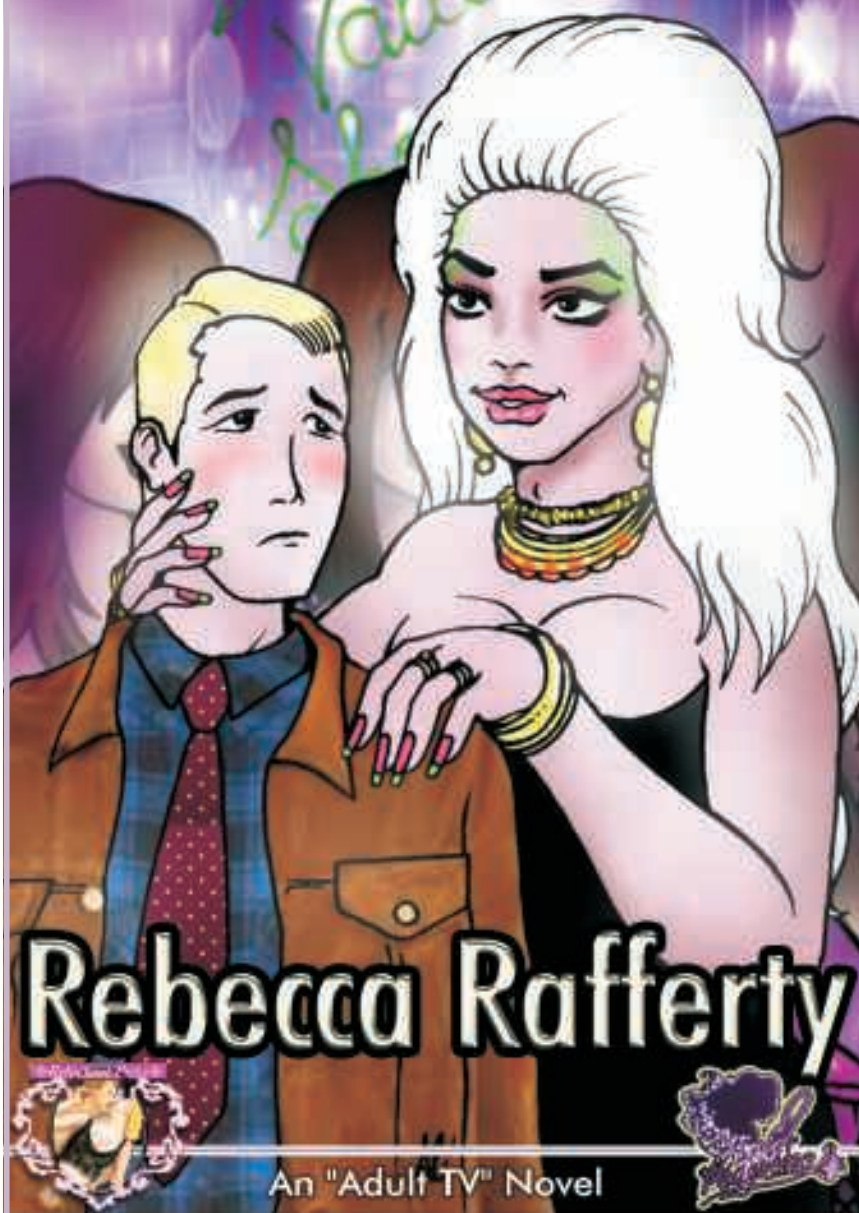


# Until Something Better Comes Along



## Rebecca Rafferty



An "Adult TV" Novel



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# UNTIL SOMETHING BETTER COMES ALONG

by **Rebecca Rafferty**

Sometimes, when I'm lying in a boyfriend's arms, I wonder if it started out for all drag queens the way that it did for my brother and me. Were they all mostly out-of-work actors like me and Bobbi—or Roberta, as he also called himself now? It was, after all, purely by accident that we ended up as the 'girls' that we now are—wasn't it?

## **I. THE ONLY SUCKERS LEFT IN TOWN**

“Okay, brains.” The sarcasm was heavy in ‘Bobby Clark’s’ voice. “So what do we do now? Like, for eating, let’s say.”

I couldn't blame my brother, the only other occupant of the empty, yet still cramped, theater dressing room. I didn't give him one of my usual ebullient replies. All I could do was stare at the pale face of my younger, darker-haired brother.

Each of us had chosen a stage name. I was Douglas Reynolds, though most people called me Duggie. Our family name was Kusniowski, which isn't an easy one to anglicize. It wasn't anything like Antonio Benedetto, so easily made into Tony Bennett. Having first names like Zenon, mine, and Zbigniew, his, didn't suggest anything other than Zen and Ziggy—which neither of us wanted.

So, we looked up names in the phone book and took first names from one guy and English names from others. We had the same agent, of course, but we never booked ourselves out as a duo. Even so, we were repeatedly employed to play the part of brothers, or, at least to be in the same dramatic projects.

We made several movies with us as the Morgan brothers. *Running Through the Line*, a kids' sports movie about football, is still pretty popular—our biggest 'hit', so to speak—with 'Doug Reynolds' often being listed as one of the 'stars' of that movie. In a lot of movies made after that, we were employed as fourth or fifth kid in crowd scenes, where a 'classroom' or a 'gang' of kids was needed. I think I'd worked in fifteen movies or more, and Zbigniew—sorry, 'Bobby Clark'—had worked in a dozen, until we just got too old. No one wanted teenaged boy actors who were, let's face it, a little undersized and skinny.

Still, acting was in our blood, or so we thought, Bobby and me. Dad boozed away any money we

might have earned as child actors, but booking agents knew us; we were in fairly constant employment as actors. We could still play ‘juvenile’ parts, on stage. So we did, sometimes not even together, in the same plays or even the same towns. Yes, with a little stage makeup, we could be thirteen, sixteen, eighteen, and not our real ages of twenty-two and twenty-one.

We’d toured three different ‘comedies’ together, over the last year, however—doing multiple parts, honing our craft, as Dad used to say before he died. The last play, *Madame and Her Family*, in which we’d been part of the gang of boy criminals (think of *Oliver Twist* and a female Fagan), had just folded. We were left broke, penniless, and on the road in Middle America.

“I must have a twenty somewhere,” I said slowly as Bobby watched me search through the tight pockets of my Little Boy jeans.

Bobby snorted. Standing, he was just as tall as me. I could see that he was thinking he should never have listened to me. We should never have tried to work together. We hadn’t been doing badly, when we were apart, for juvenile roles in other plays, with other companies. But, now that the last of our television commercials having stopped airing a year ago, we had to face up to it. We weren’t actually being sought after for that kind of work any more.

The last thing I’d done was an ad for an acne treatment. Bobby had done one for a rival company. Our smooth, unlined faces, along with our fine features, were miraculously ‘cleared’ when the treatments were applied. But our ads were dropped when acne

products had suddenly come into vogue, with famous screen actresses doing ads all over the place. As Bobby said, we boy actors got squeezed out of working with zits.

Bobby was the first to get work in a touring company. After a month or two, I joined him. It wasn't great pay, but we each had a fund of stories about when we were in the movies. That helped to keep us employed. Broadway or California? It seemed like every job in either of those places was being given out to actors from universities and Acting 'Studios'. Well, we didn't have the money for that. We were working actors, I used to say to Bobby. We could do anything, from a little crooning, a little soft-shoe or hoofing, to the straight guy or the bad kid—so there'd always be parts for us in some touring company.

I knew, in reality, I was whistling past the graveyard. Both Bobby and I were stuck in the same rut, competing for the same crumbs.

For a while, the Gillingham Players had seemed all right. An old, respected, long-established theater company, it was like what English actors told us about when they talked of 'Repertory Theater'. Besides, the Players had been home to many actors and actresses who had 'made it' in theater and movies. We even got our own credits in some of the programs—separate credits, of course.

Bobby was mad with me—but how could I have known that the Gillingham Players was a company on its last legs, so badly in debt that it was bound to totter and die (as in fact it did) once it had crossed the Mississippi?

I tossed the bankruptcy notice back on the long dressing table. “Perhaps I can borrow from ...” I said as I went next door to the girls’ room. It was as empty and lifeless as the theater had been the night before, at our last performance.

“I already checked,” said Bobby bitterly. “They must have known last night. We’re the only suckers still around. And we’re stuck here!”

I shivered. It was suddenly very spooky to be alone in a darkened, deserted theater. “Let’s get out of here,” I said. “I’ll think better over a beer.”

The twenty was cracked over a second round at the local tavern we’d adopted within an hour of arriving at the Majestic Theater.

“You know,” said Bobby, as morose as me, “before we leave this godforsaken place, we ought, on one night at least, to sample the nightlife.”

“Nightlife?” I asked, both amused and astounded.

“Yeah,” said Bobby with a grin. “Didn’t you see the taverns along Railway Street? They all have cabarets. They’re not just watering holes like this one. We should take a walk down there once and see what’s more interesting than *Madame and Her Family*, starring, straight from Hollywood, Bobby Clark.”

“And also starring the incredible acting talents of Douglas Reynolds,” I laughed back at my brother.

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The nasal twang of the country singers drove us from the first 'cabaret' at the Union Bar. "Still, it was so crowded," said Bobby, looking back forlornly as I led him away. "I like steel guitars, too."

It was the same for three blocks. We might have missed the Star Club if Bobby hadn't been getting a little miffed about all my disparaging remarks about the town, about its 'nightlife' and about country music.

The lone star flashed at the base of what looked like an old warehouse. Curious, Bobby stopped and began reading aloud a torn poster on the wall, beside the steps that led down to the Star Club.

"The Donna Vallee Show," read Bobby, grabbing my arm and leading me down the steps. There were more posters around the corner. The lower part of a blonde woman, in a black evening dress, was missing from the faded poster. She seemed to be old, thirty-five or forty at least. Written in bold type beside the photo were the words, 'Song, Dance and ...'

"Now this is a challenge," said Bobby with a laugh. "No sound of steel guitars, and we have to find out what the 'and' is!"

The attendant at the door frowned at my jeans and at both of our open-necked shirts. "You need a tie to go into the Star Club," he stated to both of us, blocking off the quiet, dark interior from our view. Just the faint tones of a mellow piano, lightly played, reached our ears.

“It will cost you five each to buy one,” said the attendant, pointing to the rack on the counter of the check room, a slight, contemptuous smile on his face. He obviously took us for country rednecks or rubes.

I pulled a face and would have left. Ten bucks from our dwindling supply of bills? But Bobby was smiling at me.

“Aw, go ahead,” Bobby said, reaching for a black woollen tie, meant for a funeral. “Pay the man and come give your ears a rest.” Bobby pushed past the burly attendant as he knotted the tie.

The bills disappeared in the big guy’s pocket. None of the ties really suited my blue check shirt and corduroy jacket. In the end, I just took the last one on the rack and so went in with a maroon tie, festooned with hideous, yellow circles that even made the attendant grimace.

“See, I have a tie!” I pointed out to him, following Bobby into the darkened club.

## **II. THE STAR CLUB**

Oh yeah, I didn’t mention that ‘Roberta Andrews’ had substituted for a very sick actress as Anne in ‘Green Gables; the musical’, did I? And ‘she’ was a smash hit! Laura Wilson recovered in a day to play her part again while the other girls took the week in bed. To my mind, ‘Roberta’ not only sang in Anne’s soprano better, but she imitated Laura’s frivolous girlishness very well. I loved looking at the pictures of ‘her’, my brother, in ‘her’ red-haired wig. I couldn’t tease ‘her’ about her lovely voice not having broken,

but I did tell her many times how lovely ‘she’ looked, until she punched me the day before we switched to ‘The Honor of the South’, and two-thirds of the girls with us left the show.

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Bobby had gone to the end of the bar and was seated on the last bar stool. Two beers were opened and set up in front of him by the bartender. I had to grimace at the price quoted for the drinks. I also had to pay, as Bobby had long emptied his pockets of ‘change’. It was going to be a short visit to the Star Club at the prices being inflicted on us.

Bob smiled as the piano player, a slim blonde girl, suddenly turned up the volume in her playing and changed to an introductory fanfare. “Ladies and gentlemen,” she said in a gravelly sort of voice into the microphone attached to her piano. “Cabaret time at the Star Club presents to you, from Chicago and New Orleans, The Donna Vallee Show!”

That’s when I heard ‘Vallee’ pronounced as ‘Vallay’ for the first time. There was a smattering of applause from the audience, at whom we got a better look as our eyes adjusted to the gloom. Surprisingly, all of the tables seemed to be occupied by couples, the men usually having arms around their girlfriends, wives, or whatever.

A spotlight came on, shining on dark green curtains at the back of a little stage. A blonde woman stepped through an opening in the curtains as the pianist gave her an imitation of a drum roll. The platinum blonde hair fell to the woman’s white shoulders,

as she shifted from her female posing and revealed her black, strapless evening gown.

It was the woman from the poster. Her makeup was very heavy and she might have been any age, but I immediately placed her in her forties or fifties. She took up a microphone from its stand and moved easily about the stage, giving a gentle rendition of *I Left My Heart in San Francisco*, doing a credible imitation of Tony Bennett in the second chorus. It was very impressive, actually – for a woman.

