

# *You Sing Like A Girl*



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# YOU SING LIKE A GIRL

**by Eleanor Darby Wright**

I really didn't want to do it. But I could hardly say that Julie made me do it, could I? Obviously, she'd helped. She'd been the one to decide that the Goth makeup, the two-toned dyed hair, the studded clothing and the fake piercings would disguise me enough but also make me stand out from the crowd. I'd be sure, she said, to get into the television section of the tryouts for a place on the reality show.

Julie was right, of course. I trembled through the whole selection process and finally was placed in the line-up that was going to be on stage before the real judges. The black lipstick and thick eyeliner about my eyes helped a great deal, as did the pale foundation on

my face. Julie's long, leather coat over a bulky shirt and my jeans did the rest. I didn't look at all like the 'me' who had been laughed off the stage the last time I had sung in a talent contest in high school.

Then, I wouldn't have dared to wear makeup, and I would never, ever have worn a skirt and let everyone gawk at my shapely, smooth, girlish legs. And high heels and dangling earrings – they would have been totally out of the question.

"So, what's your name, dearie?" asked the supercilious English judge, a fixture now on all reality talent shows.

"Sam," I whispered to him as the size of the auditorium registered on me. There were people in the dimness back there, moving sound booms and cameras around. The one over Graham's head flared a bright red. Oh gods, I was being recorded. I was on television! I was talking to Graham Notting and there was a sneer on his face as he looked at me.

"Well, Samantha," he said to me. "What are you going to sing for us today, *Hell's Bells*?"

I couldn't blame him. The pretty, blonde, long-haired girl beside him had a fixed smile on her face as if she couldn't believe what she was looking at when she looked at me in my studded Goth gear and black and white makeup. I hadn't believed it an hour ago myself in the hotel room across the way from the theater where we were to perform.

I shook my head and Julie's earrings, black balls on the end of thin chains, swung wildly along my neck and chin.

"Going to give us a hint?" said Graham snottily, like his nickname. "Or do we have to guess?"

*"All I Ask of You,"* I whispered again, as the red light went out for a second and re-flashed from a camera way over on my left, from the stage entrance I had come through.

I faced the four judges who were sitting in a row at the edge of the stage, looking at me against a backdrop of stage curtains. The roadies who had organized us off stage were standing there, shaking their heads at me, looking quite disgusted. I had heard and seen all the others who had come before me for an hour. They had all been most lively or animated, the boys as well as the girls.

"Ask what you like," said Graham, smirking at his own sort of joke or pun, tossing his clipboard on the small table in front of him. "Christie?"

Christie, the blonde-haired glamor girl, was studying my face. "You've a lot of piercings," she said. Brilliant of you to notice, I thought sourly. "How many?"

"A lot," I muttered, trying to speak up a little. I must look and sound petrified. I was, of course.

"Going to show us all of your metalwork?" Graham had to ask luridly then as if he knew that I would have piercings in private places that he would never see. There were smiles at the thought of that all along the panel and on several faces in the darkness behind the television lights.

I shook my head again. Just let me sing my piece and get out of here, I thought to myself, shaking in distress, and blaming Julie for me being here to be embarrassed in this way. It isn't going to work, Julie, it just isn't, I thought to her, wherever she was hiding. When people looked at me, the way that the panel was, they'd laugh at me when I tried to sing. Being a Goth

was going to provoke a vile reaction, particularly with the music I'd chosen to sing.

"Who wrote that song?" asked the black girl, the guest judge, with a frown. "Andrew Lloyd Webber?"

I nodded.

"*The Phantom of the Opera?*" asked the other male judge, adjusting his black-rimmed glasses. I nodded again and he frowned at me.

"What we should have expected," murmured the black woman to Christie, who nodded and folded her arms, still looking at me distastefully.

"But that's a duet," persisted Keith, the fourth judge. He was a music producer and had worked a lot with pop artists as well as rock. "Which part are you doing, Sammie girl, Sarah Brightman's or Cliff Richard's?"

I should have known that someone on the music panel would know that the female part was for a high soprano while the male part was for a crooner or baritone. I just stared at Keith for a moment as I thought about how to tell him that I had changed the words a bit so that it could be sung as a solo. I had pitched it as well into the best part of my range as a singer. So, no, he wouldn't hear an operatic singer, or a crooner, when I finally got to do my bit.

"Going to do a Susan Boyle on us, are you?" asked Keith then with an amused smile. I'd heard him say that to another girl, trying out earlier. I think it had been awfully intimidating for her. She messed up her excerpt from *Les Miz*, leaving the singers' area in tears, as she wasn't invited on to the next round of the competition.

What could I say to that? All the singers were there to make a good impression on the judges. Julie told me that I should get into the finals with the voice I had. It wasn't the voice that would stop me, I quivered in thought, but the way I looked when I sang. But Julie insisted that the contrast, the Goth makeup, the two-toned, spiky hair, the metal and leather in which I was clothed, and then the music I would sing, would get me past the judges' rounds.

"A new image," said Julie. "Now, whichever group they put you with, male or female, just go along with it. Don't complain. Don't explain. It's their own fault if they get it wrong."

So I had waited with the girls who were rock singers. I wasn't asked. I was in that group because of the way I looked. There were still five or six girls to come after me as soon as I was through.

"I, I don't think so," I muttered to Keith who had waited, head cocked, for me to answer his Susan Boyle question.

"So she speaks!" he crowed, laughing back at his smiling friends on the panel.

A lot of the boys and girls ahead of me had been asked lots of questions about themselves or their musical accomplishments. Those moving on to the next round had usually come from the self-assured ones whom the judges had seemed to like from the start.

"Well, Sammie girl," Graham said to me. "Any time you're ready." He looked as bored as he sounded. I noticed that the black girl had folded her arms like Christie and had slumped down in her chair as if just waiting for me to finish and get off. I could almost hear her saying, Whyever did you come here and waste all

our time when we could have been listening to the next Susan Boyle or Carrie Underwood?



I set myself quite still, took the mike in hand and closed my eyes. Just like on other singing talent shows, I had to sing without any accompaniment, which Susan Boyle had never had to do. Closing my eyes really helped me to hear the music in my head, the rhythm of the strings playing through a chorus in my brain, and then I could begin.

*"No more talk of darkness,"* I began, enjoying inwardly the way that Keith sat up, his mouth dropping open as, in my mind, I accompanied the strings in the first part of the duet. I tried not to launch myself too viscerally into the soprano part of the libretto, but it was hard to hold back to the range I had wanted to present as mine. Particularly in the second stanza, I flowed far too easily into Sara Brightman's soprano because I hadn't descended as deeply into the male part as I should have.

I didn't sing any false notes and I kept most of the power from pouring out of me. I didn't have to as there wasn't really a full orchestra behind me. I was whispering again as I finished slowly with, *"Love me, it's all I ask of you,"* hearing inside me the strings repeating the melody in a full orchestral sweep.

The judges were staring at me as I put the mike back in its stand. Then, Keith suddenly began to applaud me. I could feel myself flushing as I stood there, doing a little bow as the girls began to clap as well.

"Well, Keith," said Graham, rocking in his chair. "You liked that, did you?"

"I did!" said Keith enthusiastically as I stood there, waiting to be dismissed. He was staring at me. "I loved that opening. I was thinking Karen Carpenter and then you went spiralling through Mariah Carey but then you backed off on the power, didn't you? I would love

to hear you really rip that song even if it would have knocked us right off the stage!" He turned to Graham. "I think we just had our Susan Boyle moment, I really do."

"Let's not go that far," said the black female judge, making a face at me. "It was nicely sung but there wasn't much oomph behind the singing."

"Didn't need it," contradicted Keith, as I would have done if I had been able to say anything. "It was just right for this setting. I loved her not trying to overpower us and just letting the music enthrall us!"

Christie liked what I had sung and the way that I'd sung it. Damned with faint praise, I thought.

"So, next round?" asked Graham. There were four votes and, shaking like a leaf, I was handed a ticket to Las Vegas and the next round of the *Voice of the Americas* reality show.

I stumbled away, not impressing the judges by squealing or thanking them profusely. I couldn't do that. I was numb at the compliments paid me, that they had listened to my singing and hadn't laughed at me.

I was stunned into silence even when the roadies, and some kind of roving reporter, Burt, tried to get me to talk to them, a camera following me. I went out into the hall where relatives and friends were waiting.

"Well?" asked Julie, coming forward with a big smile on her face, putting out her arms to me.

She hugged me as I put the ticket into her hands. That made her squeal and start jumping up and down on the spot.

"I told you!" Julie screamed at me. "I told you!" She flung her arms about me, hugging me, which I didn't

mind at all. I had to shiver though as the earrings bounced around against my neck again. It was those things, and the styling of my hair, I was sure, that had made the cretins on the *Voice* show think that I was a girl. Were they ever going to be surprised when they found out that I wasn't any kind of girl, Goth or otherwise. And, yes, my name was really Sam, as in Samuel, not Samantha.

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I loved to sing and, when I was a boy, it wasn't hard to enjoy being in the choir at all. It was when I was in my teens, however, that people began to nudge themselves whenever Mr Brett got me to sing a solo. I don't remember the exact day but one time I looked around and realized that I was the only teenaged boy left in the contralto and soprano sections. Even Andrew Anderson's voice had cracked and broken. He came in to play piano accompaniment at times.

The tenors and basses, a lot of teachers among them, were all older than me, even the students. So I lied when I knew that Mr Brett was going to put me at the front again to do *Pie Jesu* with one of the girl sopranos.

"I, I'm sorry, Mr Brett," I had told my disappointed teacher, trying to be hoarse and whispery. "But, I think, I think, my voice has broken. I, I don't think I can sing again like I used to, not for a few years anyway."

Mr Brett looked at me and at the nudging boys and girls behind me. "Yes, well," he said. I don't think he really believed me. He didn't take me over to the piano and test me as he had other boys like Andrew. They had been trying to sing higher but their voices had al-

ways cracked. I had tried to practice that but it wasn't easy.

"Yes, well, it has to happen to all of my best singers sooner or later," said Mr Brett sympathetically. "I had hoped for one more final performance from you, John," that was my real first name, as in John Samuel Barrington, "but we will just have to go on without you, I'm afraid. Susan McIlroy, please come here!"

That's how quickly I was replaced. I could have stayed and watched the choirs perform but I didn't. Mr Robbins, my home room teacher, stepped out of the ranks of tenors, to pat me on the back and tell me how much he was going to miss my singing, how much he had enjoyed listening to me solo in the past and lead the sopranos to the heights that they could achieve. It was cold comfort to me as I went off to the library to sit, shaking with what I had done, effectively cut off from most of my social life, to become one of the guys.

I tried. Even after we moved towns, and I went to a new high school, I tried. I just should never have let myself be cajoled into singing at the talent contest. I thought that my new friends had really liked my 'crooning' style. I didn't realize until I had made a perfect fool of myself with *The Way We Were* and *People* that I had been set up.

Only when the emcee said, "Thank you, Ms Streisand, and let's get on with the competition now," did I look around and see how everyone was laughing at me. They all thought it such an enormous joke. I don't know how I got out of there without either crying or punching somebody.

I had to endure the taunts for days on end. "Hey, Barbra!" was the nicest of them all. "The boy's got no

cojones!" was a favorite, though other words were substituted for the Spanish name for my testicles.

I thought that Julie was going to start on me as well as I sat outside in the park beside the school to eat my solitary lunch, wondering how I could last two months of what I was going through before I could sit my tests, graduate, and get on with the rest of my life. Oh, I was definitely going out of state if I went to college. I wasn't going to go through the rest of my life with 'Color Me, Barbra', written all over my books and papers, in pink crayon, of course.

"I really loved your singing," Julie said to me. "I really did. You didn't know that you sounded like a girl, did you? I am so sorry that I laughed at you, Johnny B." There were a lot of Johns and Johnnies in that school. "I should have known that anything that Cotton and his gang were telling everyone to watch was a set-up in which someone was going to get badly hurt. I'm not the only girl who wants to tell you that I'm sorry about what happened."

I'd gathered my stuff together and, head down, started back to the school and afternoon classes. "It's all right," I mumbled. "Thanks and it'll never happen again."

I was half way into school when Julie came racing up to me and put her arm through mine. "I'd like to hear you sing again," she said. I felt a tremor inside me. That was never going to happen again. "Really."

"Never," I murmured.

"Then let's talk of something else," Julie said brightly as we neared an entrance to the school. A lot of Cotton Bryant's pals were standing around.

“Hey!” said one of the bright ones, Gil, who had been really a pal in showing me around in my first days in Whitefalls. “I didn’t know that Streisand was a lesbian!”

Julie was furious. The crowd was sniggering while I was mortified at what happened to a girl just trying to be nice.

“Hope you and your loser pals are going stag to Prom!” Julie called over her shoulder. “Maybe you gay boys should double date each other! You’re so fixated on being queer, aren’t you?”

The murderous looks sent my way, and Julie’s, made me groan. “Don’t help me!” I said, really hoarse that time. “You’re only making it worse for me!”

“Then, I’d better come over to your house tonight and make it better,” Julie said, leaving me for her English class, while I had, believe it or not, Auto Repair.

I knew she wouldn’t be there. No-one knew where I lived, I was certain, as we had moved three times since we had been in Whitefalls, our newest apartment in an older part of the town, over a store.

“How did you know where I lived?” I had to ask Julie as I went off with her in her parent’s car which she had ‘borrowed’ for the evening.

“When you’ve been in office detention as often as I have,” said Julie with a grin, “you know where everything is. And I was this afternoon, after Mindy said she was going to the Prom with Cotton. I called her a bitch in front of Ms Grainger.”

We went fifty miles down the highway to a drive-in movie where there was no-one at all from Whitefalls whom we knew. It was the start of a relationship that’s lasted what, three years’ now?

Mom and Dad wouldn't, couldn't, pay for college for me unless I went to State. With Cotton and his gang going there, I just couldn't. I saved enough after working a year, and paying rent to my parents, to get in a year at Morton College, across the border. Mom and Dad thought that, now I was past eighteen, it was time for me to be out on my own anyway and supporting myself. They couldn't understand my fixation on college as they'd never gone. They were only waiting, I knew, for me to move out permanently so that they could make some money by hiring out my room. Or by moving to a less expensive place.

I saw two or three people I knew at Morton but I had changed enough, my hair in particular, that I don't think anyone knew me there. Or probably, I wasn't as notorious as I thought that I was.

That was when the bottom dropped out of the job market. I was bemoaning that fact to Julie at her home. She was looking for summer work, just like me.

"Why don't you sing?" Julie asked me, right out of the blue, as we sat together in her living room, studying the Classifieds in the local rag. There were only about five red circles around ads we could even try for, landscaping and telemarketing, with a hundred people going for such places, just like us.

"That's for girl singers and groups," I said as Julie tapped her fingers on the ad that she'd seen.

"I figure we make a pretty good duo," said Julie. "We sing together well. You said so yourself."

"That's just in the car, with the radio on," I protested.

“Win it all,” Julie said, tapping the paper, “and you get five thousand dollars as a scholarship for College, plus you get room and board.”

“Only if you win,” I said dubiously, a knot forming in my stomach as I looked where she was pointing. “Only half each for a duo anyway.” Funny, but I didn’t challenge her about my voice. I knew it was high-pitched. I got funny looks whenever I hummed something or sang a few words to what was on the radio. I tried to make out that I was joking and it was all a laugh. Most people just seemed to shrug me off as weird, if they thought about me at all.

But I didn’t challenge Julie. I just sort of went along with her as if I knew that I had a girlish voice and could only sing if I was going to be a girl. She seemed to presume that I understood that. So, I just went along with her and didn’t think about the consequences to myself of what I was accepting in her thinking.

The contest was backed by a radio station and the finals were being broadcast live all over the station’s network. Julie turned on the radio and later that night we heard two deejays discussing it.

“Just two more days for entries,” the girl deejay was saying. “We’ve had a thousand tapes and disks here at the station already. But don’t think that you’re out of it, girls! You want to be the next *American Idol* or *Voice of the Americas*? Well, here’s a chance for local girls to get a start! Two days to get your tapes in! Callbacks next week. And we have a new sponsor, Homegrow Foods, who have added another ten thousand to the scholarship we’re awarding. Good luck, girls, and get those tapes in over the next two days!”

“They’ll get over a thousand in the next two days,” I said skeptically as Julie got really wound up with ex-

citement and said we had to enter a tape. It was after all a lottery and you couldn't win that without a ticket, could you?

"What chance does anyone have of being chosen for the last hundred?" I protested, thinking how weird I would sound on tape.

"It's two hundred that are heard live," said Julie. "That's a one in ten chance. And with your voice, Johnny B ..."

"And that's the problem," I laughed. "I'm Johnny Barrington, not Joanna!"

"We could fix that," said Julie seriously, making my insides do another flip as I realized that she really did mean it. This was no longer a joke, my insides informed me, as I felt so awful and wanted to heave. "But if we don't make a tape, or don't get invited on the show, we don't have to do that."

It was idiotic but Julie was persistent. She was obstinate and that was why she was in so much trouble all the time. We went over to her house and the piano that she had in her front room. The first problem was finding songs that Julie could play. The second was that she couldn't sing well and play well at the same time.

We tried but the tapes weren't very good when we played them back. And my voice. Well, it hadn't improved any, I thought. If anything, it was worse. I hated hearing the girlish voice I had on the Cindy Lauper and Carlie Simon songs that Julie wanted to record. We did try a little Destiny's Child and I had to put in a couple of Simon and Garfunkel, as well, in as much of a male voice as I could manage.

I don't know why my voice stayed where it was, at such a high register. It wasn't as if I didn't grow hair and develop as a boy in all the other obvious places. But I didn't have a prominent Adam's apple. The only doctor I had the nerve to talk to about it said that it was probably that, something to do with the way my larynx developed. For an astronomical amount of money, I could have a surgery that would 'open up or lengthen' my vocal cords and then I would have a deeper voice. I did notice in the recordings that Julie and I had made that my voice had changed somewhat. It wasn't as thin as it used to be and I had developed a tremolo since I had last sung so intensely when I was fourteen or so.

Julie came bouncing in the following week just as I was about to head out to the burger stall, the only job I had been able to come up with. "Well, we're in the last two hundred," she announced. It took me a moment to even recall what she meant. I almost threw up as I looked at her happy, laughing face.

"Seven thousand five hundred apiece," Julie said in delight. "And rent and board for the rest of the summer. Dad and Mom are really pleased!"

"But they don't know," I gasped, feeling so awfully sick. No, they weren't going to have to dress up and disguise themselves as a girl. I was.

"No!" Julie yelled at me. "And we aren't going to tell them, either. I told them I have this new girl friend, Sam, and they thought Samantha, right away. And you don't want anyone connecting with your last name, do you, so I entered us as Samantha and Julie, the Carter Sisters!"

Her last name was Stoneman. Her parents thought it quite a laugh that she had changed her name. I shud-

dered as I thought about what I was going to have to change and it was a lot more than just my last name.

