

# We're No Ladies



A "New Woman" Novel



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# WE'RE NO LADIES

by **Philippa Peters**

## **Halloween every day**

“Just get the ball to Janet,” wheezed George Miller, who liked to think of himself as the coach of our team.

“Make sure it’s a three-pointer,” said Drew Morris, the point guard, to me. I nodded and went down the court after the time out. Barry, their best player, was on me along with little Justin Mason, flexing his muscles as if I cared. I smiled at the pair of them and waited for the whistle.

“You’re going down this time, bitch!” snarled Barry. He was as red-faced as George but mostly from anger, I think.

It didn’t help that in the third quarter, Kenny, their centre, who’d already fouled out, had hollered at Barry as we took the lead, “You’re letting a girl beat you! You’re being beaten by a girl, man.” My team, of course, heard it and amplified it, reminding Kenny that I’d made him look like a ‘chump.’ I thought Kenny was going to come over and attack Steve Pound, jawing at him from our bench. It was supposed to be a friendly league. Apparently that was

when the other teams played each other. It wasn't friendly when they played the Cool Jay Aces, the only team with a girl on it.

"You sure she's a girl?" Barry yelled at George who'd recruited me to Coulthard's, the financial company where we worked and which sponsored the team, hence the Cool Jay Aces. "She doesn't look like one to me!"

Well, that was below the belt, I thought. So did my team-mates. They were so busy bumping and shoving Barry they forgot we were in a basketball game. The result was that the Eagles caught up to us; in fact, they were two points ahead after Barry's last foul shots. I knew he'd charged me deliberately but the ref was letting him get away with it through the late part of the game.

"We should have been giving it to Janet all through the game," said Drew Morris, our small point guard, who was going to put the ball in. George and Steve Pound, our benchwarmer, told him to shut up and just throw the ball to whoever was open. Steve was a nice guy usually who didn't mind doing all the little chores that benchwarmers did. I was supposed to have replaced him in the starting lineup.

I didn't know why Steve was even on the team until someone asked him about his wife and kids. Yes, Steve was married to Coulthard's daughter. She'd some day inherit the firm and Steve would be our boss. He was normally a good guy. It showed how high the tension was on our bench that he was jawing with Drew.

"High right," I murmured to Drew to get his mind back in the game. Drew nodded. Barry was a good player for this league but mainly a one-handed one. His strength was on his right. If Drew put the ball where I wanted, Barry would have to come around me. I'd spin away from him, shooting a long hook.

Drew's pass was awesome, perfect. I couldn't have missed if I tried, not even with Justin Mason clutching at my crotch. I had to smile at the look on his face when he realized I wasn't put out in the least. The shot went home. I pumped my arm, grinning myself;

yeah, I was taunting him, I guess. But Justin got his own back as he decked me with a vicious punch to my stomach. That was just too much.

I hauled myself to my feet. The buzzer and the ref's whistle sounded as I staggered up. The 'summer' season was over. We'd won the playoff! So, I showed Justin Mason he shouldn't be hitting girls. I decked him with a right cross. The thing that shot out of his mouth wasn't a mouth guard. It was one of his teeth with a whole lot of blood. I cut my hand as well but no one paid any mind to that as we all started throwing punches at each other. I landed a couple of good ones on Barry, got blood on him, too. He thought I'd cut him but it was mostly blood from slugging Justin.

There was such a kerfuffle there at the end that the President of the league refused to give the cup to either team. He walked off with it as I went to the women's bathroom to change alone, the guys on both sides high-fiving and trash-talking each other as they went to their respective dressing rooms.

"But she doesn't look like a girl," I heard Barry saying after I'd changed by myself, no fun at all. I walked out of the Ladies' bathroom as he let loose. "She's like that South African runner. The one who doesn't know she's really a guy. She's got no boobs and bigger muscles than Justin." The little guy was a bodybuilder and prided himself on his 'guns.' No, I didn't have bigger muscles than him, not by a long shot.

"Shush," said one of their players, seeing me, watching the guys guzzling beers someone had brought for end of game. They shouldn't have been in the hallway, drinking. My team was still in their dressing room, celebrating with beers too, which I couldn't have, because I was a girl.

None of the Eagles said, "Good game," to me. I usually got that grudgingly at the end from the Suns or Stars, the other good teams in our league. Some guys were good sports about losing. Some asked me when I'd quit the WNBA, the professional league. I had to smile at that. "I'm not good enough for that," I'd say, "not big enough."