The applause that broke out when she'd finished was out of all proportion to her ability. Bobby raised an eyebrow to me in surprise. Either of us could do, and had done, that song with greater verve than Donna Vallee.

“Thank you very much,” Donna said simply when she'd finished. The piano picked up with a chorus of *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* and the crowd applauded even before the Judy Garland impression, which was quite well done. That led to a pitiful Barbra Streisand and an acceptable Carol Channing. Well, that one was easy as both Bobby and I could do that voice easily. We often did her, Carol Channing's raspy sort of voice, in jokes that we told, when it needed a sexy woman's voice to make the punch line work.

Again, the applause belied the talent and effort taken up by the song and impressions. “The ‘and’ must have been ‘and impressions,’” I said lightly, turning my back to the stage for a drink.

Suddenly, I felt Bobby grip my arm tightly. I almost spilled the bottle of beer that had cost us an arm and a leg.

“Not impressions,” Bobby hissed at me. “Impersonations, Zenon my boy, female impersonations.”

I whirled around, astounded at what my bother had said, and looked for the blonde on the stage. She had moved down to the audience and was exchanging sexy repartee with several men and women at the tables closest to the stage. She sat on a big man’s knee, put his arm about her waist, and kissed the top of his bald head, leaving a scarlet imprint there, which seemed to please the guy, while everyone else in the audience was reduced to hysterical laughter.

It was there in the lilt of the voice. It could have been—it *was*—a gay man talking.

“That’s a man,” breathed my brother.

“I think so,” I said to him with a frown. “That poster didn’t tell the whole truth!”

“It was torn!” protested Bobby.

I watched in a sort of admiration as the actress—I guessed I could call Donna Vallee that—vamped and had fun with ‘her’ audience. Knowing that she was a man put quite a different aspect on her double-meaning jokes, with both men and women. I should say, rather, with men and those dressed in female clothing—because when she spoke to several women and got them to answer, male voices came through the mike, even though the same highly made-up and prettily dressed women were hugged by



their male companions as they responded to Donna Vallee's patter.

Donna released herself from a big, red-faced trucker, and started in on *Cabaret*, a natural if not close version to that of Liza Minelli. I could appreciate more the impersonation as I saw the Adam's apple bobble in her throat. Completing that song, she skipped through the audience to the bar beside me, the spotlight tracking her, to where the bartender had a glass of water ready for her.

Bobby and I could then see how heavily made up Donna Vallee was. She wore a lot of pancake, even on her shoulders and neck—but, because of her feminine gestures, she wasn't clearly male and ridiculous. By the way her skin looked, and the filled-in wrinkles at her eyes, I thought now that she must be fifty for certain, maybe even sixty.

I thought she would pass us by, but my hideous tie attracted Donna's look of horror. She stopped, leaned towards me, and vamped me over her bare shoulder.

"Hi, big boy," she said, rolling her eyes in her good Mae West impression. "You gonna come up and see me sometime?"

There were snickers all about us. I had to smile. I'd been brought up on vaudeville, burlesque, and this kind of visit into the audience. The aim, some old hooper had said to me, was to intimidate the person approached so that the rehearsed, professional response would sound so classy. Or sassy. Yes, I think he'd said 'sassy' to me.

“Well, Donna, Donna, Donna,” I responded in my best Cary Grant voice. “You have to do the asking, ba-bee!”

There was surprise on Donna’s face as the audience bellowed with laughter. There was a gleam in the black pupils of the heavily painted, feminine eyes, the thick, false eyelashes batting at me. “I’m doing the asking,” Donna responded as Mae West.

“Then I’m doing the coming,” I responded instantly as Cary Grant.

With the crowd now howling and beginning to clap, Donna grabbed my hand and waved to the pianist who began a slow sexy *Ain’t Misbehavin’* which I took over from her and did as Fats Waller. Donna smiled at her audience and leaned against me, soft hair in my face, as well as a stiff jolt of *Joy* perfume.

“Have we ever got a live one here!” hollered Donna, her voice now quite male as the audience gave me a huge round of applause along with a few whistles. “Give the man a drink on my tab, Charley!” she called to the bartender who was grinning at me as I stepped back. Donna went on to visit new parts of the audience, asking different guys if they were Cary Grant or Clark Gable, her voice spot on, though she finished with George Raft, easy enough for the mark in the audience to do. Nice improv, I thought to myself.

“What a ham!” said Bobby in disgust as the spotlight left us, following Donna.

Me, I wasn’t so disgusted. It had felt so good to get applause from real people, even if they were all men. I thought that they must be. I was certain that Bobby and I had walked into a gay nightclub.

“Just let her turn the spotlight back on you.” I grinned at Bobby. I knew my teeth were perfect. It was one of the perks from the toothpaste ads we had done years ago. Both Bob and I had had all our teeth capped.

“What’ll it be?” asked the bartender, a grin on his face as he expectantly took down a bottle of Glenfidditch Scotch whiskey.

“Two beers?” I asked him, nodding at my brother.

The bartender hesitated for a moment. “Sure,” he said, capping the Scotch. “Say,” he said as a new impersonator, Terry Marvel, sashayed out in front of the curtains in a harem girl’s sequinned outfit. She did an acrobatic, exotic dance to the sole accompaniment of the slender, pretty, female piano player.

“Say,” repeated the bartender, tearing his eyes away from the shapely, exotic dancer who definitely seemed to have breasts despite being announced as a female impersonator. “That was a pretty good act you did with Donna. You act a bit in your spare time?”

“Act a bit?” I asked him as I put my hand over my heart and turned in mock agony to my brother, who raised his eyebrows and mouthed ‘Pork’ at me. He turned away to watch Terry’s feminine legs flip slowly into the air. He watched her just as avidly as Charley, the bartender, did.

“We’re just a couple of out-of-work thespians,” I said to the bartender. “We closed the Majestic with our performances yesterday.”

I think some of the audience, those near to us, was becoming a little annoyed at the conversation I was

having with Charley. Bobby looked like it was a real pleasure to kick me in the shins to get me to shut up. I didn't want to tell him what such a gesture and the smile he made to me might be signalling to the audience, and to Charley, in a gay place like the Star Club.

Terry Marvel gave way to a pair of dancers, Cindy and Pearl, who caused both of us to exchange puzzled looks. Nothing was said other than their names, girls' names. Yet, the others had been female impersonators and introduced as such. Cindy and Pearl, both with soft, long, blonde hair, fishnet stockings and brief, sequined costumes, clearly had real breasts and soft, girlish skin.

"If they're not girls," said Bob, leaning over to whisper to me.

"Then they soon will be," I said with a little shudder. The dancing duo had raised a few goosebumps in me. If Bob and I could take them home, I knew that I wouldn't kick them out of bed. No way, Jose.

I watched the girls in fascination as they pirouetted with matching pouts on their shiny, pink lips as they eyed the audience over their shoulders. They gave a feminine flick of silky hair about their head-dresses, actions that any Las Vegas showgirl would have been proud of.

Donna Vallee returned with the help of the dancers to do a few small skits before she closed the 'first part' of the show with a few straight songs in what sounded like a genuine, if undistinguished, woman's voice.

“We’d better go,” I said to Bobby as my brother ordered and downed another beer. Bobby didn’t seem to realize how much money we’d spent on the expensive booze in this gay bar. I had only one bill left in my pocket. I did hope for breakfast before we went looking for a day job the next morning. We’d done that before, as unemployed actors sometimes had to do, in several cities.

Bob nodded, now becoming as morose as I’d been. But even as we stood, Charley, the bartender, came hustling up to us with more beers. “Hey, guys!” he called to us. “From Donna. Wants to talk to ya, too, if you’ll wait!”

Bobby gave me a look of distaste. He made no move to reach for the glass into which Charley had poured a little fresh beer before scurrying off to open and pour more for the waitresses who, I’d realized, sounded like waiters, despite their makeup, female figures and short skirts.

“Come on,” said Bobby. “Let’s get out of here!”

“Hey!” I said with a mock scowl. After all, it was free beer. “You were the one who wanted to come in here. I could use free beer as well, couldn’t you? After all, we have to do some real work tomorrow.”

I picked up the bottle Charley had left and poured a little more into my glass. I sat back down and began to drink.

“Zenon!” hissed Bobby Clark, using the name he’d promised never to call me in public. He always came back to it in times of stress. It surprised me that he’d feel stress in a gay bar and nightclub. “Come on,”

Bobby insisted. “We’re professional actors. We can’t afford to be seen mixing with drag queens!”

I looked at Bobby in surprise. I mean, half the cast we’d just worked with was gay, as were many older actors in particular. Some of those our age still seemed to be making up their minds what they were or what they’d reveal about themselves. We’d both been propositioned endless times by gay boys and men. We’d tell them they’d made a mistake. The older guys would just smile then, say things like ‘Pity’ or ‘Too bad,’ and move on.

I was surprised by how flushed and uncomfortable Bobby was. “I didn’t know you were that prejudiced,” I said as amiably as I could. I took another sip of fresh, ice-cold beer that sent chills down my spine.

“It’s your reputation to lose,” said Bobby hurriedly. “If one of those drag queens recognizes us and spreads it around that you and I go to drag clubs.” His expression was full of disgust. He really wanted to go.

Meanwhile, I’d begun to notice a lot more about the club. An older, silver-haired man was reaching over and touching the hand of a long-haired, well made-up youth, in a dress and stockings. The boy was so obvious he couldn’t be anything else but a boy. He turned back to the man and the silver-haired guy kissed the youth quite gently on the lips, making the boy in a dress smile.

Four or five ‘women’ at the next table were conversing very quietly, their muscular arms and masculine facial features showing what kind of men they were. Yet they were attended by some younger men

who seemed to be talking together. It was the ‘women’ who reached for their purses to pay the tab when the waitress brought drinks and food to the table.

Bobby followed where my eyes were looking. “Yes,” he said, gulping as Pearl and Cindy suddenly came through the crowd. The girls smiled and smiled and swished petticoated dresses over several men’s heads until they joined different tables, putting their arms about men’s heads and sitting in their laps, rocking against them as they exchanged kisses with men and accepted what looked like expensive drinks.

“I think a party is starting,” said Bobby, flushing even more. “Come on, Douglas. Let’s get out of here before someone remembers the Morgans”—meaning us, when we used that surname for ourselves while working brother parts in a play—“and rats us out!”

I took a hurried sip from my glass as Bob grabbed my upper arm to try and force me out of the club. I would have gone with him as well, but our progress was stopped by a dapper little man in a blue blazer jacket. I say ‘little’, but he was not much smaller than me.

“Ah,” said the little man to me. “I’m so glad that you didn’t leave.”

It took me a moment to recognize Donna Vallee’s voice coming from this dark-haired man, his thick, dark hair greased and parted down the center. There were traces of an orange-pink cream at the man’s neck and ears. He accepted a glass of whiskey from Charley with a nervous thank-you as he—I guessed it was *he* now—stared anxiously at us.

“Excuse us,” said Bobby stiffly, re-exerting pressure on my arm. “We do have to leave, mister. We have work tomorrow, don’t we, Douglas?”

The little man’s brown eyes, wiped almost clean of makeup, opened wider in surprise as he stared at us over the drinks. Perhaps he thought he had bought us with a couple of beers, I thought sourly.

“Thanks for the beers,” I mumbled. “But I got to go with my brother.”

I tried to edge by ‘Donna Vallee’ as my brother had done.

“Did I get it wrong, then?” asked the older man anxiously, frowning and showing off the wrinkles in his face. “You aren’t a professional actor at all, someone with paid-up union fees and all that?” As Donna spoke and gestured, I could see that his fingernails were long and femininely shaped as well as being painted a bright scarlet.

“I was going to offer you a job with us till we got to Chicago in a couple of weeks,” said Donna Vallee with a gulp that set ‘her’ Adam’s apple bobbing. “We sounded very good together—or else everyone is lying to me!”

I kept on going after my brother, past smiling female faces that spoke to me in men’s tones. “Oh, we’re bona fide, card-carrying members of the union all right,” I said with a friendly smile. Well, I didn’t mind the impersonator talking to me, even though it did give me more than a few tinglings and gollywobbles.

The female impersonator was nice enough, though I didn't want him to get any wrong ideas about me. He seemed too anxious to please, actually, but he did have money which he flashed at Charley, the bartender, for another shot of Scotch whiskey.

"I made a mistake," I said truthfully. "I didn't realize the sort of place this was when my brother brought me in. Neither did he."

The mimic stiffened as I indicated my brother waiting at the entranceway to the club. "And what sort of place is this?" asked Donna Vallee in her most campy tones.

I laughed at that and was pleased to see the impersonator looked a little sheepish. Well, she or he knew what she or he was, didn't she or he?

"This place is a dive," I told Donna in a very low tone. "And as my brother says, we do have to think of our future reputations. We can't afford to be seen in here with the likes of drag queens like you."

It was Donna Vallee's turn to laugh as she looked at both me and at Bobby whom we had caught up to.