"I can't do this!" I exclaimed. "And I'm late for work!"

Julie waved that off. "You've quit!" she shouted at me. "Now, over to my place, Sam, and we get you ready for the first appearance anywhere, of the Carter Sisters!"

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"Mum and Dad are over at my aunt's for the weekend and so we have the place to ourselves," explained Julie as I nervously let her lead me by the hand into her bedroom.

"I can't do this," I repeated for the umpteenth time as Julie led me to her bathroom, a steaming and fragrant, womanly fragrant, bath already drawn for me.

"I've gone over this enough times, Sam," said Julie pointedly using her new name for me. "It's like the first time that I heard you singing and I thought, Oh man, she sounds so great, she's got the contest won before I even get to play my piano solo! And then I rush around to the front to see you on stage and there's this wimpy boy warbling away as if he was Streisand herself. I was so disappointed!"

"You said shocked before," I murmured nervously.

"That, too," said Julie. "Now get into the bath, Sam, and let's get rid of the male hair that you have. Nothing on your legs or chest or under your arms and I'm going to wax that stuff on your upper lip and chin. Thank goodness you haven't shaved in the last week or so."

You see, Julie automatically knew what I had to do if I wanted to be a singer. I had to look like a girl. I knew it as well. But I didn't want to get into it as much as she was determined that I should.

I didn't shave very often. That was one of the things that I hated about myself and then I saw this program on ice hockey of all things. Players grow beards for the playoffs but there were some guys who just couldn't grow decent beards or mustaches, macho guys, laughing about it. One, Patrick Kane, of the Chicago Blackhawks, was even growing a mullet at the back of his head instead of a beard. I didn't feel so odd then when I saw those guys. But smearing my legs with Veet, and my arms, the back of my hands and my chest, didn't seem right.

"I don't need to do this," I gasped at Julie. "I'm not going to be wearing a dress."

"Not in the early rounds," said Julie with exaggerated patience. She said it to me several times already. "But the later rounds will be televised for local news, and, to win, we, meaning you, have to put on more of a show than just standing there, in jeans, like a wet blanket, as you were at Whitefalls High."

Why, oh why, did I ever agree to go through this Carter Sisters taping thing with Julie? It wasn't that I really did want to sing in public, I wanted to argue with her. It was just that I hadn't stopped her when she let her imagination run away with her. She'd taken it for granted that I had agreed to disguise myself as a girl. And this wasn't going to be me with a little lipstick on, in a wig and my own clothing. No, Julie wanted me to really look like a girl.

So I was going to become this Samantha Carter for a little while, I thought with a shudder, as I got into the

bath covered all over in cream, even on my back which Julie had got for me. She'd been surprised when she saw me naked. I did have quite a bush about my penis. Because I had a girl looking at me, my manhood was quite aroused as well, nearly as big as it was when I 'abused' myself, often thinking about Julie and being in bed with her. Not that I had ever suggested that, not wanting to get her to break up with me.

"Oh boy, we are going to have to do something about him," said Julie as she scrubbed me after I had soaked in the bath and all the hair was coming off me in small, dark balls. She sprayed more Veet onto my bush as well before I could stop her and so, after a few more minutes, I was as naked of hair as I had been in sixth grade.

"It will grow back," said Julie to all of my objections. "Now, I had to remove the hair so that we can duct tape you back there and not embarrass ourselves with you popping forward or bulging at an inappropriate time."

That's when I learned that one of the uses of duct tape was by female impersonators to keep their male parts out of sight.

"How did you know this?" I asked in a trembly voice as Julie handed me a pair of her black panties. Oh no, I couldn't wear my own underpants, could I, I thought with yet another quaking running through me?

"The Internet," said Julie with a smile. "It's fascinating what female impersonators do to make themselves look more girlish."

"Hey!" I said in alarm, reaching for the black panties and beginning to take them off.



“Relax, Sammie,” said my girl friend. “We’re not going to go that far. I promised you, didn’t I?”

I think that Julie was into piecrust promises, those easily made and easily broken.

“You have to wear a bra,” insisted Julie, putting one on me. “No, we’re not going to pad it up and fill it. It’s just to suggest a little shaping. Everyone will just think you’re a flat-chested girl because of the bra straps. Now, we’re going to wear matching stockings and dresses to start off with, in case we reach the final two.” She had always been so definite about that before. “We’ll make up the same and be sisters. Now, wait for me as I strip and we’ll do it all together.”

I shook with nerves as I looked at Julie’s lovely body in her black bra, panties and a black and white garter belt and silky stockings that I had to wear as well. “I’m going to be in jeans,” I protested to her.

“We can’t do the finale in jeans and leather jackets,” said Julie, rolling her eyes at me. She was losing patience at me, having to repeat all the time what she’d already said. She sat astride me, in my lap, as she began to put makeup on my face.

“Hold me tight,” Julie murmured as her stockinged legs slid over mine, the garter belt and corset on me so strange with the way that they tugged at my body. I had to put my hands on her panties and hug her to me as she began to work on my eyes and face. She got cross several times but I didn’t mind as I got to hold her for so long. But oh, how the feelings on my smooth, bare legs, just like hers, and on my constricted body made my temperature shoot up.

“Ah,” Julie said suddenly and began to cover all of my face with some kind of foundation makeup. She spent an inordinate amount of time then on my eyelids and eyelashes, glueing on false lashes, saying she would get a proper eyelash tool for later on in the contest.

I didn't quite understand as she put a clip on one of my eyebrows and then on my nose. My hair was brushed back and tied. A black wig covered my hair but she took it from me and put it on herself. "I've a better one for you," Julie said, "but, when your hair grows just a little, we won't need wigs. They're always too hot for me!"

With a strange wig on my head, a black pageboy, Julie called it, I couldn't guess what I looked like. Julie put black lipstick on me and then kissed me, hard. With her body pressed against me, her breasts so rounded and full, I could feel my own erection yearning to get free, but it couldn't. I did, however, kiss her more erotically, more seductively, than I ever had before but nothing more as I was trapped. Only it wasn't me kissing her so much as it was her kissing me. When she leaned back, her lips were black, like mine.

"Just like yours," said my smiling girl friend as she put more lipstick on me, wiggling as I caressed her almost naked body, like mine. "Look at the new Samantha Carter."

Julie eased away from me when I would like to have kept her close to me. I spun in her chair and got a look at what she had done to me. I squawked in shock as I saw the modern, brunette girl, in her black bra and panties, a few piercings at her nostril and eyebrow, who was looking at me in such stunned surprise.

"I can't ..." I began as I stood up and the black corset that Julie had put about me squeezed me tightly about my waist.

"... do this!" finished Julie, grinning at me. "Here!" That was to warn me that she was putting earrings at my ears. She'd promised me that she was going to have me have my ears pierced so we could wear his and her

earrings. I shuddered at my image. Her and her earrings were what Julie had probably meant.

"I can't go out like this!" I protested, my voice wobbling even to my own ears.

"Of course you can't," snapped Julie. "Now we put on our underslips, Samantha darling, like this." I had this spaghetti-strapped silky piece of women's lingerie to put on that covered me up and swirled at the tops of my thighs, its touch making me feel so weird and sissy-ish.

The blue, sequinned dresses were alike. Julie had taken them from a local boutique and one was going to go back after the contest. There were no sleeves in them and nothing over my chest but more thin straps running over my shoulders with the bra straps. The dress swished around my legs, sending such light and airy feelings right through me. I would have been flushing red but for the makeup on my face.

"Feels really nice, doesn't it?" asked Julie, laughing at me and the expression on my face. "No, I'm not laughing at you, Sammie, I'm not! I feel so girlie when I put on a dress like this and you should feel it as well. So, while you're feeling all girlie and stuff, let's do some rehearsing as the Carter Sisters. Yes, you put on the high heels as well as me. Yours are a little bigger than mine."

I couldn't walk in such heels as the black shoes had. "I know they're worse than what you expect or will wear when we go down there, but you have to learn, Sammie, how we girls do it. We take small steps, we swing our hips, and we smile and sway all the time. Come on, Samantha, into the living room. I know your face is Goth-y but this dress isn't. But that's how you'll

look in the show and no-one will know you at all, I promise you, not even your own parents!"

I thought that Julie had just painted on my eyebrows and covered up my real ones. It was a shock to find when I got close to a mirror that my eyebrows were my own, unlike my girlish, curly eyelashes.

"What ...?" I began as I wobbled after my girl friend who danced down the hallway to the living room and the piano. Of course, she began to play only womanly songs, *I Feel Pretty*, *I Am Woman*, *I'm Gonna Wash that Man Right Out of My Hair*, and *I'm a W-O-M-A-N*.

I started to sing on the third song and so she played them all again, encouraging me to lead off. It was in the middle of doing that when her father and a couple of younger guys walked in but Julie kept on playing, waving to her father, who went into a cupboard for fishing rods and tackle. She waved again as he and his friends left, smiling at us and pumping their fists as if we were doing something really well.

"They loved us," said a laughing Julie while I was roiling in embarrassment that men had seen me in a dress, singing like a girl. "Now let's plan what we are going to sing and play for this radio show!"

I was flushing so much, my heart still beating out of control. The guys had been singing along with me, my voice only breaking the once when they had come in. I had been so shocked as it wasn't just the weirdly dressed me singing to the mirror and thinking that this wasn't so bad. It was other people listening to me and looking at me in a dress and wig and taking me for a girl.

I could get by singing and dressing like this, I had been thinking. If this was the worst of it, and I could earn us fifteen thousand for doing this, it would be worth it. Then Julie's dad had had to come in with his friends and terror had overtaken me. I realized just what I was doing, prancing around and shaking my tush like a girl. I had even sort of enjoyed it. But I just couldn't do this, not just to sing. I really couldn't.

"They, they, didn't look at me as if I was a boy in a dress," I said to Julie, who asked me what was wrong as if she couldn't see. My nerves were still jangling, shaking the tight, pinching earrings as I swished in the dress, my legs feeling so funny as my stockings were caressed by its light, airy hem.

"You aren't," said Julie with a frown. "But that speaking voice! You do that deliberately, don't you, lower your voice into your chest and stomach. Don't do that, Samantha! Let it come from your head, light and gay! Shoot! I didn't mean that last word. I meant ..."

Even though I had shivered at her using such a word, I knew what she meant and she was right. I had tried for so long, as part of the manly image I was trying to cultivate, to speak like a man.

"Keep my voice up and let it lilt a little, as you do," I said, trying it out. Julie clapped her hands and shouted out in glee. "Oh, that's so wonderful. We're a shoo-in for sure on this show."

No, thank goodness, we didn't win. We were eliminated for three sets of country and western singers in the semi-finals. It was the only time I wore a dress and a garter belt, stockings and panties. I thought that it was because I was so nervous, dressed like that, that I had let Julie down.

“No,” said Julie bitterly. “It was my fault. I kept you in all that Goth clobber for too long. We didn’t have any large group rooting for us. You outsang all those nasal girls by a country mile, Sam, by a country and western mile. That Carrie Underwood thing you did almost made me cry at the keyboards and you saw how the audience that was there loved it! No wonder they booed when we were eliminated!”

“Was that what it was?” I asked her, knowing I should get out of the dress and wig, as well as the lovely, feminine underwear that felt so weird but so wonderful about me. I was not going to miss wearing stockings and a garter belt, and especially not the corset. I had worn it for part of a every day in ‘rehearsals’ the last eight days as a guest at Julie’s house as her ‘Sister’, Samantha Carter.

It had been such a weird experience to be treated all the time by her parents as a girl. They’d never questioned me at all, even though I was in jeans and a Western shirt almost all the time, my face makeup done by Julie, my hair often my own, which one day, Julie had dyed partly blonde, making it all stand up spikily and femininely, Goth-style, though I’d worn the black wig with the thick bangs and pageboy styling for the competition itself.

We split a Coke, commiserating with ourselves in the dressing room. We were both down to our slippers, about to put on jeans over our stockings to go back to Julie’s house when there was a knock on the dressing room door. Julie answered it and an older man came in, a white goatee on his chin.

“Disappointed, girls?” he asked as I clutched a shirt to my front, covering my bra though he could still see my legs, my panties and my stockings. “Depressed.

Well, you should be. You were in a different league to all those girls ahead of you. They just were more organized than you and they knew who their big rivals were which is why they had you eliminated."

"Thanks for telling us that, Wes," said Julie with a deep sigh. She appeared to know the older man.

"I got the same offer, Julie," the older man said with a smile. "Actually, I'll sweeten the pot a little. How about a couple of hundred more for an extra half hour on each show? You interested?"

I gave the man a frown and looked at Julie.

"I didn't tell her," said Julie. "Didn't know if you'd show, Wes, after we didn't win. This is Wes Harvey, Sammie. He wants us to spell off his lounge entertainers around the Tri-State area through the summer holiday season and he's going to pay us for it."

"The Carter Sisters can sing whatever you like," said Wes Harvey with a smile. "Four-five days a week, a thousand for that and weekends, and a cut on sales. That's a pretty fair deal for newcomers on the circuit. Go back to university with at least twelve thousand between the pair of you."

"Why not?" asked Julie, as I stood there, shaking, in her underwear, and she signed some paper that Wes Harvey shoved at her. He put out his hand to shake mine and so it was settled. I shuddered as I realized then that I had just committed myself to spending a summer dressed as a woman. What a horrible, terrifying, prospect! The only good thing was that I could sing and people wouldn't be laughing at me if I did it in Julie's underwear, her makeup and wig. If only I could keep the shakes at bay!

With makeup on my face, the wig over my normal hair, and Julie acting as the boss, no-one questioned me throughout the silly, endlessly embarrassing summer. We didn't work all that often. Three times a week was normal. That was all I had to dress up as if I was a girl and act as one of the Carter Sisters.

We did get a lot of compliments, from the bartenders and waiters mostly, which luckily Julie could react to well. I was too shivery all the time even though the bars were pretty empty, even at the weekends, for our shows. I think it was one of the waiters who gave Julie the idea that we would do well on *American Idol* or *Voice of the Americas*.

When Julie read that there was going to be an open audition for the *Voice* in Denver, which we could drive to easily, she insisted on us going. She made sure that I wore a corset and a bra beneath the Western shirt I always wore, as well as tucking myself, before she did my makeup for me. I was shaking all over when I followed her into the small auditorium, in a long, denim skirt and stockings, and sang the audition songs for the scout team. I got the invite for the second audition which overjoyed Julie even though she hadn't got an invite at all.

"I can't do this without you," I'd told her and she'd agreed.

"I'm going to be with you, Sammie girl, all the way," Julie laughed at me, making me quake as she called me that. "No matter what happens, if they find you out or not, you are going to have a career in music, my love, and I'm going to be along for the ride!"

And that's how I ended up in girl's clothing, being patronised by Graham Snottie and his fellow judges on the song Julie planned for me deliberately, to make me

stand out from the Kelly Clarkson and Carrie Underwood soundalikes, who outnumbered all other singers in the auditions. We sort of left it for them to decide whether 'Sam' had a male or a female voice. But both of us would have been really surprised if I had been placed in anything else but the girls' group, not once they heard my voice in its soprano range.

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"You're late getting here," said Ray Fielding, an older man who had the title of Musical Director of *Voice of the Americas*. "Everyone else has been here from the beginning of the week."

"The Carter Sisters had a gig that we had to do," said Julie sweetly to the grouchy old man. I stood beside her, squirming a little in the corset and bra that she had insisted that I wear. My hair was brushed up, all spiky, and partly dyed. With my vivid eye makeup and black lipstick, I knew I looked a sight, but I could wear black pants and a tee-shirt, and anything studded or metal we could think of, from belts to fake piercings. Ray Fielding looked at me in disgust but he didn't ask me how I could be a Carter Sister when I was so obviously a guy.

In Julie's high-heeled, black boots and a whole bunch of her rings, studded gear, earrings and bracelets on me, I quaked all the time as we went out in public. I was so afraid that someone would recognize me as a man and call me a female impersonator or a gay boy. It would have killed me if someone had said that to me.

I didn't want to be the next Grae Phillips. She, he, was somewhat like me. I wasn't alone in singing in a woman's voice. But Grae had made a career out of it.

He claimed on talk shows that he only dressed in his evening gowns and got dressed up totally like a woman because his wife helped him. He'd been tired of people, he said, admiring his voice and coming around to watch him, shocked then at what 'he' looked like. So he flaunted himself as a torch singer, sprawled all over the piano, in his split dress, showing off his stockinged legs, vamping the television audience as if he was a woman until the hosts of whatever show revealed that 'she' wasn't a woman.

But the latest Grae Phillips now had a boy friend, had a website, and seemed to be living totally as a woman, despite the odd claims that she wasn't and she knew it. No, I wasn't Susan Boyle and I wasn't Grae Phillips, female impersonator. No, I was me, John Barrington, not Samantha Carter. I only wanted to get into the final eight of the *Voice* show so that Julie and I would have better paid gigs when we needed to earn money for school.

"We've got no time to rehearse you properly," Ray Fielding bitched at us. "This round is all folk music ..."

"We know," said Julie, still being all cute and friendly to the musician, and his 'roadies', whom I could feel staring at me as I chewed a stick of peppermint gum. Despite the Las Vegas heat, all I could feel was the chills running up and down me and I wasn't even in a dress! "Sam's going to sing *At Seventeen*, the Janis Ian folk song. Do you know it?"

Ray was distinctly offended by the implication that he wouldn't know the song. He went on and on, however, about how the choice wasn't ours to make and he would tell me, Samantha, what I had to sing. Oh, did I ever feel so strange and the shakes began in earnest

when he called me by a girl's name as if I really had fooled him.

"We just follow a piano arrangement when we perform in a bar or club," Julie went on brightly, swinging the black hair of her wig so femininely about her face. She wanted me to do such gestures as well. She had tried to teach me how to pout and how to flirt. But I couldn't do such things, I had to tell her, as they made me feel like I was such a sissy, like I was gay.

"They make you feel girlish?" Julie had asked me, her eyes sparkling.

"Yes," I agreed, thinking that she understood me.

"They're supposed to do that!" Julie squealed at me. "Come on, Sammie! Squeal with me! Be a girl! Convince those girls in the audience who've paid a cover charge to listen to the Carter Sisters that we're really girls!"

I could laugh with Julie and do crazy things like that when we were alone in her house. But other people, in public, were quite a different matter. I could see some of Ray's band, and his hangers-on, whom I thought of as roadies, looking at me with a little interest. It wasn't the kind of attention that I wanted, not a boy like me. Julie now seemed to thrive on it, giving lots of attention to all the girlie things she loved to do. I shuddered as I watched her wiggle, knowing I could never get my hips to move like hers. I could pretend with her in the house but, if a man came on to me the way that they did to Julie at times, I would have died in shock.

Me being difficult with the Musical Director soon got kicked upstairs and so we had to meet with Gra-

ham Notting, who ignored Julie, and laid down the law to me.