That was a bit of a jolt to some. They put my success down to the fact that I was six-four. Only one player here or there in our league was big enough to play me even up. Of course, it wasn't 'even' as I'd been on a college scholarship once; and I hadn't let myself get out of shape as so many of them had.

Being six-four was the bane of my life. I'd gone to dances at grammar school, always, it seemed, ending up dancing with guys up to my waist. Now, guys like Drew Morris and George Miller were kind to me at company dances, asking me to waltz. But I always felt like I was dancing with a child when I danced with guys from work.

I tried to be a girlie girl for a while, with makeup and curled hair, but it didn't work for me. "No one wants to dance with a girl who just made him look like an idiot in his favourite sport," Lois, secretary to Steve Pound, our future boss, told me, flashing a smile across at George Miller, just about her size in her high heels.

"People are more mature than that," I said to Lois. But it seemed that they weren't. I did all the things I was supposed to do to attract a man, a tall man, which is why I'd started playing basketball again. But there was something about me, I decided, that just wasn't girlish enough. So I cut off my annoying curls and kept my hair bobbed. One day, a white knight would ride into my life. I'd look back on the heartaches and insults I'd received with laughter. I just hoped he'd be coming soon.

"Hey, Janet!" called Drew as he left the dressing room in suit and tie, his dark hair immaculate, his cufflinks glinting. Steve followed him as he often did. It was almost as if he took his cues on how to behave from Drew. "You're coming to the Halloween dance this year? You didn't come last year!"

I followed him to the parking lot, leaving the silent Eagles and their baleful glances behind us. "Any guys you know, six-eight or more, going to be there?" I asked, making Drew and Steve laugh.

"Ah, don't let the height thing get to you, Jan," Drew said to me. "There'll be a lot of guys over six feet, for sure. Not me, of course."

"Nor me," said Steve Pound. "And I won't be at the social to dance with you, Janet, I'm afraid. The old man," the owner of Coulthard's itself, "is having a family dinner and I have to be there. Can't be at the social club dance, sorry!"

Steve waved to both of us and went off. I was left with Drew who was looking at me, shaking his head. "You should go as a boxer," he said.

I grinned down at him. "What are you going as?" I asked Drew. I got a funny look.

"Um, not sure," he said. "Um, why don't we go as a couple? Shake up some of the fuddy-duddies in the firm. Ah, best not be too outrageous. I don't want to be fired or anything. How about something from Robin Hood? You could be Little John," oh, yes, I'd have to be the big guy, wouldn't I, "and I'll be one of Robin Hood's band, maybe the man himself."

Justin Mason came out then. I went over to apologize. He didn't want to accept the apology, though I hadn't started the melee. I'd finished it, pretty well. What Justin was going to do, the girl with him said spitefully, was sue me and make me pay for his tooth.

"I'll go halves on the cost with you, Justin," I said to him as Drew said something about Justin paying for stitches in my hand. I didn't want another fight. So, I pulled Drew away to his car.

"So it's a date," Drew said. "Something from Robin Hood, Jan. I'll come over to your place. We'll leave from there."

Well, I found green tights and a jacket, a hat with a feather in it, a long staff and sort-of green boots. I was just deciding which belt to wear when the door-bell sounded. I stared at the apparition on my doorstep.

"Well, do you like my costume?" Maid Marian asked me. "Oh, please let me in, Jan. There's a guy coming after me from one of your downstairs apart-



ments. I should never have kissed him when he said how lovely I was. Now he wants to kiss me again."

"Drew?" I croaked at 'her'. "Drew Morris, is that you?"

"You have to call me 'Marian' tonight," 'she' said flirtatiously, spinning and admiring herself in my hall mirror.

"You're going to the Cool Dance dressed like that?" I gasped at the auburn-haired beauty, checking her lipstick and eye makeup in my mirror. She was even swivelling and checking her silhouette which made my eyes pop out of my head as she had boobs much more prominent than mine. Her cleavage was grasped by her neckline as well and so they appeared to be real!

"Not if you don't want to, darling," Maid Marian said to me, her lovely green dress swirling about what must be really high, green-coloured heels. They must be as she was taller than Drew Morris had ever been. The top of her head, a green, glittering head band, flowers and jewels sparkling in the light I'd put on, was level with my nose while Drew had always been down at shoulder level with me before.