"You were lucky to see us at all," said the female impersonator quickly. "We move on tomorrow ourselves. Are you heading east as well?"

"Well," I said guardedly, glancing at Bobby who was staring at Donna as if he couldn't believe his eyes.

"If your world-wide reputation doesn't get in the way," the little man's thin nose wrinkled as if in dis-

gust as he spoke, “you’re welcome to hitch a ride with us.”

The man smiled at Bobby just in time to catch the shake of the head that Bobby made to me.

“Join us for breakfast over the road at Ernie’s,” the female impersonator said as his thin masculine lips curved. “My treat, of course. I’m always pleased to be able to help a fellow actor even when they don’t want to help me.” He sighed. “I’ve been down on my luck many, many times and so I know how it is. The worst, of course, is always being looked down on by everyone else in the entertainment industry for what I do.”

Bobby Clark frowned at the smiling older man, but I stopped my brother from making a caustic reply. If we could get a ride to Chicago, and not have to pay for breakfast, well, I was ready to listen to whatever proposal Donna Vallee wanted to make to me, to us.

“Thanks a lot,” I said to Donna, wondering if ‘she’ had another name when she wasn’t in drag and if it was polite to ask what it was. “We’ll try to be at Ernie’s for breakfast at nine o’clock tomorrow, but I can’t promise that whatever you wanted to ask me to do, that I will.”

Donna smiled, a thoughtful, thin-lipped smile. “Not nine o’clock,” she said. Yes, she did seem to be becoming more feminine as the gay men in drag called to her and wanted her to join them. “It will probably be noon. It’s just impossible to get Cindy and Pearl going before that, any morning.”

### III. THE DONNA VALLEE SHOW

Had I ever done drag before? In the sort of companies I worked with, I did. Bobby, I hoped, didn't know my reputation for singing like a woman, as he had done in 'Green Gables.' I guess we both came by it naturally. Actually, I was known in any company I worked with for my imitations of any famous actor. I didn't do actresses very often, but I had done a Bette Midler and a Barbra Streisand in finales with "Coming Stars of the Twenty-First Century" that had fooled even the girls in that cast—until Ron Drake had flipped up my skirts, making me squeal boyishly. Oh, how they'd taunted me then, not believing that it was just a joke, my dressing up for 'last' performances in the show.

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It was lucky that Donna Vallee had set the leaving time so late, for it took me all morning to talk Bobby into thinking we could accept the female mimic's offer of brunch and a ride back east. He followed me very reluctantly in the end, dragging a yard behind me, as we entered Ernie's on Railway Street across the road from the Star Club.

It was almost noon. There was no one in the place save for a balding, white-aproned older man behind the counter. He looked at us with disinterest and didn't even move as we sat at a table near the window.

"See," Bobby said with a smug smile. "Donna Vallee was playing a trick on you, homes."

I thought so myself until the doors to the restrooms opened. From the Ladies came three chat-

tering women, two blondes and a brunette, all clutching purses and heading to the table beside us. Cindy, Pearl and Terry Marvel all wore slim skirts that hugged their female figures.

They gave us interested, speculative glances as they sat so gracefully like—well, like women—at the table next to us, where I saw coffee cups with lipstick bows on the rims. In their high heels, the ‘women’ were all taller than us. They smiled delightfully. Bobby, of course, was blushing and looking away.

I smiled and admired the way these men had made themselves look like soft, delectable women. Wearing jewelry on their throats, ears, and wrists, they looked as if they were about to travel first-class on an airliner or train.

Terry Marvel flicked sunglasses out of her long, styled hair to cover up her thickly made-up eyes. I heard her murmur to the others, “I have a hangover today.” The others smiled in sympathy. I just admired the view, so to speak, thinking how beautifully Terry Marvel spoke, her voice entirely girlish.

We might have sat there until the impersonators left if it wasn’t for the arrival of a small man, thick hair combed to either side of his head. He wore jeans, like Bobby and me, with a white shirt and leather jacket. He looked nothing at all like Donna Vallee from the night before. This was the real Donald, if that was his proper name, of course.

Donald moved quickly across the café, smiling at Bobby and me. There was something in his manner, the way he moved so primly, making me think that perhaps the clothes were new or else he hadn’t worn

them in a long time. I got up while Bobby looked at me, aghast, as I held out my hand to the female impersonator.

“Well, hello again this morning,” I said cheerfully. The lovely ‘women’ looked at me speculatively, as pretty women do. I mean, I’m not the greatest catch in the world, but I have had my moments in entertaining and wooing women. I could tell that these were interested. Yes, definitely interested—in *me*.

Donna Vallee took my hand awkwardly, as if he wasn’t used to shaking hands with a man. His long nails pressed into my palm. “Hello,” he said simply. “Girls,” he said, turned to the three impersonators. Well, I *thought* they were impersonators, but I was a little wrong in my assessment—or so it turned out, for a while.

“This is—” Vallee began before smiling sheepishly and clicking his fingers as he recalled that he didn’t know our names. So much for Bobby’s fears that we’d been recognized—recognized us from our film performances, Bobby had suggested, as we’d walked back to the theater where we slept overnight—and that Donna Vallee wanted to trade off our names in some way.

“Doug and Bobby Evans,” I said quickly, using the names I’d agreed to with Bobby. It didn’t pay to change our first names. We’d slip up if we started using some other names for ourselves. I wouldn’t have minded, though, being a Grant or a Clint, something short and definitely male. “I’m Doug,” I added, giving them all a mouthful of white teeth.

“Terry Marvel,” said Donna, indicating the brunette, sitting with her legs crossed, her stockings making her legs appear tanned and womanly. “And Cindy and Pearl.” The latter was the one now hiding behind dark glasses. The two blondes had almost identical shades of honey-blonde hair, styled and pinned with barrettes in similar fashion. Each wore a frilly, opened, purple blouse, showing off real cleavages. I got real queasy looking at the pair—at the pair of *women*, I mean. I was thinking their breasts could not be real—not on men, anyway.

“Twins?” I asked with a phony smile as Donna invited us to sit. She—no, he—called to the counter-man to bring us coffee and the Railwaymen’s Breakfast, whatever that was.

Even Pearl lifted her sunglasses as the three female-dressed figures giggled like teenaged girls at me. I smiled at their pretty, femininely attractive faces and waited to be filled in on the joke. We had to wait as the counterman, Ernie, I supposed, came over and replenished all the coffee cups, turning over two fairly clean ones for Bobby and me.

Terry Marvel reached past Bobby, smiling at my apparently naïve question, taking a sugar lump from the little bowl for her coffee. She seemed to be making sure, I thought, that the stiffly seated Bobby got a good look at her slim arm and a good noseful of her perfume. She smiled at Bobby but didn’t say anything, even though Bobby fidgeted and blushed.

“Not twins,” said Donna Vallee shortly, after Ernie had retreated to the cooking area, the smell of bacon permeating the air. “Cindy and Pearl are husband and wife, aren’t you, girls?” he asked as the two

blondes nodded and smiled at me to see how I took such news.

Well, how do you take such news? I smiled as best as I could, though I was going crazy inside. Looking from one to the other, I couldn't tell at all which of the lovely women could possibly be the husband. I'd have hated to make a move on one and found out the following morning that the wife was mad at her husband for going to bed with me!

With what I saw across from me in their unbuttoned blouses, the tops of their bras visible, that was entirely possible. Yes, I'd have gone to bed with either of the beautiful dancers, I knew I would. I was sure that Bobby would have, as well—particularly with the way the 'girls' were squirming and femininely wriggling on their chairs now that they had our complete attention.

"Which is which?" I asked hoarsely. This made the girls smile even more demurely at me, pouting with beautiful, matched, pink lips.

"Which is which?" asked Donna thoughtfully, frowning. I saw how his eyebrows were shaped into a feminine arch, like the female shaping of the husband and wife vamping me across the lunch table. "I must admit, Doug, that I've truly forgotten, if I ever knew in the first place."

Donna feigned dismay, as if it was important that he should know. I stared at the green-eyed blonde next to me, and then at the other, brown-eyed and as pretty but for her shades as well. "I do know that one of them," said Donna with a sly smile, "is a husband and one of them is a wife."

“Come on, Donna,” said Cindy with a definite, female lilt to her voice. She must be the woman, I decided. “It doesn’t matter at all to anyone else but us which is which, does it?” Cindy lifted her small, pointed chin—in defiance, I’m sure, at the perplexed look on Bobby’s and my faces.

Donna Vallee—he was called Donna by the others all the time, despite the fact that he had changed to male attire—spread the breakfasts over the table. The ‘girls’ had fruit cups and looked rather enviously at the bacon, sausages, hash browns, eggs and toast that Bobby and I waded into.

That’s when Donna started asking Bobby and me about our driving abilities. I saw Bobby relax a little. Well, the guy could hardly ask us if we wanted to wear dresses and join the chorus line in his show, could he? I’d said that to Bobby, earlier.

“You never know” had been Bobby’s astonishing answer. “We did walk into a drag club and sit down. You even interacted in a really interesting way with a female impersonator. Could look like we were interested in men dressed as girls, or even wanted to try it out.”

I’d guffawed at my brother, telling him what an idiot he was. I should have listened to him, though, shouldn’t I, before I did make a real idiot of myself? Well, my brother did, too.

We learned that The Donna Vallee Show had three vans. We were asked to drive to earn our ride out of the fleabag town we were in. We learned that Pearl was erratic as a driver and not to be allowed behind the wheel save in a dire emergency. We also learned

that the Show was missing its normal male contingency and missing another mimic.

“What happened to that Joe and Duncan?” asked Bobby, speaking up for the first time when there was a lull, as the girls took out compacts and began to touch up their lipsticked mouths at the tables. Who were those guys, I wondered.

Terry turned and smiled cynically at Bobby, reaching over and touching his leg lightly, which made Bobby go stiff. He looked quite angry, but that didn't stop her from stroking Bobby's knee through his jeans.

“They went out to look for rough trade, darling,” murmured Terry, her voice as girlish as Cindy's or Pearl's. It was lower, however, a contralto, but it suggested nothing but womanhood. “Couldn't be satisfied with a bird in the hand, those two.”

“Terry!” snapped Donna harshly, a spot of color appearing on his pale face. He had a surprisingly vibrant baritone when he wanted to use it. He glanced nervously at Bobby and me, his eyes indicating to Terry to remove her hand which she did reluctantly.

“You'll have to excuse Terry,” mumbled Donna Vallee, pulling out a wad of bills to pay for our breakfasts. “She often makes dumb jokes—though in this case she is close to the mark. Joe and Duncan were employed as dancers, comics, actors in skits. They were supposed to do what you did so brilliantly, Doug, right off the cuff.

“Well, there's been some hurt feelings,” said Donna, glaring at the husband and wife. “And Sharon, who went off with them, was in the mix as

well. I hadn't employed any of them before and never will again, even if they come crawling back."

"They weren't entirely wrong about thinking we'd all take it off for them, any old time, on the road," said the irrepressible, feminized Terry, looking at the blushing Bobby with clear interest. She patted her hair with a well-manicured, silver-tipped fingernail, breathing in deeply to thrust out her well-formed, female figure.

"Terry!" snapped Donna again, seeing Bobby push back from the table and on the point of leaving. "We need you boys to help us with the driving. We really do. And we are all going in the same direction, aren't we?"

Bobby and I should have listened to that much more carefully. We should have said we were going in another direction, or we had a bus to catch—anything but tentatively agreeing that we did both have drivers' licenses and were heading east.

"Well, Sharon did leave with the men," Terry went on, returning to the topic of who'd left the Show, with a sweet smile. "She was doing them two at a time, I told you." That shocked Donna when she said it, but it shocked Bobby and me as well. "Two at a time, between shows! I told you that that girl was a slut, and nothing but trouble."

"So you did, so you did," muttered Donna angrily, taking Terry's purse and removing car keys from it. "Will you drive the Ford for us to Chicago, Doug? It has all our costumes in the back. Janet is sleeping there at the moment."

“Janet?” I asked as the keys were pushed in my direction. “Another female impersonator?”

Donna nodded. “Yes,” she said shortly. “She was playing the piano in the Show last night. You’ll recognize her when you see her. She doesn’t have a license in her girl name, which makes it embarrassing if we get stopped. And we get stopped all the time in this county. They like to embarrass us. If your brother—Bobby Evans, isn’t it?—could drive us out of the county in the Dodge, I’ll take the Plymouth. Then we shouldn’t be detained for too long if we are stopped.”

Bobby came with us woodenly to a yard behind the Star Club. The girls’ high-heeled shoes echoed, staccato, as we went down the narrow alley to where three vans were parked.

“It’s this blue and brown one,” said Donna, opening the door to the Ford. A dark-haired girl sat up in the back seat.

“Some watcher you are,” sneered Terry, as the delicate-looking pianist from the night before yawned and stretched, showing that she had breasts the equal of Terry’s under her white sweater.

“You found drivers going our way out of this fleahole?” queried the husky-voiced pianist, stretching her long fingers which ended in dark, blood-red, pointed fingernails.