“This is my show,” Graham said forcefully to me as I stood there in Julie’s leather coat, the one she wore all the time when I wasn’t in it. I think it was her favorite. “You’re supposed to be a quasi-professional singer. Do you always show up so late for your performances? And at the weddings and bar mitzvahs you girls sing at, don’t you have a play list of what the people paying for the gig want to hear? It’s the same with this show. You be here on time and you sing what we tell you to, what Ray and I, and sometimes Keith, decide on for you. Is that clear?”

“Samantha is going to sing *At Seventeen* since she has no time to rehearse anything else,” Julie chimed in. Graham looked so annoyed that I thought for sure he was going to kick me off the show right there and then.

“Ray?” Graham asked while I must admit to feeling some relief. It had been really scary at times to be singing in the bars, particularly when half-drunken men and women wanted to request a song. When one guy had come up and began to paw me after *Solitaire*, I had wanted to throw up. Luckily, I managed to avert my face from the kiss he wanted to give me, as I shook all over and my dress swished so seductively about me. Luckily, one of the bartenders was on the guy right away and he was ‘escorted’ out of the lounge pretty smartly.

Julie had said that the bartender looked at me all the time and really liked me. She said that I should thank him properly. When I did, he would ask me out for a drink somewhere else and I should go with him. I should date another man!

"It's not the end of the world to go out with a cute guy and let him bring you home and reward him with a kiss," Julie said, her eyes sparkling at me. "A lot of the guys I've had a drink with have asked about you and you joining us. Guys have friends, too, you know. We should double-date. I hate to think of you all alone in the hotel room, waiting for me to come in!"

"I'm not gay!" I had told her furiously and Julie said no more for a while.

Ray Fielding complained and complained to Graham Notting. "You let her get away with it this time," he said, sending shudders again through me as he casually referred to me in the feminine gender, "and she'll be running the show to please herself."

"Oh, for effing sake," said Julie. "We didn't know we had to be here so early. No-one told us and no-one told us that Sam couldn't pick her own song. We thought that we had to do it ourselves which is why we picked and rehearsed *At Seventeen*. Maybe, your problems will be over, Ray, when Samantha's the first girl eliminated in the phone-in voting."

Graham gave me a funny smile then. I should have known that he was having us filmed and that the argument, with me standing there, mute, would be part of the next show. Oh yes, Graham started right in on me as I came out in my Goth outfit, black trousers instead of jeans the only significant change in me.

"So you're a prima donna already, Samantha Carter," Graham sneered at me. "And you haven't even won our little contest at all."

"I beg your pardon," I gasped.

They played the footage of me being berated for being late, scenes of the young, gabby interviewer talking

to everyone about being on time to Las Vegas to rehearse properly. The procedure of choosing the next songs, the singer got a choice of one of three, was clearly outlined by Burt the interviewer.

“Got your own entourage as well,” snapped Graham too, showing Julie doing all the talking while I just stood there, mute. I could tell by the way my eyes were open so wide that I was having a terror attack as the words swept all around me.

“Julie is my sister!” I protested with a shudder.

I was lectured then on how to be a professional by all the other members of the panel. “You have to be reliable,” Keith told me. “No-one wants to work with some spoiled rotten princess who thinks she’s entitled to dictate every aspect of the music.”

Well, so much for being on the next show, I thought, as I stood there and had to take all the sanctionious guff. It was quite a lead-in to me singing a song that I really liked. Despite everything, the rhythm section of Ray Fielding’s band was really superb as well.

I didn’t oversell it. “*I learned the truth at seventeen,*” I began, trying to be still, but knowing that all the emotions in the song would be there on my face, particularly when I held a lot of the syllables, making each into a word, such as in ‘*el-der-ly*’, just as Jann Arden did it in her version of the song.

I had them all long before I got to the ‘*ugly duckling girls like me*’. I was shivering, and it was in pleasure as I knew I had sung well and deserved every bit of the applause that I was getting.

“Well,” said Keith with a smile. “When you sing like that, I guess I can stand a little attitude from you, Samantha.”

“A lot,” said Christie’s guest replacement, an older woman, who was actually crying, her mascara running. “What a wonderful interpretation of that song, Samantha! And you are not an ugly girl, not at all! You made me feel all the things that I felt back in high school going through all that. And yes, your singing moved me to tears, Samantha. I can’t wait to hear what you will sing next week!”

Graham was snotty again of course. “If she’s here next week,” was his opening jibe. I went off, shivering, having to meet all the other girl singers and wish them luck as the voting wouldn’t be known until the following day when one of us, and one of the boys, would be gone.

Yes, I did feel such a fraud and such a cheat as some girl, if I advanced, was going to lose an opportunity to make it as a professional singer because a boy like me was taking a slot that was reserved for a girl.

“Show tunes, musicals and costumes, choreography, singing with dancers, that’s ahead,” sneered Burt, the interviewer, at me. “Better be on time and here, Samantha, if you’re voted in.”

Well, I was. I sat on the hotel bed the next day with Julie beside me, hugging me, as I was proclaimed on some celebrity talk show as the top girl vote-getter. Each of the entertainment programs showed me, singing *At Seventeen*, and highlighted the reaction of Annie Renfrew, the older woman who had cried as I performed. The video of me singing was supposed to have had over a million hits and was growing as the weekend came. The very thought of that made me shudder

and Julie cheer. She instantly began organizing me for my week ahead as a girl singer.

“You know you have to wear a dress all next week,” said Julie with a heart-stopping prediction that I hadn’t thought about. “We’ll have to pad you up as well, Sam, as they’re probably going to want you to wear a skimpy, girlish costume. You wait and see. They’re going to try and drive you off the show, one way or another.”

I lay back and had the shakes again. Twelve more shows, eight more weeks, if I went all the way to the final show! It would be that long to get all the shows in, though some of them would be shown on successive nights, rehearsals and performances, as the competition appeared to heat up. I was bound to stumble somewhere along the line. I should just go the prima donna route and quit right away, I thought in distress,

Gosh, what would I be like in two months’ time of being feminized the way Julie and the show’s makeup artists wanted me to be? I’d already had to postpone the first semester of college just in case I did go on. In a dress all week long! In women’s underwear and having makeup on me all the time? Dancing and singing like a girl? This was far worse than I expected. Of course, I could always screw up and get myself eliminated. I should have thought of that before we had a week of intense rehearsals to make us into female Broadway performers.

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“You could get work as a female impersonator,” Julie said seriously to me as I sat, almost crying like a girl, in front of the mirror in the hotel room we shared.

I was shaking enough after all that I had been through that day, the faggy choreographer screaming at me to 'flaunt it, flaunt it, girl!'

Faggy Frankie had stood behind me and had grabbed my hips, making me gyrate just like the real girls. He spun me around, twirling me, my dress not just swishing about my pantyhose, but revealing my legs all the way up to my black, lacy panties. Julie had said that I had better wear tights if I was dancing and she was entirely right. I was twirled and twirled, my high heels clicking as I moved in fright, trying desperately not to fall over while the other girls snickered at me.

I was on the point of screaming back at Frankie when Keith Sebastian, the judge and music producer, stepped out and handed out parts to all of us girls to sing in the big production numbers. Oh yes, *West Side Story*, and guess who got to do the *I Feel Pretty* excerpts.

"She needs a lot of work," said Frankie, in a huff that Keith was moving us on to another part of the show.

"They all do," said Keith with a smile, adjusting his dark-framed glasses. "But the music is important as well, Frank. And this will be live. Think you can manage *Somewhere*, Samantha, after you've been romping around for about five minutes on stage?"

"That's a duet," I said shakily, barely having any voice after the way Frankie had tossed me around in the dance the guys and girls had to do together.

"Yeah," laughed Keith. "You and Barry together."

Barry was one of the boy singers who had done a lot of musicals in high school and college, or so he said.

He certainly moved like a dancer and I saw several of the girls eyeing him. The judges liked him and one of the entertainment programs had already picked him out as the winner of the contest. I was a dark horse who could surprise, I learned. More like a horse's ass, I thought, regretting that I had ever agreed to do this with Julie.

I was so puffed by all the exercises and dancing that I had already done that I couldn't do justice to the song right there as Keith wanted me to perform it for him. My phrasing was way off as I had to insert breaths in order to keep going.

"Can't get a new partner?" I heard Barry say to Keith after we had tried to run through it after Frankie had rushed me through another rapid set of spins and twirls, picking me up and making me dance so girlishly across the stage to Barry and the duet. "Samantha makes me look bad in the dancing, since she can't do it. And she can't sing as she's all out of breath!"

Keith shook his head as he looked at me over Barry's shoulder. Frankie grabbed me and began to waltz with me, urging the other boys and girls to pick partners and keep on working as he put me into the front row of girls as we did *America*, Janice, a short-haired brunette getting to be the lead singer, as Frankie made us all skip and swish our skirts around us time after time. My last attempt to sing was disastrous, Barry stalking away from me, the only good thing, as his arm about me made me break out in goose bumps, after being held so familiarly by another boy. No, Frankie didn't count.

"If you get discovered," said Julie, assisting me as I trembled, putting makeup remover over my stage makeup, "you'll get offers of work, you know. You

could have a lucrative career as a female impersonator."

"And do what I just did all the time?" I asked her with a shudder. I told her how awful the 'rehearsals' had been.

"What's the solo that you have to sing?" Julie wanted to know as she pinned the front of my hair and dragged the back, it was long enough now, into two tiny pigtails in rubber bands.

"I do a duet with Barry," I said but Julie didn't want to hear about that.

"Francine is doing *Memory* from *Cats*," she said. "Shonette has *Don't Cry For Me, Argentina* and Miriam has *Send in the Clowns*. Didn't Graham say that you had a choice of three numbers? The duets don't count or the excerpts in the production numbers."

"I'll ask," I said, stripping off the pantyhose, my legs quivering from the work I had been doing and from the way my hairless legs felt as I slid the hose down and then had the dance dress and all its petticoats shaking around me.

Julie got on the phone right away. "So that's the way it is," she said grimly, looking at me as I was blushing as I took off the skirt and then the top, standing in front of her in my corset, bra and panties.

"What's the matter?" I asked, my nerves so much on edge as I eased out of the panties and the tape that disguised me so tightly.

"It's a set-up," snorted Julie. "They want to make you look bad. What do you bet that Barry is moved to something else other than *Somewhere* just before you have to sing it alone? And you'll be all stressed out

from dancing like a girl. Well, we can get around that, can't we?"

I was standing there, already in my pyjamas. Julie had been out, while I had been on my third rehearsal of the day, visiting some of the big casinos. She had money burning a hole in her pocket, she'd said before she left. I guessed that she was back because she had lost up to her daily limit while I had been exhausting myself.

"Put your skirt back on," Julie said to me. "Show me the dance that you have to do."

I didn't want to but I had learned not to argue with Julie in our summer as the Carter Sisters. I felt so silly as I just put on the dance skirt and did for Julie what Frankie had loved doing for 'us girls'. I didn't do any of the smiling and vamping that he had made us do, me in particular, as he picked on me all the time. He wouldn't let me move from the front row, either, though Corinne would have changed places with me.

I got my fourth rehearsal of the day, Julie slowing me down and making me vamp and curl my body, looking coyly over my shoulder, and doing these ballet spins which put cramps in my legs but didn't exhaust me as the other stuff I was doing. The only problem was how girlie it made me feel to dance as Julie wanted me to.

"Now, don't do this in front of Frankie," Julie smirked at me. "You just wiggle out, like this, in the last number, and look right at the red light, and do the strut as I showed you. Let the others do what they want. Then, you move to the spot for your duet, which will be your solo, and you let loose with everything, you hear me."

"This is going too far and getting too strange," I had to say to Julie, trembling all over. My fingers were shaking as I slipped the skirt and petticoats from me. Julie laughed hysterically then at the sight of me in my male briefs.

I felt so humiliated. "I think we should go home tomorrow," I quaked at Julie. "Or I should. I can get some work and save for another year at Morton State ..."

Julie took my hand then and stroked my fingernails, my false ones, that I hadn't yet taken off. "Hasn't it been a summer of fun for you, Sammie?" she asked me, with a funny sort of smile flickering about her mouth. "People listening to you singing, paying you compliments, spending all your time with me? So you've had to wear a dress from time to time and makeup like a girl. I could have turned you into Marilyn Monroe you know if I had wanted to. But I've let you keep some of your male dignity, haven't I?"

Julie slipped her hand onto the waistband of my briefs and snapped them. She pulled me down onto the bed that we shared. Shared most chastely because the room was supposed to be just for one, me, Samantha Carter. Julie was always 'just visiting' me if anyone came by or saw us leaving together. She had even joked with Barry that she was in a fleapit motel behind the Seven-Eleven.

"Why haven't you ever made a move on me, Sammie?" asked Julie as she tugged on my briefs, pushing my pyjamas onto the floor. "You must really not like girls very much to have had me in bed beside you so often and not made a move on me."

"I, I didn't want to spoil, spoil our, our friendship," I whispered at her as she turned out the light and I could hear her wriggling out of her clothes.

"Oh, what a lovely aroma of Chanel Number Five," murmured Julie out of the dark as I felt her womanly body touching against me everywhere. My temperature must have gone sky high as I felt her dry lips fluttering against mine. Oh, I kissed her, really kissed her as she wanted me to, as I wanted to, and my feelings took wing. I had never thought that she, such a pretty girl, with all kinds of boy friends whom she talked with me about, would ever let me do what she was urging me to do with her.

"Your Chanel is so fragrant," I gasped as I came up for air as she twisted and trapped my legs about her.

"I'm not wearing the Chanel," said the girl in my arms, her own lovingly draped around my neck. "You are, darling Sammie!"

Oh, I was! I had forgotten how Francine had used her cologne spray on me in between dances, saying that we could both use it. It didn't seem to faze the wonderful girl beneath me, however, as she drew me against her and even helped me to enter and possess her, putting her legs over my hips and across my back. She rocked and had me gyrating pretty soon, my world spinning out of control as we made love, Julie and me, neither of us with any unsightly hair on us anywhere.

Julie came in a huge, cathartic release. "Oh, that's so good, Sammie," she said to me as we shuddered together, every nerve, and every part of me, elated by what we had done. "It's been a week for me and I think I was getting antsy not having it! Well, now you've found your way into me, we'll have to do it more often,

won't we? Could you do what you just did to me again, right now?"

Could I? I made love to Julie four or five times that night. It was if a great dam had burst between us. I didn't want to stop. I should have been the tired one. Which is why the fifth one was there for me but not so much for her. I think she slept through that attempt, to tell the truth.

I awoke with my lover draped all over me and wanting to take a shower with me. But for all her love and admiration at that time, I still had to tuck, put on panties like a girl, a garter belt, black stockings, makeup, slightly padded bra and corset, as well as a black dress and black high heels. I had girlish hair, girlish makeup and a girlish purse to carry. I wore earrings and a few imitation piercings. I walked and talked like a girl.

But Julie smiled at me as we went for lunch, her wink and conspiratorial smile all I needed to go on and practice fully as a girl once more, the warm glow of her love overcoming all the fears and embarrassments. I still felt them but not so acutely any more as the girls and boys talked about who might be sent home after this week's show. I know that Barry was certain that the girl was going to be me.

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I stunned them all. It wasn't just the dance that I did, which really made the goose bumps appear and made me feel so silly, so stupid all over, to be doing what I was doing in the really girlish way that Julie had taught me.

I saw Keith and Graham gawking at me as I stepped forward and began with '*There's a place for us, somewhere a place for us*'. Yes, I was alone. I had smiled when Keith apologized and said that there was a last-minute change of plan. Barry was going to be doing something from *Tommy*. The sponsors wanted a more rocking number beside all the ballads 'you girls' were doing.

'You girls'! If the man only knew. Julie wanted me to wear a nightie and bra and panties in bed now, and I did, rewarding me with hours of lovemaking every night, not even waiting until I was out of female clothing or had taken off my makeup to start. I think she really got off with the way I looked like a girl, making love to me, climbing over me and caressing all her lovely underwear, that I was wearing, against me.

I was sure that I would be worn down very quickly as I did it so much with her and seemed to ejaculate so much. But I wasn't worn at all. It was so enthralling to have so much sex with a woman. It made all the other humiliations of dancing and singing, acting as if I was a woman, smiling as Frankie told me to, flaunting the femininity that I really didn't have. He was pleased with me at last and delighted at how I had re-interpreted the vamping he had been trying to get me to do.

Frankie was on the Judging Panel that night. He loved everything I had done. He loved the way that I had sung and kept saying what a pleasure it was to have worked with me. That only seemed to make Graham even more grouchy with me than ever before. When he called my singing 'pretty average', Graham deserved all the booing that he got. I loved it when the results came in the next day and I was second overall

for the week and it was Corinne who went home along with Stuart, the country and western singer.

The show moved the following week to Chicago. It was an interview and singing show with no-one going home for a couple of programs. My Goth 'disguise' had me recognized in a couple of places where Julie and I went. I had to go as a girl, Julie told me, as two more placings and we would actually be making money that would at least pay university fees for one year.

The interviewer wanted to know all about me as a little girl, the dolls I played with, and what had made me into 'Goth girl' as the gossip tabloids were calling me, Samantha Carter. Julie had coached me, making me wear stockings and a straight skirt to the interview. She'd increased my padding as well and found a way of using tape about my chest that made my chest look alarmingly real in the black leather dress. I had to wear that to sing *My Name is Luka*, the Suzanne Vega song so completely different to the full throated soprano I had been on *Somewhere*.

There were questions about my sister, Julie, as well. I shivered as I gave the woman reporter answers that wouldn't bear up for a moment to any kind of real investigation. At least the singing parts were getting easier to do in a dress and with stockings pulling at my garter belt. I was even getting used to the high heels I wore and the touch of earrings at my neck. And Julie was quite right. I really did wear too much female perfume.

In Chicago, for the first time, I actually forgot, for a little while anyway, that I wasn't Samantha Carter. She had begun to seem so real to me. And I was her. I was Samantha Carter and I really did want to win this competition and earn a recording contract as Samantha.

But then I would think of all the things that Samantha Carter would have to do if she won. I flushed thinking of all the dresses she would have to wear for her shows. I was almost sick thinking how she would have to be a woman all day, every day, all the time. No, I couldn't win this *Voice of the Americas* show. I would have to mess up somehow at the spot Julie said we should reach. I couldn't be what Julie seemed prepared to accept for me. I couldn't become a woman.

But making love to Julie in my pretty nightie reassured me that I was a boy, a really good boy who could please my girl friend all night long. And it was so wonderful that people seemed to like my singing and were listening to me. The 'Goth girl' was also becoming rather famous and seemed to be on the entertainment news shows all the time, particularly after I sang.

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I was on the edge of terror all the time in the following weeks, I have to admit, as the *Voice* show moved about the country. We could all tell by the excitement of the execs in the various cities we visited that the show was doing well. Julie was the one to tell me that the ratings had never been as high and that 'we' were actually number one in the country on several days when the show aired.

