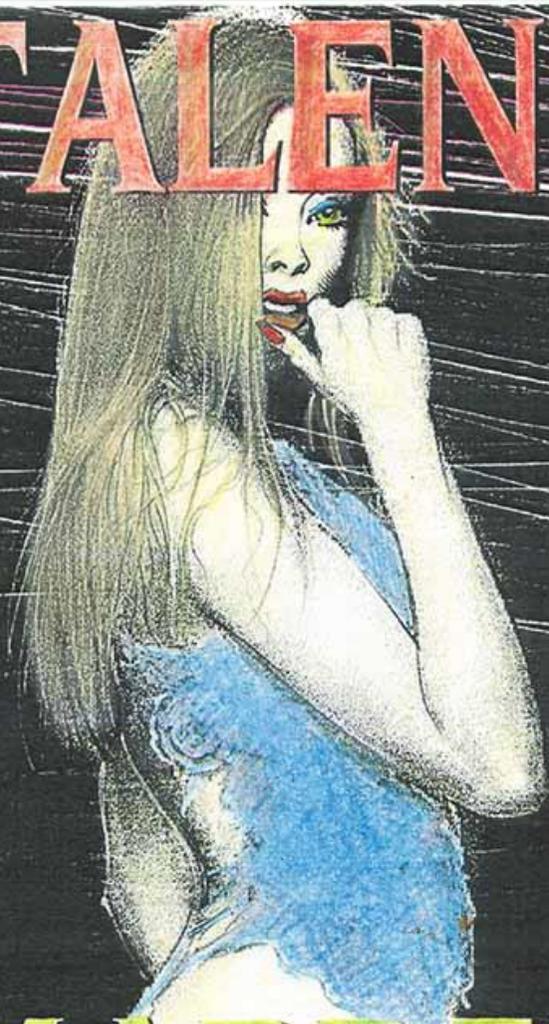


TALENT



MARDEE
LOUISE
PRYNNE

Talent by Mardee Louise Prynne

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By
MARDEE LOUISE PRYNNE



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MATT'S NARRATIVE:

An Introduction to the Cast of Characters

"You really gonna play for that talent show?"

"No choice. They want the chamber music group to perform. Look, I know it's kind of weird but I'm good at it and I like it. It's not just fooling around or getting snobby. I can make money playing with dance bands on weekends. It's a way of learning and I really need to learn more about music. The more classical I play, the more I learn that makes me a better musician. Maybe then I could get some gigs doing jazz combos. Get it? That's going to get me the bread to get through college. Is that a problem for you?"

"No, no problem. Just that all that classical stuff...Well, you know..."

"Know what?" I slammed Kenny against the locker. "You're too damn hung up on what's for real guys and what's for faggots. Just drop it. Maybe you got concerns about yourself?"

"Okay, okay. What I was gonna say is that you ain't good at classical so why keep fooling yourself? You know damn well that the only reason you got into the chamber music thing was that the competition was afraid to try out 'cause you might get nasty if they got the spot. But I didn't say anything about faggy stuff. You keep bringing that up so it must be your problem. "

"My problem? I got no problems."

I bounced the back of his head off the locker, grabbed my notebook and went down to the auditorium.

Teri was standing in front of the stage with a clipboard. She knelt gracefully to retrieve her pencil. She managed to show some knee but not much else. I was hoping to see some panty lines through her straight skirt. No luck.

"Matt, hi."

I loved the way she tilted her head when she smiled. This girl was special. We had a lot in common, both of us coming from angry blue-collar families that engaged in skilled trades, families in which, despite comfortable incomes, her cultural aspirations made her suspect. We had been consoling each other since grammar school and that led us to petting that would be thought of as somewhere between second and third base. Lately she had been paying more attention to older guys, guys already in college or apprenticed in their family trade. The things these guys had in common were ready cash and cars. She said it wasn't so but I thought better.

Teri was becoming a really tight-ass snob. I still liked her a lot even though she had the balls to say she wouldn't go out with me because I was still the bully I had always been and that all the stuff I claimed to be interested in was to impress her but under that veneer I was as coarse as ever. Bull shit!

"This is so neat. You know that girl Anne, the modern dancer, and her friend Ruth are going to sign up to dance in the talent show."

"Far out. Nothing like two arty snobs rolling around on the stage to weird super-modern music."

"Matt, you should be ashamed of yourself. You've been hanging out with Kenny again so that you're showing the attitudes you promised you were giving up. And besides, I see you eyeing their butts when they dance. It's not just Anne and Ruth this time. Now they listed three dancers."

"Three? Who's the third?"

"Don't know. Chessie something. New kid in town."

"Speak of the devils."

Annie and Ruth came down the aisle.