“Yes,” said Donna nervously, letting me enter the drivers’ seat of the car. She passed a coffee back to the feminine figure in the back seat and began to remind me of the features of the Ford Econoline.

“This way, lover boy,” said Terry to my disordered brother. “I’ll drive with you and show you how to work the stick.”

“If Terry keeps up like that,” I said to Donna forcefully, “Bobby is going to walk away when we stop to pick up our bags.”

“Oh, we can’t have that,” gasped Donna. She went across the compound, calling to Pearl to join her. One willowy female figure took the place of another, pouting, in the Dodge, the smallest van—actually a pickup with some kind of attachment over the deck. I could imagine it as an emergency bedroom if this troop had to stop along the road.

And so, we were off. Fortunately, we weren’t stopped at all. The girls weren’t lined up and subjected to a strip search as they had been twice before in that county—or so they said.

“It’s not as bad as it sounds,” said Janet with a be-guiling smile at me. “Wouldn’t you like to strip search me? It would fulfill my fantasies as much as it fills yours.”

“I’m not that sort of guy,” I babbled at her—no, at *him*.

“Of course you are,” said Janet with a smile, stretching her arms above her head again. “A sweet guy like you, taking up with a troupe of female impersonators? I bet we’ll have you in panties and a dress before the week’s over.”

“We’re just doing this until—” I croaked at ‘her’. Janet smiled girlishly at me, breathing in my ear, the smell of Chanel enlivening me, as she leaned over.

“Until something better comes along,” said Janet, joining with me as I said exactly the same words. “I know, pretty boy Douglas. I said exactly the same thing before I started working for Donna. Then she suggested I wear a dress and put on a wig, just for one performance, since nothing better had come along yet. Face it, Deedee, nothing better’s going to come along. You’ll be a female impersonator like me in a week’s time—and for the rest of your life.”

#### **IV. JUST FOR THE MONEY**

“How could you?” shouted Bobby at me, keeping to his mantra that he was ‘no drag queen’ and he wouldn’t go on stage with one. “You idiot! Did you flush your brain down the toilet, or what?”

“Shush, shush,” I whispered. “These walls are made of paper. They’ll all hear you.”

“I don’t care if the whole world hears me!” bellowed Bobby. “There is no way on this God’s Earth that I am going onto that stage and act with a, a bunch of flaming drag queens!”

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“Shh – shh – shh!” I hissed for the tenth time later, when I tried again to get Bobby to act with me, trying to calm him down. The room at the back of the run-down old hotel was ours for two days. What else would we do with our time? I’d argued with Bobby. We had to stick around, we had to eat, and this was a way of paying them back—the girls, as I called them, like Donna.

We could do some of the boys' parts in the revue, in the tiny club, and not worry about what the audience called us. It would be of great help, Donna had told me nervously. Then, we should be on the long-haul section of the trip to Chicago, where we'd be of use again. Besides, there was a little money involved. Bobby and I would get the same rate as the girls.

"I didn't think you'd kick up this much fuss," I said as quietly as I could. "After all, the girls have been good enough to feed us and to share transportation back to civilization." I began to put on the over-large tux and dark pants for the skit I'd promised to play with Donna as Mae West on the stage that night.

"You can't do it!" raged Bobby, grabbing at the tux I was sliding my arms into. "Booking agents know we're brothers. I am not having a brother on stage who's done a drag act!"

I laughed at that, which made Bobby even more furious. "I'm not doing any drag act," I said. "I'm dressed as a man, aren't I? I'm doing this for a few dollars of spending money, money for the beers you've been downing like a lush. You don't mind drag queens plying you with those, do you?"

"Don't do me any favors!" stormed my brother. "Don't I let Terry and Pearl try out their little vamps on me? And you and that Janet? She's a guy! You'd never think so, seeing the two of you together. She's always got her hands on you. These trannies are getting enough from us as it is!"

"I'm grateful for the ride, as well," I said sourly at Bobby. I hadn't told him about Janet and the warnings she kept giving me, even as she stroked and

hugged me as if she really was a woman. It was quite disconcerting, especially when I found Terry staring at me and realized my arm was casually about Janet's waist.

"Don't think this will hurt your career," I told my irate brother. "Wear a disguise, a mustache, gray powder in your hair. If you want, do a sugar daddy sketch with one of the girls, or both Cindy and Pearl. I bet it'll be the most interesting anecdote in your memoirs, Ziggy, when you finally reach the top and feel secure."

Bobby looked at me with hate in his eyes as I used his true name. He hated me using it, even though he still used mine on ten times more occasions than I did his.

"I am not walking on a stage with some fag, prancing around in women's underwear," my brother said harshly.

"When we were in Toronto last year," I said to him with a frown, "didn't we try out for the title role in the revival of *Hosanna*? And there were parts that we auditioned for in *Rent*. It was a good thing we didn't get the parts, wasn't it? One of us might have had to spend the whole play in drag. It was a good thing we weren't offered parts, wasn't it?"

I was going to say, then we'd have been prancing about the stage, guys in woman's clothes. The look on my brother's face was priceless.

"You weren't offered the drag queen part, were you?" I asked him. His expression gave it away immediately.

“You could have been in the touring company of *Rent*?” I asked him, in astonishment. “You’d still be working today.”

“And been in drag every night of that time!” blazed Bobby at me. “And all because I’m short, slim, and have clear skin, like a girl. They said that about you as well. You were their second choice if I didn’t want the part. I told them you wouldn’t take that part, either. They said that was such a pity, as they could make either one of us as pretty as the other girls in the cast. Well, I should have let you talk to them, shouldn’t I? I was wrong, wasn’t I! You’d have loved prancing around as a girl, in panties and a bra!”

“There’s a difference,” I protested, “between acting in a play about a drag queen and her boyfriend, and being in a real drag show. There’s a difference between being in a sketch about a drag queen, and really being a drag queen. You didn’t really turn down a real job for me, did you?”

“No, I didn’t,” said my brother. “I just made up the part about you.”

I looked at Bobby, staring at me defiantly. I couldn’t tell if he was lying to me or not. Oh, if I could have had a part in *Rent*! I wouldn’t have cared if it had been as a drag queen or not. It was a part in a great musical!

“This isn’t a real job,” said Bobby.

“No,” I agreed. “But I don’t think that you know what a real job is any more. All I know is that I don’t have any job in show business, probably because of you.”

We heard the rustle of skirts in the hallway. There was a light tap on our door. A heavily made-up blonde woman was poised to knock again when I opened the door.

“Oh, Douglas,” Donna Vallee gushed at me. “You look so handsome, so right!” I guessed this was because I now had a distinguished-looking mustache, and my fair hair was now gray like my mustache.

Bob cringed at her exaggerated girlish tones. Donna took my arm as a woman would. Her musky fragrance almost overwhelmed me. I smiled at Bobby, hamming it up more than a little for the woman in the sequined, light-blue, cocktail dress that rustled each time she moved. The dress was to mid-calf, showing off her shapely ankles and lower legs in stockings and high heels.

Bobby was shuddering as I closed the door on him, my scented, silky and rustling partner beside me. If either of us had got the part in *Hosanna*, I realized—if I had got it, I’d have had to spend nights in dresses, feminine makeup and female wigs as if I was Elizabeth Taylor. I’d have had to dress in female under-clothing like Janet, the female impersonator pianist, who’d told me ‘not to knock it’ until I’d tried it.

Now, as I remembered the readings for *Hosanna*, I recalled several actors going off to try on the black, Cleopatra-style wig and makeup for the part. Yes, the director had said, “Oh, she really does look the part!” The director was talking about Bobby. There’d been readings for the part I’d already been excluded for.

I didn’t tell Bobby I’d seen his audition. Why should I? I’d just hinted at it, giving him the chance

to tell me if he'd wanted to. The 'she' that the director had been cooing about had been Bobby, in dress and wig as Elizabeth Taylor. If he'd given a half decent reading, he'd have had the part.

Bobby hadn't, of course. He'd given one of his worst readings, the worst I'd ever seen from him. I knew he'd done it deliberately. Needless to say, he didn't get the part. He probably wouldn't have anyway. They gave it in the end to a prominent Canadian actor.

Still, I did wonder at the time, knowing the director, if his remark to Bobby had been quite deliberate to see how well Bobby stood up to playing the part of a drag queen. The audience was sometimes hostile at the controversial play, particularly if they didn't know what they were getting into for an evening's 'entertainment'.

I remember my own sense of shock when I'd gone to see the play and first saw the actor who'd won the part parading across the stage in black stockings and garter belt, black lace panties, and black padded bra. The wig and makeup had made it seem that we, the audience, were watching a woman getting undressed. Only I had realized from the start, in the small group I was with, that she, Hosanna, was a man. The actor had played it eloquently, without any apparent sense of guilt, being what the part called for, a drag queen, as 'she' tormented 'her' lover, Cuirette, in the play.

I shuddered after the play at the thought that I could've been in that play with Bobby, in either role. I knew I could never have played Hosanna in the way the part called for, in the manner that the Canadian

had played it. I'd never have been convincing, night in and night out. Or so, I told myself. I couldn't play the part of an aging drag queen. I wasn't aging!

Surprisingly, at the same time, I saw the same actor who played Hosanna, acting in a Canadian crime drama as a hard-boiled detective. It was on television in some Canadian town, Windsor as I recall, that the Gillingham Players went to as part of a drama festival. I remember reading, in the program notes, that the guy was married to a well-known actress in Canada and had three kids. I wonder what they thought of what Daddy did in the theater every night! Certainly, his wife must have been very broad-minded, as well! I imagined her helping 'her', prep for 'her' part, all of the time. I still shiver, even today, thinking about me being Elizabeth Taylor on stage!

As I walked down to the back room of the hotel with the blonde, smiling Donna Vallee on my arm, treating her just as if she was a woman, I had to laugh at the predicament Bobby and I were in. People would have paid to see me in a play like *Hosanna* or a musical like *Rent*. They'd have praised me if I'd carried off the part, as a woman. I'd have been considered for other roles in other presentations and musicals.

But, as Bobby said, most people wouldn't accept us if they found out we'd appeared with female impersonators in their shows. Worse, our reputations would have been toast, if we'd ever appeared in drag in a drag show. If people found out about it, of course.

I could have under-acted shamelessly in my audition for *Rent*, as did the guy who got the part of the

drag queen. But I didn't. I over-acted as I had in my reaction to Donna Vallee. Let us be known to have worked the The Donna Vallee Show and neither of us would have worked in serious theater again.

I hoped Bobby would understand what I was doing as Doug Evans. Yes, we needed a few dollars. Donna Vallee—why, I wondered, did he let himself be called by that even when he was out of drag?—had already suggested slyly that both Bobby and I could make extra dollars in sketches as good-looking women. I'd laughed at the suggestions. Donna had seriously suggested we'd be very good at being women with our physiques and looks. She'd even said she'd arrange for us to appear under assumed names. Our union would never find out.

Bobby wouldn't even listen to me joke about it. There was no way either of us, he insisted—now matter how foxy or feminine we could be made to appear—was going to appear on stage as a female impersonator.

Walls have ears, he'd said, glaring at the curved, cynical smile on Terry Marvel's lipsticked mouth. Someone would report us at the worst possible time in our careers, Bobby had ranted on, causing Terry to lift a thin eyebrow in disdain.

"Who do you think you are?" she'd asked him then, lying across our sofa most seductively. Her little black dress rode up about her shapely legs, showing us that she was wearing a garter belt with her stockings and panties. "Somebody famous?"

“We used to be, as kids,” I told her, trying not to look at the woman sprawling over the couch as she smirked at us.

“Hallelujah, we’re taken over by the Kiddie Korps,” laughed Terry while Bobby looked stricken. “Have you two ever appeared in real movies, or are you just flapping your lips?”

“A couple of dozen,” I told her as Terry did her imitations of female stretching exercises on the bed. I have to admit it was a marvel to watch her. I couldn’t think of her as anything but a woman at all as she arched her back and thrust out her breasts—yes, they were real, she left us in no doubt about that—in front of us.

“Movie stars!” giggled Terry. “Wait till I tell the other girls. May I have your autographs, please? Right here?”

Terry pulled down on her neckline and exposed most of her ample breasts as if we had pens to sign our names on her. She bantered with us for quite a while before going off to her room to change for the show the girls were putting on in this backwoods town. I couldn’t believe that such a place would enjoy a female impersonator show but, apparently, they did.

Donna had got me alone after that and convinced me that I could do a couple of sketches with her. I could do it easily, particularly if I thought of her as just an aging actress, the kind I’d played to, many times before.

*Roll on, Chicago*, I thought. The Donna Vallee Show would meet there with someone named Kate, a man-

ager of some kind. She had new replacements, Donna said vaguely, as the tour we were on swung south.

It was a pity that I couldn't go on with them, Donna said, after we got quite a round of applause from the audience for our *Cabaret* skit.

"Don't you want to come out front, dearie?" asked Donna, hanging on to my hand as if I was her boy toy. "You can pick up a few extra dollars here and there for a quick grope under the tables, you know."

"Donna!" I said to her, in humorous outrage at her suggestion.

