball, I thought.

"Hi, Alan," said Donna breezily. "Guess what happened at rehearsal!"

"What?" I asked, alarmed as the other girls, all dark-haired, too, began bouncing on my bed in a play fight.

"She was awful. Couldn't read properly," moaned a taller, jean-clad brunette, rolling right onto the old coffee table. "Can't use her at all."

It didn't take me a minute to figure why they were there.

"So we won't be an all-girl group after all," said Donna briskly.

"Providing you can really play," said a sallow-faced girl who held the small, bouncy one in a headlock on my bed.

"Beggars can't be choosers," laughed the one stretched out on the coffee table. She was the prettiest one, I decided, downright attractive, really. She saw my interest and winked at me.

"You get a one-fifth share after expenses," Donna began.

"We got very big expenses," said the girl on the coffee table, barely getting out of the way as the sallow-faced girl came rolling off the bed, intending to land on her.

"Seriously," said Donna. "We are booked as an all-girl rock band. It's the gimmick that gets us work we ain't good enough for. Never mind that, though. We have to play Sunday and we'll explain what we did when we have to. You said you're a writer. So you can read music, can't you?"

"Try me," I said, feeling more than a little bashful to be the center of attention of four girls.

We went over to their hotel, much fancier than my hovel. Donna had a room to herself; we crowded in and I played for them on her acoustic. Frankly, I was disappointed in the stuff they played. After the first number, during which they stared at me intently,

hummed, joked around, tapped in time and fooled about, they settled down as I ran through the rest of their stilted arrangements of familiar alternative hits. Even their so-called 'original' music was highly derivative drek.

The tall brunette had become Joanie Johnson, the drummer. She laughed at me easing through a piece they called Fantasy. "You think as much of that as I do," she giggled.

I pulled a face. "It stinks," I said honestly.

She rolled over Donna's bed, helpless in laughter. "I-I wrote it!" she finally spurted it out.

"Oh! Well, I, well, sorry," I began, my face flushed with embarrassment.

"Don't apologize!" Donna chortled. "We know it stinks but we do our flashy moves to that one."

"We have to play it," said Joanie, calming down. "They insist we play one-third original music."

I nodded, understanding. I must try to be less candid. But they were lucky it was only a third. Most groups have to play almost all their own music these days. I briefly wondered who 'they' were. I was about to ask when Brenda Steiger, the sallow-faced keyboardist cut in.

"So you can do better," she sneered. "Bet you could write all about being in love with another guy, huh?"

"Brenda!" Joanie was appalled at her band mate and grabbed my arm after I tossed the guitar on the bed. I was angry, to say the least, and embarrassed too. I thought that I was being nice to these girls. I didn't need any shit.

"Take it back, Bree," said Anna hastily. The little bass player looked as angry with the keyboardist as I was.

"Yes," said Donna. She stepped between the door and me and smiled at me, a tight, strained smile. "Actually, it would be really great, Alan, if you would redo some of this stuff or show us some of yours. But first things first. Will you be ready to play with us tomorrow afternoon?"

II. THE NEWEST PURPLEHEART

I should have refused to play with the Purplehearts. Donna wouldn't hear of me getting a quick haircut. In fact, she wanted to perm my hair "to give it more body," she said. Joanie had said she would wash and set it before the show the next day so that I'd look really good. One look at the sneer on Brenda Steiger's lips, though, had made me back right off on Joanie's offer. I blushed too easily, always, and I really blushed furiously then with Brenda's eyes on me.

I did have to dress more flashily with them. They insisted. They never wore jeans in their act. They were all in variations of black pants and black vests or shirts when I first met them. But they wore leather or vinyl on stage. So, I had to go with Anna Massano, who knew the only place in Peck to go, and she bought me a red and white, banded sweater and tight vinyl pants that I could never have sat down in.

As I lined up with them to go up on stage, I couldn't think why I was doing it, playing music I disliked, which I only partly knew, in a so-called all-girl band. I heard the Purplehearts announced that way and it didn't bother me, as I was to stay very much at the back, behind Joanie's central drum set.

As we started forward, though, Donna, in front of me, suddenly turned and threw her arms about my neck, kissing me very hard. "For luck," she whispered before turning and whipping away, bouncing across the stage to the front microphones.

My heart was pounding, my mouth sticky and warm, as I slipped into at the back, plugging in the older, electric Fender Telecaster they used in the Purplehearts. I chorded and began the first rhythm variation and Joanie and Anna came in on the beat at least. Donna began a screaming version of U2's *Bloody Sunday* while I did my best imitation of The Edge, but all the time what was running through my head was that we had been introduced as "five girls, known as the Purplehearts."

Joanie set down a steady beat but Brenda didn't do more than chord on the piano. I knew Edge's solo backwards and I did it with a few extra fast riffs thrown in. Only when Donna turned and smiled, nodding at Brenda, did I remember that she was supposed to solo there, but Donna picked up the right line to cut in after my sixteen bars and so we ended as a U2 clone.

"Keep going!" yelled Joanie as a wave of applause came up from the large crowd in front of the bandstand. I picked up on her beat, riffed and started a new set of chords before I realized I was into the wrong pattern. I was doing Blind Mice's second anthem to rock 'n' roll. I modulated fast into *Heat Wave*, the group's rip-off from Linda Ronstadt, and again Donna gave me a big smile.

It wasn't hard to play with the girls. Joanie could keep time, always an asset in a drummer, even though she wasn't very creative in breaks. Anna played the bass note of each chord in the arrangement while Brenda's playing was stodgy and predictable at best. So, I found myself dumping the lines they used that called on me just to repeat the main melody. I improvised as I always had with Blind Mice, but somehow, Jimmy's words seemed to sink in my hands in that set for I played a tougher, raunchier line than I had ever done with Ted and the guys.

We flubbed a few ins and outs but our audience was alive and rocking to the very familiar stuff we played for the most part. I was almost sorry when we had to stop. Then, I remembered where I was and who I was and I got off the stage fast.

There were a few roadies in the area as Joanie came jumping off after me. "What a set!" she gasped, her eyes wide with excitement as she flung her arms about me, which I didn't mind at all, even though she was perspiring as much as me.

"Listen to that crowd!" exclaimed Anna, completely unrestrained as she danced over to us, flinging her arms about us both.

"Wasn't that great!" exulted Joanie as a large woman, dressed in black like the other roadies grabbed Brenda as she came in and began to talk to her.

Brenda brushed her off. "We flubbed *Dizzy* in six places," she complained to Joanie.

"It was better that way!" laughed Joanie, hugging me even harder. I enjoyed the touch and feel of her, my hand casually resting about her waist.

"Where did you get her?" the big woman said suddenly, her voice low and rumbly as she looked at me.

I was stunned at her words. I expected the girls to laugh but they didn't. Brenda sneered but the other two looked a little uncomfortable as they held on to me.

"Bonnie," said Joanie, her voice subdued as she squeezed my hand. "She's our roadie along with her husband, John. Will we see him before eleven tonight, Bonnie? The bars close early here on Sunday."

Bonnie ignored the barb. "You can't take on another girl without my say so," she said, her eyes slitting as she looked at me. "I got you Pat."

"She couldn't play at all," said Anna quickly. "We got a better picker. Didn't you hear her?"

Her? What the heck was this? I pulled back but both the girls held on to me tightly while Brenda laughed openly at the obvious emotions on my face. I hadn't often been shamed before a bunch of pretty girls, but shamed was how I felt.

Donna suddenly joined us in a rush from the small wing area. "Come on! Come on!" she was crying. "They want an encore! We have to go back!"

Brenda's mouth dropped open. "An encore?" she stammered in disbelief. "Us?"

"Yes!" shouted Donna. "Our first encore!" She grabbed my hand in excitement and then kissed me again hard, her mouth fresh with lipstick, so that I was again sticky and warm.

"*That'll Be the Day*," yelled Joanie who had held my hand even when Donna thrust herself on me.

As we headed back to the stage, Brenda was ahead of me. She turned and looked at Joanie and me as we sort of skipped after the rest.

"At least, she's got her makeup on again," she smirked to Joanie. And I had a sick feeling in my stomach as I realized why Donna was kissing me so hard with her freshly applied lipstick.

"I can't do it! I just can't!" I told the four somber, female faces facing me in Donna's hotel room.

Their intensity, particularly Donna's, frightened and unnerved me. She had made the proposal and quickly destroyed my first argument. "You just did," she said.

"That's right," said Anna eagerly. "No one thought you weren't a girl when you were with us, with that lipstick on your mouth. You were dressed like us. So you can get away with it, Alan. You just have!"

My head was reeling. "No," I said, my hands trembling as I looked at Joanie, leaning back on the bed, and biting her lower lip.

"Don't you want to hang with us?" she asked slowly when Donna gestured to her to speak up. "We do need you, Alan, badly, for the next couple of weeks. We've got gigs

we're supposed to fulfill. But they're as an all-girl band. If you don't have anything else to do, well, you could get away with it, with our help."

I shivered and hardly listened as they went on and on, trying to persuade me, to go on with them to Rockwood, Darnley, more farmer's fields, and then across the Northeast. They didn't want to let Bonnie and John in on it. "It'll be all over the papers in an hour," Brenda said in disgust when I asked about them.

I could tell that this would be more than just walking on the stage with lipstick on my mouth. I shuddered as I thought of my eyes being made-up like Donna's and all the remarks about my hair. I now understood what they had wanted to do with it.

"It, it would be the end of me," I said, as Joanie sighed and looked unhappy at my refusal. "If, if anyone f-found out."

"That's why we keep it from Bonnie," said Donna quickly, moving to sit beside me on my chair. She took my hand and I could smell her perfume, feel her against me. A woman and interested in me.

"Look," Donna went on. "We play New York in a month. You get a free, round trip to the Big Apple. We have a break there while we plan our recording session. We can find your replacement there. We can find you five thousand in the expense account for the month."

There was a gasp from the other girls.

"Hey!" snapped Brenda.

"Hold up," said Joanie. "Don't promise what we can't pay."

"You don't have that kind of bread?" I asked, almost happy to have an excuse to be out of there.

"We do," said Donna, putting her arm around me. "We're backed by Cabaret on this tour. We're supposed to be developing our song writing while our A and R guy promotes us and lines up the gigs. With you to help us, we can get the recording deal Casey has been dangling in front of us. It'll be worth the five thousand."

She said the last with a glare at Brenda Steiger who looked away in disgust.

I licked my lips. I could use the money. I could use the recognition if they did record for Cabaret and used even a couple of my songs. There were bound to be bands I could hook up with in New York. If it just meant makeup on my face and not cutting my hair till I got to the city, it wouldn't be so bad. I mean the gig in Peck hadn't been bad. I hadn't even noticed that the audience thought I was girl.

"I won't wear dresses," I said, feeling very queasy as I said it.

The girls all seemed to relax, their tension disappearing as mine rose.

"Of course not," said Donna. My stomach lurched as I caught her triumphant smile at a frowning, thoughtful Joanie Johnson.

The girls cleared out of the Peck hotel room soon after that and I was left alone with Donna. "I have a spare bed," she laughed. "So you get to share with me."

"My stuff is back at the motel," I began, my throat dry, more than ever before. Donna was clearly getting undressed and getting ready for bed.

"Joanie's taking care of it," Donna said as she took off her sleeveless t-shirt. I could see how constrained her breasts were in her black lacy bra.

"I-I'm not sure," I stammered, looking at the way she was dressed and thinking of bras and the way she filled them. I mean, she couldn't think that I could be like her, like that! I felt a strange pull at my groin and a tingling along every nerve ending on my skin. What was I dreaming of to even think of looking like a girl?

Donna must have seen the emotions on my face for she suddenly crawled across the twin beds and I felt myself assaulted by a rapacious female. My senses reeled again, particularly as she kissed me so passionately, and, at the same time, tugged at my shirt and belt. It didn't take long before we were rolling around, locked together on the nearer bed.

I mean, if a beautiful girl comes on to you aggressively, and Donna was very, very aggressive, wouldn't you find it impossible not to cooperate? It was quickly clear that she wanted to go all the way, which sure blotted out all sensible thought in my mind. I was soon trembling and, with her legs wrapped around me, was giving her everything that she wanted. That, of course was nowhere near the end, because it took a while for her to reach her climax, and then she wanted it again, and again.

I was a shattered, nervous wreck in a short time, my previous, fumbling sexual experiences on the seats of my father's old Parisienne paling into obscurity. I hadn't known what sex was really like until Donna made love to me.

In the morning, after showering, I was relaxed and unsuspecting when she came behind me, put a towel about my shoulders, and began to put some cream or oil on my hair.

"What the heck are you doing?" I said, trying to jump up.

She laughed as she pushed me down. "You need body in your hair," she giggled. "You're washing away all the natural oils. Now, shut up and let me work on it."

It didn't go too badly. We moved to the sink and there was some stinky stuff on my hair and then she rolled up some of my hair on a huge pink roller.

"Hey!" I objected.

"Your hair needs curling and waving!" Donna shouted me down. "I'm just doing this for a few minutes. You wait and see. It will look great when I've finished. If you don't like it, you big baby, you can always go into the shower and wash it out."

She put a second roller in my hair as I half stood up. "This is to make me look like a girl!" I exclaimed. I had been really slow on the uptake.

"But of course," said Donna sarcastically. "You have to walk out there in front of Bonnie and John, you know. It won't just be on stage at Rockwood. You knew that when you agreed to be our guitarist, didn't you?"

"But I haven't agreed," I tried to say, just as the other girls came bursting in. I saw Joanie's eyes go immediately to the one bed that had been slept in and I saw her mouth twist in a wry smile.

She had brought me a black, leather jacket that she had worn the day before. It was shaped in at the waist and flared at the hips for a girl. She wanted me to wear it, along with a puffy shirt and bell-bottomed jeans. Then they all had suggestions about how to make me look enough like a girl to get past their roadies.

I tried to object but, with Anna on one side of me and Donna on the other rolling up my hair until I was covered in pink rollers, I really didn't have a chance.

"My low-heeled black shoes and Brenda's runners will do for footwear," said Joanie as Donna got this sort of shell from out of her cases and suddenly I realized that I was going to have to sit under a drier like women do when they get their hair done.

"You said..." I began, but I was ignored. Donna was bringing out short stockings, just above the ankle.

"He'll have to shave his legs," she said as she lifted my jeans to see how the dark nylon would suit my fair coloring.

"I'm not!" I yelled but they only raised their eyebrows and went on as if I wasn't really there.

"We all do it," said Anna, patting my arm as Donna plugged in the drier shell and I suddenly was pushed into a seat and heat swept over my head.

"What are we going to call him?" asked Brenda, laying out on the made bed and smiling wickedly at me. "We can't call him Alan Markham, can we? And we can't call him 'he' either, can we?"

"Of course not," agreed Donna while the other two looked a little anxious. "I propose Christine, since it's not at all like Alan's real name, and no-one will connect it with him, unlike something like Ellen."

I sat there, queasy again, while they decided that I was Christine. Then it was time to pack up and get ready to go. "We'll fast food breakfast on the bus," said Joanie, to me. And then to Donna, "You'll have to put some makeup on Christine, too, don't you think? I've got some big, clip-on earrings somewhere, too. I think then, he, um, I mean, she, will be able to pass easily."

I was trembling all over at such words and I'm sure my face showed my shock. "It's because she's so thin," said Donna, smiling at me, checking my hair which I thought was on fire. She adjusted the heat as the others left to get their bags onto the bus.

"No!" I protested as Donna came and sat in my lap and raised tweezers to my eyebrows.

"Don't be a baby, Christine," she said, concentrating fiercely as I felt quite a stinging at my eyebrows. I gripped her tightly about the waist in pain and she smiled and kissed me.

The she took an eyebrow pencil and began to work on me. Then she took another pencil and began on my eyes. I was holding myself rigidly, my temperature rising by the second when Joanie came in with several carryalls and stood behind Donna, watching.

"That's really good," she said after a moment while it seemed as if Donna was painting a picture on me. "He does. Oh, darn, I mean that *she* does really look girlish with her hair in curlers and her eyes done like that."

'She' was appalled at being described as 'girlish'. I mean, Jimmy had called me wimpy and that was bad enough, but *girlish*? That was a million times worse.

Donna finished by taking away the towel and by spraying me with some cologne across my shoulders. Joanie laughed and smiled at me. "Yes, you do have to smell female," she said. "None of us smell of sweat and beer."

"I don't smell," I said vehemently.

"You do now, Christine," Joanie said cheerfully. "And most delightfully, too!"

She sat around while Donna packed and talked about the other songs that the group played, covers of Third Eye Blind, Oasis, Alanis and Sheryl Crow.

"Isn't there anything else that you've written?" I asked.

"Oh, your voice," Joanie moaned. "You look so pretty sitting there and then you talk like that!"

I swallowed nervously and wanted to tell her not to talk like that to me but Donna interrupted. "Rasp," she said, "and we'll talk for you, since Christine has such terrible laryngitis."

Brenda and Anna came back then and there was a lot of kibitzing again until it was time for me to come out from the drier and have my hair combed out.

I got to move at last. Nervously, I went into the bathroom and almost fell down in shock. I was a mass of curls and waves! My eyes! The lashes were black and sticky with mascara. I had eyeliner above and below my eyes, eye shadow, and arching, thin eyebrows above. I looked like a girl! From the neck up, anyway.

The girls were enthusiastic about my appearance while I was shaking in my bare feet. They all touched and fluffed my curls as I took off my vest and put on the frilly shirt that Joanie had brought for me and then retreated to put on the pants. The nylon socks and almost flat shoes that Joanie wanted me to wear made my feet tingle and I felt strange feelings go through me as I tried to walk.

"She walks like a man!" cackled Brenda, rolling back on the bed. I must have turned bright red in embarrassment.

"Bree!" snapped Donna, seeing how angry I was, and how I was ready to chuck the whole thing.

"We walk with smaller steps, not big strides," said Joanie, the wry smile back on her face. "You hold on to us, too, and walk with us, and it will be all right!"

Then she put the earrings on me. How they hurt but she made me keep them on. "They're so feminine," she whispered. "They suit you and make you look real."

With Donna's lipstick on my mouth, I went out, quaking at the knees, in Joanie's jacket and pants, my ears hurting, my hair hardly moving in the wind, smelling of L'Air du Temps, arm-in-arm with giggling, smiling girls.

"She's prettier than that Pat," said Bonnie as she packed our bags on the tour bus. John didn't give me a second look. "But she's a blonde and everyone will be looking at her, Donna, not you, you know."

I shook with anxiety and nervousness at being referred to that way. I looked worriedly at Donna but she was looking at me most curiously, as if I was suddenly an enemy of hers.

I wore the same outfit as at Peck for the Rockwood concert. My hair, though, was permed now into a mass of curls about my face. My stomach lurched each time I saw myself in a mirror or shiny surface. It was my eyes most of all that changed me. Or maybe it was the pink lipstick.

The girls thought it was great to take me into the Ladies and help me fix my makeup any time we stopped. I was a nervous wreck each time I had to get up and walk anywhere in Brenda's pink-edged runners or Joanie's low heels. I carried one of Joanie's purses, too, that matched her fitted jacket, flaring out over my non-existent hips. Inside, I had my makeup, which the girls eagerly seized and used on me whenever we were alone.

Donna seemed to sense how uncomfortable I was, sitting beside her on the bus, but trying to look invisible among the girls. "Your look is so sexy," she whispered, squeezing my hand. "Wait till we're alone."

That didn't help my emotions at all. But the other girls, too, liked to touch my hair and my earrings, saying how nice my hair was, wasn't it, Christine? I looked like a skinny, teenaged girl and Bonnie scarcely looked at me. It was Brenda's leers that made my stomach churn and know that I was going to be excruciatingly embarrassed when my friends found out what I had weakly allowed myself to be talked into.

Joanie saw me hand-in-hand with Donna as she came onto the bus in Peck. She raised an eyebrow and I think her smile was sympathetic which made me feel very ill all of a sudden.

"Makeup suits you, Christine," she said shortly.

I wished I had a place to hide as Donna chuckled beside me. It just wasn't as easy as she had said it would be. I found the bus ride uncomfortable to Rockwood but changing was worse.

We had a room to ourselves and, with the others out to see that the roadies got our instruments and sound levels right, Donna and I had a close, intense necking session. My lipstick was all over her face, which she didn't laugh at. When I started to don the sweater, things suddenly got worse as she insisted that I put on a bra.

"You have to have some figure," she insisted as she tried to put one of her pink bras on me. "We'll just use tissues for light padding."

"But-but we said ...," I protested, pushing her insistent hands away for a moment.

"No dresses," said Donna, smiling at me. "This is nothing, really. Just padding, in case the guys are looking at you hard, being the blonde in the group."

I protested. It looked awful, the pink bra on my lightly haired chest, but when I pulled on the sweater—I already had the vinyl pants on—I really did look like a bubble headed, cute blonde. Even my scowl, to hide my frightened feelings and the goose bumps breaking out all over me, didn't change my appearance. I actually did look like a girl, a girl I'd be attracted to myself. I felt funny all over as I minced in Joanie's shoes and Donna's stockinged 'feet' to the stage.

“Don't you have no other clothes?” Bonnie asked me as I wobbled into the wing area.

I shook my head, feeling the curls move on my neck and against my cheek. I shuddered. It wasn't unpleasant but it wasn't me and only reminded me of the sting from my ears from the large, golden, square earrings clipped to my ear lobes.

Anna turned to me first. I braced for some kind of sarcastic shot as she looked me up and down. “Those are pretty shoes, aren't they?” she smiled, her round face as heavily made-up as mine.

Joanie and Brenda turned to look at me then, one encouraging with her smile, the other sardonic. “Shapely now,” Brenda cooed, lowering her voice so no one else could hear except me. I was naturally embarrassed and flustered that she had noticed I was wearing Donna's bra.

“Oh, heavens,” said Joanie, noticing too. “Did you have to encourage him, Donna?”

Donna was right behind me. “Blondes have more fun,” she said to the three shocked or leering faces. “She'll actually get less attention this way, and it's only a training bra, for goodness' sake.”