It wasn't all me. I knew that. I did hear one of the women on television screeching about how gorgeous the guys were as she did an interview with them as I had done with someone else in Chicago. They were all pretty nice about me as well as I had been about them in my interview, Barry saying that it was all a big misunderstanding that he hadn't wanted to sing with me.

In every show, there was a session now with the judges and each one of us still competing. I stood there, quaking, in my stockings and garter belt, a dress swishing about me, and tried to talk back girlishly to Graham, Christie, Keith and whoever were the guest judges, as if I was the girl that they thought that I was.

The singing was the easiest as several of the sessions were themed around famous singers or groups. I did Karen Carpenter and Cass Elliott song interpretations, until it finally happened that the voting had whittled down the group of us until there were only five of us left. Two more would go and the last three would do the final show, but boys or girls could be cut at this point.

“You get to choose your music style,” said Keith with a grin as we filmed a special session at the start of the week, “by chance.” He shook a bunch of wadded up papers together in this coffee tin and offered it to Barry first and then Shonette. I had the last choice and could hardly make the paper come out as it seemed to be stuck to the side of the can.

Keith actually had to help me. I think he might have palmed my choice and given me what I got that made my eyes go so big in shock on the tape. Or maybe it was that the choice he wanted me to have was stuck securely enough to the tin that the others couldn't have taken it out even if they had wanted to.

Barry was grinning as he had musicals of the nineties and twenty-first century while Shonette had Motown. Darnell had rap or hip-hop which made him smile as well while Francine selected girl bands and divas. “Yes, you get to choose your own selection this time,” said Keith as I wondered what I would get, country and western or bluegrass, I thought, as that

seemed about the only type of music left with all that we had performed up to that point, "and choose well as this one will get you into the final," Keith proclaimed, "or not!"

Francine had the grace to gasp audibly as Keith read out the genre, 'Opera', to the cameras from the paper that I finally had worked free from the choosing cylinder. "Wow, Opera," Keith said sympathetically. "Do you know any operatic arias, Goth Girl?"

I was shivering in horror at what they were expecting me to do. I shook my head, my silver earrings jangling against the silver necklace that I was wearing. He'd called me Samantha as well before and never what the entertainment shows and the tabloids were calling me. Julie smirked at me as she glued on my pins and piercings each time and said wasn't it terrific how I had an identity that was really well known in and out of the show. People were tuning in to watch me and the videos of me singing on the Internet were getting hits in the millions.

"Now, if they all vote for you right up to the final," Julie had said, after the last show, hugging me and crushing the new falsies she had bought for me against her own breasts. It made her giggle to feel me shaped like a girl. She laughed while I was weeping inside, the corset so tight about me, my hair swirling so femininely about me as I moved. "You could win this thing and be America's favorite girl singer!" laughed Julie in excitement, hugging me as girls do to one another. I had to squeal just like her and pretend that it would be so terrific as I swished the dress around me and felt so girlie and sissy-ish in the way I was made up and dressed.

“Well, you’ve done so well on every other musical piece and style in which you’ve performed that I’m sure you’ll do well with this one as well,” said Keith, after he had revealed that I had chosen ‘opera’ to sing. He had a huge smile on his face, adjusting his glasses as he always did, I had discovered, when he was gloating or pleased with whatever quip he was making. “After all, it’s just like singing Andrew Lloyd Webber, isn’t it?”

I think that Keith expected another ‘diva’ moment of protest from me, a moment that they could film and use against me in their final evaluations. I had heard that word used about me whenever I was able to watch a show that Julie had recorded. Sometimes, she would show me an entertainment news segment in which I was being commented on, the ‘Goth diva’ on this years *Voice*. Julie bought the tabloids as well but I didn’t get to see them unless she decided that I could. That was where I learned that *Voice of the Americas* was getting the best ratings it had ever got.

“This is totally unfair!” screamed Julie to me over the choice of what I had to sing. “And you didn’t object! You just stood there and let them inflict this on you!”

“I couldn’t object,” I whispered, shivering as I took off my girly clothing so that I could put on my girly nightie, panties and bra, and braid my hair so that my girl friend could climb on me as she now liked to do and treat me as if I was a girl being made love to by another really aggressive girl. I shuddered in pleasure as I always did as Julie loved to stroke my legs and my panties for an age before she spread my legs and forced me to accommodate her.

“You’re such a girlie wimp, Samantha,” Julie said to me, taking the cologne bottle and spraying it more liberally about my neck and over my chest. She lifted my nightie then and sprayed the tops of my legs and my panties as well and I knew very well what that meant.

“You don’t even know any operatic arias anyway, do you?” Julie asked me as I had been spared making any response to her insults by the way she had kissed me, making me put my arms about her neck and cling to her as a girl would have in being kissed by a man.

“Just the men’s parts, such as in *Turandot*,” I told her. Conversation had to end then as Julie’s hands lifted my nightie and caressed my wriggling legs as she French-kissed me, using her tongue on me, the privilege of being on top hers, she had proclaimed. But I shuddered as I knew that that was the way that a guy would have kissed his girl friend and she was doing it to me as if I was hers. We were stuck to one another so intensely, however, that, for a little while, it didn’t seem to matter how the singing was all going to end in Los Angeles with all the guest artists that would be on.

It would be a relief not to be in the huge finale, sparkling in some sequined, evening gown and dangling, diamond earrings, my face completely unrecognizable to me, my body tugged and constrained so that it suggested a female shape. Julie was battling already with the makeup and costume departments about what I was going to wear, she determined that the ‘Goth Girl’ wouldn’t look ridiculous. No, I wouldn’t be ridiculous. I would be very feminine, and shaking all over. But I wouldn’t have to vamp anyone as I had had to as a torch singer, thinking of all I had seen Grae Phillips do in a slit evening dress sliding over the piano. I could

hardly believe that I had actually done that myself in the last round but one.

“*Nessun dorma*,” I told Julie at last, both of us sated, my own manly thing so proud and aroused as she had slid down me and taken me orally, not allowing me into her right away. Of course, that meant that I was going to have to do the same to her very soon before she would finally let me into her. “It’s Italian for ‘no-one will sleep tonight’. You must have heard Pavarotti singing it.”

“Probably,” said Julie. “Sing a little of it to me.” I did.

“Why can’t you sing that one?” she asked then. “It’s a great melody!”

“It’s for a man!” I protested, thinking how silly it was that I should say that. “The prince who has answered three riddles can claim the Chinese princess as his bride and not be killed. But he puts his own riddle forward. What is his name? He won’t marry her, Turandot, unless she can name him correctly. So she makes the whole capital stay awake all night to watch and help her find out his name. That’s why it begins with him saying, Nobody will sleep tonight.”

“You changed *All I Ask of You*,” said Julie obstinately. “You can change this one as well so that you can sing it.”

“You don’t do that to Puccini!” I exclaimed in horror, wriggling enough that Julie had to roll to one side of me. “And I can’t sing like Pavarotti! I’m not a tenor!”

“He’s not a soprano, either,” said Julie. “Now they used to cut boys like you in Italian opera, didn’t they, to get them to keep their lovely voices.”

“That was so that they could sing the women’s parts in the great operas,” I told her wishing I had never told her about the movie, *Cry to Heaven*, and Farinelli, the castrato singer, and all he had suffered, not that we were really alike in any way. “I can’t sing a real man’s part in opera and still pretend that I’m Samantha Carter, your sister.”

Julie stared at me for a while. “Well, let’s sleep on it,” she said, which made me shudder. Sleeping on it invariably meant that she intended to return to it and have her way. She drew me to her to make love to her as she had made love to me. It was a good job that she didn’t want me instantly inside her as I couldn’t have managed it. It took me a while to caress her lovely, womanly body into an arousal that I was finally able to match with my own.

Julie was forceful with me as she urged me on to make love to her. I tried to respond and finally did manage to arouse myself by not thinking at all of what music she wanted me to sing. I should never have mentioned it at all. I should look up *La Bohème* or *Carmen* on the Internet and find the words to arias in those operas.

Thinking of the women I had heard sing those parts made me shiver as I would have to sound like them, look like them. I quivered and aroused Julie too well. We didn’t slow and let her regain her breath after the several times that she had climaxed. She wanted more and so I finally got to enter her and spent a glorious time arousing both of us to climax until she was shrieking as she came. Oh, I felt like doing that myself as I held onto her and joined her in her climactic orgasm.

Tomorrow inevitably came and Julie had thought about it. I was going to sing *Nessun Dorma*, in the trem-

olo-laden, womanly voice that I had developed, on what would surely be my last show. There were no two ways about it. I was going to do it. I must get together with Ray Fielding and prepare the music with him.

“I don’t think I can, Julie,” I whispered to her as she made me wear the black page boy that she had first put on me an age ago. It completely hid my ears and so the studs and rings I had worn about the upper parts of my ears I left off as well. But I still had long, painful dangles pressed through the new holes in my ears, very heavy as they swung against my neck and swung below the level of the black hair curving so slightly against my neck and chin.

I really looked more girlie than ever with the pageboy wig and the thick bangs. The padding at my chest and my hips changed me so much as well. I wasn’t a thin, angular, girl any more. I was actually a rounded, shapely, young woman. If anyone were to discover me now as a boy, there was no way that I could say that I wasn’t really a female impersonator or a drag queen.

No, I was far too effeminate as a guy to claim that. It was my eyebrows as well which Julie had thinned and thinned and shaped all summer long. Now, even without makeup, with my hair straggling around my face, in jeans and a jacket, I was called ‘Miss’ all the time. Even when I tried not to mince or wiggle as I had practiced so hard to do in a dress, I found myself doing it. I felt my hands making gestures that I had never made before. Beside me, Julie laughed at me as she realized what I was trying to do and what I was really doing.

“Quite the lady these days, aren’t we?” she whispered to me when we went walking through a mall to a

'Goth' store we had to visit, the girls fawning all over us as they recognized me right away. I so hated Julie saying that to me. I hated her agreeing to the cheerful store girls making me up to look more Goth than ever. I had then to switch full-time into female mode, not that was any different, Julie said, from what I was doing before.

Of course, there was a blow-up over the music that I had chosen. Keith Sebastian almost looked pleased as Julie sniffed and said that it was my choice to sing what I wanted, wasn't it?

"And you're your sister's entourage, aren't you?" laughed Keith as he put his arm familiarly about Julie. I'd moved his arm off me, he looking quite miffed when I did it, when he'd tried that with me. Julie just smiled and stroked his hand as if she liked it. Perhaps she did. She was a real girl, after all. "Our Goth Girl gets you to do all her dirty work for her, doesn't she?" a smiling Keith went on. "She's all sweet and demure while her sister is the bitch who demands everything her way for her!"

"No!" I began, shuddering as I knew that I would give in and do whatever he wanted me to do.

Julie grabbed my upper arm, really hurting it as she dug her nails into my skin. "This is what Samantha," she stressed my name, "is going to sing. You decided that she would sing opera and sing an aria she will."

"But it's a masculine ..." Keith began.

"Not the way Samantha will modify it," said Julie. "She'll blend the two parts into one voice as well, just as she did for *The Phantom of the Opera* song she did at the very first show."

“You can’t do that!” argued Keith. I think he argued enough to have a lot of tape for editing but I also think he knew Julie well enough by then to know that he wasn’t going to win any argument with her.

Oh, the knives were out for the interview with the judges. Keith’s words were there but Julie wasn’t seen at all. It looked like it was me being so assertive about the music, the orchestration and the range of instruments. They were all appalled at my choice of music, wondering why I would want to sing a tenor aria when I could have sung a soprano one. Was it some kind of feminist affectation, Christie wanted to know, or was I just scared of trying to sing soprano? Then, she gave me no chance to reply.

Graham and Christie were really nasty to me, as Keith had been all through the edited rehearsals. It finally occurred to me that they were trying to rattle me so that I wouldn’t sing well. “Well,” Graham finally finished. “More prima donna behaviour from our resident Goth Girl,” he smirked at me. “You’ve talked the talk, Miss Samantha Carter. Now let us see you walk the walk.”

With that kind of introduction, I had to be very good, I knew, if I wanted to be in the final three. I didn’t know that I did, so confused was I as I went onto the stage in the short dress, so tight about my bound and padded female shaping, and took up the mike to sing. I was trembling in my little black dress, my figure so trim and female seeming, I could see, in the screens around me. I took the mike from its holder with a quiver and the strings lifted their bows to accompany me. Julie had insisted on strings and, of course, they had been then used by everyone but Darnell in their numbers.

I think that I was good. It wasn't operatic singing. I did make it into pop music which the purists must have hated. I held the last note all the way through the repeat of the refrain which I hadn't heard Pavarotti do. Even though I sang it all in Italian, and so the audience in the main couldn't have understood a word, the applause really was deafening at the end.

I looked back at the judges and even Keith was on his feet applauding me. He and Graham, I noted, looked at one another and first one, then the other, shrugged their shoulders. Francine and Shonette hugged me and told me I was going to win the contest. Barry strode over and hugged me as well, making me squirm as he ran his arms over my bare shoulders, pulling me against him most familiarly. I flushed in embarrassment as I watched it on television the next night, the entertainment hosts gushing over my performance.

Yes, I was in the final three and so were two guys. Francine and Shonette were gone. I had one week left to be in a dress, to be hugged by the guys on stage in front of everybody, and, one way or another, it would be all over.

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The dress I had to wear was fabulous. Any girl would have loved to have worn it. Miss America would have loved it. With just one 'girl' left in the 'Final Three' as if this was a basketball championship or something, the costume girls and makeup artists went to town on me. They had found out that none of my piercings were real and so I lost all the metalware on my face that had made me so distinctive. I also was

padded and shaped so that I was every boy's wet dream of what Miss America must look like, both next to my skin and on the outside. No, I wasn't me at all and Julie wasn't around to protect me from all the things that the girls did to me.

I had new hair, a real fall that made my neck and back shudder as it swirled about me as I sang *All of Me*, no choice being given to me on what I was to sing in my final set, short excerpts from three types of music, each one chosen by one of the judges. I got to wear a stole for that first song which covered up my skin for a while but as I swung to the second arrangement, Phil Collins' *Against All Odds*, I had to let the stole go and there I was, showing off so much skin, the long hair swirling around me, my chest appearing so real. I couldn't help flushing every time I looked down and saw the 'mounds' that were in front of me.

Never mind how I felt as a woman, and I really did feel like a woman now, and how fragrant I was, I had to close my eyes to block out the screens with the vision of the dark-haired woman who was me, warbling away, with the orchestra in full support. *When Will I Be Loved* was my final number and I had to take off the long dress. The short silky dress beneath it was like wearing a nightie and I had to gyrate in it. Frankie was there to dance with me, making me feel so silly as I cavorted like a woman as I did the Everley Brothers hit, hoping that the country and western set was mollified with what I was singing for them at last. Julie had said that it was a fair choice, probably by Keith, as that 'demographic' had been complaining that I hadn't done anything they could warm up to so far. I think she really wanted me now to win this thing! As a woman!

Frankie really twisted me in the last time I was to dance with him. I felt so light-headed as he twirled me and made my dress swish. I could have been on *Dancing With the Stars* and not a singing reality show as Frankie seemed determined to make me appear as girlish as he could. I know that I was really feeling that way and his kisses on my cheeks as we finished and the hug he gave me, my false breasts bouncing against him, seemed so perfect and so right.

It was such a relief then to have Frankie's arm around me and to walk off as a woman, thinking and knowing that this would be the last time.

"We must do this in the show in San Francisco," said Frankie, not taking his arm away from me as we stood there and let the paparazzi photograph us.

"What?" I had to ask. "San Francisco? What's that?"

Frankie laughed at me. "You've read your contract for this show, haven't you, Samantha? Doesn't matter whether you win or lose, you have a tour to make with all the people on the show. We have to do some dancing and skits as well, girl, to give the show some appeal. Takes about six weeks, fifty plus shows, your introduction to the business, Miss Samantha Carter, and your first pay checks as a professional.

"Graham's company gets the biggest cut, of course, and there's the record you make. Don't look to be working anywhere else but with me, Keith, Ray and the boys for the next three months or more, Samantha. I bet Graham will want to put you on an extended contract, as he can. You're tied to him as your agent in any case for the next year. That's definitely in the contract you signed to be on this show! You should read it!"

There must have been panic in my eyes at the thought of having to be a woman for another year. No, I couldn't do that! Yes, I did feel so feminine in my tightly packaged clothing. If only people knew what I was really hiding, they'd have been laughing fit to burst themselves at me. Frankie took some pity on me and helped me back to the dressing room as I found my high heels suddenly so awkward to walk in, particularly as everything about me was so girlie and so sensitive.

Worse, I couldn't find Julie. I was surrounded by people congratulating me on the final show. Past girl winners wanted to come up and hug me, their fragrances so heady particularly when mixed with mine. I got so many bosomy hugs and kisses on my cheek. A makeup girl came and cleaned me up, smiling at me, and then spread more lipstick on my mouth so that I could go out and do the same to other girls.

Only it wasn't just women, but men as well, who wanted to hug me and kiss me and have me kiss them. I was actually propositioned as if I was a woman a dozen times, several men feeling me, stroking me as they would a woman, while Barry promised me that he was going to 'look me up' when we were on the road together.

A huge party was beginning and we girls, Francine and Shonette, as well as Corinne and others from early shows, were all there. The girls were flirting outrageously and wanted to get me into a line dance. Thank goodness, Frankie wanted to dance with me. I smiled at him and let him do that. I was able to be girlie enough for Frankie and, when I could, I managed to escape to the Ladies' Room which was packed.

I was able, though, to slip from there to the dressing room and Julie's long, leather coat. The crush was such and I was dressed so differently, not in my long gown any more, that I was able to mince out of the party. The doorman had a taxi door open for me and I was off to the hotel where Julie and I were still sharing a room even as I heard some guys yelling after me.

"Hey, you're that Goth Girl," said the cab driver as we headed across Los Angeles. "Man, you really changed your looks for the final, didn't you? You're really pretty, you know!"

I suppose I should have thanked him for his compliment but I was feeling quite mortified as I sat, my legs crossed, and saw a long-haired girl in glittering earrings and vivid face makeup looking back at me.

I attracted a lot of attention at the hotel. Several men wanted me to party with them but I managed to brush them off, murmuring about my boy friend waiting for me. I was breathing hard when I finally arrived at the room I shared with Julie.

I eased in quietly and closed the door, the sound of breathing alerting me to the fact that Julie must be there and must be asleep. It was strange that she hadn't come to the final party of the season. We had a lot to discuss. We had talked about 'after' a number of times, and, mostly, it was about bundling up the money we had and going back to school. She had been the one to read all the papers about the contest. I had just signed as 'Samantha Carter' where she had told me to.

Julie and I had never discussed me going on in dresses and women's underwear for another series of concerts. I had to tell Julie that I couldn't do that, not with all the men who were trying to put their hands about Samantha. No, I was not going to become that

sort of man, despite the voice that I had. I really wasn't. Perhaps next summer, we could work the bars again for Wes Harvey but that was all. I really should insist as she always did with me.