Donna grinned at me, her thick makeup like something one put on with a trowel. I wanted to tell her that she would look finer with a gentler makeup brush, but I didn't dare. Donna seemed delighted with her performance with me and was eager to be gone among the rural crowd. Terry, Pearl and Cindy had already disappeared. We could hear Janet on the piano as well.

"Roll on, Chicago!" I said to Donna, who leaned over and kissed me right on the lips, leaving her mark on me.

"We'll be there soon," said Donna, in her tacky Mae West impersonation, chucking me under the chin and leaving me to stagger back to our room. There, with Bobby, I listened to all the comings and goings through the night. I think the girls must have serviced a dozen men, but I wasn't about to get up and check. Well, that wasn't true. I did check, even though Bobby slept through it all—or pretended that he did.

## V. THE MENAGERIE

“I thought that a house for the week would be best,” said the brown-haired Kate Vallee, rushing about the large kitchen, opening windows that loomed over a deck and a hedge-surrounded garden. The hedge was high enough that no one could have looked over it, and thick enough that no one could have seen through it from the street.

“It does mean that we shall have to cook for ourselves unless we want to order fast food,” said Kate—thirty at least, I would have said—“but I thought that it would be better after you’ve all been cooped up in hotel rooms for so long!”

“Darling! This is just fantastic!” gushed Donna Vallee. He had proudly introduced us to his daughter, Kate, his arm about her the whole time. If she was his daughter, she seemed not put out at all at the sight of her father in a dress and blonde wig, his face far more feminine after he’d listened to me about not using so much pancake and foundation.

Well, I hadn’t been in formal classes, but I’d been around film sets and theatrical companies. So, I knew a thing or two about makeup and how to apply it. Kate loved her father’s new look and stared at me quite speculatively, when Donna gave me all the credit for it. I’d have to explain it all to her, later.

Kate was as tall as me—tall for a girl, I suppose. I thought her pretty, with short, dark, bouncy, brunette hair, but not outstandingly attractive. Yes, a real girl. She wore little makeup, unlike the other ‘girls’ who let the men, Bobby and me, carry their bags in and deposit them in different bedrooms,



Cindy and Pearl together with the largest of double beds.

Kate resembled her father in having thin eyebrows and large brown eyes, which sparkled with affection when she looked at him. Her nose, however, was much smaller than Donna's. Her lack of makeup exposed her freckles.

She'd been surprised at Bobby and me being with the party and studied us openly.

I'd had to say it. "We're not gay," I'd said while Donna looked at me, all nervousness gone now as she smiled broadly, her red lipstick vivid for a morning. I should tell her about plum, I thought, and how womanly it was supposed to be.

"What are you, then?" asked Kate, quick and forthright in her response.

"A couple of stranded, out-of-work actors, truck drivers," I told her with a smile. "Glad to be back in the big city and soon off everyone's hands."

"Oh," Kate said. Then she appeared to dismiss us entirely from her mind, welcoming the four femininely dressed impersonators as if they were her long-absent sisters. She hugged and kissed Cindy and Pearl, was lifted and swung about by Terry, and joked with Janet that her implants had grown, that the pills were working.

"I have to see the doc soon about my throat," said Janet, her harsh tones making Kate wince. "I practice the speaking lessons that you got for me, Kate, but I'm not improving. I hate going outside the clubs.

I really only get proper service in boutiques if I pretend I'm dumb or have a throat infection."

"I think you should practice more," said Kate in sympathy, giving Bobby and me no attention at all. I thought she'd forgotten about us until she said to me. "There are extra bedrooms and a study in the basement that we weren't going to use, save in a pinch. You guys can bunk down there if you aren't sharing with someone else already."

"We've made it clear we're available," said Terry Marvel with a wicked smile at Bobby. "All the comforts of home but they just don't know they have it so good."

Kate's eyebrows went up in surprise. She gave Bobby and me really searching, cynical looks, before glancing at Donna, who was shaking her blonde curls most warningly to her daughter.

Giggling like deep-voiced girls, Terry and Janet went off to the upper bedroom that they were going to share, in separate beds, of course. It was a picture to watch them wiggle their way up the stairs in their high heels while the identically dressed husband and wife, Cindy and Pearl, in yellow dresses, followed them with considerably more rustlings and feminine giggles.

"We really missed you on the road," said Donna to her daughter, looking as if she was hugging her as a mother would, though the girl's arm was permanently about her waist.

Kate laughed a pleasant, musical laugh that was so different from the giggles Bobby and I had thought of as girlish, as that was all we'd heard in the last

week. “Well, it’s good to hear that someone appreciates me in this menagerie,” she said. “So, Sharon left you in the lurch in Midland. Who did the stripping from then on?”

“You know Terry,” said Donna with a grimace.

“Yes,” said Kate primly. “She’s a marvel, isn’t she? Are you boys waiting for something else?”

“Well,” said Bobby. “We really don’t need rooms. We won’t be staying long. We have to check out what work we can find right away.”

“But tomorrow, surely,” said Donna easily as her daughter frowned at us. “Stay and let Kate produce one of her fantastic dinners for us all.” Kate had the grace to smile as her father, dressed and gushing like a mother, said that. “Then we can show Kate what we were doing on stage in Tylerville. The crowd lapped it up, darling.”

“Coffee,” Kate interrupted firmly. I, naturally, being the gentleman I am, went to help her while Bobby took our suitcases downstairs. Donna retreated to the main floor study to make a phone call. So, yes, I got to try to charm the suspicious Kate Vallee.

I recounted Bobby’s and my misfortunes with the Gillingham Players. I spiced it up with stories from other places and had her smiling at my comedic routine. Bob came up the stairs just in time to answer the doorbell as I assisted Kate in taking coffee, sugar, sugar substitute, cream, cream substitute, and cookies, into the main room.

“I hope you and your brother will eat the cookies I baked this morning,” said Kate. “The girls never will. I

never saw so many people on diets as the girls who appear in Donna's shows."

"There's someone here to see you, Kate," said Bobby, coming to the living room, being followed by a tall man, black-haired, handsome in a Latin kind of way. He stood very erect as he smiled at Kate and ran his hand over a thin, dark mustache while Bobby, beside him, had to look way up at him.

"I thought I had the wrong address," the man said, no trace of a Latino accent in his voice. "But then I saw the vans."

"Frankie!" Kate exclaimed, almost running over to fling her arms about the tall man. He was older than he looked at first glance. There were lines about his eyes, creasing as he smiled down at Kate. "Donna's on the phone right now with Alisha," bubbled Kate to the tall man, who began to study Bob, and then me, with a frown.

Bobby, I could see, was quite put out by the way the nattily dressed Latin was looking him over. Kate began calling up the stairs that coffee was being served in the living room while we just looked at Frankie and, I guess, tried to figure out how he fitted into this menagerie, as Kate had called it.

Frankie sat down and took the coffee cup that Kate brought to him. "Frankie Morel is going to join Donna's next show," she said brightly to Bobby and me. "These boys," it was funny how she stressed that word to Frankie, "hitched a ride with the Show from Des Moines or somewhere out there."

I wanted to cut in and explain that we were drivers, but Kate didn't give me a chance. Again, she was ig-

noring Bobby and me. All her attention was on Frankie Morel, which I found most aggravating.

“We are so looking forward to your joining the Show,” Kate chattered on, her eyes fastened on Frankie’s face. “Donna wants you to open, you know, as well as do the sketches we talked about in the cabaret. Everyone has at least three turns to do. You’ll have more.”

Frank Morel had very thin lips, I noted. No, never a female impersonator, I thought, as the man smiled, almost cruelly at Kate. “Well, Kate, I know what your mother wants,” he said with a leer that made me want to tell him to smarten up. “It’s doing this kind of show that I’m not sure about.”

“Oh, Frankie!” said a husky, exaggerated, feminine voice from the hallway as a ‘girl’ came down the stairs and skipped over to the seated man, her skirts bouncing and rustling as she sat in his lap. “Don’t start with that old chestnut about never having worked with a girl like me before!”

Terry Marvel smiled down into the surprised, smiling male face and ran a feminized finger over the mustache, kissing the man on his lips while Frankie put his arm about her waist and hugged her to him.

Cindy and Pearl made a grand entrance in the skimpiest bikinis I had ever seen. “Frankie!” they both squealed, and descended on him until the man disappeared under a mass of feminized bodies and long hair.

I looked at Bobby, who appeared quite sick as he glanced at me. Where was my immediate thought As I looked at the bikini-clad lovelies, my immediate

thought was: where could the husband be hiding what he had? Oh, it must hurt to be dressed like that—unless it was that we were being teased and played all the time.

Janet arrived, wiggling, in a straight brown skirt and bronze blouse, her lipstick and eye makeup muted, her hair parted in the middle and held back by barettes. “Wow,” she said, smiling at the smooth-skinned girls in the bikinis. “What brought this on?”

“There’s a tanning bed downstairs,” said Pearl in her little-girl breathy tones. “We were going to try it out—but look who’s here! Frankie Morell!”

Terry sat between the guy’s legs while the husband and wife were perched on the arms of the chair, Frankie’s hands caressing their slim waists and lovely thighs. It made a lump come to my throat. Each bikini was made of some dark-blue, wet-silk material, disguising whatever it was that one of them should have had. In the top halves to the bikinis, their full, rounded, female, jiggling breasts were poured. Oh, what cleavages the ‘husband and wife’ had!

“Oh, you girls,” said Kate with a smile. “Let Frankie drink his coffee in peace!”

The ‘girls’ clambered free most reluctantly, making sure that all of us could admire the two feminized bodies that we saw, the rounded, bare thighs, the small, bobbed noses, narrow waists and long, loose blonde hair.

“I forget,” murmured Frankie. “Which one of you is the husband and which one of you is the wife?”

Both blondes giggled. “Come and visit us in the main bedroom and we’ll let you find out,” said Cindy coyly over a thin, girlish shoulder, following her wife or husband down to wherever the tanning bed was.

Frankie still had Terry in his lap and had somehow managed to retain his coffee cup. He contorted and gulped as the coffee cup clattered as he maneuvered to get a drink. I almost laughed aloud as I realized what sort of performer he must be as Frankie Morel seemed to disjoint himself to take a drink at last.

“Hello,” he said at last, with what I would call an oily smile at Janet who had been staring in fascination at the way Frankie was drinking from his cup. “I don’t think that I know this young lady.”

“She’s not a young lady,” said Bobby quickly, sounding very surly.

Frankie was startled and looked at my brother with a frown.

“I’m in drag as well,” said Janet, looking every inch a female—well, every inch that showed, to me. I wanted to rap my brother on the head for being so sullen. At least Bobby had the grace to blush.

“I do know you,” said Janet then with a pretty smile. “We worked together with Lynne Berringer in Detroit several years ago.”

Frankie Morel set the shaking cup down and re-positioned the rusty Terry on his lap, where she cuddled into his shoulder, her long, loose, brunette hair against his chin. Frankie Morel frowned.

“I don’t remember there being female impersonators in that show,” Frankie said slowly, taking another studious look at Janet from head to toe. She had crossed her legs and was dangling a brown high heel off her stockinged foot.

“I wasn’t an impersonator then,” Janet pouted with her softly plum-colored lips.

“Then who were you?” asked Frankie Morel, frowning.

Janet was saved a reply by the arrival of Donna Vallee in a long, black, glittering evening gown. She had to be greeted by Frankie, who unceremoniously dumped Terry out of his lap and on to the floor.

“Ow-w!” shouted Terry, feigning hurt on her backside. She put her hand out to Bobby, who immediately helped her to her feet. She grinned at Donna beside her. Donna was hugging Frankie who was hugging her back. Donna promptly slapped Terry on her rounded, ample derriere.

Terry whimpered as if she was hurt and clung to Bobby, stiffening and out-of-sorts as she pressed against him, her dress rustling around him.

“Stop teasing the poor guy, Terry,” said Donna with a sardonic smile on her face. “You’ll have to excuse her,” she added to Frankie, who was still holding her, and smiling into the softly made-up face that I’d suggested would work better for Donna Vallee’s female image. She let Frankie go to accept the coffee that was being proffered to her by her grinning daughter. I didn’t know how Kate could do that, smiling at her father, being so casually hugged and treated as a woman by another man.

“Terry is the real tease in the cast,” said Donna. “She always promises a lot more than she intends to deliver. These boys can attest to that.”

“Hah,” snorted Terry, letting go of Bobby. “These aren’t real boys, Roberta and Deirdre!” The names startled Kate who looked at me in surprise. I didn’t help my case with her, as I thought of it, by blushing like a fool. Terry aped limping as if she had been really hurt as she went off to find out what the other ‘girls’ were up to. A smiling Janet followed her.

“Are they, the others, like Cindy?” asked Frankie doubtfully, his hands tracing out real breasts in the air and his fingers making a cutting motion as if he held scissors in his hand.