“Training what?” smirked Brenda while I squirmed in shame at my stupidity in trying to please my kissing partner.

Then, the concert began before Donna had a chance to retort. The Purplehearts were announced to a half-full house and we tripped out to scattered applause. The guitar pulled on my bra straps and padded chest, and I had to turn away a little. I felt so silly, a boy with padded breasts. Joanie looked down at me from her drum set and smiled and shouted encouragement as she began with a drum break I recognized from somewhere else.

Joanie was feeling good, I realized, as I chorded into *Bloody Sunday* and pretty soon, I was not Christine any more but myself, searching again for that perfect run, that perfect line. I must admit to improvising all over the place, particularly in *Dizzy* where I extended my four bar break into sixteen and they hung in with me, and Brenda even put in one neat break that I would love to have explored a little further but we had to get on and let Donna sing as she was ready and in better voice than before.

We got a great reception, both on stage and off. The manager of the headline group applauded us as we came together in the wings. I knew him and shivered as he looked at me. He didn't look at me in recognition but in admiration, which made me feel very funny all over. Somehow, I actually felt good that he didn't recognize me and I knew I shouldn't feel that way.

Donna cut in front of me and began to talk to the guy about our management deal.

“Call me up,” Jack Harris said, “if your deal with Cabaret falls through. I'd like to manage you.” He turned and looked at me directly as he said that.

I was already sweating. So, it must have been a chill I felt as I looked away quickly, feeling the heat rise in my cheeks.

Brenda slipped her arm through mine and led me to the dressing room. "Swish, Christine," she said through smiling, gritted teeth at the other folks now filling up the back area of the stage. Then she laughed as I almost stumbled.

Donna came in after us and I hadn't seen her so stunned before. "What is it?" I asked, feeling suddenly frightened, sure it was about me.

"Jack Harris!" she breathed, excitement in her eyes. "Jack Harris said he wanted to manage us! He manages the Norfolks."

Joanie and Anna stopped in the doorway. "You girls want to go back to the motel?" asked Anna.

"I don't," said Joanie. "I want a place with music."

"And liquor," said Anna with a smile.

Bonnie didn't like it. She wasn't alone. I was swept out with the others, in my stage makeup, the bra beneath my sweater, Joanie's coat and purse in my arms.

Bonnie did drive us downtown though and I nervously got out with the others on the main drag. Bonnie would join us after she found a place to park the bus. I said I would stay on the bus but Donna wouldn't hear of it.

Brenda was the only one to support me. "You know girls in the bar," she said, making me tremble with apprehension. "We're five unattached girls. Christine can't handle that!"

"Sure she can," Donna said, tugging my arm to make sure I followed her down the street.

We settled finally on a quiet bar with a turned-down jukebox of oldies and goodies. We all knew the words to the music played and, after a couple of beers, even I relaxed with Donna on one side of me holding my hand and Joanie on the other, occasionally stroking my arm. The girls were singing to the oldies while I just whispered some of the words.

There was a space before the jukebox. Some of the other patrons, middle-aged people, began dancing. A couple of women danced together when their husbands retreated, puffing, for more drinking at the bar. The bartender just grinned at them and at Joanie and Anna who got up and jived together, giggling.

Then, Brenda had to show off her Hustle and got Anna involved, too. I was smiling and enjoying watching them when Joanie suddenly turned, reached over and took my hand and pulled me up from my chair and onto the floor. Rock and roll blared from the speaker. I directed Joanie through several complicated Fifties steps and she twirled satisfactorily. I quite forgot myself as I danced with her as I would have danced with any girl. Joanie grinned at me and encouraged me on.

Then, suddenly, consternation appeared on her face. I felt a man's hand at my waist and I was turned around. My fright didn't scare him off.

"Hi, cutie," a tall, dark-haired guy smiled down at me. "Mind if we cut in?"

His partner took Joanie by the hand and continued to dance with her just as I had been doing. Joanie looked at me, trying to stop, but the guy with her was very strong.

My guy took my hands and pulled me tight to him. Donna was away in the Ladies' and all I felt was panic. The guy was really strong and he directed me in a spin as I had directed Joanie and I felt myself going with it. Then he twirled me back and I was dancing with a man, taking the girl's part.

I blushed and blushed and could only look down, at my dainty, girlish shoes, stockinged feet and the tight vinyl on my legs. Worse, of course, were the two mounds on my chest, sticking out in front of me and getting in the way of my arms.

"Let me buy you a drink," the guy said, putting his arm about my shoulders as the dance ended.

I couldn't help the tremors passing through me. "No! No!" I whispered, blushing even more as he squeezed me. "I ... we ... h-have to go."

Joanie broke free from her partner and headed for me.

"Christine and I have to go," she said to the guy holding me. "We have to work tomorrow."

"Hey!" said my guy angrily and he slipped his arm about my waist which I tried to get out of but couldn't. "We only want to be friendly. We only want to buy you a drink!"

Donna came out of the Ladies' then and immediately hurried over to where, panic-stricken, I was struggling to free myself. "Hi, honey," she said to the big guy. "How about me? You can buy me a drink."

The dark-haired guy still held on to me. "Blondie will do for me," he said, moving slightly as if he had had a hit of something. "Prettiest girl in here in months, I'd say."

Donna laughed. "Just one drink, then, guys," she said. "Come and sit down." She winked at Joanie. "And then we will have to go."

But Dave, the dark one, wanted more than a drink. He wanted to kiss me. "We'll say when you can leave," he snarled as I tried to break free. He grabbed my hair and other people got up. The girls came over and tried to help. I tried not to cry out even though I was hurting and on the verge of going hysterical.

Bonnie's arrival saved me from discovery. Dave had let go my hair and was running his hands over my sweater and bra straps and trying to nuzzle my neck, easily confining my hands and arms and not being moved at all by Joanie's and Donna's frantic efforts to get me free.

Bonnie probably broke several of Dave's fingers in removing his hand from my waist. He let me go suddenly, screaming and holding onto his hand as the bar was in an uproar. A solid right to the jaw flattened the guy who had danced with Joanie and then Bonnie turned back, large, solid and threatening. She reached for Dave's hand and the big strong guy backed off.

I was petrified, certain we would be arrested, that I would be recognized and discovered. But Joanie grabbed my arm and I was pushed after Anna out of the bar. Donna and Brenda came after us, with our jackets and purses. The bus was double-parked and John was standing on the step, looking puzzled.

"Brenda called Bonnie on her cell phone," said Joanie to me as we scrambled aboard.

"Don't worry," she smiled and took my trembling hand in hers. "It happens some of the time. It's why we have Bonnie. She protects us from men!"

Brenda was in front of us and she leaned over the seat and sneered at me. "She hates men," she hissed, as Bonnie came back in, sat in the driver's seat and we got under way. "She'd make mincemeat out of you if she ever found out you're not as girlish as you look!"

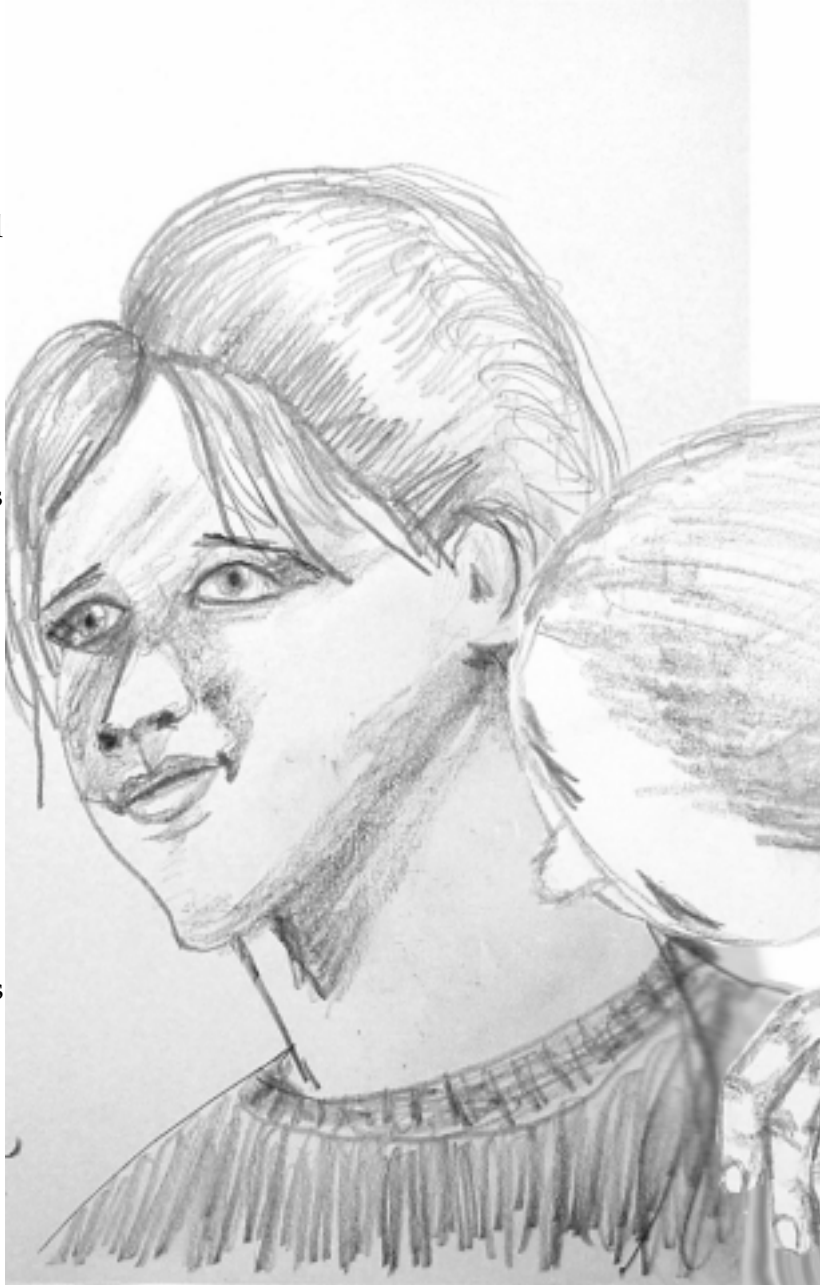
III. WORKING GIRL

Donna and I shared a room at the cheap motel and the other three girls shared another. Again, Donna was insatiable in the sexual games she wanted to play and so, the next day, in Joanie's jeans and jacket, I really was too tired to care about whether my hair was combed out properly or whether my eyes were outlined just right. All I wanted to do was sleep.

But I couldn't. That little variation of Brenda's ran around in my head and led on to such interesting possibilities for a song. So, as everyone was dozing and stretched out on different couches, I went into the back corner with Brenda's acoustic guitar, I began to lightly strum melody and harmony, stopping here and there to write it down on the writing pad I'd liberated from my own pack. This would be a tough, little punk-type song. My old band would have loved it but not believed I could write it.

Joanie rolled off her bed and I thought she was headed to the toilet but she sat quietly beside me, as I was playing right through the tune and some of the lyric that had come into my head.

"A bit bleak, isn't it?" said Joanie.



I was startled when she spoke. I looked at her, at her exquisitely made-up face, the way she had used rouge and a pale lipstick. She looked so womanly and I could never be like that.

"When I hate you, you'll love me/ And that's the way my life will be," she read a part of the lyric I'd written. "'Jailbait', that's the title?" she sounded very dubious. "Hey, we're not that punk," she said, her eyes roving over my face, taking in my fluffy curls, my made-up eyes and the fact that I was wearing lipstick, too. I squirmed under that look, wishing I was me again. "Oh," she said suddenly. "This is how you see us!"

"No-No!" I protested, keeping my voice down. "Just tough rock and roll if it's played the way I hear it. It was Brenda who triggered what I wanted to write."

I had to play it all the way for her while she lightly beat time with both hands on the seat back in front of her. I half-whispered, half-sang, what I had.

"Yeah, it works," said Joanie as we finished it a second time and worked on a couple of drum breaks she could add to punch up the melody. "You have a nice voice."

Whether that was as a man or a woman, she didn't have time to say because Donna was coming down the centre aisle from the front of the bus, looking intently at us. I felt very strange as Joanie stood up and let Donna come and sit beside me.

"You've written a song," stated Donna firmly. "Play it for me."

I looked at her strong, intense features and swallowed. It had been quite a scene when we started out in the motel room, me promising never, ever to put makeup on my face again. I was going to cut my hair and be a skinhead, a punk. But Donna insisted on making love, calming my strung-out nerves and fears and making me forget Dave and the way he had grabbed me and ravished my neck and face while I fought him off. She had begged me to stay in the end for just a few more weeks. Like an idiot, I had agreed wanting to please her as we made love.

"You haven't played this with any other group, have you?" she asked after a slightly louder play through that seemed to wake up Brenda and Anna.

I shook my head, feeling the curls on my face. Ted and Jack had fancied themselves as songwriters. Apart from the breaks I put into their melodies, I'd never had anything I'd written performed by Blind Mice. I tried to explain and Donna immediately wanted to hear anything else I had written. I had a folder full in my backpack, I told her.

I got up and tried to walk with smaller steps to the rack where my pack was stored. I was conscious of the scent on the large sweater Donna had given me. I thought it was her, but then I recalled how she had playfully squirted me in my vest that morning. That feminine smell was *me*. I felt my knees buckle as I walked back to Donna and Joanie who were having a quiet argument.

"H-here," I whispered and a smiling Donna reached out for my folder.

"We can't take your work," Joanie said bluntly as she made room for me to squish between the two girls. "You'll only be with us until New York. You'll want a portfolio for a new group."

Donna waved her to silence. "Christine must want to hear her music played," she snapped at Joanie. "And we need original music. Anyway, Christine may want to go on playing with us."

Joanie's mouth dropped open in surprise. I gagged on my protest. No, I was not going to go beyond a week. Staying on would mean being girlish for weeks longer. My shudders were obvious to them both. I was not going to become a girl permanently. I stared at Donna, my mouth not working as I wondered what kind of man she thought I was.

"Oh well," said Joanie huffily as I choked on my words of protest. "If that's the way it's going to be..."

"It-it's not!" I got it out at last but Donna ignored me completely and showed Joanie a lyric she liked right away. I was left to tremble all to myself and glower at Donna as she took over my work.

They didn't read music as well as I did. I had to play the melodies for them several times before they began to get a feel for the music I had written for Ted to sing. They quickly changed the object of love from female to male and suddenly Donna was singing my words to a guy who had treated her badly. I could only grimace as that funny feeling enveloped me again. I didn't want to think of myself as a girl as the re-writing of my lyric made me, who had written it, appear.

They liked the quicker tunes and it was strange how what I thought was tough rock became a ballad as Donna practiced it. I wanted "Dance Me" to have two screaming guitars in the background, but they interpreted it as dance music.

"You like dancing," said Donna, giving me a hug and kissing my cheek. I thought of dancing with Joanie in the Rockwood bar and I would have agreed. Then I thought of the man who had cut in, how he had twirled me and spun me like a girl, my chest so tightly held in the bra, my pants so tight. I flushed at the thought. I would never like dancing again, I thought.

"We could play this tonight at Darnley," said Donna to Joanie.

But we didn't. The other two joined us and they were much more stubborn about taking chances until they had time to practice. I agreed with them but Donna and Joanie seemed desperate to play something new.

I wore 'my' bra again at the one-nighter at Darnley and we went over well. The same at Betton Falls, though we had to sleep on the bus to make it that far to be able to play the following night. I wore the bra to sleep in and all the next day until, when I took it off, I felt as if I still had it on.

We stayed over four days at Rochfort, in a smoky bar cellar that we filled with sound but where we were right on top of the audience. I could feel eyes on me during every solo I took, taking in my dangling earrings (we had shopped in Rochfort), my new sweater, my new shoes, my padded chest, my heavy makeup with foundation, powder and blush on my face. "Because they're so close", Donna said.

I had to powder my nose between the two sets we had to play, just like the others. There were so many girly tricks I had to learn that they all took for granted. I had to learn

to take care of my clothes and wash out my stockings and bra at the better hotel where we had rooms.

We spent the days rehearsing my music and working on my voice. They decided that I had to speak in a controlled falsetto and they made jokes about it but kept me at it until I could affect a light, girlish tone, to my ears, anyway. It gave me that funny feeling all the time as I tried to use the voice they wanted. They left me to make orders in the dining room, and they left me with Bonnie, as I squeaked as best as I could.

Bonnie broke them all up when she said that I sounded better and was recovering from my laryngitis. She hoped I'd have my normal voice very soon. I felt so weird at her praise and wanted to quit.

"Oh no, you mustn't," Anna told me. "You're doing so well, really, Christine."

Alan! I wanted to yell. I'm Alan! Then I had to walk out of the coffee shop in my new shoes that I called high heels but Joanie said were not. She wore higher heels than me and was taller than me. She linked arms with me, when she could, to remind me how to walk like a girl, sit like a girl, and generally behave like a girl. I felt funny all over trying to do everything that she did so effortlessly, without thinking about it.

"But I am a girl," she said to me when I squeaked that I couldn't do things as well as her in one of our rehearsals.

It was exhilarating to hear my music, that I had only heard before in my head, come to life in the Rochfort cellar. We rehearsed and had passable versions of four numbers I had written by the weekend. And when we played them, dropping some of the drek they had written before, we got a better reaction from the audience than before.

Joanie was easy to work with, eager to learn every riff and break of Lee Alvis' that I could remember. Anna was hard. She complained about having to learn a countermelody on bass. She was used to just playing the bass note of a chord. "Too hard," she complained.

"I have to back up Donna, too, since we don't have Carrie any more. Why don't you sing, Christine?"

Anna laughed at her own joke while I flushed. "Christine has a nice voice. She should," cut in Joanie to both Anna's and my astonishment.

I was struggling with my squeak, as I thought of it, anyway. The effort was often so conscious that I felt like a complete sissy, which made me feel agitated all over.

So, I let Anna do what she wanted and I tightened the arrangement, giving myself more to do on rhythm as well as my leads and breaks. I took the time to rearrange the many 'rip-offs' we did, too, so that we at least did a Purpleheart version of *That'll Be the Day* and the Chuck Berry standards every rock band copied.

At times, I forgot that I was supposed to be a girl as the music animated me. I talked feverishly to Donna, not noticing Bonnie behind me. Donna shushed me, giving me a very funny look, and then said that my cold wasn't getting any better.

Then I had to squirm through a session of medical advice from Bonnie, leading to her going off to her room to get me some throat pastilles that she said were sure to help me.

"Oh, I can't do this," I moaned to Donna, her shoulders shaking with silent laughter.

"You just have to practice your voice harder," she chortled at me. "From tonight on, you have to sing to Anna's Mariah Carey discs. That's what Brenda says that female impersonators do. And she should know. She had an uncle who was one."

That stunned me, particularly with the way Brenda treated me. It made sense in a weird sort of way. And it made me feel very nervous when I saw her looking at me so cynically before our evening performance.

I wished that I hadn't appeased Donna's whining about my wearing the same clothes all the time at every performance in Rochfort. For the Saturday night show, I wore a white, silk blouse of Donna's over her bra. I was in goose bumps the whole time I was on stage, in my semi-high heels. I was aroused to such nervous excitement that I really boosted the speed of our playing and so it was a good thing that Anna was only playing bass notes.

The crowd really got into the act, too, half of them up and dancing along to the music. We even got called back for a whole set of encores that really excited us all, but I was totally worn out at the end. I couldn't even get out of bed when Joanie and Anna came bursting in to read the great reviews we got in the local rag.

The Sunday session was filled to capacity and more and the management invited us back the following weekend but the Purplehearts were booked into Stetford where we had to meet up with the Cabaret A and R guy who would be the one to give the group a recording date.

We zigzagged across country playing one-nighters in different clubs and the girls got on me every minute of the day. If I sat down wrongly, that is not femininely, I had to do it again. If I walked with my usual strolling gait, I had to re-walk there and back in the proper, feminine way. I suppose I could have objected, *should* have objected, but I could see their point. Steve Casey was going to be looking very critically at the Purplehearts. Any little thing wrong and the four girls' chance at the big time could be gone.

"You do want to help us, don't you?" Joanie said to me when I objected to singing in my stupid falsetto to a Celine Dion record while the others had gone out for a burger.

"But this is too much!" I exclaimed, conscious that I was wearing a black sweater exactly like hers and that our figures looked almost exactly the same.

Joanie smiled and clapped her hands in delight. "Oh, that was great!" she said, smiling and making my heart give a little jump as I looked at her. "You sounded really female when you spoke then. Keep your voice right there and read something for me."

She handed me a magazine and I read all about the colors and fabrics that would be hot in the following year's Parisian fashion lines.

"This is ridiculous," I said, tossing the magazine onto the bed she was laying on, listening to me.

"It isn't," she said seriously, raising herself up on an elbow, regarding me with a smile. "Look at you sitting there, legs crossed, in female heels no less, with more makeup on than me, your eyebrows plucked more than mine, and those are dangling earrings, aren't they? And to complete the pretty picture, your voice is high-pitched enough that no one, no one,

Christine, is ever going to think that you are male. You don't need that bra that Donna keeps forcing on you."

I reddened. I became shaky all over, as she seemed to be saying that she didn't think that I was a man. But I was! And I wanted her to see me that way.

"And I've heard you singing to these tapes now for what, five days?" she went on. "And you know that you've a better voice than Anna and me." Brenda never sang, or so I was told. "With a mike, you wouldn't have to sing loud. John can adjust the volume levels. I bet you'd back up Donna better than either of us does. We have a hard time staying in tune. You never do."

"I couldn't!" My mouth was so dry. I knew it came out in a squeak.

"Let me show you then," she said. "Let me make a tape of you singing. Anna's got some karaoke tapes of The Bangles and Janis Joplin."

"I couldn't!" I almost screamed at her. I did not want to sound like a woman on tape.

Joanie gave me a superior smile and started the Celine record that everyone knows. She sang with me and then put on some Carpenters stuff. "Listen to the phrasing and intonation here," she said. "Imitate this!"