"Julie," I whispered, slipping out of her coat and sliding the micro-thin straps of my little dress over my shoulders. I half-turned so that I could get her to undo the tight zip at the back of my dress.

The bedsheet moved and a dark head appeared as the bedsheet was pulled down. But it wasn't Julie in the bed, looking at me. It was someone familiar but not someone I recognized right away. Then, I realized why, as he wasn't wearing his glasses. I almost screamed in horror like the girl I was dressed to be as I realized that it was Keith Sebastian in my bed.

"Hi, beautiful," Keith said thickly. "Come and join us!"

Keith put out his hand, the bedsheet moving to show off his hairy chest and arms, no evidence of clothing in sight. The bedsheet moved again on the other side of him and Julie's head appeared, her hair a mess, her makeup smeared, her arm snaking out to grip Keith and pull him to her.

Then, Julie saw me in the thin, silky dress that I was wearing. "Oh, shoot!" Julie shrieked. "You were supposed to be the belle of the party, Sammie girl!" I shuddered as she grabbed Keith's arm that had been stretched out to me, re-placing it about herself, about her lovely breasts.

"Come in and join us," laughed Keith, his voice as blurry as Julie's. They must have both been drinking, a lot.

I trembled and backed away, stepping automatically back into my high heels, as Keith's arm reached out and ran down and up my stockinged leg as I tried to fence with him and keep him from touching me. Oh, I didn't want a man doing that! Yet, I was learning to love Julie doing it to me, shivering with guilty pleasure at the feelings she aroused in me when she ran her hands over me when I was still in drag.

"Keith!" said my smiling roomie, climbing on top of him just as she did me. "You've got one woman in your bed. You don't need another!"

One of them pushed the covers back and there they were, completely naked. I stood there, aghast as Julie worked her way onto Keith's aroused masculine member and guided it into her. The two of them proceeded then to make energetic love, with her on top, without any regard for the fact that I was still in the room with them.

I edged away to the bathroom, leaning against the closed door when I was inside, as the grunts and shrieks rose from the other side. I could even hear them talking, getting hot myself, as Julie used the same kind of words that she used with me.

I partly understood. I knew that Julie was promiscuous. She had rarely had a boy friend for longer than a week in all the time I had known her. I had smugly thought of myself as her boy friend in the last few weeks as our relationship had become sexual. I had been with her, sort of, for two years, at least when she was down from school.

I should have known that Julie would have taken up with another man when she had seen how occupied with the other singers and musicians I had been at the party. She couldn't have known about how awful I felt

in being caressed as a woman all the time. She definitely couldn't have known about the contest contracts and that they tied me to Graham Notting as Frankie had said that they did.

She couldn't know, I assured myself, knowing that we had a simple way of nixing the contract. I could go back to being who I was. Jeez, but we had to get some money out of all this. I really deserved it this time!



“Oh, baby,” I heard Julie’s muffled voice saying. “That was so marvellous! I haven’t had a real man inside me in what, a couple of months! Oh, gods above, that was so wonderful!”

I leaned numbly against the door. A man inside her in the last couple of months? I had been her man for the last couple of months. I had been inside her, several times a night, every night!

“Oh, it’s so great to be in a man’s arms!” I heard Julie saying. “Just hold me, Keith darling. Just hold me. Oh yes, it’s not the same hugging Samantha, really. She’s so girlie, and soft and flowery, like a girl. I like a strong, muscular man, I do, and his beard and his hair. Oh, it really turns me on. Yes, Yes! Yes, Keith! Just like that. Oh, turn me on, yes! Yes!”

There were huge creaking and grunting noises as Keith turned my girl friend on and forced her down on the bed. She was squealing with delight at whatever he was doing. I could hear them, no matter where I went in the bathroom, even with my long, pointed, pink-tipped fingers over my ears. Finally, I ran the faucet, shivering as I looked into the mirror at the stylish, feminine girl looking back at me. Her pink, painted lips were quivering as were the long earrings that peeped out beneath her black hair.

Running the water brought on urges inside me. Samantha had to lift her dress and take down her panties. She had to ease off her pantyhose and then she grimaced, her mouth making a red ‘O’ as she freed herself from the taping.

I sat as I always did now, my dress about my bare skin, thinking that I shouldn’t do this. I could stand to pee. I was a man, not a mouse, wasn’t I? I didn’t need to fear Julie. I didn’t need to fear what Frankie had

said. I was going to change completely back to being John Barrington. Yes, and I would start by getting out of this dress and out of this bra, the falsies, and the corset. I slipped off the wig, having to work for minutes to get it free of all the clips and pins that held it to my head.

Gods, I still looked like a girl. I had to get makeup remover on my face. There, now I looked like such a horrible mess. It took me much longer than it had to free myself from the makeup I had worn. Oh, I still couldn't look like me. I still looked like Samantha. It was because of my eyebrows and my eyelashes that seemed to retain whatever mascara and eyeliner had been put on them.

My lips seemed to be in a feminine bow as well, the edges that I had had to mark definitely remaining femininely in place. It had been Darnell, of all people, who had said that I had kissable lips and he had to try them out. Wow, how shocking that had been. And how Darnell had laughed and said that he liked kissing me and he was going to do it again whenever he felt like it.

"Oh, no, you're ..." I had begun but Darnell had kissed me again then, really holding me tightly to him, his arm about my head. He'd kissed me for half a minute or more and I couldn't get away.

"You got to learn to relax, baby, and enjoy it," Darnell had laughed at me, when he did let me go, his tongue all over my lips trying to get in my mouth. Oh, I was so mortified at what he had done. It was why I had looked so hard for Julie. I shook as I thought about what I had been thinking. I had thought that Keith or someone like that wouldn't let her in to the party. So I had hurried back to both console her and confront her

about the contract that Frankie had said that Graham would enforce upon me, Samantha Carter.

“Are you decent?” asked a voice at the half-opened bathroom door that I was holding onto as I couldn’t hear the creaking of the bed any more or movements of people in or outside the bed.

“Depends,” I whispered nervously to Julie. “On whom you’re expecting to see.”

“I kicked him out,” Julie said, laughing as she said it. “He didn’t want to go. Keith actually thought that you were going to join us in bed and he was going to have you. I had to tell him that we sisters never share our men in bed, not him, anyway!”

“This isn’t funny, Julie,” I said as she pushed in and moved my dress and panties from where they were draped in front of the bathroom door. “I, I did hear what you were saying to Keith as well.”

“About what an adorable hunk of a man he was?” asked Julie, jerking her shoulders as if she was being thrilled by what she had said. “You didn’t believe that, did you? I don’t care if Keith did. He was supposed to. No, I’ve had him now for one night and that’s enough. How come you came home so early? You should be dancing the night away, Sammie my girl, after that performance you put on. And wherever did you learn to dance as sexily as that? Wow, I was inspired which is why I had to have a man, right away!”

“But I’m not a man,” I said bitterly.

“Well, no, not really,” said Julie candidly, running a soft hand in the dim bathroom over my soft-skinned body. “But you know that, don’t you, Sammie darling? And you like it now, don’t you, being dressed like you are? I could tell that by the way you were smiling up at

that dancer who had his arm around you. You like being made love to, as well, don't you, lying on your back and taking it from me. You know how girly you are when you make love, don't you? I was thinking of getting a dildo and using it on you. Wouldn't that just be absolutely wonderful for both of us, my darling Samantha, now you really are my sister?"

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "No," I protested weakly but that was as far as my protest got as Julie put my thin, short dress over my head and worked it into place, ignoring my attempts to be free of her. Of course, I kissed Julie back as she kissed me. And I relented enough to let her take me to bed with her, the same bed in which she had just had a 'real man' as I had heard her whispering to Keith. I'm sure he must have gathered that Julie and I were lesbians and that was why Julie was coming on to him so strongly.

One penetration wasn't enough for Julie any more, not with me on top of her, my silky dress sliding against her lovely breasts and body, and she saying how much she loved it and urging me on to caress her like that. No, she didn't call me her man and tell me what a wonderful man I was.

Julie did mount me. I finally let her as she whispered that it was the best way for a woman and she wanted me to be able to get my hands all over her. I don't think she was faking it, though it did occur to me after what I had heard between her and Keith. How could she be so aroused and so frenzied all of the time as she was, I wondered.

The dawn finally came and I had to ask her all about what Frankie had said.

"I never thought either one of us would win this thing," said Julie slowly, caressing my longish hair, now so free. She pinned it behind my ears to the back of my head. "I'd forgotten all about what the winners have to do. But it didn't hurt any of the previous winners, did it? They're all selling records like crazy and they all have careers in music. That's what you want, isn't it?"

"Not as a woman!" I protested.

"Well, you can't have everything," laughed Julie, scampering first out of the bed and into the bathroom. "Hey, come and join me and let's find you a really nice dress to wear for when you win. You have to make a speech, you know."

After bathing the next morning, I gritted my teeth as Julie said that there were no jeans any more among all the clothes we had when I went looking for them. There were no shirts or male underpants. I didn't need them any more, did I, she smirked, as I went all hot and flushed as she finally let me see how she had re-done my hair and makeup so glamorously. I had to wear a straight skirt and the falsies in my bra that made my pink top look really womanly. I flushed just looking at it. Well, it would be the last time, I kept saying to myself.

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And it was all for nothing in the end as it was Darnell who won. He was the new *Voice of the Americas*. I had to congratulate him and tell him how I had loved his stage act and the way he presented his rap music. I didn't mention to his stunned face how much coaching he had received from all Graham's 'people' on the

show. And he'd never had to do anything like the variety of styles thrown at me.

Graham walked around, being nice to everyone. His eyes were gleaming as he hugged me. My skin crawled at the touch of his hands on me. "See you in San Francisco," he said, actually smiling at me as if he was pleased to see me. A first. "We really have to work up an act for you, Samantha, to highlight your voice."

"I already have an act," I said to him shakily and his eyebrows went up in surprise. "The Carter Sisters," I added.

"No," said Graham Notting, holding me, caressing me as if I was a girl, making me want to grab his hands in front of everyone and dump them away from me. "Read the contract you signed, Samantha. That part of your life is over, the Samantha and Julie bit. Julie understands. Keith tells me she'll take the hundred grand and not bother you again on the tour or when you're in the record studio."

I was stunned as Graham said that so easily, looking down on my pretty, madeup face as if he owned me. No, Julie could not be leaving me. But there, across the room, there she was, talking to Keith Sebastian. She turned and gave me a sly smile, woman to woman, waving as she picked up her purse, put her arm through Keith's and took off with him. I wasn't just stunned at what the only girl in my life was doing. I felt shattered and chilly icewater seemed to run through my veins.

"We're ready to make a huge investment in you, Samantha Carter," Graham was going on, whispering and blowing into my jewelled ear, ignoring Darnell and Barry who wanted to talk to him about their futures, I guessed. "Paragon, the record company I work

for, thinks that you'll be the one to pay us back with interest over the next few years if we make you into a singing star. I have an idea to put you into a musical. There're a dozen offers on my desk for me to pick from. All you have to do is give up the Goth girl image and look as pretty as you do now, Samantha. The next year of your life should be a real challenge for you!"

"But, but, I didn't win," I murmured.

"Works for you," Graham smirked at me. "The conspiracy theorists will have a field day. You're the girl whom the audiences want to hear, you know. In a year's time, no one will care that you lost, or care about Darnell, either. With our packaging and our A and R behind you, you are going to be a really big star, Miss Samantha Carter. I know it and so does everyone else here, no matter how Darnell's devotees managed to cook the computer scoring."

I wanted to talk to Julie. I needed to talk to her, the shakes overtaking me. The fright that was convulsing my stomach must clearly be showing. I tried to control my face but Graham was staring at me as I shook my head and backed away from him. I had to get out of the unreal atmosphere of the show's set, I thought in panic, where everyone was treating me as if I was a woman, and get back to the hotel. I had to talk to Julie. I had to get out of this dress and female lingerie! She couldn't have taken money to abandon me. I knew it couldn't be true!

The hotel and studio was packed with reporters and it seemed that every one of them wanted to talk to me, the cheated girl. I was absolutely terrified as I tried to go out and get a cab back to the hotel in my tight dress and heels. No wonder all the news and entertainment

outlets said afterwards that I looked devastated on the loss of the *Voice* competition.

I did look harried, my long hair and extensions blown by the wind, and it was all because of them and all the questions they were shouting at me. I was lucky in the end that the hotel's security came and shoved the cameras and questioners away from me. Quivering all over, my makeup so vivid, and not looking at anyone, I managed to get into a waiting car as reporters were fighting over the cab's door, my skirt rising to show off my smooth, stockinged legs. They were trying to keep the door open, asking me to comment on my 'tragic' loss!

"They're going to be at your hotel as well, *senorita*," said the older, white-haired, Latino driver to me sympathetically. "It's the way it is here, media capital of the world and all that."

"Just drive around for a while then, if you would," I said tearfully, having to ask the driver to borrow his cellphone to call Julie.

"It's me," I whispered to her. "Where are you now?"

"I'm at Keith's pad," said Julie. "Don't go back to the hotel, Samantha. It's a zoo there. Losing is even a bigger thing than if you had won it all. It's on every news show, leading off, if you can believe it! Call Graham and get him to set you up with some private place for a while."

"Why can't I come to you?" I asked Julie, crossing my nyloned legs as I leaned back in a tight, shapely, woman's dress. There was silence on the phone for a while. "It's true then that you've sold me to Graham for a hundred grand." I actually did really sob, just a

little, and the cabbie looked back at me in concern. "I, I, thought that it was going to be us ..."

"The Carter Sisters?" asked Julie. "Gimme a break, Sammie. It's you who has the talent, not me. Now, you're going to make millions and, yes, I'll come and visit you when this thing cools down a bit. Just go to San Francisco ..."

"I'm not doing that," I said to her, knowing that I was almost choking as I shook and tried to hold back the tears that were spilling over my painted eyes.

The cabbie had tissues for me as his despatcher called in to him and asked him if he had Samantha Carter in his cab with him. "Dropped her off and picked up a flag," said the cabbie, winking at me as he did so. "Headed to Anaheim right now."

There was a conversation then, the despatcher knowing that the cab hadn't dropped me off at the hotel where I was staying. The despatcher was annoyed that the cabbie was heading in the wrong direction from where he had a fare for him and that the cabbie wouldn't tell him where he had dropped me.

"Don't do anything stupid," was the last thing that Julie had said to me, a touch of alarm in her voice. I hung up on her and gave Gregorio Lopez back his phone.

"So, where can I take you?" the cabbie asked me with a grin. He must have been about fifty years old and looked a little like my father.

I needed clothes. I needed male clothes to be me. I needed to use the credit card the show had provided me with, it was supposed to have a limit of five thousand dollars on it, before it was terminated.

"The nearest shopping center," I told him nervously, thinking how I could do it, go in and actually buy men's clothing again. We were there in just two minutes.

"You going to walk in there like that?" Gregorio Lopez asked me and I nodded unhappily, my earrings shaking on my neck. "I think you'd better fix your face first, Senorita Carter. If you walk in there, you're going to be mobbed, Miss Samantha Carter. You're going to be mobbed!"

Gregorio was right of course. He used his own money and went into the store and came back with female, skinny jeans, makeup remover, a shirt, a pack, pink running shoes, and white ankle socks. He was fascinated by the way I looked when I took off my wig and earrings and stuffed them in the pack. I don't think he liked the new, unglamorous me, my false eyelashes put away and my face clean and pale, my hair a scraggly mess about my head.

"Well, no-one would recognize you now, Miss Carter," Goyo said to me, after I had tried to be modest and wiggle out of my dress, in the back seat, he watching me in the rearview mirror, into a frilly, white, patterned shirt and skinny jeans. He escorted me to a bank machine where I withdrew all the money I could and paid him off for all his help. He wouldn't take the thousand dollars I offered him, but did finally take five hundred as he wished me well and told me I'd been ripped off in the contest.

Gregorio was going to buy my CD as soon as it was out, he said, as he had loved all the songs I had sung. I shivered as I left him, trying to walk away in my women's jeans and pink running shoes as if I was a woman. My first fan, I thought with a shudder, know-

ing he was watching me all the way into the shopping center. I wiggled my tush like a woman but I intended to buy some more masculine clothes than he had for me.

It didn't matter that I wore real jeans after a trip to the bathroom, or a proper men's shirt. My face was clean and makeup-free. But I was still 'Miss' to the cabbie who took me to the bus station where the first bus with space on it was headed to San Francisco.

I took it, knowing that I would buy a new ticket in San Francisco for a new destination. I just snuggled back in my seat, an older, black man fast asleep against the window, when a woman came and sat beside me. She had a tabloid in her hands and I couldn't help reading a headline about an inside story. It had a picture of me, singing, a femininely shaped, glamorously dressed, Goth girl, I could see, as shivers ran through me.

It was the headline that stunned me, however. 'Singing sensation says that she's a sex change!' I read in horror as the bus lurched away from loading area. The woman rolled up the paper and put it in her pack as I wanted to tear it away from her and find out what was in such a story! Oh no, it couldn't be that Julie had sold my story to the tabloids as well, could it? Cold palpitations shook me as I sat, my legs crossed from force of habit. And I couldn't have grabbed it, not with the feminine nails I still had.

"Are you all right, Miss?" the black man beside me asked in concern.

I couldn't answer him as I was shaking so much. I shook my head and leaned back, closing my eyes. The way that the old man was looking at me I was sure that he had recognized me. I was still 'Miss', after all. But if

he had, he didn't say anything. Neither did the woman on the other side of me, her paper put away in her bag.

"Do you need some help, Miss?" the black man asked me after we had got off the bus.

"I have to get a ticket," I muttered and the older man showed me where I should go, telling me that I didn't look well. Maybe I should stop over for a while and get some sleep. There was a redeye going northwards, however, away, away from Los Angeles, from California and from the reality show. I decided to take it as there wasn't any bus headed home before morning. I could sleep on the bus, couldn't I?

I know I was wiggling like a woman as I went for coffee at the station restaurant. The news was on and there I was, on television, the waitresses and cook watching such a feminine me, singing and dancing so girlishly with Frankie in the finale of the whole show.

"It must have been a set-up," the waitress declared, putting a glass of water in front of me. "Coffee, Miss? How could anyone have voted for anyone else but her?" That was to her friends who worked there. "What do you think, honey? You been watching the *Voice of the Americas*? That Samantha ought to have won by a mile, shouldn't she? She was so great from the start." She began singing *What I Did for Love*, which I had sung on one of the middle shows when we had all been learning to dance and sing at the same time.

"Aw, c'mon, Sheila," the grinning cook called through the kitchen he'd returned to. "Give us a break! She didn't win, did she? Run off to cry all about it, as well!"