"I do have tickets," 'she' said in a strange sort of drawl that wasn't Drew's voice at all, "to the Regal Ball. We should go where you won't to be embarrassed to be seen with me."

Marian took two tickets from her purse, 'she' was carrying a purse, ye gods, and gave them to me. My mouth dropped a little at the five hundred dollar tickets.

"You paid a thousand for these?" I asked her, I mean, him.

"You don't want to know what I paid for my dress and the rest of my outfit," said Marian. "But if you want to stay with Coulthard's social, I'll come with you on one condition. You don't tell anyone who your date is! Let them guess!"

"You want me ..." I said to a smiling Maid Marian, swishing around in her very flirty dress. My good-



ness, she had more than one petticoat in the collection of skirts she was wearing. She lifted a hand to push back a strand of long, reddish hair behind her ear, showing off the dangling earrings at her ears. Her long nails were red and shaped like daggers. She could have scratched my eyes out with them, I thought, in a panic.

"You want me to take you as a woman into a dance with all our friends?" I asked her, the guy who worked in a cubicle, feet away from mine. I didn't say, "What will they think of me, a woman, dressed as a guy, bringing a woman to the company dance?"

Marian was ahead of me, however. "They'll all be thinking that you're a lesbo after all!" she said with a laugh. She sounded like Drew. I frowned and she caught it right away. "Oh, I do have to laugh and giggle like a girl!" she went on. "I need more lessons on my next Trans-It Adventure. My voice isn't quite right, is it? It's having to go to work and being Drew for days on end! I really need a long vacation and then I can nail my voice and my giggle!"

I listened to her bemused and watched her twirl this way and that and smile at her beautiful image in the mirror. I'd always considered Drew Morris to be a handsome guy, fastidious about his clothes and the way he looked. He always smelled nice, always wearing cologne. He just wasn't like other guys at work.

"I don't want people at work to put my name and lesbian," I said forcefully to Maid Marian, "in the same sentence. And when they find out about you," I shuddered as she adjusted her boobs quite naturally, as a woman might, "aren't you afraid about what they're going to say about you?"

Marian turned away from the mirror and smiled at me. I sensed this wonderful fragrance, so feminine and so delicate. I'd had it sprayed on me as I walked through perfume counters always in the entrance of large, department stores. Salesgirls wanted me to take free samples away with me but *Intimate Evenings* was far too feminine for a big woman like me.

"You mean," said Marian, her lips pouting and looking so lovely, glossy with a reddish-pink colour,

fuchsia or something like it, “they’ll say that I’m a tranny?” she asked. “Or a drag queen? Or a transvestite? A cross-dresser or a fag? Well, they can say all of those things if they want as they’d all be true!”

“You’re a transvestite?” I asked in horror. I couldn’t believe one of my male friends admitting that to anyone and why to me?

“It’s so much easier for you,” said Marian, putting her hands with their long, red, beautiful fingernails on my arms. I could only stare at her and blush in embarrassment at what ‘she’ was doing. She steered my arms about her waist while I looked into her exquisitely made-up face. She must be wearing false eyelashes! Her perfume tantalized me with its delicate hint of femininity, just as its ads said it would.

“You women wear pants all the time, just like us men,” said Marian, tossing her hair back behind her ears as women did all the time. All women, but not me, I thought of my short, straightish, dark hair, cut into a bob. I brushed it to one side and thought that I looked like Rachel Maddow but she had more hair than me.

“You can wear shirts and ties, t-shirts, jeans and running shoes,” said ‘Marian,’ her voice sort of feminine. “Who cares? But I can’t go out in a skirt or put a little makeup round my eyes or everyone in the neighbourhood is calling me names. No, I have to do it in secret! Which, Jan, I do and now you can tell how many shots I’ve had tonight to make it out this far and to be talking to you like this!”

“You’re drunk?” I asked Maid Marian, stroking on my arms, swaying against them as a girl would who’d just met the man who was going to take her out on a date. I was in a state of very great shock.

“Not drunk,” giggled Drew Morris, trying to control his girlish voice. “I’ve just had a few, Jan. I had to. I nearly didn’t come. I was going to go back and waste the money I spent at Madame Eugenie’s.” That was the premiere cosmetic salon in town. I know my eyes opened really wide when Marian said that but I could see it must be true, so lovely was ‘she.’

"I really had to steel myself and have a few belts," 'she' said in the drawl I was getting used to, "to get in the taxi. But the guys when I got out! I didn't know you lived in such a swinging apartment block, Jan! They were all over me!" She stopped and looked at me in sudden concern. "It, it wasn't because they read me, was it? They weren't joking with me, were they?"