We tried. We giggled as we both missed it. We sang the wrong lyrics and Joanie only laughed when I put in 'boy' for 'girl' in the romantic lines. I was really sorry when Donna came back and shooed Joanie out so that she and I could go to bed. I must admit to fantasizing what it would be like to make love to Joanie. I got quite worked up, in fact, and a happy Donna asked me what had got into me. She really liked me coming on so strongly.

Steve Casey was there in Stetford. We opened for a 'name' group, with one low-selling CD out on Cabaret. Casey was a 'suit', tall, dark, curly-haired, thick moustache, faultlessly pressed. He stood in the wings of the Coliseum, on my side, as we played. Every time I turned on my high heels, there he was, looking at me.

He took us out for a drink after the show. I trembled as Joanie held my hand, having seen how Steve was looking at me. I could feel my new earrings, hoops like Joanie's, bouncing on my neck. I wished I hadn't used so much perfume when Donna and I got ready to perform that evening.

"You were a shock to me tonight," Steve Casey admitted, looking at us all slowly one by one. I wondered if he could see me shaking as I tried to look him in the eye as his gaze went to my pink lipstick, black choker, and white, silky blouse.

"I already recommended to Cabaret to let you out after what I heard before. Now, though," he cleared his throat. "Who caught the writing bug? Donna or Brenda?"

"Christine," said Joanie quickly, squeezing my trembling hand one more time. "She brought songs with her."

"But we're all working to make our sound new and original," cut in Donna, asserting her role as leader.

"Christine?" asked Steve. "Who's that? I thought it was Carrie Dewitt."

Donna grimaced. "She quit at Peck. Before the show," she said decidedly. "And Pat Whatshername, the one Bonnie and John said they got from you, was frigging awful."

Luckily, Christine was there." She looked at me and I began to shake in my so tight pants, feeling my purse in my lap. "She'd just been dumped by her boy friend. We were going to give her a ride and then when she said she played, well, she fitted right in."

"Fitted in," muttered Casey. "I would say she's the group right now."

I shook my head in nervous protest while the other girls looked stunned.

He nodded firmly. "Christine what?" he asked, smiling at me.

"Christine ... Harris," said Donna without a glance in my direction.

Casey nodded again at me. "You write catchy stuff," he said with a smile while I quaked inside. "That *Dance Me* number we have to record right away. Did you see the reaction to it? Half the girls were up and dancing in the aisles! We cut a demo of that and something else new, that one about a rock 'n' roll queen, say, and I'll put you up to Brian again."

He lolled back in his chair in the quiet lounge he had taken us "to talk business". "We'll have a lot to do besides recording. You have to have a video these days, you all know that. And we have to organize a proper, promotional tour in the big centers, not the kindergarten circuit like this. There's a few New York clubs you can pay your dues in, too."

"The master plan," sneered Brenda, leaning back, her leather jacket opening. She wore a blouse like mine, like Donna's, I mean, but she, Brenda, was not wearing a bra.

"The master plan," agreed a smiling Casey, looking at her and then looking at my unmoving chest. "Oh, another thing, you lose the jackets and tight pants, too. Brian can't stand girl groups looking like boys. You wear dresses, mini-skirts, short stockings, sexy stuff, you know. Even girls these days like to see good-looking girls showing off their sex. Girl power, you know!"

"But you can't leave us now!" argued Donna, her arms on the padded shoulders of the jacket I wore, Joanie's shapely, leather jacket.

"I-I have to," I said, Steve Casey's words ricocheting around in my brain. Wearing mini-skirts and stockings. Showing off my girlish sex. No, for me, how much of a sissy I was now was already too much. I shuddered and blushed all over. "I can't. I just can't wear dresses."

"Yes, you can," said Donna shortly, putting her arms around me. "It would be for us, we know that. You saw the girls when they left."

Yes, I had. Brenda had been the only one to comment. "Steve was right, you know," she had said bitterly. "We've let her become our whole act."

They had been silent and very tense as they filed out of Donna's and my room. There were girls' clothes everywhere in the motel room on the edge of the Bronx, girls' makeup on the dresser, girls' jewellery and girls' lotions, underwear and stockings in the bathroom. The room smelled of L'Air du Temps.

Joanie had turned and stared at me, making me shiver. It was as if she was fixing a memory of me, now that we were in New York, with my hair now combed out onto my neck, around my ears, tangling with my earrings. I didn't have dark eyebrows naturally or vivid, dark eyelashes that made my eyes bluer, so much larger and clearly femininely at-

tractive. I didn't have red, sticky lips or soft rounded, reddish cheeks. I didn't usually have gold in my ears and about my throat and wrist. I didn't usually have breasts protruding from my chest. I knew it was time for Christine Harris—I could guess where that last name had come from in Donna's subconscious—to disappear, even if I didn't want to.

"I should never have played with you," I whispered, trying to draw back.

"Oh, nonsense," said Donna, still holding me. "Without you, we all know we're nothing. We'd even have lost Bonnie and that deathtrap we call a bus two weeks ago if it wasn't for you. We were all dreading meeting Steve again last weekend. We knew the end was nigh."

"You never let on," I said, somewhat aggrieved.

"Oh, Christine," Donna let me go, and giggled as if delighted at the lessening of tension. She fell back across her bed, holding onto my hand as I sat on the edge of the other bed, what was supposed to be mine. "Couldn't you tell our desperation? I mean, doing this to you? The moment you played, we all knew you were great. We said so afterwards. That's when we agreed to do anything to get you to play with us."

I was shaken. I was chilled. It felt as if my knees were knocking as I held them tightly together in my vinyl pants. My teeth were chattering. "You-you w-went s-so f-far as t-to s-sleep with me?" I asked, my heart sinking.

"That was the best part," said Donna, stroking my arm. "You are so great, in and out of bed. So many guys want their egos stroked all the time. You don't. You don't push. We had to coax music from you when usually guys just push it onto us, figuring they know best what we want to sing. I never met a guy before with so little ego as you."

"Not true," I mumbled, flushing beneath my makeup.

"It is," said Donna. "Look. We need you now and you know it. We need your music, your arrangements, but most of all we need your playing. You excite us all when you cut loose and we haven't a clue where you're going to go, or if you'll get back, but you always seem to. That's what the people out there listening get so excited about. If we stick with you, we'll get everything we've been striving for: fame, recognition, and we get to play and sing with you. The other girls want it, Christine. Joanie, Annie and Bree. We want this badly. If you leave us now, we'll sink right to the bottom again. We know it. We know we'll break up. And what have any of us got going really outside of this band? Nothing, that's what."

"But I'm not a girl," I insisted, my heart beating a hundred times faster than normal. "We had a deal," I whispered, unable to look her in the eye.

"I know," she murmured, drawing me atop her on the bed, clinging to me, kissing my cheek and then my mouth. "But you could be. So easily."

I tried to break free, my chills threatening me all over. "N-no!" I insisted shakily.

"It wouldn't be forever," Donna went on as she kissed my neck, my newly waxed cheek, where she had insisted I not shave as I used to every few days, then she kissed my mouth.

"It's only changing our deal a little. We'll break in a new girl as soon as we're established. Then you can write for us." She undid my blouse and began to kiss my chest and the edge of my bra. I curled into her, feeling my excitement rising. I began to undress her, too.

"I'm your girl, always," she whispered as she pried me out of my clothes. "We won't let Casey and Brian push us too far. We won't. You do love me, don't you? I love you so much."

She sounded so desperate, so choked up and she was so apologetic for asking me to do just a little more for her, beyond the terms of our agreement. I couldn't resist kissing her long and passionately. She responded and we made a wild and crazy kind of love.

"Oh, Alan! Alan!" Donna moaned as she writhed under me, over me and around me. "I can't give this up! I can't!" She began to cry. "It's too beautiful! You have to stay! You do! You *have* to stay!"

She kissed me in places that made me jump and aroused me more than ever before. She leant over me at one point, her necklace falling onto my lips as she brought me to a feverish climax. "Say you'll stay," she breathed, her new, musky scent enchanting me and she caressed me with every part of her body.

"I'll stay! I'll stay!" I gasped, thinking only of trying to reach the moment of ecstasy that she held so tantalisingly out of my reach.

"Oh, darling Christine!" she cried and suddenly went wild on me, raising me to an incredible climax as I exploded into her, my whole body becoming awash with thrills in every part of me. I burned. I flamed and then I relented.

Donna sobbed and held on to me as if for dear life. She kept on kissing me softly and rapturously as I slowly came down and was able to take stock and wonder why she was going on so long and crying so much. Yes, I would be her man and stay with her. Me, Alan Markham. I would cut my hair, write my songs for her and stay with her as long as she would have me. She cried herself to sleep in my arms. The problems of the Purplehearts were so far away as I went blissfully to sleep that night, knowing that we'd put everything right in the morning.

IV. PROMISES TO KEEP

"But you said," said Donna, eyes bright as she regarded me still naked in bed. She at least was dressed. She had awakened me with a kiss to tell me how pleased the girls were that I was staying on in the Purplehearts.

"I meant that I want to be your man," I said, flushing at the angry look on her face. "I-I'll stay by you as-as Alan."

"But I told the girls what you said," said Donna tearfully. "It would be best for us all!"

Not for me, I thought anxiously as I searched over and round the bed for my pants, for my clothes, even my performance outfit. I couldn't see any of them anywhere. I pulled a sheet about me and hobbled over to my pack. It was empty. The closet, too, was devoid of jeans and shirts and the stuff either Donna or I normally wore.

I looked at her sitting on the edge of the bed, her eyes very bright, twisting a tissue in her hands. "My clothes," I said, knowing with a sinking feeling what had happened even as I spoke. She was wearing a black mini-skirt, black stockings and a dark blue blouse, long-sleeved. Her dark hair was brushed thickly about her face and neck.

"Well, when you promised," she said tearfully, almost sobbing. "Well, this morning, I thought we should start right away. We've all been wanting to dress up but we did promise you, and we kept our promise."

"I want my clothes," I snapped, suddenly seeing what was laid out like an outfit on the unmade bed.

"Oh, Christine," she begged.

"I'm Alan, not Christine," I said, my mouth dry, my temperature rising.

She suddenly looked very angry and stood up. Her high heels made her slightly taller than me. "After last night?" she asked, shaking the tears running down her pretty face. "You knew what I was asking you. I gave you everything when you agreed, all of me. How could you have used me like that? You let me think you loved me, too."

"I need pants," I said nervously.

"Bonnie's halfway to the Salvation Army with all our leather gear and jeans," Donna said firmly, her little chin coming up as it did when she was very determined. "We cleaned out all our masculine stuff. All we have left is our pretty, female things."

My speech left me. All that was left! I looked at the dress, at the skirt on my bed. "I said you could have my songs!" I squeaked, trembling with humiliation at what it looked like I was going to have to do.

"Thanks," said Donna sarcastically. "But we want Christine. I want Christine. And I'm going to have her." Her jaw line was set as she looked at me.

"Donna," I pleaded.

"We shall dress you properly as a girl," she said firmly. "You won't make love to me like we did and then back out on a promise."

"But I didn't promise," I howled, getting back into bed and drawing the covers about me.

My protests were of little avail. Donna unplugged the phone and took it with her and I had no way of getting anything in. I didn't think she'd be away so long. By late evening, I was starving. I'd argued with myself all day. How bad would it be to put on a dress and get out of there? But where would I go? I was in the middle of New York. All my stuff was gone, my wallet, my pants, everything. How could I explain all that to anyone if I was in a skirt? It was the looks I would see in people's eyes, the teasing. I mean, they only had to look at my hair or my eyebrows, as I did in the bathroom and they would know what a sissy I had been.

The key turning in the lock signalled Donna's arrival and so I dived back under the covers. She looked cool and gorgeous as she ignored me and changed into a low-cut, blue silk dress, her cleavage very evident.

"We're going out for pizza," she said at last as she renewed her lipstick in our mirror. "Want to come?"

"Bring some back," I begged, and she scowled at the male tones I used. I tried to take her hand but she stood up and moved away.

"Christine can come and get her own," she said coolly, moving to the door. "See you tomorrow at checkout, downstairs."

I couldn't stand it any more. I was so hungry. "Wait!" I said as the door was closing behind her.

She came back half way. "Well?" she said.

"I'll wear pants," I said huskily.

She shook her head and began to close the door again.

"All right!" I said, throwing the covers back and getting naked out of bed. I could put a dress over my underclothes, I thought, my stomach heaving at the thought of how I would feel in a dress, how I would look. "I'm too hungry to argue any more!"

I would get my wallet back and then I would walk out, buy new clothes, and never see any of these crazy women again.

But there were no male underpants for me to wear and Joanie had my wallet apparently. I must have left it in her jacket pocket when I wore it last.

"You are not getting all sweaty and smelly into my panties," said Donna, pushing me into the bathroom.

I showered but that wasn't enough. When I got out, she splattered a lotion on my back and then all down my legs, rubbing it everywhere as I stood there. Then she turned me 'round and did my front until I was covered everywhere, even down my arms.

"What is this?" I asked as a sort of rosy scent rose to my nose.

"Wait," said Donna a little tensely. "It will soften you so you don't rip our clothes all apart."

Then she got on a chair and began to blow dry my hair again, putting some oil in that, too. There was too much steam for me to see what she was doing but I did feel the sides of my hair drawn up and pinned in some way on top of my head.

"Hey!" I protested, shaking but not at all at my nakedness in front of her.

"Just an idea," she said and she suddenly smiled. "You look awfully cute with your hair up, you know. Oops!" She smiled even more broadly at the reaction of my male member to her words. "A cold shower for you, right?"

Embarrassed, I got back into the shower hurriedly and began to wash off the cream she had put on me. I didn't notice at first until the little balls on the cloth I used on my legs looked like it had squashed ants on it. "My hair!" I gasped. "It's coming off!"

"Good," said Donna, opening the shower curtain. "It's working just the way it's supposed to."

"What is?" I gasped as my thigh in front of me was suddenly as smooth, well, as smooth as Donna's thigh.

"The hair remover I put on you," said Donna cheerfully.

"You didn't do that! You wouldn't!" I whispered, fear spreading through me.

"I did," she said almost vengefully. "Now rub hard, Christine, and see, you're as smooth as I am."

I tried to get out of the shower but she blocked me, insisting I finish the job, that she do my back. We thrashed about a little, in and out of the shower, but when I tried to use the towel, it was covered with hair.

"What have you done to me?" I raged.

"Nothing," she snapped, backing off to the doorway, arms folded. "This is nothing. This is just getting ready to wear girl's clothes. Now you wait and see how wonderful everything feels now when it's right against your skin."

I was wiping the hair away from under my arms when she came back with something. I was feeling hysterical. That's what I would have called it if I had been a girl.

"This is the best we can do for a gaff," Donna said coming to me. "It's Brenda's thong."

"Gaff?" I gasped at the turn and she nodded, her chin up in determination.

"Brenda says female impersonators wear them to hold their male parts up in their body cavity so they get a flat front. This is the best we can do." She helped me from behind, the dark nylon covering what very little was left of my pubic hair. She pulled the cords up between my legs and I yelped. It was the only way to describe how I reacted to the discomfort I felt. Then she fastened the thong at my waist and discomfort turned to pain and worry about what she was doing to me.

"There," she said smiling, kissing my shoulder. "Nothing bulgy any more." The touch of her hair and hand on my skin was sensual in the extreme. I wanted to turn and cuddle up to her, my skin tingling with warmth and excitement.

I could barely walk after her, though, with the thong cutting into me. I felt like I was being cut into two. I gulped at the pantyhose she had put me on. It was a strange, airy feeling as I pulled them over my toes, my smooth calves and my hairless thighs. They felt so silky to my skin and I was trembling, in part with the strange, airy feeling as I adjusted them between my legs and over the thong.

The panties had pads in them as I put them on. "Joanie's," said Donna wickedly. "She needs help with her shape, too. Just like you."

She called the thing she put about my waist, a waist cincher. I would have called it a corset. "Anna's," she said and, when she pulled it tight so that I could barely breathe, I could feel the inward curve I now had at my waist.

"No more," I breathed as she brought me the familiar bra and put it on but she ignored me. The little slip with thin shoulder straps was dark green and shiny.

"Mine," she said, leading me to the mirror at her dressing table. I had to gasp at myself in the smooth pantyhose and short slip that touched me so gently on my thighs. The thong

hurt so but I looked like a girl in her lingerie, even without makeup. It was my hair, pulled up, pinned and then let to fall back behind my head. It was thick behind my ears, and when I moved, I felt it now, so soft on my heated, smooth skin.

“Doesn't feel so bad, does it?” cooed Donna, as she began doing familiar things to my face, making up my eyes, my lips, my cheeks and then lightly powdering and perfuming me. I just sat there, scarcely able to move, numb beneath the thong, feeling strange, strange but not unpleasant as Donna transformed me into a very good-looking, modern girl.

I barely resisted the little red dress. “It has flounces like this,” said Donna, touching the shaping panels that flared out at my waist, “to make it seem that you have more shape than you have.” It was collarless and had three-quarter length sleeves, a round neck.

When Donna zipped me up at the back, it clung to every false curve of my body and tightly about my waist. It only came to the middle of my thighs and held me tightly there.

“You only take small steps,” warned Donna, as she put my high heels beside me. I mooned at the extraordinary girl who looked back at me from the mirror equally quizzically. I put on my high heels and let Donna put on my new tasselled earrings.

“I-I can't!” I gasped as I tried to move a few steps. It was all too strange. It was like being a woman. My appetite had fled. I didn't care if I ever ate again. I could not go out like that. I could not face Joanie. I shuddered. I could definitely not face Brenda like this. Not with my makeup so femininely perfect.

“Oh, Alan,” said Donna, putting her hands around my padded shoulders and hugging me to her. “I love you so, and I know I should call you Christine when you're dressed like this but you are always Alan to me, really, and I'll never tease you, honestly, because you once wore a dress and we called you Christine.”

She kissed my lightly on my cheek and while my emotions seethed, took it off then with a tissue. She found me a coat then; a black girl's coat, a match to hers, and pulled and cajoled me out of our room and to the other girls' room where they were apparently waiting most anxiously for us.

I wobbled down the hallway and into the girls' bedroom. “Here she is!” Donna announced proudly, going in before me, dragging me after her. “And in a dress!”

I felt suddenly so ashamed of myself, of my weakness before these women. I knew I had been manipulated to appear before them like this, my hair and earrings softening my neck, my legs made to mince in the tight skirt across my thighs and on such high heels. I felt hot waves of shame coursing through me, especially about my so tight and painful groin.

Then I looked up through a sticky fringe of mascara and saw Joanie, who was plainly shocked at the way I was dressed. Anna seemed only curious, even excited, but Brenda openly laughed at me in 'drag'.

I had learned a little about walking in the high heels I wore on stage but I was so panic-stricken right then that I wouldn't have been able to walk without Donna's constant help. I sat in a chair most clumsily and had to be reminded by Donna to cross my legs. Four pairs of eyes watched every movement as I crossed one nylon-covered leg with the other, add-

ing to the pressure and pain on my groin, even as I thought, with goose bumps breaking out, about how smooth my legs now felt.

"She's shaved her legs," said Anna in wonderment. "Just like us."

"Actually, we did it chemically," said Donna smugly, "so that we could do it all over."

"And did my thong help?" asked Brenda sarcastically while chills swept through me again and I could not look up at them, only at the edge of my dress and the amount of thigh I was showing off, just like all of them in the various skirts and dresses they now wore.

"She's wearing it," said Donna. "Can't you tell? You will when she takes off her coat."

"So let's go eat," said Joanie grimly, turning away and reaching for her coat and purse. She tossed mine to me and I flinched. Then I had to get a public rebuke from Donna and a lesson in how to make a ladylike lap for anything thrown in my direction.

Joanie and Brenda were out of the room as I got up and Anna came and took my arm. "You look so real," she enthused. "Donna said you would look great in a dress and you do."

I trembled and felt so stupid. I couldn't thank her, could I? Donna just grinned at me and shooed me ahead while Anna looked puzzled.

I hadn't expected how cold and airily different it would be when we went out onto the parking lot from the exit on our passageway. There were people there, too, and a lot of them looked at us. I was sure I would hear cries directed at me at any second but there weren't. The older couple we passed looked at me, from the front, but then their eyes moved on to Donna who said, "Hi", brightly to them.

I was dry-throated at the thought of people seeing me like this, in a dress. What if the police stopped us? I thought in terror. Bonnie had taxis for us. The driver smiled at us as a group and Donna went around to the front to distract him while Joanie, unsmiling, showed me silently how to enter a car like a woman.

I did the best I could, holding my coat in place; Anna followed me in. We were very quiet as the driver looked us all over, me as well as the others, but spoke only to Donna who was easy and very chatty in the front seat.

We got out at the restaurant and my nerve failed me. The place was packed! Bonnie elbowed her way in, John and Brenda after her, Brenda giving me a superior, knowing wink and smile as she went with them to see about our reservation. I followed Joanie, my eyes downcast, wishing desperately that this ordeal was over. We had to wait in the line and the enormity of what I was doing struck home as the people sitting on the couch opposite us eyed me up and down.

There were others there, in a takeout line; every time I looked up, I found someone looking at me, most of them smiling openly as if they knew. I couldn't help flushing and feeling so silly. I wanted to run away, and for a moment, I was almost overcome by hysteria and did just that. A slight upward look at a girl opposite revealed that she was studying me intently, looking over my face, checking every line of my makeup.

Joanie sensed the alarm and fright surfacing in me and moved between me and the inquisitive eyes, blocking off the girl.

"This is a nice place," she said quietly, smiling at me, her fixed expression revealing her inner tension, too. "Dark, though. No one can see what they're eating. We found it when we were here six months ago, still pounding the pavement, trying to get someone interested in an all-girl group."

I didn't dare speak. I had a lot of lip-gloss on my lips and now they seemed stuck together. My chest felt tight and I could feel my bra straps. My waist was so tightly confined that I could barely breathe. I swayed on my high heels, the dress tight if I tried to move a little to relieve the pressure of the thong. It was absurd! I clutched my purse to me.