Why weren't they talking about the tabloid story? About me being a sex change or something, I thought

wildly, shaking all over. Not that that was true. And why was everyone calling me 'Miss' all the time? This was San Francisco and they ought to be able to tell, if anyone could, just what it was that I was, a man, a man in drag.

But it was, "Thank you, miss," when I left a tip beside the plate I'd used. I shouldered my pack nervously, wondering if they were all being sarcastic with me, this was San Francisco after all, and went out into the station. I had some time to wait and a visit to the bathroom was in order. I stepped towards the Men's bathroom on the station as another man was coming out.

"Hold on, sister," the man laughed at me as I tried to go in. "You're on the other side of the washroom sign. So I was red-faced and embarrassed as I was escorted to the Ladies' where women going in didn't seem to think it strange that I was being forced to use the bathroom with them.

I could see why when I finally got to look in a mirror. I had lost weight and my waist had gone in several inches. I hadn't done as good a job as I thought in cleaning off makeup as my eyelashes seemed to be so dark and thick, a dark line still evident on my eyelids. My eyebrows were so female as well. My hair was two colors and long enough to not really be a boy's hair.

I looked in the mirror at a girl. A smooth-skinned girl looked back at me. There was a sparkle at her earlobes and a pink glint at her fingernails as she cleaned herself. My lips seemed to have taken on a female shape and fullness. Not even a lack of lipstick could hide how feminine they appeared to be. I was stuck with it, I saw with a shudder, as I ran a comb and brush, from my purse, through my hair.

I shivered and put on a little lipstick, pressing and rolling my lips together as girls do. There, I was disguised for a little while longer. In Seattle, I would phone home to let my parents know that I was going to be back for the next semester at university while I was taking a job to get money to pay for it. And I was going to have to get a job, wasn't I, to make ends meet. I shivered each time I thought of it on the long ride North, how much easier it would be to get a job as a girl rather than as a boy.

I holed up in a fleapit of a motel for several days, trying to figure out what to do with my arched eyebrows that didn't seem to want to grow hair above or below the line that Julie had made on my face. The stubble on my face didn't come back, either, as an itchi-ness on my legs and under my arms made me do what I didn't really want to, go to a drug store to buy feminine hair removal products for myself, for my legs.

I did buy some male briefs and a couple of shirts, just like all the other kids were wearing over black tee-shirts. But still I was 'Miss' in the store even though there actually was a drag queen in there buying all kinds of panties and female underwear for himself.

The tranny was quite belligerent to me. I guess I was staring at 'her' too much.

"Haven't you ever seen a man in a dress before, honey?" the tranny drawled at me, making an affected pout as he minced across to a rack of dresses, leaving the panties on the counter in front of me. He was in a short mini-skirt and a top that showed off breasts that must have been padded. No man could have had breasts like that, I had thought in fascination, as I stared at 'her'.

"I'll take you here, miss," a salesgirl had said, rolling her eyes to me, and smiling derisively as she nodded to where the tranny was engaged in selecting dresses 'to try on' that the store seemed to be allowing 'her' to do.

Only as I left, did I get an attack of nerves as I realized how I had been treated as a girl even though I was buying more boy clothing, socks and underpants, which hadn't fazed the salesgirl who had served me at all. I was still 'Miss' to her when she asked me if it would be cash or a credit card.

I did see myself walking towards the door in a mirror and realized that I was taking steps that were too small. I was probably wiggling a little as I walked along even in the black and white sneakers I had bought. My hair was clustered around my face, my skin still so soft and feminine at a glance. Even without lipstick, I still seemed to have a feminine attitude that I hadn't shaken.

I avoided the newspapers as the television was bad enough. "Just where is Samantha Carter?" a leading newsman led off his network news show, with reports and comments from any number of people, including Graham and the Ryan Seacrest-lookalike, Burt, who had always been bugging me for comments on the way in and out of shows but I had never had a real conversation with him. Now, he was telling the world, this Burt, how distressed I had been on not winning the show, how I had cried on his shoulder, how he had hugged me and how soft and 'really girlie' I had felt.

Graham was assuring everyone that I was going to be in the show in San Francisco. I was going to be issuing a CD for Paragon Records very soon of the songs I had sung in the competitions. He made it sound as if I

had planned to do all of that myself. He was only obliging a pretty girl, his words, with a little help to launch her future, professional career as a singer.

I think I was there a week, holed up in the motel, the fuss beginning to die down, or so I thought. I had nothing to do but watch television and there, suddenly, on one of the entertainment shows, there was Gregorio Lopez, the cabbie, talking all about me. He was telling everyone who wanted to know how much I had changed my appearance but how girlishly I had looked, walking away from him. He'd heard too much of my conversation with Julie as well and he had rightly understood that I was telling Julie that I wasn't going to sing any more.

"She got rid of all her glamorous makeup in the back of my cab. Samantha looked like she was a Goth girl again when she left me," said Gregorio, smiling and pleased at being the center of attention while I squirmed at being referred to all the time as 'she' and have him saying how cute and pretty I was. I didn't want to be cute and pretty! Boys weren't cute and pretty and I was a boy! I know I cried like a girl in frustration as I watched the interview all over again.

"Except that she didn't have any of those clothes pins or nose rings all over her as she used to have at the start of the show," Gregorio had gone on. "She actually looked much prettier that way, like a real girl, you know."

I knew and I wondered how long it would be before some enterprising reporter tracked me to the bus station and to San Francisco. It would be easy to find out where I had gone if someone was really determined to find me. But would anyone? I thought for a little while that I was exaggerating who and what I was, but the

whole show seemed to be about me with all these famous people saying that I should have won and implying that I had been cheated in some way. They actually wanted to hear me sing again!

I hadn't exactly been trying, save for not wearing makeup, to hide myself, and my hair, its two-toned spikiness, would surely have been spotted on the bus or in the station. I didn't know how to dye my hair. It wasn't a skill I had thought to learn growing up as a boy. So, I bought a bottle of peroxide and did the rest of my hair. I shivered as I followed all the steps Julie had showed me and became a platinum blonde.

I felt chills all over me as I tried a little eye makeup and lipstick from the purse that I had kept all along in the pack I had. Oh, gods, how femmy I looked like that. No, I didn't look much like Samantha. But I was definitely on the female side again, I thought with tremors running through me. I looked at myself and shook with nerves as I saw what I could become.

I had been going to hack off some of my hair as well, make it much shorter. But the peroxide blonde hair was enough and short hair was only taking me back more and more to the Goth girl image that Julie had wanted me to exploit from the start. Short hair, even a crewcut, wasn't going to make me any more mannish. It was everything else about me that I had to change.

I had to stop walking as I did, standing as I did, posing so femininely as I did and stop fluttering my arms and hands as I had been so encouraged by Julie to do.

I don't know what made me think that Canada was a good idea, easy to get across the border, and where no-one would know me. I had a driving licence for

Samantha Carter. I remembered the terrifying day when I had had to take the test as a woman, certain the man who administered all the testing must have been laughing up his sleeve at me cavorting around him in my tight skirt. Julie had seen to all the administrative things connected with that. I only knew that I did pass the test and had a genuine drivers' licence as Samantha Carter.

In Seattle, I was on the sidewalk, by the bus station, in my skinny jeans and a sleeveless pink top, even earrings on my ears and lipstick on my mouth. A tooting minivan with two girls drove up beside me. I wasn't the only girlish figure asked if I was going to Canada. There were three others and the first two girls were offering a ride for a split of gas expenses.

The other girls going into the station piled into the minivan, talking about the places in Vancouver that they wanted to go. I'd been thinking of going back home even though I knew I wasn't welcome. I just really had nowhere else to go. And so, when these girls were all laughing and piling into the van, I just thought, Why not, and I went with the five other girls, chattering away and squealing as Julie had taught me to act as a girl. I was across the border and heading into another large city with no problem at all.

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Where is Samantha Carter? That was a running topic on every entertainment show. Poor Darnell, I thought with a shiver as a lot of the comments were about how I probably should have won the competition, as a girl no less. That made me really shake with embarrassment and shame, sometimes. I couldn't un-

derstand why there wasn't an exposé of the real Samantha, like the one that I had seen in the tabloid on the bus. I expected, with dread, every time I watched an entertainment news show, that someone would be outing me as a drag queen. How they would all be laughing at me!

But, every time I turned on a television, and looked at myself in the continuing news, I was in one of my sexier, feminine, singing or dancing performances on screen. Yes, all the American news channels were available in Canada. That I had definitely walked out on the show had become evident. I was reported to have 'cleaned out' a bank account as well. Graham wasn't pleased about that at all. But lots of the shows weren't nasty about my disappearing at all. Sooner or later, of course, it would all blow over, I had no doubt of that. The worst thing of it all was that I was kind of stuck as a girl. No matter how I dressed, no matter my lack of makeup and the flattening of my hair, everyone still insisted on calling me 'Miss', wherever I went.

I was having a coffee in a Gastown district café when I ran into Gail, one of the chatty girls I had ridden into Vancouver with. I was beginning to wonder what I was going to be doing for money soon as I hadn't thought that Canadian dollars would be worth as much as American dollars as it seemed they were.

"I, I have to find a job," I said, knowing I was becoming more and more girlish as I talked about Canada to Gail. She called me Joanne as I said that was my name. She didn't seem to notice at all that I was a boy. How could she since I was in my skinny, femmy jeans, a little makeup and denim jacket. "I'm the illegal immigrant here. I guess I'm going to have to head back

across the border soon. Do you know of anyone who's headed that way and wants to share gas money?"

"No," said Gail, smiling at a boy who was eyeing us. "But if you're looking for a job, and you don't care what it is, or how menial, how about one of the cruise ships?"

"The what?" I asked her stupidly.

Gail made a cleaning job sound so easy. She was a girl, after all, and thought that I was one as well. It wasn't easy, though, for me, to even try for a girl's job on a ship. The hardest part was me making the decision to buy a skirt and top, put on more makeup and actually make the application to work, as a woman, on a cruise ship.

I was being turned down when the woman who was trying to be nice, as she sent me on my way, got a phone call about staff quitting unexpectedly from a ship that was sailing right away, that night. I was right there in the office, smiling pathetically at her, this personnel officer. She decided quickly as she was being berated over the phone by someone. Could I leave immediately? She wanted to know. I swallowed hard, smiled a lipstick smile, uncrossed my nyloned legs and said girlishly that, yes, I could go right away, the urge to heave not leaving me all through the rest of that frantic day. I left Vancouver that evening at high tide for a cruise down the Pacific Coast to Puerto Vallarta, with stops in many ports as well as at Catalina Island.

I was a chambermaid, the actual title they used on board, working as a girl, my new suitcase with new lingerie, extra falsies, bras, panties, stockings and pantyhose, a roll of duct tape, and 'safe' skirts and dresses, stowed in the room I had to share with another girl or woman. My dresses were supplemented by the uni-

forms we 'girls' had to wear. I was sure that the purser, who was in charge of us all, could see the tension boiling off me as he looked me over.

I gave a little smile, like a woman would have, and looked him directly in the eye. I fought down the anxiety threatening to incapacitate me. This wasn't going to be long, after all, I kept telling myself, that I would be wearing a dress, for this one last time. Six weeks to get back to port and I would have built a little 'nest egg' again. If I could even stomach another cruise, if things worked out as a girl, and I wasn't throwing up all the time, and, of course, if I wasn't discovered, I could actually have a whole year at university paid for.

An older woman showed me, and the other new girls, how to make the beds properly and showed us what we had to clean. It wasn't very difficult. I made a checklist for myself and retreated to the cabin I had been assigned as a girl. That was the worst part of it, of course, as I had to share with another girl, Kay. She had already taken the bottom bunk. Then it was that I realized that I hadn't brought a nightie with me. I had been sleeping in a t-shirt and underpants since I had become a man again.

Knowing that I was going to climb up sometimes when Kay was in bed, I had to do what Julie had had me do first so long ago. I used the Veet I had bought, 'just in case', and so I was a smooth girl in my panties and tee-shirt going to bed, another girl looking at me with interest as I did so, not seeing the tape that made my frontage at least appear like a girl's.

Kay was so earthy. She embarrassed me no end at first. She was often naked "because we are both girls together" and flopping about everywhere. She was a big girl, filling our cabin, and really willing to be my

friend, my 'girl friend', as she called it, meaning something quite different from what I would have meant in using such words. She 'loved' the little bit of makeup and feminine cologne that I had brought with me and just had to try them out on herself. I had almost none of it left after three days and had to go to the purser's 'store' and buy some different feminine stuff to keep myself looking and smelling like me, like Joanne Smith, that is.

The purser had been so cross when the five new girls and two guys arrived on the ship. The others all had passports but I had just flashed him my driver's licence. He hadn't bothered to check, just asking each of us in turn our names and so I took another big chance. It worked and I was Joanne Smith, with a nametag that said that I was.

"There's going to be a party for all the new staff," Kay said to me as we girls went for breakfast after doing the first morning round for all of those passengers who were up, not seasick or really late risers.

"When?" I asked her, feeling the trepidation rising in me, my dress flapping around my stockings, as I had caught several of the admiring looks and salacious comments about us girls from some of the older men, the 'stewards', who worked on the boat, we had to call it that, all the time.

"Tomorrow night," laughed Kay, her eyes sparkling. "I'm staying close to you as well, Joanne. I figure that if I just get a quarter of your leavings I'll be doing all right. Now, you know about the sock on the door handle, don't you?"

"The boys do that in university," I said, feeling distinctly sick, and wondering if I could fake sea sickness the following night.

“We use colors,” Kay said with a smile. “Any color but white says that I’m in with someone but white at night just says I’m home alone. Nothing on the handle means no-one’s here. Only knock, will you, to check ‘cause I know the jokers on this ship and some of them will get round some nights to walking off with all the socks or towels or shoes that they see outside the cabins. Just on our decks, of course.”

“Where do we go if our cabin is in use?” I asked Kay then, sick a little at the customs that she was so used to as a girl on a boat like this.

“Go to his cabin,” laughed Kay. “Or on our deck for a little smooching. A pretty girl like you will have lots of options. It’s me who’ll be looking for a refuge at night. I know some people like to try out the lifeboats with a guy but you can get in big trouble if a sailor finds you doing that.”

There was a clear division on the boat. The sailors who operated the boat were all way more important than any of us service personnel. The officers also ate with the passengers and mingled with them socially as well. That wasn’t for us girls. We rarely saw the passengers at all, only going into their cabins when they left signs for us to do so.

“If it’s really choppy, you’ll have to come here, to the lounge,” said Kay. “You can always watch a video.” Kay had already told me how hilarious it was that the movies the ship had were so well used. The lower crew like us got such equipment like hand-me-downs from the upper crew. No wonder people left frequently without even a moment’s notice, I thought, when I tried out the lumpy sofas with a laughing Kay and watched *It’s a Wonderful Life* that kept

skipping so much that it made no sense and must have been over in forty-five minutes, tops.

"If you've got any good CDs for dancing, bring them along on Saturday," said Kay. "Arnie," he was an older grizzled steward who worked the dining rooms on the passenger decks, "will be the deejay and you have to specify which track number you want played or he'll just play his old, boring heavy metal! I don't mind the karaoke stuff he'll play sometimes but we have enough pub nights as it is and I want to dance with a guy tomorrow!"

It was if I was a teenaged girl with Kay. She was my bunkmate and my girl friend, helping me with all the stuff the older woman hadn't told me about. Kay stayed close to me when we were off-shift which did keep the guys away. Several of the other girls I saw clearly making eyes at some of the older men. It was something that I should have thought of, I thought in distress. In a closed in world like this was, it should have been obvious to me that men and women would be getting together and shacking up.

I really didn't have a party dress as such. I had avoided buying mini-skirts as well. Kay thought that I was some kind of weirdo not to have one cocktail dress. She would have lent me one of hers but she was much too big for me to borrow from. She knew, of course, that I had falsies in my bra or in my corset. She shook her head as I put on my stockings and let my grey, pleated skirt fall to hide my legs and the garter belt I had had to wear. I rarely shivered any more, changing so femininely in front of her.

"You look like you're going for an interview, not a party," Kay said. "We'll have to go ashore in San Diego and get you some sexy clothes, Joanne my girl."

"I'd rather save my money," I said to her, looking at the makeup on my face and thinking how girly I really looked with my brushed back platinum hair, the earrings at my ears, and the thicker lines around my eyes. I had even powdered my nose and face a little and done my lips carefully. I would have looked odd if I hadn't 'dolloed up', as Kay said. All the other girls did.

"It probably won't matter this once," said Kay and she was right. The dining hall for us lower crew had been turned into a dance hall and the booze was flowing freely. I, a new 'girl', was a target immediately as soon as I nervously stepped into the noisy room, holding tightly onto Kay's arm.

Other girls looked me over as half a dozen men moved in on Kay and me right away. "Joanne," a thirty year old guy said. "Newbies get their first drink for free but then a pretty girl like you isn't going to be paying anyway, is she?"

"What'll you have?" at least three of them asked me.

"Just a Coke," I said, hearing the nervousness in my voice as someone was yelling at Arnie to put on some music that we could all dance to.

A fortyish man pushed a Coke into my hands while Kay took the beer he had been keeping for himself. I took a sip of the Coke and could tell that there was something else in it.

"Rum and coke," the older man shouted to me as the noise in the room seemed to get louder and higher. "You have to have a real sailor's drink for your first aboard!"

"Grog," laughed a younger man, taking my hand away from Kay, giving her my Coke. He pulled me

into the open space in front of where Arnie was all set up. *Crocodile Rock* came bursting from the speakers, almost deafening us all. Jeff, he shouted his name at me, started to swing me and twirl me in a dance, other people joining in all around us, many shouting at Arnie to turn the sound down a little.

Arnie put his hand around his ear as if he couldn't hear anyone, winking at me as I was twirling right in front of him, my skirt flaring up and showing off my stockings and garters to anyone who was looking. My cheeks were on fire as I think there were only about twenty people doing that.

Jeff was just the first. I did the twist with Diego, some weird kind of line dance with Paul, and a waltz with Ron, the older man, who had brought me my first, now misplaced, drink. Some guys tried to talk to me, ask me where I was from, but it was too noisy and crowded to be able to carry on any conversation. Thank goodness for that, I thought, as I swayed so girlishly on my high heels, my skirt caressing my stockings and newly hairless legs. I tried to ignore the girlie way I felt as I smiled and smiled. Kay was laughing and dancing just as much as me.

There was a big cheer when Arnie finally stopped the music and let us get at the hors d'oeuvres that the cooks had saved from the paying passengers up above. That's what Arnie said anyway. That's when Jeff and Paul returned and I found myself as a sort of prize in a contest between all the men who had danced with me.

"You've got to give the girl time to answer," said Ron, the older man, who put another Coke in my hand, promising that it really was just a Coke this time. "Go ahead, Joanne. You're not from Vancouver at all, are you?"

"No," I murmured to the avid faces watching me. I should not have become a blonde, I thought with a shudder. My hair was just attracting men to me like flies. "I, I'm from the States." That's the way I had heard America described all the time in Vancouver.