Marian/Drew looked quite shaky. I had to say something nice about 'her.'

"I didn't know you when you were at my door," I said to her. I'm a sucker for anyone who appears the least little bit distressed. "And I see you at work every day. You looked like a beautiful woman to me!"

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" exclaimed Marian, throwing her arms about my neck, pulling me down a little. My arms were still about her drawn-in waist and before I really knew what was going on, she was kissing me.

I haven't kissed that many guys in my lifetime, though I'd like to. I've kissed a lot of girls in parties and celebrations, not that any were with passion intended. I hadn't kissed a girl like Marian before but, as I held her, I felt her padded breasts against me. I realized I wasn't kissing a girl. I was kissing Drew Morris, the point guard on my basketball team. But a Drew Morris, waiting French, ultra-feminine perfume all over me.

I hadn't been kissed in a while, either, my white knight's charger lame or something. I knew my white knight couldn't be Drew Morris. No, he couldn't be, I thought, as I bemusedly kissed Maid Marian and wondered when 'she' was ever going to break it off.

She did, her lipstick definitely mused. "Oh, that was lovely," Marian simpered, moving her shoulders just like a woman. "So we go the Regal?"

"I guess so," I said as she took her hands from me. She took out her lipstick and repaired her lips in the hall mirror.

"There, ready to go," Marian said in a pout over her shoulder at me. "Let me pay for the cab, Little John,"

she went on coyly. "But you'll have to give it to the driver as a lady shouldn't be paying, should she?"

### \*\*\*\*\*A night at the Regal\*\*\*\*\*

While we had waited for the cab, Marian had found the moustaches and little beard I'd bought with part of my costume, the Robin Hood tunic and hat. "Oh, you must wear them," Maid Marian urged me. "I've never kissed a man with whiskers before."

"Nor have I," I said archly and she giggled like Drew again.

Marian helped me in positioning and placing the adhesive just perfectly and I have to admit I did look like a guy who'd grown the appendages on my chin and upper lip. "Ye gods!" I muttered when I looked at myself with Maid Marian.

"Say that a lot," Marian said. "No one will think you're anything but a guy."

"Ye gods," I growled at the ring of my intercom. The cab driver was there.

Marian picked up her purse and waited at the door. It took me a few moments to realize she was waiting for me to open it for her as if she was indeed the woman and I was the man. She waited while I locked the door before following her to the elevator.

"Put your arm about me," Marian whispered as we waited. She re-said it furiously just before the door opened. The elevator was loaded with revellers. But they squeezed us in. No one said anything about us being a role-reversed couple.

"Have fun!" a lot of people called to us as I kept my arm about my date and escorted her to the cab and helped her into the back seat.

"This is so silly!" I said to the man sitting so girlishly beside me, moving closer to me and putting my off hand on his silk-covered thigh. Marian moved so that I could feel that there was a garter on her leg. She smiled at me as I connected with a garter belt, a

woman's garter belt, of all things, that my basketball team mate was wearing under his layers of silk.

"Oh, Jan Brennan!" said Marian in a higher, lilting voice than the drawl she'd been using before. "You be a good boy and leave my garters alone! Till later, anyway!" Then, she kissed me and laid her thick hair and head on my shoulder.

I swallowed hard and looked up. The cabbie was grinning at me. He winked and put his thumb up. I felt so weird. It was just a short distance to the Regal where the uniformed valets rushed forward to assist my lovely companion out of the car.

"Hey!" someone shouted as I went around the car, my short bow and staff looking pretty authentic. Maid Marian leant against me as the flashbulbs went off. There was a television camera shooting us as well. Marian waved femininely at the cameras, her long sleeve making her arms look so feminine, especially when her nails and bracelets glinted in the lights.

A reporter, or his assistant, came jogging after me. "Can we get your names?" he asked us.

"Maid Marian and Little John," said 'Marian' sweetly, arching her figure as she minced beside me. Her voice was still ridiculously high as she clung to my arm as if I really was her date and she really a girl.

"Your real names," laughed the reporter-intern.

"Jan Brennan," I said gruffly to him, "and ..."

"Marian Andrews," said my girlie companion.

"John Brennan and Marion Andrews," repeated the intern, dashing back as someone else was coming down the red carpet behind us.