"Why did Cabaret take a chance on us?" Joanie asked, slipping her arm through mine.

Piped-in music failed to make any sense, the melody slipping away aimlessly as I tried to concentrate on anything but the panties and women's undergarments I was wearing.

"Donna got to know Brian Fields very well," she said intently while Anna, slightly in front of me, turned back in alarm, looked at me anxiously and tried to shush Joanie. I didn't need the sinking, humiliating feeling that engulfed me to get the picture from the two strained, enigmatic expressions. Donna had slept with this Brian Fields. She had manipulated him as easily as she had manipulated me.

"Brian is the top man at Cabaret," Joanie went on. "We changed our name then. We had always been the Black Heart Gang up to then but Joanie Jett has that name for her backups. Black Hearts suits us better than Purple, doesn't it? Especially when you think of what we'll do to anyone in our scramble to get to the top."

We were called in just then. With Joanie behind me, pushing me ahead, I couldn't get out as self-loathing took over. My hair and earrings bobbed against my neck; I felt as if I was walking on stilts and my skin was energized by soft touches of my dress and slip on my tightly encased legs. It was agony to see the smiling, assessing looks on people's faces as they glanced up as we passed into the restaurant. Joanie steered me into the booth, inside her on the bench seat.

"Smooth your dress as you sit," Donna had warned me and I did after the smiling waiter helped us out of our coats and hung them up for us right there. I wanted only to get out of the public eye and hide.

"That's a pretty dress," gushed Anna. "How come I haven't seen it before? Has Donna been holding out on us?"

I found everyone at our table looking at me, looking at the neck of my dress, at the obvious mounds on my chest, at the way the dress clung to me. I couldn't look up and flushed to the tips of my stockinged toes, squirming at the absurd thong between my legs.

"It's very nice," agreed Bonnie from across the table.

"Christine has her own stuff," Donna said acidly to Anna. "She doesn't borrow everything of mine to wear, you know."

We were partly concealed from other diners in the place though everyone who came by us had to comment on so many women out with one man, John. They lumped me in

with the girls. I trembled at that. Brenda and Anna stared at me openly from time to time but with John and Bonnie at our table, the conversation couldn't be anything but general.

The girls talked about gigs in New York and the strange habits of my predecessors in the group. They talked about previous groups they had been in and I quaked in fear, expecting at any moment to have Bonnie ask me about where I had played before.

Our food arrived; Donna had ordered a chicken salad for me. Donna promptly gave half of mine to John, assuring him that I would never eat so much. I couldn't open my mouth to complain and had to agree with Donna in a whisper that I was full when Joanie later tried to share some of her pasta with me. It was a great, if small, meal but I couldn't believe the lipstick mark I left on my water glass. The other girls didn't leave as much as me. Then, I noticed that they weren't wearing as much lip-gloss as me. I thought with a small quake that, yes, I really needed it the most.

It was a relief when we left Arturo's and headed back to our hotel. I had been in a dress over two hours in a public place and not been challenged. But my nerves were shot. The waiter had helped me with my coat as the others left me to him, grinning at the flush on my face. As we left, I recalled Donna's early lesson in being able to pass as a woman and I tried not to look away. It was amazing how many men looked away from my direct stare, though women still scrutinized me as we went down the line and out to our taxis. I was exhausted as I settled back in my seat.

"Not a problem at all," chuckled Donna who had gotten in beside me, leaving Anna to go with John and Bonnie.

We went through the foyer of our motel; who should we find waiting to meet us but Steve Casey. He looked us up and down, smiling as he saw our stockings and high heels beneath our coats and dresses.

"Now, that's much better," he said, looking intently at me. I couldn't help the shiver that ran up my spine.

"Is this what you came to see?" asked Joanie, an edge to her voice.

Casey glanced at her, puzzled, his eyes coming back to me, his admiration clear, and I felt my knees go really weak, so afraid did I feel. "No, though I love it," he said with a smile. "You all have such nice legs. You shouldn't cover them up!" He turned to Donna. "I spoke to Brian and told him how impressed I was. On my say-so, he got a weekend at the Stargate for you and he has Colin Wheeler lined up to record your demos next week."

We all stared at him, while people came and went in the foyer about us. I didn't think to look at how they looked at me. All I could think of was that I was about to commit professional suicide if I appeared at a place like the Stargate in drag.

Steve was fidgeting nervously while we stared at him, trying to think what to say, I guess. "And, er, Donna," he said, clearly uncomfortable. "Brian, er, would like to see you. You know, to go over the terms of the contract and so on."

"Now?" asked Donna, her face tense as she looked at me. I bet my face mirrored hers if the tension I felt showed in any way.

"Well, if you're not doing anything," Casey mumbled. "It is a travel day tomorrow, isn't it? You can see him and get things over with."

At this time of night? My mind queried, and by the tense way we all held ourselves, I'm sure the others thought it, too. Donna broke the tension by letting go of Anna's hand and walking forward to slip her arm through Casey's. She went off out of the hotel, I don't know where, laughing at Steve, with not even a backward glance at us.

"We do have to practice," said Joanie glumly, steering me along to the passage that led to our rooms. We turned a corner and walked towards a mirrored wall. At first, I thought it was a group of girls coming at us. Then I saw it was Joanie holding on to this really attractive girl's arm. Her coat was open, showing off slim, beautiful legs, a shapely figure in a really fine red dress that hugged every curve and a pretty face, her doll-like features emphasized by her makeup.

"I'm not sure I can play drums in a skirt," Joanie was saying, as I realized numbly that the pretty blonde girl was me. "No matter what Stevie Boy says."

She stopped just before we turned the corner again and the other two came up and we all looked at our reflections, then they all looked at mine.

"Can you play in a dress, Christine?" asked Anna anxiously. "I'm not sure I ever have. We do all need to practice and see if we can play in our dresses."

Joanie and Anna stayed with me and we practiced for several hours until Donna came back and asked what we were doing. Anna told her we were practicing in our dresses so that we could play and move in them, which made Donna laugh.

It was much later that I found out that they'd always played in dresses before I arrived. I was the only one who needed practice in a dress.

"I'm going to bed," Donna announced then and that drove the other two away. "Help me undress," she said to me, "and then I'll help you."

I unzipped her; she stripped to her panties and bra but then went for a moody walk about the room and played with the TV channels before she went to her chest of drawers and pulled out a nightie. Then she looked at me wickedly and pulled out another, long and white, and put it beside the first, short and black, with panties to match.

"Please," I asked, pointing to my back zipper, but she came sashaying up to me as I felt my temperature and my anxiety rising. She put her arms about my neck.

"Pretty Alan," she said huskily. "Do you feel like a girl yet?" And then she kissed me, her tongue licking the gloss on my lips.

"Donna," I gasped, as she dropped her hand onto my pantyhose. She caressed my thigh, and I felt unbelievable strange and thrilling feelings pass through me. We fell onto her bed and she began to kiss me and caress me passionately and I responded, giving as good as I got, following her lead. My thong got tighter and more painful as her hand went under my skirt and caressed my silky panties.

The thong tortured me as Donna eased up and began to lovingly and slowly caress me, encouraging me to do to her exactly what she was doing to me. It wasn't fair, though, because she had her clothes off and I was wrapped up in my tight skirt, waist cinch and stockings.

She relented eventually and unzipped me, encouraging me to undress even as she caressed every exposed part, even my padded breasts. She took off my earrings and kissed my ears as I was trying to take down my stockings. She helped me with that; the soft caressing of my legs making me cling to her, so sensuous and thrilling was the sensation of soft hands on my even softer legs. Then she released the thong. I thought I would be relieved, and in time I was, but first I had to endure pain unlike any I have ever endured before.

I didn't want to. I objected, but she insisted. She turned away from helping me cream the makeup off my face. Oh, well, I thought, I've done everything else, why not this? I put on the long nightie, shivering as it cascaded down over my hairless body. Why did it feel like a gentle breeze was blowing, I thought, as it settled against my ankles? Sitting down in a nightie to comb out my hair was weird and then Donna, smiling, came to help me, brushing my hair into two tiny plaits at the back of my head.

I was without makeup, but I looked like a teenaged girl about to go to bed. Donna bent her head and I saw and felt her kiss my neck. She sprayed me with more perfume and then drew me to bed, she in her nightie, and I in mine.

We made love, she controlling me as ever. She raised her head at one point, stroking my chest through the silky nightie and said, "I feel like a lesbian doing this with you. Don't you?"

I tightened in protest and she clung to me, grinning and telling me, yes, yes, that was it. Wasn't that better than we had ever been before? And I felt so ashamed. So ashamed that I enjoyed her so much. I was totally spent again and hardly knew when I fell asleep.

I knew, however, when I was awakened, however, for Joanie was there to tell me to rise as Donna had been called



out again to a business meeting. I had forgotten about my nightie until I tried to get out of bed and Joanie saw what I was wearing.

The look of disgust on her face was enough to turn me into a stammering, apologetic wreck for the ungainly exit I made to the bathroom. "Don't mind me," Joanie said when I came back from my shower in one of Donna's robes, clutched tightly about me. "What you and Donna get up to is your own affair, not mine. The more of a girl you are, the better for us, I guess."

"No, no," I said, drowning in pity for myself. She just didn't understand. I was doing this all for her, for the band, for the girls because I liked them, not because I wanted to get dressed up in women's frillies. "It's not like that at all!"

Joanie looked over at the other bed at the purple, lace panties and bra set Donna had left out for me. She sighed as I spluttered. "Of course not," she said. "Brenda is on a scouting operation around Times Square for you. She called her uncle, Lisa she calls him, and got the address of a shop to get female impersonator stuff, proper breasts and gaff, for you. It shouldn't be as painful as Anna's thong. But Donna says you'll have to wear it today in case we have to meet up with Brian."

I protested again, my lips trembling as I tried to say that I was all man but Joanie only gave me amused glances as I vowed what I was. Yet, I put the thong about my male parts and put on panties, pantyhose, then my bra in front of her. She helped me again with my hair and makeup and to get into a purple slip and little black dress.

The high heels were higher than any I had worn before. "We always wore stilettos on stage before you joined us," Joanie said. "We didn't have a lot going for us but sex appeal. You help us with that, too, being a blonde. Haven't you noticed how the guys are coming on to you, like Steve?"

I tried to walk in the heels and it was agony. Not only did I feel like I was on stilts, but the thong cut me again and Joanie's words and interest in me being a woman shook me up. I couldn't bear it as I smoothed the dress against my thighs and my hands felt the pads in the panties at my hips. I couldn't help it if I made up into a pretty girl, could I? I just didn't need Joanie constantly reminding me of it.

I just hoped that, when we were all finished with this, and she saw me again as Alan, she wouldn't constantly bring it up then, too. She didn't seem to realize how hard it was for me to put the panties and the dress on. I knew boys are not supposed to do it, not seriously anyway, but if it wasn't for them insisting that I could and should do it, I never would have, would I? I wanted to explain it all to her but she just laughed at me as I tried to talk as I crossed my legs. She would have to point out how a woman does it more gracefully and ask me to follow her and do it right. So I never really got to tell her how I felt about being in a dress. She just assumed that I wanted to dress like her and she did her best to make me be a girl like her.

Joanie was with me constantly over the next week as Donna was away almost all the time in 'business consultations' with Brian Fields. She and Anna worked with me on the cultivation of proper female responses to situations and also on developing my voice.

Brenda's contribution was the undergarments Joanie had said she would get. I couldn't believe the softness and naturalness of the breasts glued to my chest and the special frilly

bra that held them tight but at the same time let them move a little, the nipples on them showing through the bra.

I was appalled when she and Joanie fitted them to me in the afternoon. Appalled and fascinated by how real they appeared as I stood there in front of them. In the mirror, I looked just like a blonde pretty girl with real breasts.

"We should get her a transparent blouse," grinned Brenda. "Watch the boys swarm her then!"

I was in agony under my thong and flushing like mad, with chills and strange feelings of longing, of sexual excitement, as I hastily pulled up my slip and dress and Joanie zipped me up. "The gaff later," she murmured as she hurried Brenda out of the room with an errand to find Anna.

"I can't do this!" I moaned. I felt the breasts move as I tiptoed back to the table we had been working at.

"Nice voice," said Joanie, her face lighting up. "You didn't hold it back at all that time. It was completely natural and feminine. Can you remember what you did that was different that time? It was great and you look better, really. No one was ever as stiff as you were before. It's one problem dealt with. Now let's try the major one with your voice."

I tape-recorded my objections and my feelings of humiliation at doing this in front of the girls. I sincerely felt that way and I longed for it to be over but Joanie asked what was good about being in a dress. She *liked* the feelings I called weird. She called them natural. She wished men would have smooth legs and bodies and, of course, she liked long hair and earrings. She patiently got me to talk about how impossible it was to make me into a girl, to talk like one or sing like one.

"It's mostly inflection," she said, "and gestures. Look, don't lean forward as you speak. Lean back and always cross your legs. I don't care how much it hurts you, smooth your skirt, however little it is across your thighs, and try not to show me your panties as you just did, no matter how nice they are. That's it! The way you did it that time, your hands in. You look so much like a woman, really. Now, sound like one! Read this."

Red-faced, embarrassed, I read some of the corniest, steamiest scenes imaginable from romantic literature. In the dialogue, Joanie would read the guy's parts and have me act the female roles, stressing how I would hold my body, how I would move to be suggestive or to be the opposite. I learned to be coy and when I thought about it, I felt hot all over to be acting in such a fashion. My embarrassment often flustered me but Joanie was patient and insistent as we worked together. When I saw us in the mirror, I couldn't help but notice that we looked much the same in our high heels, with our smooth stocking legs and shapely bodies in very short skirts. We had makeup on our faces, necklaces and earrings, curled and waved hair about our necks. We were girls working together, a blonde and a brunette, and, when we joined Anna and Brenda for salad lunches and suppers, I was treated exactly like one of them as well.

I got hoarse of course and even came close to tears in the frustration of trying to sound like a girl as Joanie pressed me every second to keep my voice up. We also sang with lots of girl singers, all the current hits on radio, as we used Anna's CD player. It was supposed to help me but it really did strain my voice.

On the third day of this female practicing, waiting for Donna really, I was strumming Brenda's acoustic; I did a little Alanis, and looked up to find the three of them watching me intently.

"Hey, that was great," Joanie said, smiling. "More Anne Murray in the voice than Alanis."

"Karen Carpenter," chipped in Anna brightly. Brenda just shook her head as I shook inside myself.

"You've picked up the singing much more quickly than speaking," Joanie went on. "It would be such a help if you could back up Donna as well as me. You must have heard how we need it."

I had to agree that two girl backup singers would be great but I was absolutely certain that one of them would not be me. I had had hours to think of my predicament, thanks to Donna being so preoccupied. I was sleeping in a nightie, often on my own. I knew that if anyone ever found out, I would be laughed out of the business. Already four other people knew about me, the girls in the group and that made me tremble with anxiety. There was a deep pit of shame in my stomach as I thought of how I looked; how Donna thinned my eyebrows more and more each time she 'helped' me apply my makeup. I knew my waist cinch was tighter than before and that they were controlling my diet very severely. Even when this was over, it wasn't going to be quick and easy to get back to being Alan Markham. I should have asked for more money.

Joanie kept asking me what I liked about wearing this dress or that one, or my new gaff, was it more comfortable (No, it wasn't!). I was forced to answer at times what I didn't want to. Yes, I liked the dark pantyhose. They seemed to make my legs more feminine. Yes, I liked the longer, tighter skirt. It reminded me now to walk properly with small steps and a swing in my hips. Yes, I did think the newer lipsticks were best, not as red as the one before. Yes, this blouse was nicer than that one. It was softer. Yes, my skin did feel soft in pantyhose. L'Air du Temps was my favorite perfume. Because I just liked it.

Yes, I had to admit, I liked being one of the girls. I meant being one of the Purplehearts. Yes, I did. I'd been in a few bands and I always tried to fit in. That had sounded lame even to my ears and I flamed in embarrassment as I stretched out in my high heels and pantyhose. I liked the girls and I suppose it wasn't so bad to help them out but I would be glad when it was all over.

Donna was tired when she came in and found me in nightie and panties, but awake in bed. "Still up?" she asked lightly as I set down the fashion magazine Joanie had given me to read into the tape machine.

"I-I need to talk to you," I said in a whisper, conscious of the silly, frilly hem across my chest and upper arms.

"Not now," said Donna wearily, taking off her dress, showing off her sexy underclothes and swelling woman's figure unreservedly. "I'm tired. It was a hard day."

I felt the hair bunch about my neck as she lay beside me. I stretched and my nightie stretched with me, my smooth legs feeling the nylon entwined about them. "Donna, it's been a week," I began. I wanted to tell her that if there wasn't to be a deal, I could leave.

She turned to me, her eyes narrowed. She sighed, cutting me off. "All right, Christine," she said, but there was no smile on her face.

She leaned over and kissed me. It wasn't what I intended, what I wanted to talk about, but I eased up to her. But, when I tried to put my arm about her and roll on her, she suddenly became fierce and pushed me back.

"Oh no, Christine, my girl," she said, running her fingers over my neck and then letting her hands drift down my body to the edge of my panties beneath my nightie. "A good girl like you deserves it the proper way."

She made love to me, it was the only way to describe it, in perfect mimicry of the last time I had made love to her. She kissed my soft chest where the nightie's hemline plunged on my chest. She pinched my nipples until they were as hard as hers had ever been and she wouldn't let me do anything to her. She caressed my legs as she raised my nightie, her cool hands on the inside of my hot, fevered thighs. I shuddered and held her tightly as she fondled my panties and thighs as I had fondled her before.

She held me down and would not let me rise even when I desperately wanted to come and throw her on her back to do it the way that had been best for me. She straddled my nightie, letting my panties down only onto my thighs. I finally came that way, with her watching and waiting for me, or so it seemed.

"That's a good girl," she said after I had come. She freed herself enough to pull the panties back into place about me. Then she rolled free.

I lay there quivering while I sensed her staring at the ceiling, quite composed, our love-making clearly not having aroused her at all.

"Bad-bad day?" I muttered, wanting to talk about all the feminine things I had been doing and how, being so swishy of late, I was going to have a problem being Alan very soon.

"Darned awful," she said moodily. She shifted her head on the pillow and I saw the gleam of her eyes as she looked at me. "I'm sorry," she said, sounding contrite. "I took it out on you, didn't I?"

"It's Brian Fields, isn't it?" I said, shivering as I touched her bare leg with mine, so soft, both of them.

"Effing Brian," Donna said bitterly. "All he wants is ... Well, you can guess what he wants." She sat up restlessly. "We should be playing, not sitting around here, waiting on calls from His Majesty. Then after our private conferences," there was a sneer in her voice, "he's addicted to blow jobs if case you're ever called in there. You could do him and he'd never know you were who you are, what you are. After, he's too emotionally drained to do business and he'll see me the next day and it's the same damn thing."

She couldn't have said anything to distress me more. I could see myself being called into some guy's office and being told to do just that. The thought of it, that a man's member could be presented for me to, to, to do what she had done. Ugh. I revolted at the thought of it and I couldn't get the image of it out of my mind. Nor the image of me in a tight skirt, with my very shapely feminine figure, wiggling up to a shadowy, leering, older man, with the girls urging me on. I went down on my knees as a beefy hand grabbed my

hair. It was a horrible nightmare and I broke out in chills and fever as Donna described her meetings with Brian Fields.

"But we do record," I murmured in my squeaky, girlish voice.

"Not this week, darling," said Donna, sighing and blowing strands of my hair across my face. "We've been bumped out of the studio but Brian hasn't had the nerve to tell me yet. It'll be two, three weeks at least."

"Oh no," I gasped.

She moved against me, wrapping her legs into my nightie and between mine. "You're doing just great," she said, running her fingers through my hair. "Joanie told me your voice is fantastic and you sing like a girl, too. You look wonderful. We could be sisters, you know. Wouldn't you have liked that? To be a sister of mine? I would love it, you know. I really would. You should write me a song about being a woman, you know. I think you love it as much as I do, don't you? But I am not going to introduce you to Brian Fields. Not yet, anyway."

V. ON THE RECORD

"This is a dump!" snapped Brenda angrily as we stared at 'The Cavern' in early morning light.

"All the top bands played here at one time or another," said Steve Casey hastily as we looked at the old, peeling-paint, warehouse walls.

"It's a punk hangout," protested Brenda. "We don't go over big with an audience like that!"

Steve Casey looked at me, at my blonde hair pinned up and the fake braid in place down the back of my neck, ending in a wide, black ribbon. Every time I felt it on my back, near my bra, I cringed in the recall of how I was dressed like a preppy schoolgirl, in a short, pleated skirt, long stockings above my knees, exposing several inches of bare skin, in patent leather, high-heeled shoes, platform-heels Joanie called them. I felt sick as I tried to walk and not have to bend to expose my legs and the purple, silky panties Donna had had me wear. It was so awkward to sit or bend to put in my power cord without feeling the little skirt move on my legs, reminding me that I was supposed to be a girl, act like a girl.

"I heard you play in Stetford," Casey said, looking at me again more than he looked at the others. "If you play like that, you'll do well here, you'll see."

Donna glowered at Casey and turned her back on him. Our so-called recording session was still 'days away'. She had been downright nasty to Casey about our needing a gig and this is what he had come up with. It looked to us all a far cry from the promised Stargate.

We were not the only band performing at the Cavern, either. This was no place for Beatles-type rockers, despite its name. The audience was 'punk' or downright grotesque, with oddly shaved hair, body piercing and tattoos on almost everyone, male and female.

Donna was pale with fright, I think, as we watched the Zuts, on before us, perform minimalist, New Wave music that was mostly ignored by the audience.

“What do we do?” Donna asked as a sarcastic emcee waved off the Zuts and made stupid remarks about us being an oxymoron, an all-girl rock band.

Joanie looked at me. “Well?” she asked. “What would you do?”