Kate gave one of her pretty peals of laughter while I froze at the thoughts that went through my head. I’d opened my door a fraction at all the noise in the hallway in the Tylerville hotel, only to see Cindy or Pearl in a see-through nightie kissing some man goodnight as he left her room, the one the girls shared. As he left, the big man had patted the blonde’s pretty rump and then pulled her panties down as a parting joke. I had seen then that one of the two girls was definitely the husband of the other. She’d laughed, pulled up her pretty, frilled panties, and blown a kiss after the first man, before she’d turned back into her room, the one ‘she’ shared with her wife. Another man, already inside, had grabbed her. She’d gone willingly back with him to whatever orgy, as I think it must have been, was going on in there.

“I did tell you, Frankie,” said Kate reproachfully. “I did warn you what modern female impersonators are like, with all the hormones and surgeries available so

freely. I have to tell you, Dad,” she added to the blonde woman, swaying lightly against Frankie Morel’s arm, “that Janet wants to have her voice done again, properly. You may have to rely on canned music, after all, in your show.”

“Oh, we can’t do that, darling,” gushed Donna very girlishly, letting Frankie Morel put his arms about her. “We must have a piano player at least, like Janet.”

“The Donna Vallee Show is one of the last revues, drag or otherwise,” said Kate, shaking her head, “to have all its music authentic and played or sung by artistes in the show. I know, Daddy, I know! I don’t suppose either of you boys play the piano?” She looked hopefully at us. I did, but I didn’t want to admit that I could play at least as well as Janet.

“Doug plays,” said my brother, totally letting me down.

“You do?” asked the blonde ‘woman’, Donna, in surprise while his daughter also looked at me in interest.

“If he took Janet’s place for a while, he’d have to wear a dress,” said Kate with a frown.

“Yes, Doug—no, that’s *Deirdre*—can do it,” said Donna with a laugh. “We should do our Cabaret routine for my daughter later, Dee. She’ll be surprised by how talented you are.”

“I’d like to be surprised,” said Kate, smiling at me, making me quiver. “We could do with an infusion of new blood in this show, Donna.”

There was a crash then from the basement. Janet raced up the steps. “Kate!” she yelled in her gravelly voice. “Come quick! We need you! These idiots have gone and burned themselves in the tanning machines!”

Kate fled to the basement. Donna went after her as well, wiggling in her long, black dress while Frankie assisted her to the top of the steps.

Frankie turned and frowned at Bobby and me. “We were supposed to put on a show in Calumet City in a week,” he said with a frown. “What is Donna going to do for female impersonators if Cindy and Pearl can’t go on?”

## **VI. BEING AN ANGEL**

Well, if you don’t know what Donna was going to do when the husband and wife impersonators couldn’t go on, then you couldn’t have been paying much attention to this story, could you? Ooo, panties, corsets and a bra over the falsies provided, were something I was chided, by Bobby, for wearing on every step in drag-queenhood (his word, not mine). I kept quiet, except to remind him that it was just for a couple of days and then we were gone. Definitely.

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“It will only be for two nights,” the anxious Donna Vallee told us. “You saw the show that we did in Tylerville. You could do that as well as those silly girls could do it. You’re both trained actors, aren’t you?”

Kate frowned at that. I didn’t contradict the ‘woman’, trying to convince me to do a drag act with

her show. What is a trained actor, anyway, someone with a degree from university? Well, Bobby and I were too young for that.

“Bobby won’t do it,” I said, meaning to excuse why I wouldn’t as well.

“But *you* will,” persisted Donna Vallee. “We could do that number from *Rent*, what’s it called? *Seasons of Love*! You know it, Janet.”

“*I’ll Cover You*,” said Janet from across the room.

Kate smiled. She actually smiled and was looking at me. “It would be wonderful if you could be an angel and do it, Douglas,” she said. I shuddered and felt sick, knowing I was being played. I liked it when girls, real ones, did that to me. “I’ve been trying to tell Donna how dated her show has become, and how she needs to update the material. You should be doing impressions of Destiny’s Child and Mariah Carey in the show, not Judy Garland and Barbra Streisand.”

“Bobby and I did audition for parts in a touring company for *Rent*,” I said doubtfully, stupidly. I was treating her request for me to do a drag act as if it was a real, genuine request. I should learn when to keep my mouth shut. “I was telling Donna about it,” I ended lamely.

Kate smiled. “So that’s where Donna got the idea from,” she said fondly, squeezing her father’s hand. “And I thought that you’d been listening to me at last, mama darling.”

“We have to keep that date in Calumet,” said Donna, a worried look on her womanly, made-up face. “I can’t cancel out on Lou Diamond. He’d never

have us back, and his shows are all over. I know it's a lot to ask of you, Dee, but I thought everything would be fine once we got to Chicago."

"It would have been," said Kate darkly. "Anyway, we have to see how Douglas does the song, Donna. We can't just push any old rubbish onto Lou Diamond. He expects a class show from you, mama."

"Well, we do have Frankie," said Donna confidently with a smile. "He's always sweet on me. He told me already how he likes my new look. This is all Dee over there and his suggestions, Kate. I think he has the eye. I know he has the talent. He'll need a new union card, in a new name, to perform with us until he finds something better. The brothers have been in over twenty movies, you know, as child and teenaged actors. We have to protect their reputations while they help us out."

"Oh, I agree with that," said Kate earnestly. Oh, yes, I didn't doubt that I was being played again.

"I'll go up to Walter's," said Janet with a wink at me. I had to flush a little then as I recalled what she had said to me before. "I need keys and some money, Donna, for the sheet music of *Rent*."

"Looks like you have an audition," said Kate lightly with a smile as Janet sashayed out of the room. "Do you think that you can walk like that?"

I gulped as I saw Janet mince so delicately to the cars and vans parked behind the house. She got into the car by sitting in the seat first and swinging her stockinged legs in after her. I wouldn't have been able to tell, at the distance we were from her, that we were watching a man getting into a car.

“I’ve never been able to tell with Janet,” I told Kate, with a definite swallow after some of my words. “Except for her voice at times, that is.”

Kate looked at me and smiled. “You won’t have the troubles she’s had,” she said lightly. “Come on up to my room. I’ll help you to change for the audition.”

I thought I was just going to have to put on some tights and a dress and a wig, maybe a little makeup—but I was wrong. “This isn’t a theater,” said Kate. “You aren’t a long way from the audience as you would be there. In a big theater, you can use panstick and pancake to make yourself look like anyone you want to be. But in the small clubs that you’ll be performing in, you can’t do that, without looking tarty—like my mother. Thanks, by the way, for what you did for my mama. She does look so much better with lighter makeup.”

“How?” I began. Kate looked at me sharply, her intelligent eyes on mine. She understood right away.

“Donna’s my father,” she said simply. “And my mother. She always has been. I called her ‘Mama’ before I ever knew what she really was. The kids at school told me that my mama was my papa long before I knew enough to care about it. I’ve been on the road with her, every holiday, since I was a baby. I used to set and comb her wigs before she went on. I thought she was marvellous. Then, as I got older, I got embarrassed about it all.

“But now, since I divorced, I see it all differently. Donna was always there for me. You should have seen her at my wedding, trying to be so butch in a tux and slicked-down hair. Donna’s always been there

for me. I don't care if she has Frankie in her bed tonight. I don't care what they do for each other. I only know that Frankie will make my mother happy for a while. That's all there is to it."

Kate stacked up bottles of hair remover and hair-removing wax on her dressing table and pointed me to her pink-colored bathroom, with white, frilly curtains at the window and in front of the shower.

"Don't you feel funny being the only woman in the house?" I asked her. "Besides Pearl, that is?"

Kate frowned as I slowly took my shoes and socks off, with a strange feeling like butterflies in my stomach as I prepared to make my debut as a campy drag queen. Donna just didn't know how much this was going to stretch my acting abilities.

"Pearl isn't a woman," said Kate. "That is, she hasn't had the big snip yet. She is definitely a pre-op, though."

"I meant Cindy," I said as I took off my t-shirt and she got a look at the thin hair on my chest and at my armpits. "Isn't she the wife of the husband and wife team?"

Kate smiled at that and began the shower and overhead fan for me in her bathroom. She tossed a terrycloth robe onto the throne for me to put on when I had finished.

"Cindy isn't a woman, either," said Kate with a sly grin. "That's a game those two play. They're both pre-ops. What do you think men say when they make love to them and find out that they made love to a man? They say that it was their own fault not being

able to tell the difference between a real girl and her drag queen husband. That's what the guy who's doing the other one is also thinking. They'll get caught out some day and probably really get hurt, physically, in the process. I hope that you and Bobby don't play that silly game, Dee."

"Douglas," I reminded her.

"Not on your union membership," said Kate with a grin. "You have to have it to work most of the places Donna will take the Show. She's always been straight up like that. All the girls who work for her have their union cards or Guild cards as female impersonators. It's gotten her out of more than one hassle with the police or club owners."

*Dee?* I shuddered as I dumped my jeans on the chair by Kate's bed and went into the adjoining bathroom. She followed me and locked what I had thought to be a closet door but actually led to the bedroom next door, maybe her father's.

"I'll do your back," said Kate as I slipped off my underpants and got into the warm shower.

I was about to deny her, but cool lotion on my back and down over my bare derriere and down my legs made me stiffen and I could say nothing. Kate dumped lotion in my hands, and, while I stood there, half-turned from her, began to rub her hands together with some other waxy substance. She was soon applying it to my face.

I lifted my arm to fend her off and Kate looked at me in annoyance. "You knew it would come to this, didn't you?" she said, a trace of anger or sharpness in her voice. "All of you girls have to do it in order to

pass. For the first little while, I'll help you. The other girls would laugh and play tricks on you, taking off all your eyebrows, for instance.

Soon, though, you will have to learn to do this on your own."

I didn't think any of it had worked when I dried myself the required twenty minutes later. Kate came in, though, with some rough white cloths after she heard the shower stop. The hair just came off me in black pellets as she dried me, paying no attention to the naked parts of me.

"That can't be me," I sputtered. "I—I have fair hair."

Kate smiled as she ran the cloth roughly up my arm. I was devoid of hair everywhere that she touched. "It's what it always looks like when you do it," she assured me, "shaving or with chemicals. There, let me do your face for you, Dee."

I knew that Kate was using that name and words like 'you girls' to get me used to what I was going to do, but still I had to shudder each time she did. *This is just an audition*, I told myself. *This is just for a part in a play or a movie*. Yes, I had to be authentic, like the other 'girls' who would be trying out for the part of Angela.

I had guessed that the girls did more than gaff their private parts. I had thought for a while that they didn't have male parts, but that was wrong. Kate told me why she had had me apply the lotion to my pubic hair as she brought out the tape. She showed me how to put my male equipment into my body and tape between my legs.

I had thought that I looked like a teenaged boy again with no hair on me, but Kate taught me how easily the tape would come off. I shuddered to think how I would have untaped with all the hair that I normally had ‘down there’.

I had the robe about me as Kate assisted me. I let a woman I admired, whom I had only known for less than a day, do that to me. Terry and her ‘sisters’, and Donna, had made hints to me, but it had taken Kate only an hour or so. Oh, goodness, I was ready to put on the panties that she passed to me to hide the taping job she had done.

It was a bitch, as they say, to move to the bedroom. Cindy and Pearl did this all the time and must be used to the hurt—and worse, the intense feelings of humiliation or embarrassment at doing such a thing to appear in front of people as a woman. I thought of the audiences we’d seen for the Donna Vallee Show. I realized that this was done, the shaving of the body and putting on feminine underwear, to make me think I looked like a woman, inside. I could then appear in front of an audience, as a woman. I shuddered greatly as Kate sat me in front of her dressing table mirror and changed me from Douglas to Dee, in her mirror.

“You overdid my eyebrows,” I told her as she began to cover where my vestigial beard might appear again soon.

“No, I didn’t do enough,” Kate countered with a smug smile. “I respected your male pride too much. Now hold still and let me arch them.”

Goodness, what was it with me? This woman, this Kate, daughter of someone I hardly knew, was enchanting me, had enchanted me, right from the moment that I'd met her. Now look what I was doing! Did I want to please her that much, this smart, manipulative woman, that it didn't take her minutes at all to get me to dress as a woman, like her, when I wouldn't have done it at all for Donna, Janet, Terry or another of the girls? I doubt that I'd even have done this, let my face be worked on, "just to see" if I could help out this troop of drag queens in their 'hour of need', as a smirking Kate put it to me. I wondered, I had to, if she was as instantly attracted to me as I had been to her, or if this was all and only for her father. She probably didn't care how she was belittling me by taking charge of me and making me into a resemblance of a woman as her father was.

Kate made my eyebrows very dark as well as my eyelashes. "Being a blonde, your natural coloring," she said, "is hard for a man. Your features need to be much softer. Yours are pretty soft. You would only need a little tweaking to be a stunning blonde, Dee. But I think you'll be absolutely authentic as a brunette."

I had to admire her skills with makeup brushes and creams and makeup sticks. I hadn't realized how full my lips could be made to appear until she outlined them and had me put on Ravishing Red lipstick. I protested at that.

"A female impersonator is always *more* of a woman than a woman is," Kate pointed out, insisting that I rub my lips together. "If we were going to Walter's Music with Janet, I'd have had you wear a softer, plummier lipstick. But you're doing an audition, not

going out shopping with me, and so this is for the audition.”