"A Yank," called out one of the guys, swaying a little as if he had had a lot to drink. "She's a Yank, guys! I told you she was."

They wanted to know where I came from, what a girl as pretty as me was doing on the boat, and how long was I going to be staying. Well, I lied, of course, shivering at all the attention I was getting, vowing to get someone to re-dye my hair to a brown color and to tone down the makeup I was wearing. All the compliments being directed at me must surely be making me less and less popular with the girls all around me.

"You heard what happened upstairs?" asked one of the female cooks, bringing in a huge tray of pastries that was rapidly depleted from her hands.

"What?" asked Jeff, still trying to get his arm around my thin shoulder.

"Petula collapsed," said the woman, laughing as she said it. "Just hit a high note and tumbled right off the stage. Morgan had to carry her down to the medics and says she was passed out. He thinks she's broken her leg as well."

"Who's Petula?" I asked Jeff but it was Ron, the older man, who answered.

"We call her that because she does *Downtown* all the time as her signature tune," Ron said. "They get live music up there and she's the girl singer. She does a cabaret act as well. I wonder what the backup plan is

for entertainment if she can't do her act every night in the lounge."

"Maybe they'll have a talent contest," said Jeff, his arm now around my waist as he tried to squeeze me. I'm not going to enter anything like that, I thought with a quiver, as I removed his hand from my thin, corseted waist.

"They'll fly some entertainer in to meet us," said Ron.

"That will take a while," said Jeff, gripping the hand that I had used to free myself. "Maybe they'll take Arnie and his karaoke machine away from us."

"No such luck," laughed Paul, turning off to a brunette who was as new as I was.

I lost my drink again as Ron handed it to Jeff twirled me out on the dance floor to start the dancing once more, making me show off my legs and panties once more. Kay finally rescued me when I was getting into a little panic as I saw some pairings taking place.

"We're having an early night," Kay announced to the guys trying to move in on me, the new girl. "I know you're trying to rush my bunkie off somewhere, Jeff, but give her time to get her breath. I've got a lot to tell her about you layabouts!"

So I didn't have to go spooning on the lower deck with one of the guys as several of the girls were doing. "Get your beauty sleep, Joanne, and we'll see you tomorrow," grinned Ron at me. "And you should listen to Kay, Joanne. She knows us all pretty well."

"Intimately too," said Jeff and he really did sound as if he'd had too much to drink.

Kay had her arm about me as we retreated shakily to our cabin. "Don't pay any mind to Jeff," Kay said as she immediately began stripping off her dress in front of me. She did it so forcefully while I still was so slow in removing my stockings and my girlish stuff, getting a rush from doing that, my womanly, padded figure making me feel so, so feminine, to tell the truth, a feeling that was pleasurable only as long as I wasn't challenged and only admired.

"I wish I still had a girl's figure like you," complained Kay as she went to bed and watched me gathering my underclothes from our bathroom and washing out my stockings and putting them up to dry. "And before you think that Jeff is kidding, I have to tell you that he isn't. All you pretty things get attached quickly, and then the rest of the guys are willing to lay anything that is willing and I am so willing, Joanne. I am so willing. If you'd let Jeff take you up on the fantail deck as he wanted to, I'd have had Ron in here. He's my favorite because he doesn't make a big deal out of me sleeping around with other guys. If you want a turn with him, you'll find that he's pretty nice. I'd share him with you if you wanted that."

"I, I'm not doing that!" I exclaimed, knowing how red-faced I must be, now that I had creamed off all my makeup. "I, I'm not that kind of girl!"

"Who sleeps around?" laughed Kay. "Wait till you've done three or four cruises, lass! You'll be chasing the new hunks just the same way that Jeff was chasing you, you'll see!"

No, I wouldn't, I wanted to tell her. I thanked her for coming back to our cabin early and rescuing me from Jeff.

"I'm tired," Kay said with a yawn as I minced over to the ladder and climbed up to my bunk. "Always too much to drink at the first social of the year. Still, better than later. Can't even screw a guy for a drink when we turn for home port again."

Kay went to sleep then, leaving me to tremble and mull over the fire that I appeared to have leapt into from the frying pan.

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The following night was pub night. That meant karaoke for the girls and women and darts, cards and dominoes, at first, for the men. They kept up a series of ribald comments about the girls who were actually trying to sing. Usually, it was laughter, and drink, I suppose, that prevented the girls from putting on a good show.

I was nervous going back to socialize with all the men there but Kay was looking forward to it and singing her head off around me all day. If I heard *Down-town* one more time, sung so off-key, I knew I would scream.

As the drinking and singing went along, the ribald men yelling out for their favorites as well, Kay kept on pulling on me to go up and sing with her. "Look, Mottown!" Kay squealed as a picture of Diana Ross appeared on the screen. A quintet of girls beat her to *Baby Love*, which she sang lustily right beside me, drowning out the attempts of the other girls to at least sing on pitch.

Inevitably, I would have to sing, I began to realize, as I was the last 'girl' who hadn't sung at all. I had had

to dress in my grey skirt again but in a different blouse. I had to wear heels as Kay insisted. Our sneakers were all right to work in but not for a night out, as she called the pub night. "All right," I said to Kay as the lyrics to *Stop! In the Name of Love* came up on the screen. "Let's do that one together!"

I should have known that once Kay had a microphone in her hand that she wouldn't be satisfied with one song. I had to laugh silently to myself as fears that I would be recognized disappeared from my mind as she completely drowned me out and so no-one could tell that I was even singing at all.

Everyone sang along anyway as we did *I Hear a Symphony*, *My World is Empty Without You*, *Babe*, and then *Touch Me In The Morning*. Only, on the last one, Arnie flipped the switch to Kay's microphone as we started and so I found myself singing it all alone, not really using Diana Ross's intonations as our voices weren't very similar.

Kay was going crazy as her microphone was dead and she started to protest as I warbled the lyrics I was reading, hoping that the melody I was following was the one that I remembered. Kay stopped and stood there with me, looking at me foolishly as I went on. Suddenly, I realized what was happening. I was singing like the Samantha Carter I had become for the *Voice of the Americas*. I tried to hand the working microphone over to Kay but she refused it.

"Finish!" Kay yelled at me, pointing to the lyrics scrolling past. There weren't that many and so I did. And then, as I looked around at the previously yelling audience, I saw many of them, sitting there, dominoes dangling from statue-like fingers, staring at me.

“That was our turn,” I said hastily to Kay, putting down the microphone as if it was red hot.

Arnie suddenly began clapping at me, a big grin on his face. “Isn’t anyone going to sing again for a while after that performance, Miss Ross,” he called to me.

I was shaking as I sat down and pulled my Coke in front of me, Kay, open-mouthed, sitting beside me. “Where the hell did you learn to sing like that?” she thundered at me and all of the next table of girls turned as well to hear the answer to that question.

“In, in church,” I whispered, the only answer that I could possibly think of on the spur of the moment.

“Hey, can you sing that song from *Les Miz* that Susan Boyle does?” asked Betty, an older woman, who ran the laundry.

“I, I don’t know the words,” I said, shaking as all the eyes in the room seemed to be looking at me.

“Hey, Arnie,” called Betty to the frowning music man who was trying to get someone interested in Lionel Richie’s *Hello*. “Put that Susan Boyle track on and the girl here can sing it for us. Don’t worry, love,” she smiled at me. “We won’t bite if you make a mistake but it’s so nice to hear someone down here who can carry a tune for once.”

“Too right about that!” said one of the red-faced guys who worked with the presses down there in the hot, airless laundry almost all day long. “Let’s hear her sing again, Arnie. Give her the mike that works!”

What could I do that wouldn’t attract attention to me? Nothing, I thought as the quaking began inside me as Arnie sorted through his disks and found *I Dreamed a Dream*. I think I should have said that they should all help me sing but I didn’t think of it that first time.

I tried to do it very softly, despite the tinny karaoke sound track. But when I got to the line *And they turn your name to shame*, with the five rises on the last word, well, I was in tune and my audience was gasping. I was quivering as I finished. I handed the microphone off to Betty quickly with a flourish as everyone in the room was applauding me.

I sat there, red-faced in embarrassment as I thought of how I had exposed myself to the lower ship's company. I was sure someone was going to say, What are you doing here, Samantha Carter? But no-one did.

"Did you sing anywhere else, Joanne, but in your church choir?" asked Betty seriously as some of the guys took up some of the familiar drinking songs like *We Will, We Will Rock You* that they had their own actions to as well.

"Not since I left school," I lied again.

"I bet you were always the lead soprano," said Kay more than a little grumpily. I suppose that I deserved it as I had shown her up, a lot, in front of people she knew well.

"No," I said, shaking my head, my earrings dancing about my neck. "I sing contralto in the choir as I'm pretty wobbly on the high notes as a rule. We always have enough sopranos in the choir where I came from, anyway, without me straining!"

I did sing more but I asked other girls to sing with me. I think they liked it after a while as I deliberately pitched my voice low and tried to support their sincere efforts. I didn't let myself lead again, not even when a subdued Kay did a turn on *Survivor*, to which I added like a good backup singer should.

Ron helped by saying, "Hey, Kay, that sounded really good," as we were applauded as all the singers were now, the efforts being much better than they had been before.

I really didn't see it coming. I was trying to think of a way to develop a cold, anything that would prevent me taking part in any more karaoke singalongs for a while, until the knowledge of my singing died away a little. I went up on the deck where the wind blew most heavily around my skirts and hair but Kay came after me.

"Hey, you can catch a cold and cough doing that!" Kay scolded me. "Wait till we get in warmer waters before you start going up the deck like that. And that uniform has got no weight to it, you know. You need a sweater or a cardigan, my girl, if you come up where the spray is coming in!"

We were going down the gangway to our cabin, Kay insisting we go in, when we were suddenly waylaid by a man in a sort of uniform, black pants with a stripe, a short light-blue jacket, white shirt and black bow tie.

"Hey!" the man yelled at us, coming from 'under' the gangway, the steps down. Kay had warned me a few times to beware guys there as it meant they were taking the opportunity to look up your dress at your underwear, your feminine underwear. "You chambermaids! Can you point out Joanne to me, one of the new girls below decks?"

Kay looked at me but I didn't say a word. A band uniform. That's what it is, went through my head. It's a bandsman, a musician. A sinking feeling began to overwhelm my stomach.

“Are you dumb?” the older man rasped at the pair of us. “I ain’t gonna rape the chickie. I just wanna talk to her. Capiche? Savvy? Get it?”

“She’s Joanne,” said Kay, grabbing my arm. I would have gone on with my dumb act as the gleam in this guy’s eyes was terrifying me. “What do you want her for, Mr Palermo?”

I had all the guy’s attention on me then. I wanted to run for it, but where could I go on a ship. I knew already what he was going to say.

“You Joanne?” he asked, peering at my nametag. “Joanne Smith? You the girl who did the Susan Boyle and Diana Ross down below last night?”

I was tempted to be sarcastic and tell him that I wasn’t Australian. I wasn’t from ‘down below’ but I had the idea that this guy wouldn’t get it until I explained it to him a few times.

“I think you’ve got the wrong girl,” I said to him.

“But, but ...” Kay spluttered beside me.

Palermo smiled at me. “Your pal says I got the right girl,” he said, his leer showing off a mouthful of capped, ivory teeth.

“I don’t want to sing with your band,” I said to him as directly as I could, linking my arm to Kay’s and trying to pull her past this old guy blocking our way below decks.

“I ain’t offering,” sneered ‘Mr Palermo’. Oh yes, Tony Palermo and his Swing Orchestra, the poster on a wall in the purser’s had read. Appearing nightly, two shows, at the Ocean Boulevard. Dining and dancing had been in a separate box. Reservations for cabaret requested to avoid disappointment.

"Yet," Tony Palermo added while Kay stared at me as if I was insane and didn't budge to let me go past her. "You gotta pass a test to join my orchestra and maybe someone else already has. In which case, too bad, Miss Joanne Smith."

"Good," I said, shaking like a leaf. For a moment, he did look a little startled while Kay at last moved with me.

"Those yellow things don't do a thing for you," Tony Palermo went on, referring to the uniform dress we had to wear, as I started down again to the deck below. "A black dress, evening gown, goes a lot better with the black panties and garter belt you're wearing."

I know I was flushing but it was Kay who rounded on the bum then and gave him the benefit of her tongue.

I thought I had escaped to the safety of our cabin as I broke away at last and left Kay to chew out the old pervert. "You've got to go up to the Ocean Boulevard lounge right now," said Kay when she came in. "Tony Palermo is working on Captain's Orders. He wants to check you out as a replacement singer for his band. You got to do it!"

"Got to do it?" I gasped in dismay.

"Captain's Orders," said Kay, her eyes huge. Then she smiled. "They're having a heck of a time finding a new singer. The male crooner they signed is still in bed with sea sickness and we haven't even hit rough water yet. You should try, Joanne. It's a cushy billet for a few days until we get into a port where they'll be picking up someone to replace Petula, at least. More pay as well."

"I don't want to sing with a band," I said with a shudder. "All those eyes looking up at you, looking you over." I added the last part dramatically to try and convince Kay that I wasn't just crazy or had other motives beside stage fright.

"Well, you have to go," said Kay with a shrug. "Palermo's off talking to Arnie about finding you. I didn't tell him that you were my bunkmate."

"Let's go back to work," I gasped at Kay, perturbed by the way I was falling so easily into being a woman. I was even thinking I was Joanne now. It had to stop, soon. But as we 'girls' stepped out of the cabin, there were Arnie and Tony Palermo headed in our direction.

"Hey!" yelled Tony Palermo again.

Arnie was frowning at me. "You should go with this guy," Arnie said to me.

"He's a pervert," I said to Arnie. "He was hiding under the gangway to look up my dress."

Arnie laughed while Tony Palermo began swearing at me. "He's harmless," Arnie finally said to me. "Go on up, Joanie, and let them check you out. Just pretend you're in church and singing with your choir."

I went up moving like a girl to the upper decks with Tony Palermo, more frightened than seething, though I tried to make him think that that was what I was feeling. I would have to mess up my singing, I knew. I could do it. Starting off with the wrong pitch would do it. Musicians hated to have to start over and over again when someone couldn't find the right note to start.

The barroom, the Ocean Boulevard by name, was almost deserted but an older black man was seated at a piano, gently improvising a show tune for himself. A young bartender smiled expectantly at me as he began

to pour a drink for Tony. "Another contestant in the talent contest?" he asked Tony Palermo as I stood there in my chambermaid dress.

"Check her out," growled Tony Palermo to the black piano player, ignoring the bartender. "Arnie below decks was telling me she sounded pretty good. It's either her or nothing."

"Okay, girl," said the black man as Tony tossed off his drink and left the bar. "What do you want to sing for me?"

"Nothing," I told him, refusing the mike that he tried to hand to me.

The older black man glanced at the bartender who still seemed interested in me and grinned widely. "Tony's been his usual charming self, has he?" the piano player asked. He moved on his piano stool and patted part of it beside him. "My name's Teddy Ross and you, I see, are Miss Joanne Smith? Is that any relation to John Smith? Wrong name to be hiding out under, Miss Smith."

A spasm of shock rippled through me as I stared down at the laughing black piano player. He tinkled a little bit on the keys. He was riffing on *All of Me*, which I had sung on the *Voice's* last show. But it seemed to be a coincidence, I found out in relief as I sat down, my legs wobbling beneath me. I remembered to smooth my dress beneath me and cross my legs as he began to croon the melody and asked me, seriously, if I knew the song.

"Yes," I said briefly as he went on into a series of melodies that Sinatra had made his own.

"We get all kinds of requests and these are some of the popular ones," Teddy went on, playing without

even looking at the keyboard as he studied me. "It's an older crowd, see. For you, a much older crowd, a lot of sixty, seventy year olds. They like music that was popular just after the last world war. And most of them are white Canadians, and so they're not into much Motown or new stuff, unless it is or was really popular. Here, try this one."

Teddy didn't even ask me if I knew the lyric. I guess anyone who can sing a bit can do *Come Fly With Me*. "Stupid choice for a boat ride, isn't it?" said Teddy as I did sing it quietly for him, kicking myself then as I realized that I had started in the right key and kept to the proper rhythm, even if my voice was low.

Teddy sang along with me as we did some Nat King Cole and most of the crooners, even Bobby Darin, one of the few to survive past the onslaught of Rock and Roll. I tried desperately to be Anne Murray, who sings so low, even for a contralto, but I couldn't help staying on pitch and rhythm. It was so hard to mess up, I found.

"So, you don't want to sing with Big Tony's Swing Orchestra," said Tony, easing into an Ellington instrumental.

"No," I said to him. "I, I'm not a soloist. I just sing in church, in the choir."

Teddy grinned at me. "Pity," he said. "I bet you don't hold back like you just been doing with me, though, when you're in church."

What could I say to that? "It, it's different when you sing along with a choir. It's not so terrifying as singing by yourself with everyone looking at you."

“Yeah,” said Teddy sympathetically. “That’s the singer’s lot, of course, and why they pay you the big bucks.”

He looked at me expectantly and was probably checking out whether I was lying to him or not. Finally, he sighed. “All right, Miss Smith, just do this one,” it was *Memory* from the musical *Cats*, “and I’ll let you go. I’ll tell Tony that you ain’t got the voice to be his thrush.” He smiled as I grimaced at his choice of words. “That’s what Tony will be calling you when he introduces you. He’s as stuck in the Fifties and Sixties as is most of our audience.”

It’s easy to be tripped up in singing *Memory*. Pitch it too high and you’re screeching on the top notes unless you have an operatic voice like mine, which I didn’t want to reveal to Teddy Ross. Pitch it in a normal range to start and you end up having to sing the lowest notes in baritone or in an unnatural grunt. I avoided both pitfalls, switching keys, which isn’t true to the song, to avoid having to soar, as you should and I normally did, in the song. Naturally, Teddy caught what I was doing.

“You wouldn’t do that when you really sang, would you?” Teddy Ross asked me as Tony Palermo came thumping back into the bar, signalling to a frowning bartender to bring him a drink.

“Well?” asked Tony Palermo. “Should we rehearse her with the orchestra this afternoon?”

Teddy looked at me and shrugged his shoulders. “Sorry, kid,” he said to me and sounded as if he really meant it. “Singing with a real band ain’t no karaoke.” He looked up at Tony Palermo. “Guess we’ll have to go on with all instrumentals, boss.”

Tony looked at me in disgust which was fine with me. But then, the bartender coughed. "Well?" asked Tony.

"She and Teddy came to an agreement," said the bartender, startling me. "He promised not to recommend her to you and she sang him everything he played for her, including that song from *Cats* that the old ladies always want."

Tony reached into his pocket and passed an American bill to the bartender who withdrew from us with a grin. "A paisan," Tony said with a leer at me. "So we'll rehearse at two. Wear anything but that uniform, Joanne Smith. Hell, what kind of a name is Joanne Smith. Let's make it something sexier than that!"