“*Satisfaction*,” I said nervously, feeling my braid swinging across my back. “Then, *Jailbait*, with no stops between, the same into *Dance Me*. Don't stop and let them think whether they like us or not.”

Joanie nodded. “Got it?” she asked the others, who all nodded.

“She might look like a cute, little schoolgirl,” sneered Brenda. “But she's still got a lot of lessons to learn about being a co-ed.”

I wished so much that I was strong enough to have said no to the short kilt, as Joanie had called it. The black stockings came up to my thighs but left enough bare skin for the boys to ogle as I played. I panicked for a moment as the strap of my guitar pressed on my new breast and I thought I had burst it. I adjusted my strap and felt my braid swinging again as I chorded into the Rolling Stones classic.

My little kilt moved against my legs as I swayed but I had added a solo to the old arrangement and so I tried desperately to ignore the movement of my skirt as I double-timed a heavy series of chords to contrast to Joanie's steady drumming. I didn't dare to look at the audience. We were so loud that I doubted that they could ignore us anyway.

We segued into *Jailbait* with Joanie doing a neat riff and the club patrons had no chance to react. As I listened to Donna spitting out my lyrics, I shivered at the image she was screaming about. It fitted me so perfectly. I was wearing heavy makeup, the lip-gloss heavy on my mouth. My eyes were vividly made-up, and I definitely had a woman's shape in my tight, little girl's skirt and tight, pink t-shirt, under a tied-up shirt, halter-style about my 'breasts'.

I felt really weird as, for the first time since I had been writing, I felt that a song was about me, about a girl like me, leading someone on, deceiving someone who ought to have known better. I felt like writhing in shame at what I was listening to, and it affected me to change the sound of my guitar into a rawer, edgier tone which I kept as we went right on into *Dance Me*.

I think it was then that the first couples got up and started dancing down by the stage but I don't really know. We had prepared *Dizzy*, my *Rock 'n' Roll Queens*, and *Back in the USA* among others. I couldn't stop and so as we went into our finale as one long set. I bridged with new breaks and we slipped from one song into another. The girls seemed to understand my mood and they went with me, even Brenda.

Donna came dancing to me as I opened up on our version of the Beatles' *You Can Drive My Car*, which we had turned into a slowed, cynical version of the song, as Mick Jagger might have sung it. She stuck the microphone in my face and without thinking, I sang the next couple of lines and suddenly the crowd roared back at us. I looked up and everyone was on their feet, rocking away with us.

“Oh, your voice!” screamed Donna as we went off to thunderous applause.

“Oh no!” I gasped, certain I had embarrassed myself no end in front of a club full of people who now knew I was a man.

“No, it was great!” said Donna, laughing. “Look, if we're going to play like that all the time with no breaks, then I need a break for my voice. You can sing one here or there for me.”

“No, I can't!” I screamed back as yelling and gesturing people made us go back on and do an encore which we now had ready, another punk-type snarling of *That's the Way Life Should Be*. I hadn't realized that there were three rows of hurling, tossing bodies against the stage. The cheering was prolonged as Joanie grabbed me at the end and held me there for us to take a bow before we left.

I was shivering as we came off. “Love your purple panties,” said Steve Casey, leaning over and whispering in my ear, putting his arm about me. I shuddered at such a touch and was glad when Brenda grabbed my hand and pulled me into the Ladies' Room, right off the stage.

“What a creep!” she said as I undid the blouse from under my breasts, my fingers fumbling with all the emotion I was feeling. “Was he trying to hit on you?”

I was wearing purple panties and he must have seen them when we bowed to the audience, whom we could still hear in the distance. I staggered to the washbasin for cold water for my flaming cheeks and saw how loose my hair was, curls wisping about my face. I was a girl, I thought, hot with embarrassment and shame, seeing how the softer breasts moved as I leaned forward and looked at myself.

Brenda loomed behind me. “Now, if you were my uncle,” she said, “you'd be in that guys arms by now, making kissyface with him, flaunting what you've got. Or are you holding out for blowing Brian?”

I recoiled from the mirror, the disgust and revulsion coursing through me. “I just want out!” I screamed at her just as Joanie came bursting in to find us. The look she gave Brenda would have curdled water, never mind milk.

“Let's get back to the dressing room,” she said, taking my arm. I found it very hard to move, with every step reminding me that I was in a girl's skirt, in a girl's shoes and stockings. My waist was tight and I had moving breasts and hair, curly hair about my face and a heavy braid down my back.

It was calmer, emptier, in the hallway to the dressing room, where all we had done was put on heavy stage makeup that I was now ruining with a cold compress. We could hear the Lords of Indifference performing a pseudo-Kurt Cobain number to a much calmer crowd.

Only in the dressing room did my shakes start again as Anna and Donna shouted at me for messing with my rouge. I struggled to say that I needed to tone down to my street makeup, thinking how incongruous it was for a boy like me to be asking to reapply his eyeliner, eye shadow, blush and lipstick.

Steve Casey came in then with Bonnie and John. “Girls, girls,” Steve beamed, opening his arms to us as he looked at me. I shivered as Donna flung herself in his arms, which took him by surprise.

“What a smashing New York debut!” Steve gushed on. “Christine! What picking! You sounded so bad!” He stretched the last word out, his face as elated as Donna's who clung to his arm.

“So when do we record?” asked Donna, her voice hoarse from her work on stage. “You saw how we are now that we have Christine!”

No! I wanted to scream. You don't have me! But Joanie and Anna both put their arms around me and Brenda joined us, squealing like the other two and I found myself joining in the group celebration.

Steve was watching us, trying to move Donna to join in with our group but she was arguing with him, saying something into his ear.

“I have to put that to Brian,” he began to say.

“Screw Brian!” said Donna savagely. Our jumping and wiggling came to a stunned shock. Even Casey looked distressed.

“Now, Donna,” he began nervously. “Don't blow it now.” Then he looked very ruffled as Donna and Brenda immediately laughed at him. When we caught on, we joined in, too, even as Donna linked up with us and we were five girls together. She winked at me and I felt weak suddenly, knowing I was still the odd one out. I couldn't think why I felt so sad about that.

“Jack Harris came to hear us play again,” Donna said levelly, over her shoulder to Steve Casey. “I called him. He'll give us a deal right away with Coast City.”

“Donna!” exclaimed Steve Casey, whitening visibly. “You owe Cabaret a lot. Your clothes, for instance.”

“The girls back me on this one, don't you?” Donna asked, a gleam in her eye, her chin raised in determination.

“Yes,” said Joanie quickly.

“Right,” said Anna, grinning.

“Yes, sir,” snapped Brenda, squeezing my hand hard.

“Yes,” I whispered, unable to look Steve in the eye as he stared only at me.

“We record next week for Coast City,” said Donna, stepping over to me and putting her arm about my waist, making me feel exposed and vulnerable as the others all looked at me. “Or Cabaret. We don't care. Just don't think that you can romance Christine out of our group, either. She is one of us. Tell him,” she said to me.

“I-I'm a Purpleheart,” I said anxiously, feeling my gaff gripping me so tightly that I was numb. My heart was beating a hundred beats per second, it felt like. The other girls all began hugging me, too. It was wonderful for a moment to be so accepted, so wanted. It was the most thrilling of feelings and I meant it when I said, “I want to be part of this band forever.”

Then I thought about what I had said and blushed all over, as first Anna and then Joanie kissed my soft, smooth cheek.

"I-I got to talk to Brian," said Steve Casey, backing hastily to the door. Bonnie and John looked stunned as they went out with him. Joanie laughed and handed me a jar of cold cream, taking some for herself. She began to cream away her stage makeup and we all did, laughing at the gruesome faces we suddenly presented to each other.

"You were fabulous, Christine," said Joanie quietly, thoughtfully, to me. I didn't know whether she was referring to my playing or to my talking.

"You were all great," I said, knowing I was speaking in my practiced, girlish tones.

"I didn't know your voice was so good," said Donna, holding my head still while she carefully redid my eyeliner and mascara. "It would really add to our vocal sound, you know, if we could get you in on the choruses. Joanie and Anna can be high and you low, together. It'll sound great."

I flushed as we all unwound, got our jackets and followed Donna out of the room and out to the taxi John had waiting for us to go back to the hotel.

"Tomorrow," said Donna, twisting so that she could fiddle with my hair. "We should give you two little braids at the back and lots of flyaway bangs at the front. This little girl look really suits you."

"Yeah," said Brenda, resting her hand on my bare thigh and stroking me, which sent daggers through my skin. "She should sing that Jailbait song, too. We'd have half the guys there coming in their pants if she did."

"What about the other half?" laughed Donna, playing with my hair as I tried anxiously to restrain Brenda's hand.

"They're gay!" laughed Brenda hysterically while Donna just looked at me wickedly. I found the cabbie's eyes on me and fumed as I could say nothing that wouldn't get me into even further difficulty.

Joanie and Anna waited for me to get out of the taxi at the hotel, which I did with difficulty thanks to Brenda. I'm afraid I did show off my purple panties to the cabbie and both of the girls.

Anna put her arm through mine as I shakily stood up and got my skirt straight. "I'm glad you're one of us now," she said with a smile as we walked into the lobby. "We'll show them all that an all-girl band can really rock as good as any boy band."

"Annie," I began. I shivered as I tried to think of the words to remind her that I was still very much a man no matter how I looked or what I wore.

Joanie took my other arm. "You're a Purpleheart forever, you said," she laughed at me, seeing the look in my made-up eyes, I'm sure. "And since we're an all-girl band, you know what that makes you."

We were just as much of a smash the next night as we changed around a few of the items we played, bringing back our covers of Matchbox 20, Third Eye Blind and Offspring. This time, at the end, an excited Donna screamed out a closing to the crowd, "We're the Purplehearts! Joanie on drums!" There was a cheer from one part of the audience. "Annie on bass, Brenda on keyboards," small cheers, "Christine on lead guitar." We were all un-

prepared for the roar that came back at us, the hooting and whistling, which didn't die even as Donna finally yelled, "And me, Donna Kelly!"

We did a raucous *Hard Travellin' Man*, changed to *Hard Travellin' Gal* by Donna, that had them all joining in at the end. I must have blushed all the way to the end as they applauded each lick I made on the guitar. I wished I was anywhere but on that stage in my little miniskirt, mid-thigh dark stockings, in glittering red, skin-tight top, my hair so blonde after Joanie had given me a rinse, my little braids making me look, truly, like jail-bait.

It was a relief to get into the recording studio at Cabaret the following week and really polish the presentation and singing of our original songs. Colin Wheeler, the producer, was really patient with us. His suggestions were spot on and if we had to endure more takes than we wanted to, it was more to do with our lack of musicianship than his producing and recording skills. We no longer had the live audience and their noise to cover our mistakes. And so recording was a humbling experience.

Colin worked constantly to get the right mix and tried to explain to us what that was. We barely understood his explanations but we let him direct us. It took us a week to get *Dance Me* and *Rock 'n' Roll Queens* into versions that the cool, unflappable Colin would accept.

"This is going to take months!" snapped the usually even-tempered Joanie to me.

I hoped not. I had talked to Donna about finances, wanting my money for playing if I left. She had just laughed and asked me if I knew how much we girls were already in debt to Cabaret for our living accommodations, our food, our clothing and travel. We owned nothing and the credit card Donna used was only good up to the limit she constantly negotiated with Cabaret.

"We'll need a monster hit and a world-wide tour to get out of the hole we're in right now," she said as she made love to me. She took it for granted that she was the leader now in our lovemaking and if I protested, she just laughed and said that now I knew how it felt to be real woman with a real man - always flat on my back.

"So, you can't leave," she said, smiling to me in the morning, dressing me up again in a short, dark, green kilt. "You'd have no money or male clothing. Your eyebrows will never pass. I suppose you could cut your nails."

She and Joanie had given me a manicure and pedicure after the Cavern show. My nails were now as softly pink as my lipstick and gently narrowed and rounded by them. I was afraid they would get in the way of my picking the guitar but they didn't. They looked like the other girls' nails. I also had painted toenails, which they bought me open-toed high heels and light stockings to show off.

I must admit that they did look very feminine and I felt that way now. I was included in conversations about cosmetics, clothing, hairstyles and such and the girls made me shop with them now whenever they went out. I couldn't believe how much shopping we did for clothes and how much they tried on, how much they had me try on.

Then there was shopping for shoes, with men's hands caressing my legs, their eyes occasionally looking up my skirt at my panties. The other girls laughed at my blushes. "If

he's nice, you don't complain," explained Joanie, smiling after we had purchased some really glam stuff from a nice, somewhat embarrassed salesman. "You know, we have to get you a date."

That blew my mind and I could not sit down or walk properly for the longest time. Each time I thought of what I had done to myself, I got so hot and bothered, I just couldn't truly be Christine Harris at all. But my reflection in shop windows told me who I was. Walking arm-in-arm with Anna or Joanie, we were two giggly girls out on a shopping spree. And we got lots of attention.

I was really scared of it at first but Joanie and Anna basked in any attention, particularly male attention, we got. "We're girls," explained Joanie to me as we sat in a cafe trying not to notice the teenaged boys trying to get us to notice them. "We like male attention. It makes us feel good. It should make you feel good, too. It means you are playing your part well. So smile when a good-looking guy wants to talk to you. Don't cut him off like you did in the shoe store and talk to me. You're allowed to flirt, you know. You are a pretty girl and men are going to make passes at you. You have to let them know you appreciate them even if you do turn them down and you don't have to turn everybody down, you know."

"Steve Casey," I asked, trembling inside at her attempts to make me into a girl like her.

Joanie grimaced. "You need a lot more experience before you tackle a man like that," she said.

Donna agreed with Joanie that it would take us a year to get a CD out, but, of course, it didn't. We got more experienced and I got to know just what I wanted in music, even though I was totally confused about the rest of my life. I mean I didn't mind, somehow, being a girl among girls, but whenever I was cut out of the group, on my own, it was nerve-racking to be treated with condescension for my supposed gender.

Colin was easy to work with and he rescued me from several situations, particularly with Steve Casey, checking up on us. I began to get the experience in listening to Colin's comments about how to balance the instruments and voices in the group. And so we had a rough cut of the CD and several other songs ready before Steve Casey could put the make on me again.

It was an exhilarating time for me putting the music together. I quite forgot at times who or what I was supposed to be and acted quite naturally with Colin as he showed me his tricks of the trade. I was listening in to some of his dubs while he was out for coffee when Steve trapped me in the sound room.

"Christine," he said, delighted.

I was panicked as I put down my headphones. I was in a short dress as usual with my long, stockinged legs exposed. I felt my inserts tighten at my chest as he advanced on me.

"It's so good to get you alone," Steve said, smiling at me, advancing right up to me. I suppose he was good-looking for a guy. The girls said he was but I was still no judge, nor did I want to be, on male sex appeal.

"Um, Colin and I are working," I began.

"Yes," he said, "and doing very well. I've heard the final product. But I want to talk about us."

"Us?" I gasped, my heart flipping. There was no us, not unless he had read me. I almost disintegrated with shock under his piercing gaze.

"I have to see you," he said urgently.

"You-you *are* seeing me," I murmured. A shake of the head made my hair flick about my neck, my earrings rattle on my soft skin.

"I mean socially," he said earnestly. "Ever since I saw you, I knew you were the girl for me."

He tried to take my hand. "Don't!" I gasped, retreating across the small room and he came after me.

"I'm obsessed with you!" he said, coming after me. "Your scent, the look of you. I want to run my hands through your hair and caress you all over. I want to kiss you everywhere, starting with your perfect lips. Christine, for frigging sake, I want to make love to you!"

He tried to take my hand as I skipped around the big mike in the middle of the room and he grabbed my hand. I couldn't get free as he held me with one hand and stroked my polished nails and smooth fingers with the other. "So soft and gentle, dear Christine," he began.

The door crashed open and Colin Wheeler came hurrying in. He took one look at my stricken face and at Steve Casey. "Out!" he said forcefully, jerking his thumb over one shoulder.

"Christine!" Steve appealed to me.

I got my hand free. "No," I said, trembling. "No, never."

He was speechless. He took a look at Colin, glowering at him, and he began to edge to the door. "We have to talk some more," he said. "I was too blunt."

I shook my head and took a deep breath, conscious of both men looking at the rise and fall of my false breasts.

Colin, tall and lean, with Ivy League good looks, closed the door quickly on Steve and then turned to me, looking quite sheepish, even embarrassed. I had heard from Brenda very early on that he was gay but he was one of the manliest men I had met around Cabaret Records.

"Thank you," I said softly, a strange fit of girlishness coming over me.

"Well," he said, running his hands through his dark hair. He looked sharply at me, at the way I was looking at him, I suppose, the feminine way I was standing. "Well, you do know that I am gay, don't you?"

I had heard him make a remark about Neil, his lover, once, that had confirmed Brenda's remark. I don't think he had noticed or remembered, so easy had our working together on the CD become.

"Does it make a difference to you?" he asked, deliberately casual.

I shook my curls. "I knew," I said. I wondered fleetingly what he would do if he knew about me, about what was beneath my flowery dress and purple panties.

"Good," he said and smiled very friendly-like to me. "I'm glad you knew. So if I start doing some things like that oaf you just kicked out, you'll know it's just because I like you and want to be friends."

"F-friends?" I stammered, my feminine heater going up again.

"Sure," he grinned. "You girls are going to be big. I like the way you think and write your music. That's why I wanted it to be so perfect from the start. I want to stay on and produce your next records as well."

"Well," I said girlishly. "Donna is our leader." I squirmed and wished I was elsewhere than having this weird conversation with a 'queer' when I was the one dressed in petticoats, dress and manicured and made up as a woman. My stockinged feet, toes painted, peeped out of open-toed high heels and reminded me of how much a sissy I now was. Thank goodness he only thought I was a woman, I said to myself, trembling at the stupidity of such an idea.

"You're the writer," he said intently. "I think you should be the singer, too, and Donna should be backup, though having two leads can be really helpful in sustaining a group's life."

"No," I whispered huskily, alarmed as he put his arm about my thin waist and guided me out of the sound booth and back to the big control panel where several technicians were still at work.

"Yes," he said. "You should sing. You have an unusual, low, husky voice. It would be really right on some of the ballads you wrote. Now, when the Purplehearts break up, and all groups do, you know, I want to produce you as a solo girl singer. Will you let me?"



"We'll never break up," I whispered, fear in my heart as this grey-eyed guy leaned over me, squeezed me to him and altogether made me feel like I was really a Christine.

"Not likely," he said lightly. "Oh, and about me being gay."

He's not, I thought wildly. He's going to confess to me it was all a gag and that arm about my shoulder pushing me against him means something.

"I don't tell everyone," Colin said very quietly. "None of the team here knows, I think. I do tell beautiful girls who might, you know, wonder why, after all the time we've been together, I don't come on to them."

"I won't tell anyone," I said shakily, feeling my dress make a slight sway across my thighs.

"Thanks," he said, squeezing me, just as Donna and Brenda came into the control room. They made a lot of snide remarks when I was the only one who could hear about me having a boy friend. We were trying to put down a re-written Beatles' track, *I Saw Him Standing There*. Thinking of their remarks and the affectionate way Colin had held me and treated me left me in such a muddle that I messed up completely, much to Joanie's puzzlement.

"Christine has a new boy friend," sneered Brenda softly as Colin asked us all to be ready again.

Joanie's dark, brown eyes, heavily outlined, swivelled onto me and made me feel as I really was, a tarted-up boy in girl's clothes. Now she would think of me as a perverted, dolled-up hypocrite with all my protests and moanings at always being so femininely dressed.

"It was just Colin," I explained, flushing. "He was being nice after he rescued me from Casey."

"He was hugging her," said Donna, grinning broadly. "And she liked it."

My face was on fire beneath my makeup and I knew it was true. I liked Colin and I hadn't minded at all that he held me. Admitting it to myself didn't help though. I didn't know why I liked Colin holding me and I didn't really want to think it all out.

"Don't listen to them," said Joanie, frowning as she saw how unsettled I was. "Bound to happen that you're going to have contact with men. We should all be glad it's only with Colin."

I was aghast as I heard her say that and I realized what she had revealed about herself and her views on gay people. Or at least I thought so. I must really be the lowest of the low to her, I thought despairingly, as I projected my voice into the backup mike, trying to be a perfect member of an all-girl band.

There was one guy who was occasionally taping us on what I thought was a camcorder. It wasn't until we went out to an old home in the country, somewhere in Connecticut, that I realized he had been taking shots for a video. We did all sorts of wardrobe changes; I think we must have run through someone's teenaged girl catalogue, with the little skirts and different tops we wore.

There were all kinds of people about us in this creepy, old house. I clung onto Joanie, who insisted, for me, I'm sure, that we have privacy when we dressed and our so-called 'dresser' only saw us after we changed. She was a cross woman to start with and I heard her to say to someone else that we were nothing but a bunch of prima donnas who'd done nothing and never would.

Joanie looked at me and we had a good laugh. It was strange that I didn't feel any of the terror I normally felt in large groups when almost everyone was looking at me in my short stockings and even shorter skirts. Donna was my hairdresser though the other girls had a guy working on their hair. She combed my hair out into a loose, long style that got all across my face when they turned on air blowers on the roof of the building where we stood.

Then I had braids and lots of pins and a little black dress and flesh-colored pantyhose for shots standing about in a garden with artificial, very colorful flowers. I remember my surprise when snow started falling on us. I could hear the machine but this man was calling on us to pay no attention. I realized afterwards that it was attention to the snow that he meant. They turned on again when we were inside the hallway, my hair in bangs and little pigtails, wearing what I called my high school uniform.

We worked all day, not miming at all, just letting the director of the thing fuss about and put us in all kinds of poses. Then it was over and I had no idea at all what song was going with the video or how what we had been photographed doing, moodily sulking about an old house, fitted with anything I had written about.

I asked Donna about it. But she was mysterious. "You'll see it if and when it comes out," she said. I was hardly seeing her at all as she was off with Brian all the time. I was getting used to sleeping alone.