The foyer was filled with couples, all dressed outlandishly in fancy dress. "Great costumes, man!" said a tall, thin Michael Jackson whom I actually could have danced with except he was off with a Marilyn replica. I sighed. Another missed opportunity, I thought. Marian yanked on my arm and stored her purse with those of all the other ladies.

A basketball player, dark-haired, wearing LeBron James' uniform and number, nodded to me and smiled at Maid Marian beside me. "Are you a couple?" he asked, still smiling, while I felt sweat coming to my forehead, sure he'd made us, despite my moustaches and Drew's shapely breasts.

"Yes," said Marian quickly, coyly. "But John and I have a very open relationship!"

"Then, you must have a dance with me, a polka," said the white LeBron James. "I make it a point to dance with the ten prettiest girls at the Ball each year and get ten phone numbers." He smiled at me and punched me on the shoulder. It hurt! "You don't mind, Little John?" The way he stressed the last two words and the glance he made at my green tights was clearly meant to put me down to my 'girl friend.' If he only knew, I thought angrily, wishing I'd the nerve to do to LeBron James what I'd done to Justin Mason.

"What a jerk!" I said loudly enough to Maid Marian that LeBron overheard me. He was laughing at me as we joined the crowd passing into the ballroom where a group of musicians was doing a medley of modern rock songs.

Marian, I just have to call Drew that, as he was behaving like a Marian, completely different from 'him' at the office. He was always cracking jokes, of course, but we all did in Coulthard's office. The thing was the jokes were always about some trait of ours. I was twitted about basketball and my height while Drew was the metrosexual, the perfect, modern man. I saw a lot of girls like Lois, my friend at the top, smiling at him when he made a particularly good jest, usually at Georgie Boy's expense.

I shivered at what I'd say now in the office when we got back there. Marian drew me onto the dance floor and put her arms about my neck, flinging back her long hair, moving her hips suggestively. I had to dance the samba-salsa-lambada with her, through the changes of music, a smile on her lovely lips as I gave up being careful with her and treated her like one of the girls in my dancing classes.



"Oh, wow, you guys are fantastic!" chimed in Lebron James after Marian and I had done a half-hour on the floor. I was tired enough to suggest a break and she'd agreed. Lebron pulled her hand out of mine. 'She' went with him willingly onto the dance floor to do an energetic twist and Shake as the little music group did a first-rate interpretation of Beatles' songs.

"Hey!" said the guy beside me as I lined up at the bar and got a beer and a vodka punch for Marian. "I know you, don't I?"

"You should, Barry, you should," I said, wiggling my moustache. The geek laughed at me. Well, he was a geek scientist, complete with white coat, tape on his empty glasses and a pocket protector.

"You won't be playing in the winter, you know," Barry said with a grin. "But I won't, either. We all got suspended for six months. Did George tell you?"

"No," I said with a frown.

"Hey, would you like to dance?" Barry asked me, taking the drinks from me and putting them on the side of the bar.

"I thought you'd never ask!" I said, moving to take his hand, feeling so great. A man wanted to dance with me. A tall man, as tall as me, someone I didn't have to look over.

"Oh, there you are!" said Maid Marian, pushing me back towards the bar. She was in thoroughly girlish mode. "I'd love one of those pink things, Jan. Oh, hello, who's this?" I snorted as Drew knew very well who Barry was. "Hi, stranger! Are you a friend of Jan's? Oh, listen! I love Cyndi Lauper! I have to have this dance!" So I lost my white knight to Maid Marian. She had her head on his shoulder as the band went on from *Time after Time* into *Can I Have This Dance For the Rest of My Life?* I loved that by Anne Murray but the singer butchered it. That didn't seem to bother Maid Marian. She was kissing Barry before the song ended, his hands all over her, as everyone could see. Still they weren't the only ones kissing

through that, and a couple more, before we were called to supper in the banquet room.

"I have to go to the Little Girls' Room," said Drew Morris to me in the lilting, girlish voice, coming more naturally to him. He swished away to the cloakroom for his purse, not knowing how messy his lipstick was. I had to wait twenty minutes for Marian to re-appear, her lipstick perfect on her mouth.

She hung onto me. "I'm starving, Jan," Marian smiled as she held my hand with both of hers. It made her cleavage even more impressive as we entered the banquet room. We had seats with a six-four George Bush and his date, Snow White, who giggled at everything the Brokeback cowboy said to her.