Kate used the same explanation for putting false eyelashes on my eyelids and painting my lids with greys and whites and browns, all the way up to my arched, feminine eyebrows. She also powdered me so that everything, the rouge on my cheeks and shadings about my nose stayed in place. Well, I was an actor. I'd worn makeup a million times and in a million ways, I told myself, as I shivered and quivered under Kate's tutelage.

I looked at my absurd face as she put a stocking cap on my head. I had worn such things before in period plays when I had had to wear male wigs. I looked so faggy, so much like a drag queen, as I looked at myself and knew that this audition wouldn't work—but then Kate put the wig on my head.

Oh, good grief! I changed from being a drag queen into being a woman! The bangs of the hair gently curved across my forehead and the dark hair fell about my head, clustering at my neck where Kate brushed it so that it curved up cutely against me. She put a cold necklace of pearls at my neck and hoop earrings, clip-ons, at my ears and stood behind me, smiling.

“Tell me now, Dee,” Kate said at last as I sat there, quaking, as I looked at the woman who was me. “I'm a genius, aren't I? You are one pretty female impersonator, if I do say so myself. Let's see what we can do with that body of yours now.”

I stood up with the robe clutched about me. It was a woman who rose in the mirror, her earrings wob-

bling, as she stood beside the real woman who was smiling so mischievously at ‘her’.

“You know I didn’t have to do this,” I said to her anxiously, feeling the hair moving at my neck and the earrings pinching my ears.

“Oh, I don’t believe that,” said Kate smugly. “I bet that you’ve wanted to know what it was like to be a Cindy or a Pearl or a Terry, all the way here in the van you were driving. You and Janet have a little thing going as it is, haven’t you? Now, you’ll know just what it’s like to be one of the cast of the Donna Vallee Show. It should be a big help to you, Deirdre Johnson, the next time you try out for a part in *Rent*, or the touring company of *Tootsie*.”

“There isn’t,” I began before her sly smile told me that I’d been had. Again. I slipped off the robe as Kate directed me. Oh, gosh, in just the womanly slip she’d made me wear over the panties she’d provided me with, it was definitely a girl looking at me in fright and surprise in the mirrors about me.

## VII. THE AUDITION

I knew I would have to wear a bra and padding. It was funny to put it on—but, really, no weirder in a way than getting ready for a costume drama. Usually then, however, there were other men with me. We were all in the same boat, trying on togas that were essentially gowns. We had to go to makeup as well. We had to learn how to walk in skirts, basically, but with a male swagger. This was going to be very different.

Kate taped the gel bags to my chest. “You see the advantage of being hairless,” she said as she fitted a white bra to me that matched the panties I had on. Then she put a tight-fitting waist cinch about me, pulling it so tight that it made me gasp.

“I don’t think that I can sing with this on,” I gasped.

“Oh, you will,” said Kate with a smirk. “You don’t want to sing from way down there, anyway, Dee darling, not if you want to sound like any kind of woman, as you do.”

So I endured the waist cinch, but it was difficult to sit and put on stockings and a garter belt as Kate said I had to. “No self-respecting drag queen ever wears pantyhose,” she proclaimed as I wanted to object. “They like the touch of stockings and black suspenders on their legs like you are going to wear.”

I had a second pair of panties as well, padded in the rear, to put on. It had all felt very enervating and effeminate to put on. I shivered through it all and willed myself not to think of what I was doing. It was only a part, a role, as Bob and I had prepared for many times in our lives up to now. But the glimpses I caught of myself were so embarrassing, so absurd. Bob would scold me when he saw me, his older brother, looking like anything but myself. Yet I was looking more and more like a teenaged schoolgirl as I went on with my transformation—or so I thought, until I had to put on proper women’s clothing.

The black blouse and black skirt with a slit in the side made me into not just a woman, but a sexy

woman. Then Kate had black boots for me to put on. The high heels made me taller than her when I stood.

“Wow,” Kate said, smiling at me and holding on to me as I wobbled across the room, with the heels and the tight skirt, despite the slit, making me shorten the way I usually walked. “I think, in that wig and outfit, you could be a dominatrix, Dee. You could earn a lot of money, seriously.”

“Hey,” I said, gasping as I tried to control the weird emotions I was feeling. “I’m not that kinky, really!”

“Can you lift your speaking voice?” asked Kate. “Sort of into your throat. You must have heard the other girls talking, not Janet of course. They’ve all had to learn how to find their feminine voices. In time, you’ll have to as well. You know the song, *I’ll Cover You*? Can you sing it for me?”

Well, I tried, but Kate wasn’t pleased. I was in tune but I sounded too much like a man, she said.

“I’m glad you noticed,” I said to her, feeling so absurd as I looked at myself, at the tight blouse and skirt I was poured into, the stockings and boots on my legs helping in the illusion of femininity that I saw if Kate didn’t. “After I have auditioned for this part, I’d like to take you out and prove it to you.”

“Oh, I love to go out shopping with the girls,” said Kate with a smile. “We’d love to have you along. You should buy your own panties and bras, Dee. You can borrow mine for a while, of course, but we’re not exactly the same size. You’re going to pull my clothes out of shape and my shoes will hurt you a lot.”

“I’m not a female impersonator,” I tried to tell her as she led me back to the dressing table and had me cross my legs in the skirt after I sat. This was only going to be for a day or two, as I helped out the Show, by doing an act in Cindy or Pearl’s places, I wanted to tell Kate. She smiled at me encouragingly as she manicured my nails, attached on acrylic tips that made them pointed and feminine, and then painted them bright red like my lips.

“Of course, you’re not a female impersonator,” said Kate with a grin. “You’re just an actor down on his luck. But this will earn you a few bucks, won’t it, until something better comes along?”

“Don’t keep saying that!” I urged her as she had me practice walking like a woman about her room as we waited for my nails to dry.

“Has your brother ever tried to be a woman in a play like you?” Kate asked me, laying down on her bed and watching me walk up and down, my derriere beginning to sway as I put one foot in front of the other. She was encouraging me to do it even more, and not to try to stop myself as I had been doing.

“He did an audition for a play called *Hosanna* in Toronto,” I told her, giving her a quick synopsis of the play. “If they had selected based solely upon looks, Bobby would have got the part. Then he would have been Cleopatra, the Elizabeth Taylor version, every night on stage. He looked really a lot like her when he was made up.”

“Why didn’t he get the part?” asked Kate, showing me where to put my arms, slightly behind me, as I stood and answered her questions.

“A better actor wanted the part,” I told her, defending Bobby a little bit, though I didn’t know why after what he had said about me. It had all led to this, me being prepped and primed to be a drag queen in a drag burlesque show.

“He must have been a closet queen,” said Kate with a smile.

“He had a wife and three children,” I protested.

“They always get into the part with much more gusto,” said Kate, smiling even more broadly. “They know that people wouldn’t suspect them of having latent drag queen tendencies.”

I couldn’t argue with her, I realized.

“Come on then,” Kate said smugly. “Let’s go down, Dee, and knock ’em dead in your audition!”

I saw the way I was dressed, the slit in the skirt showing off the tops of my stockings, and I began to shudder. I couldn’t go in front of other men and drag queens dressed the way that I was. I couldn’t let my brother see me, I thought in a panic. Kate had done far too good a job on me. I didn’t want the teasing and the knowing looks that I was going to get.

Kate opened the door, smiled, and came for me. She tugged me down and out of the door where I could hear a piano playing in the living room. It stopped suddenly with a strong cannonade from the pianist. I heard Janet saying, “I’d prefer it if you did *Seasons of Love*, myself. Then we could bring in some of the members of the audience with the other girls in a big finale. But this is how the duet between Angela and Collins goes.”

I clicked over the floor with Kate's arm to steady me. The moment she saw me, Janet stopped playing and looked at me, her hand on her mouth, as though she was thunderstruck. "Here she is, girls," announced Kate in her most cheerful voice while I wished then that I had never done anything as stupid as I had in letting her make me be a female impersonator from the skin out. "Here is Deirdre Johnson, the latest member of the cast."

The girls came bouncing off the sofas, chairs, and piano stool then to welcome me to the special society of drag queens. Even Pearl and Cindy were there, without makeup, but with some sort of Vaseline on their faces, white terrycloth robes clutched about them. They were pink and red and a little puffy, while their legs were smooth and red as well. They hugged me gingerly.

"You look so pretty!" said Pearl with a grimace as she touched me. "I knew you had it in you. You should have been doing this in Tylerville, you know, where we needed another girl."

"I'm not," I began, but Donna shushed me with a smile.

"I think I will have to go back to doing my act out in the audience," Donna said, as the flowery fragrance I had been smelling became muskier. That's how I realized that the flowery essence was from me. It was as if the clothing that I wore had been soaked in a woman's perfume. Probably, it had.

"You smell nice," said Terry Marvel on cue, as she hugged my padded front to her natural curves. "Just like a woman."

“I did warn you,” said Janet huskily with a shrug and a kiss on my cheek. “I said a week, didn’t I? You do look lovely. But can you sing?”

“I can do Collins’ part,” I protested as Kate poked me immediately. Janet looked surprised at the voice, my own, that I’d spoken to her with, not thinking that I did have to alter the way that I was going to be speaking as a drag queen, as the ‘other girls’ did, probably without thinking about it.

“You can do better than that,” insisted Kate. She wanted me to repeat what I had said in the girlish way I had briefly practised with her in her bedroom.

“Come over to the piano and let me work with you,” said Janet, taking my hand and grinning at what had been done to my fingernails. “Do you feel a little bit like a woman now?” she asked me, teasing me. “Do you feel like the queen of all you survey?”

“Maybe a little,” I said. Janet sat on the piano stool as I stood behind her. Ooo, my skirt was so tight, and my hair was so soft and long! I had to toss it back and try not to sway so much, feeling all the feminine things I was wearing, as I tried to sing like a woman as I’d done for the casts in the past, of whatever play Bobby and I were practising. We ran through an awful version of *I’ll Cover You*, but Janet said that it wasn’t bad for my first time.

“You’re on the beat. It’s your pitch that we need to work on,” Janet said. “Try this for me.” What she did was give me a music lesson in how to sing like a woman. Surprisingly, the other drag queens in the room didn’t interrupt, and listened just as intently to

what she was saying, as I struggled to master simple repetitions.

We worked on exercises and lessons for over an hour before we did the song again. I flushed with embarrassment as Terry called out, “Hey, that was really good. You really improved, Dee, in just one hour of Janet’s teaching. Can we hear the whole duet now, Janet?”

“I don’t see why not,” said Janet with a smile. “Frankie! Come on over and do this with Deirdre. She’s your new partner.”

I shivered as Frankie got up from the sofa where he had been sympathetically cuddling the two injured drag queens. He made me shudder right away as he gave me the same smile that he had given the other girls earlier. I shivered and tried to move away as he put his arm about me and sang with me, his baritone voice making mine seem light and girlish, I suppose. Frankie then finished the piece by kissing me on my lipsticked mouth.

I pulled back in a panic at the touch of a man’s lips on mine as the room erupted a little. Some of the queens protested while Terry was shouting, “Right on!” at the top of her voice. Kate berated Frankie while Donna was trying to calm both of them down as I retreated behind the piano, feeling the air conditioning coming on and cold air blowing up my skirt and about my stockings. I shivered even more at that as I wobbled away from the man who had kissed me.

Then I saw Bobby looking at me, open-mouthed, from the top of the stairs that led down to the basement. I quaked as I got out of the crowd arguing

about Frankie kissing me and went to my brother, my high heels clicking again, my chest wobbling, my hair and earrings caressing my neck and chin.

“It’s just a part in a play,” I said huskily to my brother. “To help Donna and Kate, who were so nice to us in giving us a ride here!”

“Of course it is,” said Bobby, looking at me. “But, but,” he went on, staring at me so intently. “You look so *real*, Doug. You look just like Mommy used to look.”

Our mother had died when we were very young. Bobby had become much attached to her photos, I recalled, when he was very young. He had told me, on more than one occasion, when we had discussed our drunkard of a father, that we didn’t take after him at all. We were like our mother, he said. I’d always thought that he meant in the way we behaved kindly to one another. Now, I realized that he also meant in looks.

“Those were very old photographs,” I began, putting my arms slightly behind me as I swayed, taller than my brother, on my high heels.

“Dee,” said Kate, coming to get me. She stopped when she saw Bobby and smiled brilliantly at him. “Let’s do a choreographic run-through of how you and Frankie should do that number together. Oh, hello, Bobby, nice to see you again. Why don’t you come and see how well Dee is picking up this part as Angel? It’s always amazing to me how quickly you actors pick up any part you want to play. If I was working here with Terry, it would take me a week just to

get her to learn the dialogue, before we could ever see her sinking into the part like Deirdre just did.”

The feminine name jolted Bobby. I tried to make a joke. “Did I pass the audition, then?” I asked the girl who was manipulating me still into being a girl just like her.