Then, abruptly, without even a day for rehearsal, we all moved West "on tour", with a brand new bus, full-size this time, with John and Bonnie but also with a brand new manager, John C. Parker.

Joanie protested that we didn't need him. He just looked at her and smiled, bemused.

"We do so need a manager," proclaimed Donna. "We need someone to look out for our interests."

"Yeah," said Joanie sourly. "Just like Steve Casey."

That made me tremble a little bit. Donna smiled at me. "Yes," she said. "Colin told me about Steve trapping you in a sound booth. He said that Steve had to go and I agreed, for different reasons."

Joanie looked at me then across the table, her distress evident. "Steve came on to you?" she asked.

I nodded, blushing through my makeup. John C. Parker, older, greyer, father-like in a way, though not like the jerk who had raised me, looked at me with interest. "I can see why," he said affably. "But I can assure all you girls that my interest in you all is going to be strictly professional."

Donna laughed. "We're not all out of bounds," she said, giving me a wicked look. "Some of us still have our amateur status and some of us don't."

I couldn't have helped myself then. I had to blush as she implied that I was still a virgin. It wasn't true. I still occasionally slept with Donna whenever she was interested and we were to share a room whenever sharing was necessary on this tour.

I couldn't look at this new John C. Parker. Luckily, Donna monopolized his time and soon I was left to Joanie's company at the back of the bus.

"She's always doing that to us," said Joanie vengefully when we were watching Donna flirting outrageously as she got the old John, Anna and the new John into some kind of card game while Bonnie drove us along. "She never asks us our opinion."

"I know," I said with feeling. I had new red polish on my nails, which wasn't my idea, nor was the red lipstick I was wearing. Donna had decided I had to look more like a woman than a girl, as she put it, in front of our new manager. I begged for pants but she had ignored me and given me a little, v-neck sweater that clung to me tightly but suited the short, grey skirt I wore with pantyhose and low heels, which was a relief at least.

She had curled my hair with an iron and crossly told me I had to learn how to do it. I swallowed and told her that I didn't need to because hadn't I done everything she had asked me to do for the group? I could be released now for sure, couldn't I? She ignored me completely but just told me to pack as we were going on tour. I had had a lesson on which clothes went in first and how they should be folded. I was staggered by how much female clothing had come my way in just our two-month stay in New York.

Joanie looked at me and smiled. "She does dominate you, doesn't she?" she said in a low voice. "Is that what you get off on, being dominated by a strong woman?"

"N-no!" I squeaked in protest. But I'm sure she saw the doubt and astonishment in my expression as I had to consider what she had said. Perhaps it *was* like that, I thought.

"In which case," murmured Joanie gleefully, "don't you think our Brenda would be a much better dominatrix? After all, she loves to humiliate men!"

"Stop!" I pleaded. I would have got up and left her but she reached across the little table between us and took my hand.

"I'm sorry," she said, a wry smile on her lips. "I'm only talking, teasing, you know? You should know Donna better than I ever did now. I wonder, though, where Alan Markham is. I look at you now and I can't see him at all, you know. When I see you two in bed together, I think of you as Donna and Christine, lesbians."

I was totally shaken by those words. She had, after all, been trying so hard to get me to behave like a girl. She had been pleased when I did things girlishly or femininely. I had been happy when she had given me little hugs or squeezed my hand when I learned my lessons well. But I did know that I was taking this deception too far.

I didn't have to be told how to dress any more. I even did some of my own makeup and I thought nothing of wearing feminine perfume. In fact, I didn't feel right without a feminine fragrance about me. I even found myself admiring my legs in pantyhose. I was slimmer than Anna but rounded all the same. I liked it when we got comments like we all had nice legs. I was thrilled that I didn't stand out as freakish and was just like my girl friends. I loved things like that which no man should be proud of unless there was something wrong with him.

And that was what I was so frightened of, so stunned about. I didn't want to admit it but there was something wrong with me. I actually wanted to be Christine Harris at times. I wished I had female childhood stories to relate when the others got to giggling about common girlish experiences. They were getting lewder too, not seeming to notice that it was me, Alan, with them, and that I had never had a flow, nor embarrassed myself in front of classmates with a feminine hygiene problem.

But one thing I did know was that I wasn't a lesbian. I loved Donna before I dressed up, didn't I? So I couldn't be, I tried to convince myself.

"Let's change the subject," said Joanie, giving me another affectionate hand squeeze. She looked at me hard as I nervously wriggled in the seat, unable to find any words that would really explain me. Had I really had no choice in doing any of this as I was telling myself when I thought of it? "What have you written lately?"

"I've written a couple," I said with a shudder, thinking of *Remembered Dreams*, all about Donna and me. What would Joanie think of the lyric, about how sweet I felt for Donna in my little, black dress?

Joanie wanted to hear it and went for Brenda's acoustic guitar. Utterly embarrassed, I did sing it for her, without—as I didn't have reverb—the guitar snarling out different breaks in the spaces I had left in the melody.

I wanted to apologize for the stupidity of the lyric, how much it exposed us, but I didn't get a chance.

"Fantastic!" breathed Joanie when I finished my half-playing, half-sung version of the song that was so differently arranged in my head. "Donna will *love* singing that! I wish it was on the CD we made. You really got inside a woman's mind in the lyrics. Girls will *love* singing that. We don't get all dressed up without wanting someone to notice the trouble we've taken."

She didn't get the references, I understood suddenly. She didn't understand that it was me, a man, being dressed by a woman.

"Too country for my taste," said Brenda, getting up from the long seat, which served as a bed at the back. "Are we going to be copying Deana Carter now?"

"Knock it off, Brenda," snapped Joanie while I experienced waves of emotion at revealing so much in a song. I was quivering at the words, yet neither of the other two noticed that.

"Christine's music might compare to some other's best work," Joanie went on loyally, "but it's not copied or rehashed like the stuff we played as our original content before she joined us."

"Before she joined us," mimicked Brenda, standing after stressing the 'she'. She picked up a *Rolling Stone* from the bed and swayed off provocatively to join Anna and the others.

The way she walked reminded me, with a sickening feeling, of the 'choreography' Steve Casey had insisted we work into the act on stage at the second gig we did at the Cavern. It was basically a provocative walk I had to do with Donna and Anna in low-cut, sequined dresses that split right up to our hips to show off our legs and panties. Rehearsing with Donna alone had been bad enough. Doing it for critical eyes was instantly upset-

ting. If ever someone had smiled falsely then, it was me trying to be as girlish as the others and still play. Brenda's walk brought back how demeaned and humiliated I had felt in such a sexy dress, having Steve tell me how great I looked, how great we all were in presenting ourselves.

"Don't mind Bree," said Joanie, wrinkling her nose in disgust. "She picks on us all at one time or another. You'll see."

I nodded, which was a mistake, given my feelings at that point. My loose hair and dangling earrings fell on my cheek and I had to push my hair back, using a red-tipped finger.

"I wonder if she'll still do things like that to you when the record starts to sell," said Joanie, glancing over her shoulder at the others.

"If it sells," I said with a shudder, re-crossing my legs with the telling female sound of nylon sliding over nylon.

Joanie turned back and laughed at me. "You need to believe in your own writing and playing," she said. "We do. I wonder if that's why you're still dressed as a girl, because you don't believe, not even in yourself as a man." She shook her head at my stricken expression, not knowing how I felt chills right through me at her words. "No, that's too pat an answer," she said, more to herself than me.

But why I allowed myself to be corseted as I was, my figure now exceptional if totally false, was beyond her to account for. I wanted to tell her it was beyond me, too.

"You're wearing false eyelashes," she said suddenly, staring in my eyes. "I was wondering why they looked so good!"

I felt that falling sensation again as she sat back in her seat. Was she disgusted with me now, I thought miserably, as she studied my makeup, the black, vivid surroundings for my eyes. The nice boy, Alan Markham, looked back at her through dark fringes of feminine lashes and wished he could just explain that he really had no choice.

VI. ROCK 'N' ROLL QUEENS

Our CD was released during the third weekend of our tour. It was like a scene from that Tom Hanks movie, *That Thing You Do*, when Anna came shrieking into our room, turned on the cable TV, and we saw the *Dance Me* video. It was strange to see us in tableaux in that creepy house in Connecticut and then in the recording studio which was where Donna was captured actually singing. There were shots of this blonde girl frequently, playing her guitar, or posed sexily in short, short skirts. She had lovely legs, a pert, little figure, and vivid eyes, and 'she' was *me*.

I could barely watch it after I suddenly realized who I was in the group and how I must look to others. But it wasn't me. There was nothing of Alan Markham in the way that girl moved or looked, even when they took close-ups of me.

"Did you see who hogged the spotlight?" Brenda sneered, coming in with Joanie.

"Blondes do have more fun, don't they?"

"But Christine was cute," said Anna, puzzled. "And they *had* to show her guitar solos. That's the best part of the music."

"Thanks very much," snapped Donna, which only made Brenda fall on our bed in helpless laughter at Donna's naked jealousy of me, a man, being a cuter girl than she was.

I tried to say something, apologize, but Donna cut me off. "Forget about it," she said angrily to me and so I did shut up. She made me wear baby doll pyjamas in bed that night, though, and she frightened me with how belligerent she was in making love to me. She told me to shut up when I tried to protest or ask her about it. I knew then that she was deeply offended by how successfully I had accepted her transformation of me.

"If we sell some copies of the CD," she said the morning after it was released and as I put on my false eyelashes quietly, "we can pay you off and you can go back to being Alan Markham when this tour is over."

I don't know why but I felt nothing but regret when I heard her agreeing to everything I really wanted. It *was* regret, wasn't it? I was going to miss the girls, well, maybe not Brenda, but the others who had become my friends. I would *really* miss all the jokes and hugs and squeezes I shared with Joanie.

Dance Me wasn't the "smash hit" Cabaret Records said it was. It did get air play, though, and so we became a name band and we picked up a few gigs because of the record, often driving all night and day to make a gig, opening for bigger names. For the most part, we were the only opening act and we went anywhere, or so it seemed, to warm up an arena for headlining acts whom we rarely saw because we were moving on, often while they were still performing.

John Parker kept us advised of sales and, once, he let me know about the royalties I was earning as a songwriter. It wasn't that much but I now had a bank account as Christine Harris. I had money! I could leave the Purplehearts and I wouldn't be broke.

We exhausted ourselves playing and got used to the routine of a new town or city every night. I'd done it before with the Blind Mice but it was tougher as a woman. The makeup and dressing took me a long time, as it did for the other girls; they got less and less interested in helping me as we progressed through the Far West and headed inland.

We occasionally read the local reviews and found that the critics shared the feedback we were getting from the audiences. Our music was liked, even the 'oldies' and 'borrows' that we used. We were often superior to the headline act, according to the critics, and Parker used that in advance of our arrival in several towns.

We had some dates on our own in smaller clubs; we played the same stuff and the audiences seemed to eat it up even more in a closer setting.

Each night, I had to cream my face after the show, removing every trace of makeup and then take off the clinging dress in which I had performed. Bonnie would take care of our dresses and stage wear, including the teddies, panties and bras so heavy with perspiration after we played. I would be frantic each night to get into a robe before Bonnie came calling and, of course, there were some items that I had to wash myself that I could never let Bonnie see. Donna did the same routine as me. We took off our stockings the same way and hung them up to dry in the bathroom side by side.

We were too exhausted most of the time to do anything but sleep. The travelling and the energetic shows began to take a toll on us and we almost welcomed routine to keep us

going. I knew that I had to brush my hair so many times at night and in the morning. I had to use the curling iron just so. We had makeup to put on and I learned how to get my eye-lashes in place and do my eyes so quickly that sometimes I was helping Donna now.

I kept to the waist cinch or corset even though Donna laughed at me and said that I was thin enough already and didn't need it. She was probably right but it felt like I was wearing a girl suit with my false bra, the nipped-in waist of the corset and the gaff between my legs. I felt secure with them on and hardly noticed them as we performed any more.

I waxed and depilated with the girls as if it was normal for me to have smooth legs and a bikini line free of 'unsightly hair'. We discussed how to make ourselves more attractive and glamorous. I welcomed their suggestions and tried them out. I didn't object when Jo-anie raised the question of pierced ears. We all had a giggle in Springfield, Illinois, I think it was, when I got them done in a jewellery store and bought my first permanent studs and five pairs of flashy dangles. I couldn't decide which I liked best. On stage, thereafter, we would all wear identical earrings, a sign that we were all the same. I was one of the girls and they treated me as one of them.

I dressed each day in feminine underwear, made-up, braided my hair and wore whatever one of them suggested would make me look sexy. I didn't give it a second thought. I just wanted to get on with it, do the interview, and perform. *Rock 'n' Roll Queen* was issued as a single and it and the CD began to sell. We caught our video on TV fairly often and laughed at how cheap it was. But usually we just slumped, most unladylike, into chairs or on the beds of whichever room we were in. On the bus, we all just slept.

John C. Parker was my worst problem. He walked in on us all the time with just the fastest of raps on the door. He caught me many times in my flimsy underwear. He must have known I wore falsies several days after we were out but Donna only laughed and said not to worry about it. But I did. She always flirted with him, quite brazenly. She was dressed just like me, in lingerie, and she encouraged him to come in when he had something that was written about us, usually something embarrassing about me, because it singled out my feminine looks or how I played so well.

"He could really go for you," Donna said one morning after we had been surprised again and finally got him out of room, each of us in dark stockings, going for our high school look again. "Why don't you be nice to him?"

I looked at her then as I brushed the light powder over my face, my eyelids dark grey, my lips a crimson red. I felt an uneasiness rising in me as I saw by her unconcern and the way she was looking at her own dark eyes that she meant what she said. The others joked with me about boys and I had learned to joke back or just take it. But Donna wasn't joking.

"I-I couldn't," I began, a feeling of distress rising in me. I knew, really knew, as I hadn't for weeks, that I was a man, taped, squeezed, pulled into feminine shape, dressed and made-up prettily. I might resemble a girl but I knew I was a man.

"You could," said Donna deliberately. "There's no reason why you shouldn't enjoy being a girl, is there? Not now that you pass so well. We know you won't be dressed this way forever, don't we?" She chuckled at that while I cringed inside, guessing what she really thought. "You could have gone all the way with Brian Fields and he'd never have

known you were anything else but a beautiful girl. Anyway, J.C. has asked me if he has any kind of chance with you when we get off the road."

"Please," I gasped, my bra very tight across my taped chest, giving the illusion that I had cleavage, one of Brenda's suggestions. I staggered to my feet on my customary high heels, and took hold of my little miniskirt.

"This stupid tour isn't going to last forever," said Donna rising with me and pulling her little sweater over her head, revealing her bare midriff. Mine was similar, but longer, hugging in to my very thin waist. She slipped her arm through mine as we went down to the hotel dining room and had fruit for breakfast.

"What are you girls doing tonight?" asked the smart, well-dressed man who took our credit card at the cashier. He smiled directly at me.

"See," said Donna, laughing at my attempt to walk properly with my emotions in such turmoil. "You could have had anything you wanted from that guy. You just have to loosen up, Christine. You have to flirt. I'll show you how. Yes, it's time you had your first date. You could start with J.C.!"

"P-please," I stammered as I had before. "I-I'd quit right then if-if you did that." I almost ran into the elevator.

The reflection in the glass wall showed me who I was and that the two guys in the elevator were giving me quick, little looks behind my back as I stood, waiting to reach our floor. My arms were crossed; my purse was hanging down from my shoulder to the hem of my very short skirt. My blonde hair was massed at my neck and, when I wore it loose, as now, it went down my back a little. I had intended to braid it before we went out to our interview at a TV station at noon. Stray curls framed my face and smooth, pale skin. My makeup was right out of a magazine or model school. No wonder the guys were looking at me. As a man, I would have been goggle-eyed at a girl like me as well.

My figure was very slim and girlish, my legs slender and in mid-thigh black stockings, sexy, or so the girls thought; I could see now that I was overdoing it. I'd lost pounds and with the soft mounds on my chest that moved as I did, no one could say that I was not real. Was it all the constrictions, I wondered, appalled at myself, that were giving me such a female outline? Beside me, Donna grinned at my examination of myself. She was even more sexily dressed than I was.

One of the guys jumped forward to hold the elevator door for us when we reached our floor, smiling at me again. I flushed nervously. "Thanks," I murmured, my eyes downcast, not able to look at him.

Joanie, Anna and Brenda were up when we got to their suite. Joanie was wearing a low-cut, sequined dress, spaghetti straps across her shoulders, her upper chest basically bare. The bodice hugged her figure but the skirt was very short and split, showing off her hips and high-cut panties. There were more dresses of different colors on the bed.

"I can't wear that!" I protested when Donna picked up the glittering, pink one and held it against me.

"Of course you can!" Donna said cheerily. "In fact, you will!"

Plans on our dress had changed. Now we were going to play, and live as well, in dresses like these, according to the other girls. Joanie sniffed at my protests and said I'd worn sexier stuff in the video, so why was I complaining? They all thought nothing about changing in front of me nor did Donna hesitate in stripping to the buff to change into her black, sequined dress.

"Come on," she said as I stood there, looking at her nude body, strange feelings swirling inside me. She opened the zip on my skirt and let it down. None of the others seemed to notice me as I slowly took off my sweater and stood with them in my girl's underwear.

"You have to change those panties," was all that Anna said. "You have to match the dress." A glance at the mirror showed me why. With my fake cleavage, thin waist, and padded panties, I looked just like them. I really *did* look like one of the girls.

"Stop admiring yourself," snapped Brenda, "and get dressed like us."

That drew attention to me and made Joanie look at me in my almost transparent teddy, with my bra and panties showing through. Anna got it, looked over at me and giggled. "My!" she said, looking at me up and down in all my female, skimpy underwear.

I took off my teddy and panties. I put on the pink panties, my hands shaking with the humiliation of dressing in front of them, then removed my bra. It took a while and some help from Donna and Brenda to get me into the pink, push-up bra that went with the dress, which fitted me perfectly. It swirled about my thighs as I moved. Why did mine have to be pink, I wondered when theirs were blue and black and green?

I adjusted the straps over my bare shoulders and adjusted my chest, the unease in my groin growing. "Hey, they look real," said Brenda, the sneer clear as usual in her voice. "Are you sure your boy friend isn't on something, Donna?"

The other girls were as shocked as me.

"What-what did you say that for?" I gasped, burning with embarrassment as they were all looking at my 'breasts'. "I'm not, never even said I would. Why are you always picking on me? Saying such hurtful things?" I could barely see out of my thickly fringed eyes. I shuddered as I realized that I was teary and about to cry in front of the girls, just like a girl myself.

Brenda was taken aback.

"Yes," said Anna, coming, surprisingly, to my defense. "I've had it, too, with your snide remarks to Christine. I just wish I looked as good in a dress as she does."

She meant it as a compliment but I could only feel complete shame at myself for what I had done to myself and what I was doing now. I could feel the tightness of the bra straps and the taping, pushing on the falsies and me to create the illusion that I was female like the others.

Donna touched my chest and adjusted the neckline slightly. "There," she said casually. "Beautiful boobs, just like mine."

Joanie snorted and I agreed with her. I shivered and tried to bat my eyes quickly before the unshed tears ruined my mascara.

"Now we can afford it," Donna said thoughtfully, looking at me in a way that made me tremble, "I think we should all see a plastic surgeon I heard about in New York. I'm padded, too, Bree, and so is Joanie, I know. And look at what sitting down is doing to your tush, Bree! I'm going to get implants and Christine should have them too. Dressing would be much easier then."

A stunned silence followed her words. I couldn't believe what I was hearing! I didn't want to hear it! I was *not* going to become a woman forever! I sat down on the bed but no one said anything, the others too stunned to speak. My dress opened and showed off my slender thighs and the pink, high-cut panties I was wearing.

"See," said Donna, into the nervous silence. "A tits and ass job would do wonders for Christine. She is part of us now, isn't she? She isn't ever going to be dressed like a boy again, even if she doesn't know it yet. I've been trying to tell her all morning that she is really a girl like us, even if Bree can't accept it."

"Look at it. We're coming on as a top girl group now. That's what we are, girls. We have to make a new video in New York. J.C. is working on it. It's a huge crew of people with dressers and wig people, cosmeticians, manicurists, the lot. None of us are perfect and we could all use a little augmentation here and there. Then who would care about being half-naked when we're dolled up for a video shoot? I want to be the sexiest girl around, don't you?"

I shook my head, feeling so masculine that it was hard to think that anyone couldn't see past the swirling mass of blonde hair that crossed my face. "I'm a boy," I whispered, feeling tremors in my pantyhosed legs up to my panties and sequined dress. "You ought to know that, Donna."

But Donna's attention was taken by something on the television that had been turned on to a music station in the background. "Shush," she said, ignoring me. She went to it and turned it up loudly.

"Here, the group with the hottest disk, the one moving the fastest up the charts," boomed the familiar veejay. "Here's the Purplehearts and *Jailbait*, the newest single from their smash CD!"

The video that followed looked like a lot of outtakes from what we had done in Connecticut. At one point, the camera seemed to follow me all over the house; where I had stopped and asked the cameraman to let me go in peace to the changing room, it had been edited to look like I was vamping the camera.

I shouldn't say "I." It wasn't me. It was this blonde-haired girl named Christine. I shuddered as we watched 'her' cavorting down the central staircase while Donna's voice sang over my staccato playing in the background.

"It was all her," said Donna, her voice choking as she turned back to us. "See what I mean?" Now she sneered like Brenda.

"The camera loves Christine," said Joanie, turning to look at me thoughtfully.

I shook my head as Bonnie came up for us. "Are you wearing your hair down?" she asked me as, with trembling fingers, I accepted the black coat she offered me. The room was cluttered with women's clothes and lingerie.

I looked helplessly to Donna, who wouldn't look at me. "I guess so," I said.

Bonnie actually smiled. "It looks good on you that way," she said cheerfully, while I shuddered again. "Every group should have a blonde bombshell, I told John when you joined up. You were pretty then but now you're gorgeous. You look like a young Marilyn, you know. I drove her a few times once, long ago. The photographers will eat you up today, you wait and see."