"I saw you guys dancing at the start," said Snow White to us. "You looked so beautiful together. I hope you dance together in this half." It seemed she'd hurt her hip and all she could do was watch the dancing. "You shouldn't let your girl get away from you so much, young man," she said to me. "She might be a flirt but she's only testing your love for her, you know."

My love for her!?! Snow White was another idiot, I thought.

"Yes," said Marian demurely as we were served promptly. "That's why I flirt so much, Jan. You need to be much more loving to me in the second half of the Ball."

"I should put you over my knee and spank you," I muttered. "I should do it at the office tomorrow!"

"Ooo, would you, darling?" cooed this 'female' nympho beside me, her leg against mine. 'She' stroked my thighs with her stocking leg, her dress raised to allow her to do that. "I just love to be spanked and consoled afterwards."

Snow White only heard the last part of that but she thought that we were 'charming.' She told Phil, the tall George Bush, that he must invite us to the New Year Revels at their house. "How long have you been a member?" Snow White asked me.

"Just a month," I said as Marian smiled at me.

"Just a month in this battery," she said sweetly to Snow White. "Jan was pledged in Stanton County. I got my Daughters' Pin there as well."

"Oh, then you must come to our Revels," said Snow White, smiling at me. "Phil and I encouraging all the new blood we find to make the Minutemen Batteries their home and first charity. I must introduce you to Bill and Betty, the Swiss goatherds." Snow White indicated another couple.

"Well, there's my song," I said, getting up, and taking Marian's hand. She didn't want to go but I was so out of my depth and drowning. "This is stupid," I muttered under my breath to Marian as I twirled and swished her about for the polka. She loved the way I lifted her and assisted her to land on her stiletto heels without letting her fall.

"Oh, Jan," she said, her arms about me again, her face turned up to me. "We have to do that again!" She kissed me just as a waltz started. That was when the weirdest of sensations overtook me. It was just as if I was drifting around the floor with a girl in my arms. I was drifting around the floor as a guy. I kissed her on her soft, pliant lips. I looked up, feeling triumphant.

Barry, my white night, looked at me over the top of a blonde's hairdo and shook his head, his expression one of complete disgust. While I was trying to think what to say to him, 'Marian' put 'her' arms about my neck, closed 'her' thick eyelashes, and kissed me as passionately as anyone's ever kissed me.

I drifted with her to the end of the song, her lips working mine over, our bodies pressed together. "Get a room," Barry sneered as he left the floor with the woman he was with.

"Well, we got Barry, didn't we?" said Marian, still holding me. "He's not half the dancer and doesn't kiss worth anything, either. You kiss really well, Jan. I think you must have had a lot of practice."

"You think wrong," I snarled at her. "Look, Barry asked me for a dance before you horned in. No, he doesn't know you, Marian, but he sure knows me."

He's seen you kissing me. My name will be out there as a lesbo when we're on the court again."

"Well, that won't be for a long time," said Marian/Drew. "Didn't you see the local news on television tonight? They had a camera video of the whole thing, the fight, the president refusing to give the cup to anyone, your punch on that little guy, Mr. Muscles, Justin. So, you won't be playing next year. Unless we get you a different beard and a crew cut! Or better, maybe a bikini, for once. No one would know you!"

"I knew this was a rotten idea," I snapped at 'her.' I'd have left but she held onto me. She had a man's strength after all.

"No, this wasn't a bad idea," Marian said to me. "I got to dance with you, Jan, which I've wanted to do for an age. I got to kiss you which I've wanted to do since we met. This has been a wonderful dance for me. I didn't dare to do it outside the Valley before but now I have. There's no stopping Jessica now!"

"Jessica?" I asked her as she put her hands around my waist and shimmied against me, her breasts pressing on mine. Well, I had real ones, starting to act up more than a little, with the perfume filling my nostrils. 'Jessica' was kissing my lips teasingly and hugging me, her hair against my neck, her earrings scratching me but I don't think she noticed.

"Jessica is me," said Maid Marian. "When I'm like this, of course, I go out in the Valley."

"In the Valley?" I asked her, swaying with her as the group started up again, two girls joining them to sing Abba and Dixie Chicks songs. It wasn't as bad as that combination sounds. "What Valley? Carterville? Or up in the mountains?"

"Not round here," laughed Jessica. "I'll take you there some day to see the real me, Jessica the party girl."

I don't know why I said it. The moment I did, I knew I'd have to carry it out. "What's wrong with seeing Jessica tonight?" I asked. "I'd love to meet this party girl."