“Of course,” said Kate with a brilliant smile and a touch of her hand on my silky arm. “You passed the audition with flying colors, Deirdre. You can consider yourself one of the girls now. You’ll be in the show when we open again at *Diamond Lou’s* in Calumet City!”

## VIII. ONE OF THE GIRLS

I was one of the girls. The upstairs study was given to me as Frankie Morel moved permanently into the same bedroom as Donna Vallee. I could not go down to the basement since that was the boys’ territory. That prohibition, announced to me by Terry, was how I learned that Kate Vallee was busy getting two or three young men to join with us in the show and be the male dancers that the show lacked at present. They would be down there with Bobby, who I knew would be perturbed. All the boy dancers would be gay, Kate confirmed. And what was wrong with that?

“Nothing,” I said, but I knew that Bobby would be upset.

Since I had passed the audition, Kate and Donna wanted me to be a girl twenty-four seven till after Calumet City. “You have a lot of work to catch up on,” explained Kate. “You have to be thinking like a girl, or a female impersonator at least, all of the time. You

have to dress like one and act like one all of the time, particularly since Donna wants you to pick up on some of the routines that Pearl and Cindy would have done. We'll have to change some of the costumes for you as well, but the girls are all good seamstresses. So, that can be handled here."

I tried to protest that this wasn't what I had signed up for, but I got very short shrift from Kate, Donna, and the other mimics. I was part of the troupe. I should help them out in every way that I could. Rehearsals began in earnest with the carpets rolled away in the living room. There wasn't a time when the click of high heels, dancing, and constantly walking about couldn't be heard emanating from that room. And most of that was from me, as well, as I had to learn how to walk and dance like a woman in a variety of female clothing.

I had to change into dark tights, and wear ruffled skirts, as Cindy taught me her routines. They were simple, involving a lot of mugging like a girl at the audience, a lot of sexy sashaying, and a lot of graceful, womanly gestures that made me blush to perform at first.

I was sleeping in a nightie by the second night, my face and arms covered in scented lotions. I wore girls' clothes every day as well, from panties to dresses, never once in pants or a pantsuit and never in male clothes. I was Deirdre or Dee all the time; even my brother was calling me that.

Pearl pronounced herself fit, after two days in bed, and came to rehearsals in black tights, like mine. She went through the routines she and Cindy had done before. A day before we went to Calumet City, we had

a dress rehearsal. I was fitted out as a showgirl in Cindy's scanty costumes, in her thin high heels, with a blonde wig on my hair, and my makeup exactly like Pearl's. I was padded, poked, and prodded until every male suggestion in the contours of my body had been changed or disguised as female.

"You're not Deirdre," said my brother as I swept femininely out of the main room where I had been rehearsing with Pearl, while a headache-y Cindy criticized my performance as her. She told me how to hold out my tush with the feathers attached there just so. The men would like me a lot better if I did that, Cindy groaned at me, as she covered her forehead with a cold compress.

I had seen myself in the mirror, the long-legged showgirl, her costume all sequins and so scanty, the headdress over my blonde mass of hair making me appear to be six feet tall.

"Yes, it's all me," I simpered to my brother who looked at me in such alarm.

"Dee, for goodness' sake," Bobby implored me. "What are you doing to yourself?"

"I'm making us a little money," I said to my outraged brother who couldn't keep his eyes off my shapely figure, making me feel so weird in my flamboyant, female costume, long hair and makeup. "I'm helping out some people who helped us out when we were down and out in Nowheresville. Remember? And," I looked around slowly, the huge headdress moving with me, feathers stroking my mostly bare arms, my pink-gloved hands on my hips, "I didn't tell them who had been fiddling with the controls on the

tanning beds when we first went down there before you took our cases down.”

Bobby did have to look a little guilty at that. “Okay,” he said with a nervous glance at the argument still going on in the living room. “But this is going a little far, brother, to make a payback for a silly accident.”

“Is it?” I asked him, noticing how he was looking at my prominent, inflated female chest in profile as I was slightly turned away from him. “It’s their livelihood, these drag queens, the tours that they make, the clubs that they play. This is an important one for them, there’s something about their future in this one, and so I promised Kate that I would help out.”

“You think she’s going to like you more as a man because you’re dressed like that?” asked Bobby scornfully. He didn’t have to say that as I had thought it myself, several times. Whenever I did try to remind Kate I was a man and get on some sort of wavelength with her, she said something to put me in my place.

Kate had taken several photographs of me and sent them in to whatever person she was dealing with on Deirdre Johnson’s behalf. Over the computer, I now had a photographic record of myself as a woman—no, as a female impersonator, real name, Douglas Evans.

I had tried pinning her down on going out with me as Doug when this show in Calumet was over. “We’ll see,” she had said with her lovely smile. She’d brought up all the pictures of me as Dee, in my show-girl costume with Pearl, in my black, slit skirt and

boots as Angel, or Angela, as almost everyone was calling me. Pictures of me, in the frilly dresses and gowns Kate and Donna had been dressing me in, also appeared to show me rehearsing various sketches with the other mimics.

“Don’t you look pretty in this dress,” Kate had enthused as I was caught from an angle that showed all the petticoats about my stockings as I descended the stairs. I did look like a debutante or something—something very feminine, that is.

“What are you doing with all these pictures?” I asked Kate as I shivered at one of me dancing with Frankie, his arms about me as I smiled up into his face.

“They’ll be part of the advertising board outside *Diamond Lou’s* in Calumet City,” Kate said with a grin. “And, on the posters he’ll have had made up, from what I sent him over the Net! Would you like to have a copy for your resume, Mr Evans?”

Well, at least Kate had called me by the male name that I was telling her that I was. “Funny thing, though,” she said. “Donna thinks you and your brother are legit actors down on your luck but, when I asked the union about Douglas and Bobby Evans, they hadn’t heard of either of you!”

“We didn’t give your, your mama,” I said to her, crossing my nylons with a female sort of sound that made Kate smile at me as if she knew how I was feeling when I did that. “We didn’t give him our real last names,” I mumbled.

“I figured,” said Kate smugly. “I checked who and what was playing in Midland and found out that the

Gillingham Players folded there. What was the play? *Madame and the Family*? What sort of part were you playing in that? Whores? Or was it a crime family play?"

"It was a family drama, a comedy for the whole family," I told her, through gritted teeth, my lips seeming to slide over one another waxily with all the lipstick she had had me wear for my dress rehearsals.

"Douglas Reynolds and Bobby Clark," Kate had jeered at me. "I never heard of you. What kind of reputation were the pair of you trying to protect by not helping Donna with her show?"

"Well, I am, aren't I?" I asked her a little angrily, standing up on my high heels and being taller than her for once. "And we have been in the movies, a lot, I'll have you know, since I was eight years old!"

"Child actors!" Kate had laughed at me, shaking out what seemed like a bathing suit, a woman's bathing suit, and holding it against me. "Can't give it up when no one wants you and your time on stage is past!"

That had stung me. That had hurt me a lot more than dressing up like a ridiculous show girl and mincing like some glamorous Playboy bunny about the living room of the house Kate had rented. What Kate had said wasn't fair and wasn't true. Bobby and I weren't after fame. It was just the chance to perform, to playact on stage, to do the one thing that we both knew we were good at.

Besides, it wasn't just us hanging on to the past, I wanted to tell Kate. What about her father, her

mama? I'd heard her call the blonde show owner that. Donna hadn't been out of drag since we had reached Chicago. It sent shivers up and down my back to hear Kate call an obvious man, her 'Mama'. And she accused *me* of clinging on to a past that was gone!

Now, Bobby was reminding me of it all, the way that Kate had treated me. Did I think that she would see past all of the paint and female frippery that I was wearing all of the time at her suggestion? It hurt as Janet and Terry smiled knowingly at me in the background, while I tried to sound and look and sparkle like a girl on stage.

Bobby was right, I thought. I was an idiot, shaking myself as my long earrings danced on my neck and the long, blonde wig tantalized my bare shoulders. I could barely walk as I was tucked so severely between my long, smooth legs, compressed by the smooth, nude-seeming dancing tights that I had to wear as a showgirl. *And don't even think about what you did, had to do, dancing with Frankie*, I thought, feeling that I was breaking out in a sweat and spoiling my girlish makeup.

I turned and looked back at the little scene in the living room where Pearl and Cindy were showing Kate what I was doing wrong as a girl, and I decided I'd quit. Yes, I'd quit—but then Kate shook her finger under Pearl's grinning face and turned to me. Kate skipped over to me, to throw her arms about me and hug me. even though my impossible heels made me taller than her.

"Thank you, thank you, Dee," Kate smiled, her makeup-free face so fresh and girlish. She saw Bobby

again at the top of the basement stairs, and smiled at him as well as she put her arm about me. “Thank you for being such an angel and helping us out so much.”

Kate put her arm about my waist and smiled up at me. “Let me help you slip into something more comfortable,” she said seductively. “You’ve been on those heels all day. They must be killing you. I always feel it when I’ve been a long time in heels. Let’s get you ready for a last run through with Frankie—and that will be it until you open tomorrow night!”

All thought of just telling Kate what I had been going to tell her—that I was quitting, that was it, the end—slowly left me as we went up the stairs to my room. There, a large trunk was open. All I could see were dresses and costumes that Cindy normally wore, packed and waiting for what I was wearing to be ready to go.

“Your brother is giving you a hard time?” asked Kate sympathetically. “It’s odd. Donna isn’t usually so far off base in her predictions. She told me when we got here that Bobby was the one who’d certainly be in drag and liking it in a week. She’s a little annoyed she can’t do her Mae West routine with you as her swain. That really is something that I’d like to have seen, as well.”

“I’d like to do that, too,” I began eagerly—but then I had to say it again in a girly way, my voice pitched much higher, as Kate insisted. I had to practice speaking like a woman all the time. I couldn’t let down the standards of the show, at a most inopportune time.

Kate helped me out of my headdress and my long wig, helping me to mount them properly and store them as I looked at the caricature of a woman I'd become. The mirror showed this person with short, male hair, with eyelashes curled and face heavily painted in a skimpy, sparkling costume, apparently with a woman's breasts and a tiny waist.

"Don't look at yourself," said Kate, putting a dress over the mirror so that I couldn't see how silly and feminine I now appeared to be, even to myself. I could look down, however, and long tassels from my ears flickered into view, my prominent, girlish chest heaving in front of me. Kate quickly put on the dark wig of hair that I would wear as Angel.

"There," she said with a smile. "I was talking to Cindy and Pearl about what we can do when Cindy recovers. The three of you could do girls' singing groups, you know. I really like what you are doing with your voice. I bet you could do any and all of Destiny's Child's hits. I was saying to Janet and Terry that the five of you could revive the Spice Girls as well. Wouldn't that be fantastic?"

"Janet wants to go electric as well. She was telling me about range of sounds and recorded music, and of a drum machine she could use." Kate stopped and sighed. "But it all costs money, of course. We'll have to work very hard, and have to change some costumes to fit any new act we bring along. Most of all, we have to have someone as talented as you, Dee, with us, all the time, as Beyoncé!"

"Don't count on me!" I told Kate as she assisted me out of the costume that clung to the padding and cinch about me. It made me seem so like Cindy. It

was a relief, as she had said, to be out of the heels and out of the clingy, shimmering tights.

“You don’t want to be Beyoncé?” asked Kate with a smile.

“Kate,” I told her as her smile faded. “I told you that this is a one-off for me. It is. Bobby reminded me, today. I’ll do Cindy’s part, which I never did propose to do in the first place. I’ll do the songs as Angel but, after Calumet City, I’m Douglas Reynolds again. You’ll have to find some other female impersonator to do what I was doing.”

“Do what you *are* doing, Douglas?” said Kate then, giving me a little push that sent me backwards onto the little bed that had been installed in the upstairs study for me. I knocked the pillow a little astray, revealing the nightie I wore at night, now. “You don’t understand at all, do you?”

“Understand what?” I asked her, puzzled. Kate smiled and took off her blouse and began to take off her skirt—and there she was, dressed in panties and a bra just like I was.

“You’re incredible,” said Kate, pushing me back onto the pillow, her sweet lips caressing mine. It wasn’t exactly a kiss as she shared my lipstick, but soon her lips looked like mine. I put my arms about her and kissed her, getting aroused so easily that it made me squirm beneath her.

Kate smiled as if she knew exactly why I was being so wiggly. “We’ve all been in awe of you, all week,” Kate said. “You pick up things that the others have taken years to perfect. Donna said you have perfect pitch in a song. You do, whatever range you’re sing-



ing in. You can dance like Fred Astaire or like Ginger Rogers. You seem to be a natural mimic, male or female. None of us can think when we ever saw anyone as talented and as quick a learner as you. You could be the savior of our little show.”

Kate began to kiss me in earnest. She slipped down her panties and took my feminized hands and showed me how she wanted to be pleased. I didn't mind all the foreplay. I clung to her and held her small, femininely soft body to me while she smiled as her real breasts bounced on my false ones.

“Kate!” I whispered to her, reaching for the panties I wore to take them down like hers.

“No, Deirdre darling,” Kate whispered to me. “That's my job. I'm going to show you how we make love around here.”

END OF PART ONE