She was right. I had a lump in my throat as I signed autograph after autograph and had my picture taken time and again, much more than all the other girls, outside and in the television station. We saw ourselves on tape afterwards and again the camera seemed to find me all the time, my golden tasselled earrings glinting in the intense lighting.

I was shivering as the music ended and I realized that everything I wore was so familiar to me, high heels to earrings, that I would feel strange not wearing them. I was definitely changing. But I mustn't, I thought wildly, conscious of accepting the name, Christine, as mine, not even looking up when someone asked for an Alan to come and pin mikes on our skimpy dresses so that we could talk to our host.

Luckily, I was the dumb blonde, which seemed to please the bottle blonde who interviewed us. We went on to the auditorium for a sold-out show, and as we played, I realized again how much I was trying to be a 'she', how much I thought of myself that way, and that I really shouldn't accept it any more. I thought of ways of leaving the group, faking accidents and stuff, shivering and feeling sad, but I had a premonition that my time in the group was running out. It had better be a premonition or Donna would have me changed forever.

As usual, I wrote music when I was unsettled. I tried not to let Donna see *You Can't Make Me Change* but she heard me humming in the bathroom on the bus and soon got it out of me that I had written a rock ballad.

"The second CD is always the hardest to make," she pronounced as our tour took us around the Great Lakes, then into Pennsylvania. "But we now have two great songs for it, with this and that *Remembered Dreams* thing I inspired you to write."

She looked at me wickedly, knowing how I felt whenever she referred to our relationship in which she was more and more like my husband and I like her wife. She even wore pants now, even on stage, but she never let *me* do that.

Anna came onto the bus and, without asking, took my hands, tut-tutted at my nails and began to give me a manicure, chattering on about colors and shades. She said that any of the reds suited me, as blonde as I was.

Joanie lay down on a long seat and listened to Donna sing my new lyric. She twisted her face in a grimace and looked at me thoughtfully. She was the only one who seemed to be able to connect my words to what was going on inside me.

"Another ballad," was all she said, however. I seethed inside as Anna caressed my hands and painted my fingernails.

"If Chrissy writes ballads," cut in Donna, her eyes glittering at Joanie. "That's what we play."

"She's softening what we are," stated Joanie, her voice giving a lie to the yawns she also made. "We're a rock band."

"An all-girl rock band," sneered Donna, knowing how it would affect me. Tremors ran through me as I thought about that. "Freaks. What girl rock band ever really made it to the very top? To get out of this," she waved her hand to take in the bus and touring, "we have to be balladeers as well."

"You don't need a rock band to sing ballads," said Joanie, her face set. "Write us some rock and roll, Christine."

"Now, girls," said John Parker from a nearby seat. "Why argue? Cabaret has the right to tell you what will be on your second record anyway. Colin Wheeler's already agreed to produce you again. He's supposed to catch up with you in Detroit to talk about it."

"It's too soon," muttered Joanie, having the last word.

The first person Colin greeted when he came into our hotel room was me. He put his arm about my waist and hugged me, kissing my cheek lightly while the others looked on, astounded. That was the way I felt as well, astounded and very strange all over.

"Can't wait to hear your new stuff," Colin said, smiling his familiar, slow smile while I reddened as his hand stayed about me, making me, I must admit it, feel quite girlish. He wrinkled his nose and tossed a small, flat case onto the sofa in the suite Cabaret had rented. "You've changed your perfume," he said. "I like this one, too."

"Our Christine is changing in ways you don't know about," said Brenda sarcastically as he escorted me to the sofa and sat beside me. I was so flustered! I crossed my legs and clasped my knee with my slim, manicured hand; my nails still a bright red. My tight skirt was slitted and it opened too much, letting him see the edge of my slip. But Colin didn't seem affected by that.

He picked up the music from the coffee table, the ballads for Donna and a couple of rockers for Joanie. "Christine, Christine!" he breathed, turning to me, breaking into a wide smile. "I like this rock number, *Coming In*, and this ballad, *You Won't Make Me Chang'*. You ought to sing this yourself, you know. It would really suit your voice."

I saw the look on Donna's face. In one moment, she was smiling at me but, as Colin spoke, her expression changed to one of fury. "Donna is our singer," I said quickly. I couldn't sing what I had written. I knew what the words meant and how much of a lie they were. It would be awful to sing such personal agony. "I-I wrote it for her."

Colin glanced up at the glaring Donna and then leaned back beside me. He looked at my blonde hair, now in a thick braid at the back of my head. I knew he would not penetrate the makeup at my eyes or on my face. He would not sense the falsity beneath my black, silk blouse or know that I was wearing black panties and black bra to match. He would see only what I wanted him to, a blonde, attractive girl. And thus, not so attractive to him.

"Yes," said Colin, giving a slight smile. "Perhaps I should tell you all what I told Christine. She has a really lovely, singing voice. I like altos like her, low and sort of fuzzy. That's makes *Jailbait* the pick of your first record. It's the harmony of Christine with Donna. Christine ought to sing the occasional solo."

"You heard her," said Donna flatly. "*Change* is mine. I've already rehearsed it."

Colin hesitated momentarily. He seemed to take in my tense posture and realize that there was an undercurrent he didn't understand. "All right," he said. "Tell me what other work you're thinking of before our next date."

Brenda raised her eyebrows but said nothing as Joanie and Anna glared at her. I knew what Colin meant, but didn't understand why he wanted us recording so quickly. He probed about some of my older writing and some old stuff I wanted us to do like Ten C.C.'s *I'm not in Love*.

We argued over music, Colin and I, with me getting quite animated as he drew me out, much to the astonishment of the other Purplehearts, who had rarely seen me in such an extended conversation.

We had lunch sent up and, as we waited, Colin followed me over to the tinted window that overlooked a small balcony, the Renaissance Center set out before us.

"I didn't mention," he said quietly, "how beautiful you look. I mean, I may be gay, but I can appreciate female beauty and you, my dear, have blossomed on this tour, have you not?"

I struggled with that, wanting to tell him right then, but he put his arm about me. I don't know why, but I felt my legs weaken and there was a funny feeling in my stomach. I found that I was breathing hard and my bra suddenly seemed too tight. I wasn't sure I liked being held by a man, not with the effect it had on me. I mean, I wouldn't have stopped Colin but I didn't know if I wanted to feel as girlish as he made me feel.

He courteously guided me back to the table to the lunch spread, much to the amusement of the others. When it was over, Donna stood up and indicated to the other girls that they should leave.

"We know you and Colin will get along much faster without us, Chrissy darling. Just don't cut me out altogether, will you?" she said with a definite pout. "We need to get ready at six and I have shopping to do. We'll be back by then."

Joanie left me with a particularly stiff smile. I wished I could have gone with her but Colin thought it was a good idea for me to be alone with him. He tried to put me at my ease by assuring me that I was safe with him, a declared homosexual. I knew he would have no interest in me as a woman, but what if he knew I was a drag queen, I thought with tremors going through me. What then?

Colin found out that it was my first time in Detroit and then he wouldn't hear of work until he had shown me the sights, old and new. He pulled me up onto my high-heeled feet, helped me on with my silk-lined coat, found my purse and gloves for me and took me out and about.

The cabbie well earned the hundred Colin gave him for our trip about the waterfront, past Motown Records, and some of Colin's old haunts among the jazz clubs. We toured the Renaissance Center and then walked, hand-in-hand, slowly back to my hotel.

We found an open, veranda-style cafe and he bought me a cappuccino. We watched young black girls, in suits and good clothes, scurrying off in taxis, as it was time to be go-

ing home. Men going by stared at me. I guess it was really too cold to be sitting out but I had wanted to and Colin went along with me, as the girls never did.

I took out my compact and checked myself in my mirror to see that I wasn't exposed in any way. When I saw my painted eyes and realized how womanly I looked, I put it away quickly, my long-nailed fingers trembling.

"You're on edge being out with me," said Colin as I took a sip of coffee to hide my confusion.

I nodded. I crossed my legs again, the skirt slipping open just where my coat was open too. I was chilled being in pantyhose, not pants like most of the women we saw.

"It-it isn't you," I tried to say, conscious of my tight chest, uncomfortable groin and tight earlobes. My mouth felt sticky and I knew my lips were trembling.

He reached over and took my hand. His was so different to mine. Mine had long, pointed nails and was slender and hairless.

"I won't let you get involved with me," he said seriously. "I will be a friend. Anything you ever tell me won't go farther. But I won't let you become a fag hag or a girl who tortures herself with unrequited love for someone gay. That's a promise. I'll walk if I think that's happening."

"It's, it's nothing like that," I said too quickly. I flushed. I had been thinking along some of those lines, about what the girls would say about him and me. "The girls..." I began, stopping and biting my lip, tasting not just coffee but my own lipstick.

"Ah," he said, sighing long and hard. "I'm beginning to see. They think that you and I could get together. You could cure me?"

I flushed. They would know better, wouldn't they? Then I thought of the way Joanie had moved, leaving me. My bra was too tight, my groin numb. My perfume was too much, too overpowering.

"They'll think I will encourage you to cut them out, take more solos, sing," he said soberly.

"Yes," I said, relieved that he was so far from the truth.

"Well, you *should* do more," he said crisply. "You are the talent in the group. Don't those stupes know it yet?"

"Colin!" I gasped, my ears burning.

"You're also the prettiest," he said, squeezing my hand. I felt so funny again, that feeling I called 'girlish' almost overwhelming me. "If only I wasn't gay," he concluded regretfully.

It was comic that he was so sorry. I managed a little smile at the irony of it all.

Then he talked about music and reminded me that we had several tracks already done. "We need more time in production next time," he said. "I thought of strings and horns, too, in that first ballad you showed me, that *Dream* thing. We have to start early if we want to get your second CD out before Christmas. With the way your first one is climbing, we

want to catch the gift-buying season when you have just passed the peak on that first with a really great second one. If you sang, I know it would be great!”

I shook my head, earrings and braid fluttering. I couldn't do that. I couldn't stand out front as Donna did and flirt with an audience. I crossed my legs again, fighting to hold my coat in place. A man going by whistled at me, at the amount of stockinged leg I was showing him. Colin laughed as I flushed. Everything that restricted me tightened even more.

VII. DONNA TAKES CHARGE

We finally got to New York. Cabaret told us to find places of our own while Colin made arrangements for studios and video shoots for our new CD. We also had gigs in clubs and arenas around and in New York. We even did one-nighters as far North as Boston, in Jersey, in Philly, and as far south as Baltimore.

Joanie found me an apartment, fixed the lease with the landlord, and helped me to move in and store all my dresses and lingerie. She organized drapes and furnishings, dealing with chic, snooty saleswomen in a manner that I never could have. As I put away my coat in my closet, I realized that I was going to be on my own, as a young woman. If I wanted, I could just walk away and not go to the studio in the car sent for me in the morning.

I was paralyzed by that knowledge when Joanie came to me, grinning, with a glass of wine.

“This is a lovely place,” Joanie said, leading me to lie back in the sofa like her, our heels kicked off, our stockinged toes wiggling on a soft, golden, velvet footstool.

“Thanks to you,” I said, twisting the glass in my hand, seeing how our legs were so much the same. “You did it all.”

It had been a tiring, enervating day, separating from Donna. It was Joanie who then come to my rescue.

“It's too expensive, of course,” Joanie said, “but it is secure, with the doorman.”

I had my own music publishing company, set up by Cabaret, and a banking account, all as Christine Harris. I had credit cards, as Christine, and now I had an apartment with not a pair of pants or a masculine garment in the place. When I thought about getting pants, I felt the same strange feeling I once had had about cross-dressing. I would look just awful as a member of the 'opposite sex'.

“So,” said Joanie at last as we sat, relaxed, sipping on our wine. “Tell me all about you and Donna. What happened? Don't you two hit it off any more? I thought she had a thing for Alan Markham.”

“When I *was* Alan,” I began bitterly, stopping as I realized in surprise what I had said. I shivered as I thought that I was Christine now in my mind. I saw the lipstick bow on my glass and looked at my long, slim legs, so pretty in sheer pantyhose stretched out before me.

“You aren't Alan any more?” asked Joanie, giving me a quick look, her hand picking up mine, touching my long, painted nails.

"You-you know what I mean," I said huskily, crossing my legs with a feminine rustle of my skirt and slip as I tried not to think disturbing thoughts about what I was. "Well, did you know that Donna and J.C. were sleeping together after Detroit?"

Joanie squeezed my hand. "Before that," she said quietly. "He was before Casey."

I shivered and held her hand tightly. I liked doing that. "I-I should have guessed. She- she said she wanted a man not, not, someone like, like me."

Joanie sighed. "You let her do this to you, you know," she said archly. "You sure she wasn't just jealous of Colin Wheeler and his paying attention to you, not her?"

I shivered again. "You don't know about Colin?" I asked tentatively.

"What about Colin?" she asked, setting down her empty glass and standing up.

I didn't know if I ought to say anything. But Brenda knew. "He-he doesn't like girls, if you know what I mean," I said as Joanie picked up her purse and began to check her look in the hall mirror.

She frowned, even prettier, I thought, with her hair so long and dark, when she was so serious. "He likes *you*," she pointed out.

I flushed. "The music," I said. "He-he thinks I'm a girl."

Joanie smiled and looked down at me. "Anyone would," she said. "Are you upset about Donna, though?"

I shook my head, feeling a soft, silky touch at my shoulders that sent shivers through me. I scrambled to my feet, smaller than Joanie in her high heels. "I really liked Donna," I said shakily, my voice unsteady. "But she went off with Brian Fields for a while. And now it's J.C.. "

"And before that, it was Steve Casey," said Joanie grimly, looking at me to see how I reacted to that.

I nodded shakily. "I-I am glad that it's over with Donna," I stammered as Joanie reached out to the front door with one hand. "She was sort of mean as we broke up. I-I guess I was so flattered in Peck when a girl like Donna came on to me. I loved the attention of a pretty girl." I knew I was blushing as I spoke. My nails dug into my palms as I tried to control the tremors that ran through my feminized body. Why did I always feel this need to explain myself to Joanie?

Joanie sighed as she opened the door to the well-lit hallway beyond. "I'll pick you up at nine tomorrow," she said, eyeing me critically. "Can you do your own hair and makeup?"

I nodded. It took me over an hour to outline my eyes, put mascara on my lashes and lipstick on my mouth. I didn't even want to try rouge, eye shadow, or false eyelids yet but no one had seemed to catch on yet.

"You-you could stay," I began tentatively, flushing as my dress swayed against my stockings, strange thrilling sensations running up my tightly bound, softly caressed figure.

Joanie gave me a hard look that made me flush even more and probably confirmed what I knew I was asking her in roundabout fashion. She abruptly stepped out into the hallway.

“Alan Markham I really liked,” she said, not looking at the blonde girl I now was. “But he went with Donna, not me. I feel sorry for you and the mess you're in now and I'm grateful for what you do for us. But I don't think I could, not even if you cut your hair and became Alan again.”

I stood rigid in the doorway, my stockinged feet caressed by the carpet as Joanie left me and hurried off down the hallway.

The apartment was cold and lonely with Joanie gone. I went into one of the furnished bedrooms, filled with all my clothes, so pretty, so feminine and so new. A long, white nightie, matching peignoir, and panties lay on the bed, white high-heeled, fluffy slippers on the floor.

I undressed slowly in the quiet room, only the swish of my dress, or the rasp of my stockings to be heard. I shuddered as the long nightie cascaded over my smooth, practically hairless body, all paddings and straps removed. I brushed my hair as Donna had shown me, unable to stop the pleasurable sensations as I did so. It was so feminine a gesture to see myself combing my long blonde hair before I plaited it for sleeping. I became hard just looking at myself.

I wished that Joanie had stayed. I longed for her to be here. I would have liked to do all of this with her, creaming off the little makeup I had worn, the bright lipstick. I put more perfume at my neck, ears, chest and wrists as Donna had liked but I thought of Joanie.

I felt very strange, feminine I guess, as I put on my slippers and the soft, silky peignoir, tying the ribbons while the bulge in my panties grew harder and heavier and I could scarcely breathe. No, I thought despairingly, as the long, soft skirts moved so pleurably and enticingly about my smooth legs as I went to brush my teeth.

I used a cold cloth on my face but my hot, flushed sensations would not end. I knew what I had to do to myself in order to let myself sleep but it was Donna of late who had helped me with that. I wished again that Joanie had stayed, even in the other bedroom so that we could be girlfriends together. I should never have listened to Donna. But then I wouldn't have got to know Joanie, Anna and Brenda at all.

I had to become Alan soon, I scolded myself. I must cut the lovely hair I was even then braiding into a thick plait down my back. I must give up wearing the pretty dresses I had become so used to. I must forego all the attention I now received that I had never had before. I must leave good friends like Joanie and Colin, give up luxuries like this apartment, and especially give up the courtesies as simple as having doors opened for me with smiles and compliments paid to me on my beauty by admiring males.

I shuddered and wrapped the peignoir tight about me, putting on the bedroom television to divert myself. But there wasn't an interesting movie on and Letterman was having a bad night. I'd seemed to have lost interest in sports during my travels.

The satin pillow and silken sheets seduced me as I thought of Joanie and sharing a bed with her as I had with Donna, our nighties sliding easily over each other, often waking up in a different nightie. I was far too restless to sleep but eventually the tightness between my legs became too insistent and I serviced myself, spoiling my panties.

I woke with the alarm ringing to start me off on another day of being a pretty girl, beginning with long preparation at my makeup table. We were going to a photographic session, Joanie had said, and since they would re-do us at the studio, I only put on light applications, even on my eyebrows and lashes.

It was Donna who was waiting for me with a taxi when the doorman called for me to come downstairs. I panicked a little when the intercom went off, forgetting where I was and that this expensive apartment was that way because of the security.

"Come on," Donna said crossly as I nervously smiled to the doorman, an older man who looked at me suspiciously as I left. The way he had scrutinized my seemingly bare legs beneath my red coat, my red heels and large, round, red earrings, a match for my lipstick, made me certain that he could read me for what I was.

"See you later, miss," he said as I went out and got into the cab.

We didn't take the same route as we had before. But I was easily lost in New York. "The last session went well," I said, trying to make light conversation with my ex-lover.

"Do you have to be such a pretty girl?" asked Donna suddenly. She was much more fashionably dressed than me. Her hair was freshly spiked and her earrings interestingly different, gold rings on one side and spiky towers on the other.

I was astounded at her words. I pulled my coat about my short, blue dress, with flounces at the hip. My red accessories seemed gaudy by contrast with Donna's earth-toned jacket and slacks.

"J.C. still wants to make it with you," said Donna bitterly. "I should have sent him over to you last night. He was making love to me but thinking of you. I could tell."

I tried not to move, not to let a trembling thought out. But I had an image of J.C. in bed with me and his rage when he discovered I was a man. I was thoroughly distressed at such thoughts.

"Why don't you tell him whatever it was you told Steve Casey?" asked Donna angrily.

I remembered Steve Casey holding me, trying to kiss me, arms about me, telling me how much he loved me, Christine. I had been so terrified of him as I tried to push him away. I recalled how he had looked when I had made it plain I preferred Colin to him. That awful, shocked look on his face. He had been so disgusted with me, an apparent woman choosing a gay man over a straight. Oh, if he only knew that I wasn't a straight woman!

We had driven far too far. "This isn't the way to Cabaret," I said as I read the sign with mileage to Albany and Buffalo. I'd never seen that before on any freeway we had driven on.

"The photographs were cancelled," said Donna, frowning at me as I suddenly took an interest in where we were going. "I told Joanie I'd tell you."

"Then where?" I began, sitting up, smoothing out my skirt, annoyed at Donna. I had spent over an hour taping my chest and getting my hips and waist cinch just right. I had spent much of the time trying on dresses and shoes and skirts until I had settled on the

figure-hugging dark blue silk. It set off my false breasts so well. I could have spent those hours, well, doing something else.

"Remember what I told you I thought we all ought to do before we go back on the road which, by the way, is a month away," said Donna. "Anyway, I'm going for it," she put her hands over her chest and pushed it up. "I think you should, too."

It took me a moment to recall what she meant. She chuckled at me as the penny suddenly dropped.

"No!" I gasped, my groin tense, bra tight, my pantyhose soft and caressing as I held my newly-shaven legs together.

It was a tense few minutes as the cab pulled off the highway and into a small town, with several parks or wooded areas. I was desperately searching for a sign of where we were when the car turned onto one tree-lined lane and we drove away from the road. 'The Chester Sanatorium' read the sign we passed on the way through a colonnaded entrance to a large, white building.

Donna held me firmly by the arm as we went in, our high heels clicking on the marble floor. We were shown into an office with the name Dr. Gregory Chester on the door.

He rose to meet us with a warm smile. I was shaking all over and it got worse as his first words to us were, "This is your transvestite friend then, Donna! My, but he does make a spectacular girl as you said!"

I'm sure I blanched. I know I shuddered in total dismay. I turned to run but the friendly, smiling, older woman just gave me a knowing smile as if she totally understood my panic.

"Oh, I'm sorry, my dear," Dr. Chester went on quickly. "I shouldn't refer to you as 'he' at all, should I? It must have been a long, long time since you've been called a man, mustn't it?"

He stood and held a chair for the slyly smiling Donna and then for a nearly hysterical, quaking me. He dismissed his nurse with a wave of his hand.

"Don't mind Miss Wagner," he said cheerily, sitting on the edge of his desk and studying me. I dropped my eyes and wished I was anywhere else in the world. I hated Donna then.

"Miss Wagner has assisted me in treating many transsexuals," Dr. Chester went on. "My goodness, but you do look very, very feminine, Miss, er, Miss... I'm sorry, what is your name?"

"Chr-Christine," I stuttered, my cheeks flaming.

"Alan Markham," put in Donna. "When he's dressed in girl's clothes, we call him Christine."