Teddy began to play softly again. I looked at him in dismay and he shrugged his shoulders, a gesture I was to see many times from him in the next few weeks. "Sorry, kid," he said. "But you'll do fine, really! And Tony won't do more than flirt with you on stage and yell at you, off. It's his way."

"I'm not going to sing with the band," I said shakily. But I had hardly got back to the cabin when a purser's mate appeared at the door with a note telling me that my assignment on board was changed and that I was to report to Ocean Boulevard that afternoon. My belongings would be moved as well to a new cabin on a deck above, where a chambermaid would be around to keep my cabin clean.

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So I sang, or rather, Miranda Ewing did. Tony thought it was such a classy name. I guess he was a fan

of *Dallas* on television. I sang in two shows a night, one of which was called a cabaret. Besides me, there was a male comedian and a line of four dancing girls. There was supposed to be a male singer but he didn't show in all the time we sailed southward.

We stopped over in San Diego, in Catalina, off Cabo and off Acapulco before easing in to Puerto Vallarta. I didn't get off the boat at all. I couldn't, once we were in Mexico, as I didn't have a passport. Since all the passengers were on shore, I headed down to my old cabin and Kay.

She still had rounds of tidying up to do and so I helped her as Kay was my friend and confidante. Much later, I read that girls always have someone, a special friend whom they confide in all the time. It made me really uneasy because I could see that about myself, that I was doing that all the time now that I was femininely dressed and aping women. I was acting the way a woman behaves in so many ways.

"Is Jeremy still bothering you?" asked Kay as we did a state room quickly. The sooner it was done, the sooner we could laze around on what we landlubbers called the poop deck. It was an open deck at the rear of the level on which Kay's and my cabin was located and it was, well, just as its name implied.

Kay could smoke there and lie out in her bikini, which I, of course, didn't do. I told her that Tony forbade me to do it as I wouldn't look good in the shows I had to do.

"No, I figured Jeremy Astor out," I said to her with a smile. "I get him to buy me shots to get me drunk. He drinks his and I empty mine if I can. If I have to drink, I sip it in and take his beer chaser as well. Only I don't drink that. I just dump the liquor in my mouth into it.

Jeremy thinks he's loading me but he's the one passed out three of the last four nights in the Boulevard."

"That's a dangerous game with a guy like that," Kay warned me and I shrugged, just as Teddy Ross does all the time.

"I heard Stefano, the bartender, say that Jeremy Astor is going to be given an airplane ticket back to Vancouver," I said with a smile. "Something about being afraid of who is responsible legally for serving him so much alcohol."

"So you won't have to sing *I've Got You Under My Skin* again on this voyage," said Kay, lying out and taking a newspaper from the stack that she said Betty had bought her in a dockside shop in Puerto.

"Such a relief," I said with the mockery clear in my voice. Jeremy wasn't the only one getting on my nerves with constant requests for the same songs. The seventy-year-old Cliffords always wanted *Moon River* before they would leave the bar at night.

"You sing it so wonderfully, my dear," Mrs Clifford would always say and her husband would always try to tip me which wasn't allowed but he left hundred dollar bills all the time on Teddy's piano.

"She sings it after you all night long," Mr Clifford said on the night out of Catalina, the moon on the horizon so enormous and making a trail of light on the calm, calm sea. "Just like on our honeymoon!"

"Must be in their nineties," said Teddy with a laugh, pocketing the bill left behind. He was good about splitting it with me later when he had change to give me fifty.

After the early show in the bar with the full orchestra, all eight of us, nine if you counted Tony on his clar-

inet, I had to sing in the cabaret, which had been sparsely attended at the beginning but was now usually full.

It made me a little uneasy to see so many people coming to the shows now as I had to sing music from many Broadway shows and range far too highly away from the crooning that I could get away in the swing sessions early and the slow ballads that were often just Teddy on piano and me singing requests into the late hours of the night and early morning. Which had made Jeremy Astor think that I, the new girl singer, was singing just for him.

“You don’t have to wear that wig,” said Kay as I sat in the shade and watched her skimming through a tabloid which had a blaring headline, ‘Missing singer: \$25 000 reward put up by show!’

“I have to,” I said to Kay, knowing that the soft, brown hair that I had inherited from Petula, whom I still hadn’t met, disguised me enough, especially now that my dark roots were beginning to show through the blonde hair that I had been so proud of. “Unless you could dye my own hair back to its normal shade which is sort of this color.”

“Why?” laughed Kay. “Don’t blondes have more fun?”

“It’s trashy,” I told her, thinking that some mornings when I woke up in my new cabin and looked at my hair in the mirror, all spiky and partly blonde, partly brunette, that I would only need a nose ring or an eyebrow piercing and I would look like Samantha Carter again, the ‘Goth Girl’ that I was looking at on the front of the tabloid that Kay was holding.

“Who said it was trashy?” Kay wanted to know indignantly.

“Tony,” I said and she snorted at that. “And Teddy agreed with him for once. Told me I’d look classy if I was a natural blonde but anyone could see that I wasn’t. He said I looked cheap.”

Actually, Teddy had said nothing of the sort. It had been Tony who had been railing at me when I wanted to slow down his version of *I Get a Kick out of You*. And I had been polite. Just because Maggie, I had heard Petula’s real name for the first time, liked to sing it that fast in a breathless little girl’s voice didn’t mean that I had to do it that way.

So, I had done it as instructed in the first show and it had just passed by the audience with little reaction. I was surprised when Teddy added it to the varied, improvised program that we had started to do in the late show. He slowed it right down at the start and then changed tempo half way in, slowing once more at the end to let me finish reluctantly. I think we were both surprised at the way the late crowd, some of the officer crew among them, gave us a real round of applause for that one. Guess what happened the following day in our warm-up to the first show. We still did *I Get a Kick out of You* but Tony told the ‘orchestra’ that Teddy would show us all a new version of the old chestnut.

“Well, if Teddy wants a change in you,” said Kay slyly and I had to smile at her. I suppose that I had quoted Teddy at her a lot. I was getting along pretty well with the old, black man. He was unfailingly polite and upbeat with me. Yes, I thought with a tremor, he was a gentleman, always treating me as if I was a lady. In my evening gowns, and singing as I was, I felt that way as well. That I was a lady.

The late shows were particularly great as Teddy seemed to know, no matter what was requested, just what was the best key for me. I was trying to be the next Anne Murray or Karen Carpenter there on the boat, keeping to the lowest of my natural registers.



I had butterflies in my stomach each time I went out and applause greeted me as I swished to the front of the band in a long, tight, off the shoulder gown and began to sing. I had to wear huge, long earrings when I was with the Swing Orchestra because Tony said so and often he would choose a dress for me from whatever selection that Petula had had, some of which I had to increase the padding in to make me fit into the silky womanly clothing.

In the music, though, it was easier than all the cross-dressing I was getting so used to, to switch into a Bobby Darin, Frank Sinatra, Matt Monro or Michael Buble number with the swing orchestra, or, later, with Teddy just tickling the ivories, as he called it, me sitting or standing, leaning over the piano as we improvised our way through the growing number of requests that filled the jar that Teddy would place on his piano.

“Everyone says how well you are doing up there with the orchestra,” said Kay as we retreated to her cabin. She said that the purser’s store on the boat would have hair dyes and she’d go and get some Nice ‘N Easy for me.

“Probably because it’s not very difficult music,” I said to her seriously, actually meaning that by and large. “We had a lot more difficult pieces to sing in church. This is mostly old stuff as well. I suppose that a young voice makes it all seem fresh to the kind of people we have as passengers. But it’s all standard stuff, nothing like what Beyonce or Christina Aguilera or Mariah is singing.”

Of course, the only song by any of those that Kay knew was *Voulez-Vous*. She must have seen the video that Christina had made of that with Pink and other singers I had forgotten. She got up in the cabin and did

a ribald version of that, missing half of the French words. She got me to stop laughing and to do it with her, asking whoever we were singing to if they would like to take us to bed with them, strutting like a street-walker in heat as we did the song just like Christina did.

“Someone’s happy,” said Betty, her head around the open, cabin door. Kay laughed while I turned beet-red, I’m sure, as we didn’t know how long Betty had been there watching us cavorting in the little space in front of the bunks, our skirts hiked up as if we were Folies dancers, wiggling and patting our hips to show our men what we had for them.

I chatted to Betty for a few minutes as I tried to regain control of myself. My shaking like a woman had been really wild there at the end. But Betty didn’t say anything about me making a fool of myself. Kay looked at her bedside clock and shot off to get the hair dye for me. Betty had things to get at the purser’s and went after her.

I had time to look at the newspapers. The tabloids always contort the news. I knew that. But I couldn’t believe what the first newspaper was saying! Samantha Carter was now the subject of a police search across the country as she, that is me, had been missing for nearly a month. And there was something there as well about me and a CD of me singing coming out in the very late fall or at the beginning of the Christmas Season. How could that be, I wondered, as I wasn’t there to sing anything for anyone?

Graham had an ‘in’, it appeared, with the big record company. It was what he had kept holding over all of our heads, all the singers on the show. We would get a recording contract if we won the competition. In fact,

several singers on the show might get recording contracts because we had done so well and showed we deserved it, blah, blah, blah.

I'd read enough about reality and talent shows to know that contestants on such shows were generally a pretty average lot. That's why I didn't actually disagree when Graham had said that my singing was average. It probably was for a girl. He just couldn't know, I thought, still trembling in fear when I thought of it, that my singing was definitely un-average for a boy, me.

It was the record company, Paragon Records, who had posted the reward for any information that led to the establishment of my, that is Samantha Carter's, whereabouts. In several of the other papers, there were stories about me as well but mostly in the entertainment sections.

There were references to Julie and some interview on a famous chat show that she had done. There was a line in it that chilled me through and through.

"What about the rumor that Samantha Carter isn't a woman at all ...?" Walter Brown, the interviewer, had asked her.

"That she's a female impersonator?" Julie was supposed to have said. Reading the words made me dread what was going to come next. "That's what the *Tattle-tale* reported, wasn't it? They only ran it once, that she was a sex change, didn't they? And then, when everyone laughed at them for that, they switched the story and began calling her a lesbian! Can you imagine how she could be a female impersonator and a lesbian at the same time?"

“There are some pretty wild claims about her,” Wally Brown had gone on in his easy, fatherly way. “Why has she really run away?”

“Sammie never wanted to be on the show in the first place,” Julie said. “I had to persuade her to go on every time. She hated the way she was treated and then I did something unforgivable. They didn’t want me around. They wanted her to make a CD of songs they wanted her to sing. And I took money to go away from my sister for a while and leave her in the clutches of people like Graham Notting and Ray Fielding.

“Samantha knew I’d taken the money because Graham told her. And she went off right away. All because of me and how I hurt her. I’ve no idea where she’s got to but I want her to call me and we can put this all right. I know we can. I’ve given Graham and Ray back their blood money.”

“Good to hear it,” Walter Brown had praised Julie.

It took me a long time to hear the whole interview which was on *YouTube*, I think. In it, Julie had said a lot more. About being a female impersonator, Julie had made up an excuse about it really well. “That’s what Samantha said all the time, wasn’t it, about what she was singing, that she was a female impersonator,” Julie had said on my behalf but if any one of us had ever used the term, it had been her. It was so weird to watch her saying that on television but then she had gone on, “She kept on saying that she wasn’t singing any original music and she was singing everything like someone else, impersonating Jann Arden, who’s a big favorite of hers, or Sarah Brightman. That’s what she meant! And *Tattletale* knew it when they printed the rubbish that they did!”

In every newspaper Kay had, there was a story about me, about the search for me and how it had spread to the North-West. And there it was in the most recent paper of all, a tabloid daily, that investigators were asking, in a story on its entertainment page, if Samantha Carter had crossed the border into Canada.

Kay came back with a 'lustrous' brown dye and, for the rest of the evening, we giggled and sang as I slowly had my hair changed to a reddish-brown. With so many people ashore, I had no show to perform but Kay wanted to show me off, I could tell. So, I went to the lounge with her and did karaoke with the girls, insisting all the time that some of them help me so that I didn't sing alone at all.

I got compliments on my new, short, reddish hair. Kay's comments about what they'd said 'up there' about my blonde hair being cheap and tacky were met with disbelief.

"I liked you as a blonde," Jeff told me, trying to move in on me again, I could see, and so could everyone else. He was chased away by the other girls with all the derision and scorn they felt for a two-timer like Jeff, heaped upon him.

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Of course, once we hit Los Angeles, on our way back north, I was paid off and gone from the boat before I even had a chance to say good-bye to Kay and thank her for all she had done and all the remarks she had made in support of me.

Tony had found out that I didn't have a musician's union card and a whole new show came aboard in Los

Angeles, including a trio of girl singers who all had passports and valid union cards.

Teddy carried my pack for me to the top of the gangplank that led down to the dock. I think that most of the crew was already ashore, anyway, as it was late in the evening when I got the boot, only after the replacements had arrived. Still, I had a cheque for a lot of money, the allowance for a singer doubling the amount that I had thought that I would make.

"So it's back into the real world for you, Samantha," said Teddy Ross.

"Yes," I said, shivering as I took my pack from him. "Thanks for being such a brick, Teddy." Tears were in my eyes as I wanted to hug him for being so nice to me. Even though, he had started to come back with me to my cabin, 'to protect me' each night.

At first, it was so awkward for me as I didn't quite know how to say goodnight to another man. Teddy had laughed at me when he realized how clueless I really was and had put his arms around me and showed me how I had to kiss him.

The first time we had done that I had been in a tizzy all night long and I couldn't face him the next day. Then, I was almost in complete distress when he took me to my room again the next night, my long gown swishing around us all the way. He stopped me as I started to say good-night, and so I had to kiss him again. Yes, I had to kiss him. Teddy insisted as he had done the honors, he said, the night before. Only when I kissed him, he hugged me to him and suddenly his lips were devouring mine and he was kissing me as a man should kiss a woman.

I was in a panic as we heard some other people coming along the passageway then and it was obvious that they had seen us. So, Teddy pushed me into my cabin and came in with me, holding me, my whole body quaking and shaking as we heard the men pass us by and one of them actually beat a staccato on my cabin door.

“Sorry, girl,” whispered Teddy. “Ruined your reputation.” I felt his hands pressing so tightly around my waist. “Shame to miss such an opportunity, though, isn’t it?”

Teddy stroked my bare back and kissed me again while I stood there stiffly and let him, wondering how I could get him out of my cabin without a fight.

“You could help a little in this seduction, girl,” Teddy whispered to me. “Move your lips when mine meet yours, like this.” And so, I got a whole lesson on how to kiss a man, how to pleasure him with kisses and what I should be feeling as a girl when I did what he told me to.

The worst thing was that I did like doing that with Teddy. And as soon as I realized that, my mind rebelled against me. I tried to push him away but he seemed to think that that was natural in a ‘shy’ girl.

“We will take this further, girl,” Teddy promised me. “But not now and not until you are ready for a man like me, old enough to be your father. Now, when a man leaves, he gets a really special kiss. So, put your arms around my neck, hug your body to mine and say a really soft, girlish ‘Good Night, darling Teddy!’”

Well, I didn’t do that last part the first night, but I did the second, and the third, and who knows what I would have been doing after that if I hadn’t been told

that I had to leave and right away as the replacements had arrived.

I was actually looking forward to kissing Teddy each night, yes, feeling so womanly as I sang for him and knew what was going to come at the end of the night. Yes, I was getting pleasure from our kissing and he seemed to be getting a lot of pleasure as well out of kissing and caressing me. I was wearing my new Chanel perfume just for him and loving the way he pushed me against the door to increase his pleasure in holding me.

I had even begun to think like a girl, wondering how I could invite Teddy into my cabin and how far I could go with him before he had to leave. And what would I do if he didn't want to go. No, I would have to make it very clear to him how far I could go as a girl and he would have to promise to go no further.

That had been swimming through my head, agitating me as I sang each night just for him. Then, all my problems were solved. I had to go and I wasn't happy about it. I stood at the top of the gangplank and kissed Teddy with a passion that I had tried to avoid each time we had approached my room and the saying of Good Night.

"I, I loved singing for you," I whispered to Teddy, my arms about his neck, my lipstick all over his mouth, as I actually wiggled against him, thinking that a girl would do that to a man that she was saying good-bye to, wouldn't she? I really loved his kiss again as he held me, his hand playing gently with my bra strap as he sometimes had done, making me feel so girlish and desirable.

Well, he could dream of me as the girl who got away, I thought, thrilling at how womanish I felt. I

kissed him again and again and he had to push me away then at last and lift my pack for me.

"I liked our evening shows as well, Samantha," he said again, stressing the name that I had missed him calling me earlier.

I staggered in my high heels then as he put one of his arms around me and hugged me. "Yes," Teddy Ross said, staring into my heavily made-up, stunned woman's face. "It took me a while to work it out. But it's pretty obvious, isn't it? Missing girl singer. Wonderful singer hiding out as a chambermaid. But it was a pleasure, Miss Samantha Carter. And you don't have to be Miranda Ewing again, or Joanne or whatever other name you use. I know I'm going to hear from you again but no-one, I promise you, Samantha, is ever going to hear about you from me. This time, there's only the two of us around and so it's a promise I can keep."

I had to hug Teddy then as a woman would hug a man. I almost wished that the falsies that pushed into him were real as I cried and kissed him, and hugged him some more. He finally pushed me onto my way, his hands caressing me and leaving me tingling all over and wondering why I hadn't given in to him as a woman in my position would have done. I wished that he had made me. He certainly deserved more from the girl that he thought that I was.

My eyes were misty and tearing up all the way to the bus rank where I joined workmen and women from the port going into the city. I knew that I was thinking of myself as a woman and that it was completely wrong. I wasn't a woman and I shouldn't feel as I did. I shouldn't even be kissing a man as I had, just because he had been nice to me.

I had an idea where a cheap motel could be found and was on my way there, thinking again how much I was going to miss sitting beside Teddy in a long, tight gown, slinking a little when I stood to sing a song like *Memory*. Then he would put his arms around me and lead me back to my cabin and for a little while, I would be in some kind of girlish bliss, my whole body feeling so feminine as I felt him against me, his hand on our last occasion stroking my legs in my garter belt and stockings, really, really, turning me on and making it so hard for me to let him go.

“Another night,” I had promised him shakily. It wouldn’t come now and I would never know ... never know the disappointment and contempt that Teddy would have had for me for leading him on so. I felt hot tears of relief, distress, loss, all rising up in me, blinding me a little.

I staggered along the roadway towards the flashing ‘Vacancy’ sign of the motel. I never saw or heard the car that hit me. I just felt as if I was being picked up and hurled by a mighty hand towards the fence around the motel I was headed for. It all came hurtling at me and then there was nothing but pain in my chest and in my legs. I was lying on the ground, looking up at the underside of a car.

\*\*\*\*\*end of one of two\*\*\*\*\*