"Ah," said Dr. Chester, picking up a chart from his desk. He was tall and dark, his hair straight and thick. His moustache was thick and dark in a tanned, Slavic face. "But she cannot be dressed in male clothes often these days, can she?"

"No," agreed Donna, still looking at me spitefully. I wanted to get up and argue. I was not having anything done to me, no matter what Donna said or tried to make me do. I held

my chin up and tried to let Donna know by my determined look that I was not going to cooperate with her any more.

"Now, Donna," the doctor went on in a business-like manner, consulting more papers. "I've scheduled you for breast implants this morning. As for Christine, not knowing exactly what you'd need from me, I kept the whole afternoon totally free for you." He smiled at me while panic spread through me. "I have to examine you, of course, but, at the least, I don't see why you shouldn't walk out of here today with your very own breasts."

I went hot and squirmed in my seat, my groin tighter than I had ever felt it in my gaff before. "I'm not here..." I began.

"Your voice," Dr. Chester went on. "It's excellent but I can hear how much you are straining to keep it high, right? If you want me to, I can work on your vocal cords. Tighten them. That really helps in raising your voice level. I can shave your Adam's apple, as well. I see that yours is recessed now and invisible. It may show as you get older and thinner. I should do that as I attend to your vocal cords. Will you stand and take off your coat?"

I stood, my high heels feeling foreign to me, wobbling as I trembled, wanting to protest. My dress, though, betrayed me with its soft touches, making me tremble.

"What a lovely dress," said Dr. Chester, smiling encouragingly at me as he came forward, raised my chin and then flicked my long, blonde hair behind my ears, exposing my pierced ears and the large, red earrings I wore.

"You realize, of course," he said, looking straight into my troubled eyes, "that I don't do the male to female sex change operation itself. You'll need psychiatric testing and counselling before any hospital would allow that. But you should have no trouble meeting the criteria they set, Christine. You clearly can live as a woman now. You probably do!"

I seethed inwardly with fright and humiliation as he smiled at me, confident that I wanted his attentions when I knew that I really didn't. Then he wanted me to take off my dress, my slip, the waist cinch, my panties, pantyhose, and my bra while talking all the while to Donna and sometimes to me, praising my femininity and good looks.

"Yes," he said, easing the tape from my hairless chest and letting my aching chest muscles relax. "Breasts should be no problem. We make incisions here and here," I recoiled at the touch of his finger, flushing then as he cupped my chest muscle. "Not too large, but full, the incision hidden here at first before it disappears."

I lay on his long table, shivering with goose bumps all over as he asked me to roll over and then on to my side and examined my hips and thighs. I'm getting out of here, I thought desperately, as soon as I can. I'll just take off. I'll say...something, I'll do *anything*, I promised the heavens above. Just get me out of here.

"I think hormones, too," said Dr. Chester, turning to Donna. "We have to develop more primary and secondary female characteristics for a successful sex change. You use wax on her face? That's good but she should be started on electrolysis right away." He took his hand away from caressing the back of my thigh and I heard the squeak of his pen as he wrote something.

Was he ignoring my obvious distress, I wondered, wishing again to have this examination over? Or was he just insensitive? I would have to shout it out loud and I would. No one was going to make me more of a woman than I already was. I wanted less, not more, femininity. Then I thought of myself in my long nightie and peignoir and long hair at my shoulders and shuddered. Some things were all right about being a woman, I supposed, and I tried to drive that thought out of my head.

"That will cause a readjustment of fatty tissue," he went on, touching my hips, "so we will just lightly add to what you have." He smiled at me, rigidly holding myself as he caressed my upper thighs again. I squirmed. "You are so slim here that you will welcome an augmentation, surely. Then, there is your face."

He let me go, naked and shivering all over. I half turned and Donna leered at me before he turned to speak to her. "I should give her a nose bob, not too much, as I did for you and a little work on the cheek bones, shaving the bone here and there beneath the eyes. She won't look tremendously different, just much more feminine, rounded, and not blocky like a man."

"You're the doctor," said Donna with a shrug and a sly smile at me. She knew how I was being tortured in this examination. Why didn't she just tell him that I was not having anything done?

"We can start this afternoon," said Dr. Chester. "Recovery for Christine will take much longer, naturally. There is, of course, the payment of fees." He named an outrageous figure, which made me gasp.

"That's O.K.," Donna said, a gleam in her eye as she looked at me. "Charge it to me. Alan will pay me back later."

"Don't you want to think about it?" asked Dr. Chester, glancing at me over his shoulder, a thin, hairless boy obviously, my hair spread out like a golden halo about my pretty head.

"What has to be done, has to be done," said Donna, still smiling, but more warmly at him than me. "Should Alan get dressed now?"

I tried to get dressed but the doctor pushed my padding and inserts away from my hand. "You won't need those any more," he said to me with a smile, which set me shivering all over.

Miss Wagner came in then, looking over the mess I was. I was a boy from the neck down, struggling to get my panties and pantyhose back in place. I barely had my pantyhose back on when I was called to the doctor's desk.

"To be paid by your medical insurance for this examination," he said. "Sign here, here and here and here," not giving me any real chance to see what I was signing for.

Let's get out of here, my brain screamed. My hand shivered as I signed my boy name. Let them figure it out, I thought wildly, golden hair cascading over my shoulders.

"No lunch today," said Donna with a grin as I pulled on my bra and then my dark slip. Miss Wagner looked at me condescendingly.

"We-we are going to l-leave," I stammered, pulling on my dress, loose without my inserts to give me shape.

"Donna can come with me. We are ready for her," said Dr. Chester quickly. "Miss Wagner, perhaps you can show Christine into the waiting room. She can have a drink of water at least while we get Donna prepped."

"Of course, Doctor," said Miss Wagner, smiling at me as I wobbled in my high heels.

Dr. Chester took the papers with him as he and Donna left. She looked back at me and gave me a wicked grin. I felt so foolish, feeling only half dressed with no tight fastenings about me. Even the flowing skirt did not help to give me the feminine feeling I was used to and now wanted so much.

"You'll make a lovely girl," said Miss Wagner with an encouraging smile. "I saw that dress in Marta's in Manhattan. You do so much more for it than my niece ever would have. With a bust of your own, you'll fill it out."

I picked up my coat and purse with trembling fingers. I tried to block out what she thought of me, and the doctor, and Donna. I shook as I tried to walk in high heels to the telephone at the desk. I wouldn't wait for Donna. I *had* to get a taxi and get back to my apartment and sanity. I would pay any price.

As I reached the desk, though, the phone rang. Before I could pick it up, Nurse Wagner hustled by me and answered it. I waited anxiously, shuddering with shame as my mind replayed every suggestion the doctor and nurse had made to me.

"Yes, Dr. Chester," said Miss Wagner into the receiver. "Of course. Certainly. Yes, certainly, Doctor." She looked at me most thoughtfully.

"I need to make a call," I said, reaching for the phone.

She kept her hand on it. "This is just for inside calls," she said with what I was sure was a forced smile. "But if you come this way," she pointed to the inner door from which Donna and the doctor had exited, "there is a phone at the nurse's station."

What could I do but follow her? She insisted on taking my coat from me as we walked into a two-toned green painted passageway. Another nurse looked up, talking on a phone as we approached what looked like a nursing station. "Just sit here until Julie finishes," said Nurse Wagner brightly. Like a fool, I sat in the chair in the middle of the office.

I felt Donna approach on one side of me, barely feeling the prick of a needle in my other arm as she leaned down to my ear as if to whisper something. But all she did was leer at me. Then I felt the jab in my arm and jumped up.

I remember saying, "I want..." before my legs felt all rubbery and I was woozy all over. I meant that I wanted to get out of there.

"Wow! That acts fast," I heard Donna say as I felt her arms and someone else's helping me back into the chair.

It must have been Julie who said, "What are you doing to her?"

"Terrified of needles," I heard Donna say, as all I saw was whirling lights. "She'd run unless you took her by surprise." Her voice faded as I struggled, trying to protest it was untrue, against the swirling darkness that overwhelmed me.

I woke and couldn't move. The dryness in my mouth and throat was painful as I tried to swallow. There was something across my face and over my eyes. Panic rose in me and I croaked, a dry rattle from my throat, my hands jerking against restraints.

A cool swab was pressed against my feverish lips and I sucked on it desperately.

"Drink," I gasped, my throat still on fire. There was something like a bandage about my throat.

"Not yet, dear," said a distant female voice. Again the cool swab was pressed on my lips and I sucked on it fiercely, trying to get moisture for my throat. "It will take time to recover from the anaesthetic."

Suddenly, I knew where I was. The sanatorium! Fright engulfed me. I thrashed about in the bed while the woman beside me tried to keep me still. I could sense that I was in a nightie and probably panties. There was something on my chest but I couldn't move my hands to find out what.

"Now, now," said the cool voice that I thought must be Julie or Wagner. "You mustn't spoil Dr. Chester's work. The restraints will be off shortly. You just lie and sleep. You'll be delighted tomorrow when you see what's been done!"

The voice tried to be soothing and reassuring but I felt just the opposite. She gave me more cool cloths to sip on, then she left me. I heard her steps moving away and I was left alone with nightmarish thoughts of what Donna had had done to me. I screamed silently as my imagination ran riot. I imagined a grinning Donna, knife in hand, slashing at me. I screamed, a loud rasp coming from my throat. I fought against the restraints but I couldn't get a hand free.

I 'saw' the doctor looming over me, his hand between my thighs, as he had examined me before. He was pulling something out of me, longer, longer, like a sausage. He seemed surprised, delighted. "What have we here?" he was saying, smiling at me, pulling it out, further and further, reaching for his surgical scissors...

I sensed the door open by the change in air pressure and then I heard steps coming toward me again. I screamed for water as my smooth legs pressed together and I seemed to feel what I should between my legs, even as I was sure I felt my panties, too. But there was numbness in my thighs, hips, and buttocks. There was a prick in my arm and the cool swab as I tried to protest. I saw the nightmare of Dr. Chester again and I felt nothing between my legs, nothing.

"Five days," said Nurse Wagner, as I jolted to reality, realizing I must have been talking to her for a while. The bed was tilted to let me sit up. She was fluffing pillows behind my head. "We had to sedate you after the fit you threw. We wouldn't have wanted you hurting yourself, would we? And everything's going fine. The doctor is very pleased with that."

She reached over and arranged the pink, puffed shoulders of my nightie carefully. I could feel that my face was still covered by bandages, but there were slits through which I could see. Nurse Wagner then lifted a straw to my lips and I was able to drink cold, wonderful, beautiful, liquid orange.

“Not too much at one time,” said Nurse Wagner, taking it away as I savored the cold in my throat.

I tried to focus my eyes on her and felt then the soreness all over my body but especially my face. My senses wavering, I expected my hand to be restrained but it wasn't. I lifted up my hand. Someone had painted my nails a glossy, silvery-pink.

“Try not to touch the bandages,” said Nurse Wagner sympathetically. “They'll be off soon. You'll be very bruised at first, you know, and very swollen. That's the way it is after plastic surgery. It all fades, though, and you'll see yourself getting more and more beautiful. You wait and see.”

My trembling hand touched the bandage at my throat, my arm brushing a mound on my chest. Why was I wearing my falsies in bed, I thought in confusion. It didn't feel as if I had my bra on.

“It would be better, too, not to touch the dressings on your breasts,” Wagner went on cheerfully as I nearly shot out of the bed at her words. “The incisions need to heal and Dr. Chester did some work on the aureoles to make them, you know, appear more female.”

She held my hands and smiled down at me, as I shuddered with shock at her words. “I know you will want to touch. Just be very gentle,” she said. “Your throat will, of course, only get better if you don't talk for a while. Nurse Brown or I will be in whenever you need a treatment. You need to just lie there and grow more and more beautiful by the day.”

When she let me go and left, I fearfully leaned forward to see my chest. The frilly edge of the silk nightie obscured my sight. I had to pluck the hem forward to see that I did indeed have women's breasts. With trembling fingers, I explored the mounds on my chest. They weren't hard. They were soft and yielding to my touch.

Strange emotions swirled through me. How could Donna have had this done to me, I wept inside. Did she hate me that much? She had tricked me every moment I had known her, using me to her own advantage. As soon as I could talk, I would have this reversed. That cheered me slightly and the chills going through me slowed a little.

There were dressings on my nipples which itched greatly as my nervous fingers touched the soft, spongy mounds about them. They weren't that large, the mounds, I thought with some relief. I wouldn't have to wear a padded bra any more, for a while at least, not until I had them removed. In fact, I thought shakily, I couldn't wear anything masculine, either, with the real bust I now had.

My only real relief was that, in a check of my panties, I confirmed that I still had my manhood. But my hips and thighs seemed fuller, the panties fitting me much better. My upper legs were rounder, more womanly, and I guessed what the doctor had done there. My humiliation was beginning to turn to anger. How could they have done this to me when I didn't want it?

I lay back in the pillows, my soft hair, braided and ribboned, pushed over my shoulder. I was shivering as thoughts of what I was going to look like went through me. I wasn't a whole man any more, was what went through me, and I fought with that. I was a man, I silently screamed, and when I got rid of Donna, the source of all my troubles, I would be

back here. I would never give her the pleasure again of playing guitar for her or writing songs for her to sing. I would get back to being me, Alan.

I must have dozed off, I looked up to see Donna sitting beside my bed, reading a magazine, looking very sexy in a low-cut, revealing, black dress. She seemed different. When she looked up and saw me looking at her, she stood and came to the bed and I noticed how firm and noticeable were her high, rounded breasts.

"Like them?" she asked, raising her arms slightly and pirouetting to show off her enhanced, female body. "Yours are just like these. Dr. Chester did good work on both of us! Aren't the girls going to be jealous when they see us again!"

I tried to speak. I was quivering inside, thinking of the hurt I would see in Joanie's eyes, the contempt in Brenda's. I didn't think I could live with that. I shuddered and tried to challenge Donna but only a dry rasp came out.

"Yes, it is tough for you, isn't it?" pouted Donna in fake sympathy. "It's going to be a couple of months before we can hit the road again. Two whole months before we can see the woman you were always meant to be. Right?" She laughed at me while I squirmed and fumed with indignation.

"Brian was pulling his hair out when I told him to cancel our gigs for the next two months at least," she went on cynically. "Guess what? Our CD was the second best seller in the whole company last week and he wanted us to be out there promoting it. You should see the write-ups we got in the New York dailies last weekend. You should be walking on water after what they wrote about you."

I tried to talk, to tell her that I wasn't ever going to play with her again but she motioned to me not to talk and in helped me to drink the cool orange drink.

"I have told the others," she leered at me. "And guess what? They're all glad you're doing it. Joanie sends her love. Isn't that what you wanted to hear?" I couldn't keep the shudders that went through me quiet and she laughed as she noted them and knew where they came from. But surely, Joanie couldn't



have been so offhand. Surely, she couldn't have been.

“Colin Wheeler has been trying to find you,” Donna smirked. “He wants us to finish up our second CD, or as he calls it, *In Harm's Way*, if you are going to be out a while. I didn't know that you and he did those extra tracks at the beginning for another CD. With the new stuff you've written, when we do get back on the road, I'll be singing all about changes you didn't want to make, remember?”

She laughed at me again. “J.C. wants me to do more ballads, too. You can start writing more of them if you like while you've nothing else to do. And don't think of running out on us. I mean, with your new boobies and girly figure—and you signed your permission to have them done, you idiot—the tabloids will have a field day with you. And we'll be so shocked and amazed that our lovely lead guitarist could fool us so!”

I lay there helpless, angry as never before, ashamed of myself and humiliated beyond belief at her words. I tried but couldn't talk. She left me in misery which didn't clear up in the days ahead.

I was visited by the nurses, pricked, given pills to swallow, and even had a girl come regularly to give me electrolysis even though I rarely had more than soft fuzz on my face.

When I first got up after being so long in bed, I could barely walk. I was very, very wobbly in my high-heeled fluffy slippers. I was also embarrassed by the excruciating wobble I felt in my chest. My nightie bobbed about my smooth legs but I was used to the enjoyable feel of silk on my legs. I wasn't ready for wooziness and the soft touch of silk on my sensitive, unbandaged nipples. They felt so erect on my chest as my nightie rubbed over them. I even felt hard in my groin then.

In the bathroom mirror, however, I was able to see myself for the first time since my operations. My face was swollen and bruised as if I had been beaten up. It looked like a maniac had attacked me. My hair was tightly braided and I pushed it behind me as I took off my nightdress. The body was not mine.

It was a female body, the bikini briefs obscuring the genitalia. The breasts were smallish, but definitely breasts, rounded and firm, the nipples large and erect, slightly surrounded by yellowish bruising. My waist and hips seemed changed, too. My waist was nipped in, very small, and I could see my ribs. I wasn't eating much and it showed.

But as I thought that, I could see that my hips went out, accentuating my waist. My bare legs were thin but they were more rounded at the top and flowed into a curved buttock that filled my panties. I gulped as I touched the smooth, rounded surface, trying to recall what Dr. Chester had said about 'improving' me in that area. I felt sick as I remembered what Donna had said weeks ago about a T and A job. I knew I had had that and more.

I was almost crying at the changes that had happened to my body when Wagner came in to check on me since it was my first trip to the bathroom. “So pretty and natural, aren't they?” she enthused while I covered my chest in panic and reached for my nightie, my braid swinging across my back. There was a young girl in the mirror echoing my every move. My mind fluttered with anguish as I tried not to think that 'she' was me.

"You're so thin, Christine," the smiling nurse went on, "that they make you into a lovely girl right away, don't they? Shall I wash your hair now? Dr. Chester will be in this afternoon to see you and you want to look your best for him, don't you?"

I couldn't object with my throat still so sore when I tried to say something. It wasn't unpleasant. It was just unnerving to have a woman helping to bathe my face and my stitches, helping me to wash and reset my hair, all the while keeping up a female way of speaking. She called me 'Christine' throughout and told me about other beautiful girls, just like me, who had passed through the clinic.

"We see them all the time in fashion magazines," she giggled as she lowered her voice confidentially. That didn't ease my anxiety of being discovered. Now more people would know about me. Know what I looked like.

"I saw a girl who wasn't as pretty as you," she went on blithely, ignoring my nervous shaking and distress at the topic that seemed to enthrall her. "She was very male in the back and shoulders and what an Adam's apple the doctor had to work on! I saw her in one of those men's magazines. She was on the cover and so I bought it. Even nude, you couldn't tell she had had the operation. They do it so well these days.

"There was another one, quiet like you, I saw in the paper just the other day. Married a stockbroker last week. I'm sure he didn't know. She wouldn't have had to tell him. You wouldn't either. Do you? Do you tell men you are a boy? Dr. Chester says we don't do the operation and it's true we don't do it here, because of state laws. We go across the state line to get it done in his other clinic but we bring you back here to recuperate. You shouldn't wait too long. We've done so many over the years. One of the girls we made stayed on as a nurse here. She's helping another new girl recover right now. She really understands what you are going through."

I was screaming inside for her to stop, my nerves completely shot as she went on and on. I crossed my smooth legs, trying to hide the bulge I felt must be growing and evident in my brief panties. But Wagner seemed not to notice and seemed to think I wanted to hear about other men, other transsexuals, other she-males, as she chucklingly called some of them. She insisted on me wearing a new, long, purple nightie with a deep V-neck and white, frilly straps over my shoulders. Fresh panties, as high-cut as the others and a peignoir trimmed in white lace completed the set.

I was trembling in a confused state of enjoyment of my nightie on my smooth body and legs and hatred of what had been done to me. There was no doubt now, though, that the nightie hung a lot better on me; when I tightened the soft silk belt, I had curves. I really looked like a woman as well as felt like one.

My hair was blow-dried and combed out, and left loose about my neck, my bangs thick. Nurse Wagner then brought me new earrings, like chess pieces. "This is a gift from the clinic," she said, taking the studs from my ears and replacing them with the pendants. "They should look really good with long hair like yours."

The gold was cold and heavy on my neck and made me shudder each time I moved my head. I couldn't wear makeup but I was treated again by the electrologist and liberally doused with Opium perfume, not really what I liked.

Dr. Chester was all smiles and approval as he examined me. He eased my nightie down. I lay stiff as a board as he palpated my breast as if he was examining a young woman, so gentle and considerate, while I wallowed in self-pity and humiliation at what I was subjected to. He touched, pulsed and checked out my sensations very carefully as I was scarcely able to bear it. I don't know why but I breathed so much harder and my groin got so hard as he examined me even though I just lay there and said nothing as he gently stroked my breasts and studied me for my reactions.

I had to roll over then and let him examine my hips and thighs. "Beautiful," he exulted as he stroked them. He had said the same as he cupped my breasts. I shuddered as he told me to sit up.

He nodded. "You won't have any scar tissue in a year, probably much less than that," he said. He touched my arm unexpectedly and I jumped visibly, pulling my arm in and touching my new breast. He looked at me in surprise as I was openly shaking.

He examined my face and neck quietly, my new earrings jumping all over the place as he made me move my head. My nose felt twice its size and I still felt only a rasp from my throat.

"You're doing just fine," he said as he had me re-bandaged all over my face. "You're right not to try to talk. Everything looks just beautiful, inside and out. You will be a sensationally beautiful girl, you know. Men are going to flock around a blonde like you. I do suggest the other operation pretty quickly for you and then you can really enjoy all of this without a worry." He patted my arm. "I make sure all my new girls have real feelings after the other operation. You know, real enjoyment." I was in agony and aghast as he described how he turned a man into a woman and kept every nerve ending intact so that the new 'she' experienced everything a woman could, even a sort of orgasm.

I was writhing in humiliation and shame after he left. Men will flock to you. He had said it several times, trying to be persuasive about the operation I "should have." Never, I cried miserably to myself. Never. I felt so lonely and so afraid. I didn't want to be a woman. I was Alan Markham, lead guitarist, songwriter. I had never felt so desolate as my arms rested under and pushed up my quivering breasts, so much a reminder of what people would see me as.

People would see me as Christine Harris, and my figure would not betray me. I had to get up and look at myself. I was a man trapped in a woman's body.

*****End of Part One*****