"Matt, I'm so glad you're here. We really need you to help with our dance presentation. Oh, please, please."

"First you tell me what you want from me. Then I might consider it."

"We want to use live music. You know, a piano and bass just like a real jazz combo."

"Who's the pianist?"

"Karen."

"Lemme think about it."

"Oh, Matt. Thank you." She stood on tiptoe and kissed me lightly on the cheek.

Teri clearly did not approve.

No way was I going to give up the opportunity to get close to Karen Cohen. This doll transferred into school a couple of weeks ago when the fall semester started. She and her mother came from a small town in New England somewhere, so she talked kind of funny. They were renting a really big house on the other side of the park. No one knew for sure why they were here or for how long they would be around. The word was that her mother was some sort of professor who was spending the school year lecturing and giving seminars, whatever they are, at some colleges and universities in and around town. Their house wasn't even in our school district so by rights Karen shouldn't have been going to our school. Someone must have had a contact. Karen was beautiful, bright, talented and aloof. I felt a little guilty about using the talent show Teri was putting together to get near Karen, which was the same as getting away from Teri, but, as I said, Teri was beginning to outgrow me.

Teri gave me another disapproving glance. I responded by taking Anne's hand.

"Anne, I'm your bass player." Anne's response was to throw her arms around my neck and kiss me.

"Matt, you're a darling. Thanks awfully. I just know you're going to love doing this. Wait till you meet Chessie."

"Can't wait," I said while thinking to myself that another one like Anne and Ruth was the last thing I wanted to meet. It wasn't that both of them weren't pretty enough and they both had really great bodies. It was just that when they weren't being so arty, they were too girlie cutesy, more like a drag queen doing a high school girl than a real high school girl. Also, they were really so hooked on their dancing that they had no time for anything except school, dancing, and just the two of them hanging out together. Still, either one would be worth a pop except a guy would have to get real, real lucky just to get near them. Hey, you never know. Kind of nice in a weird way. I'll be hanging out with Karen and with Anne and Ruth; probably the only guy who ever had that limited privilege.

"Yeah, great. I'll call you and we'll set up a time to get started."

What bugged me about Ruth and Anne was not only their independence but their toughness. I mean I know they came off as all girl, too cutesy sometimes, but even with that they always stood their ground. They didn't act like they were afraid or scared of anything or anyone. I even saw them stand up against some pretty big guys rather than give an inch. The guys always flinched. It seemed to me that Ruth was disappointed when the guys backed off. Like she would have liked to take them on. That's not how things are supposed to work. Scary when you think about it.

I walked out the side door of the auditorium toward the back of the building. There was an isolated covered walkway that

connected to the boys' gym. A pair of senior boys were harassing someone I never saw before. These weren't greasers or jocks, just ordinary 'nice' guys. They weren't the kind of guys I expected to see ganging up on anyone especially not the little doll they were bullying. What gives? I wondered what was really going on because these two were more the type who gives a girl's parents peace of mind when they date her.

A slender figure about five four or five was being pushed from one guy to the other. Her blue eyes were wide open in terror. A large bag, the kind that dancers carry, had been dumped on the floor and it along with its contents had been strewn around.

"Back off guys. Two on one's no fair." I collared the closest one and shoved him away.

"Hey come on, Matt. This shit..."

"Back off, punk." I slammed my fist against his upper arm. His buddy kept a respectable distance. "Now get out of here before you piss me off."

As they left the building, they yelled "Faggot lover," and took off running.

Their victim was on one knee gathering and shoving everything she could reach into the dance bag. As she bent and twisted, I was drawn to the very visible panty lines under her tan chinos. Tan chinos? A little unusual because girls almost never wore pants to school back then. Maybe she had gym as her last class and changed from her skirt for some after school activity. Well, I sure appreciated the view it gave me. Not only were the leg bands of her panties visible where the fabric stretched across her butt, that intriguing semi-circular line where the crotch was sewn in was visible as well. This was enough to give any high school senior a thrill back in the mid-fifties. I stared in rapt attention until

I noticed a few tears trickling down her smooth fair face. I knelt alongside her.

"Let me help."

She shook her as she bit back the tears.

"No, please. I really want to help you," I said as I stooped toward her. She was the one to break the silence.

"Thanks. You're being so kind, so sweet." Her blue eyes were all the prettier for being wet with tears and wide with panic. Her blond hair fell in choppy bangs matted across her forehead by sweat.

Her smooth hands quivered slightly.

"Hey, it's all right. I just hate to see someone ganged up on." I scooped up a pair of white nylon tights. As she reached to take the tights from me, the sunlight glinted off the very fine, almost white fuzz on her arms where the cuffs of her sleeves were turned back.

This kid had to be a genuine blonde.

I grabbed for a pair of black dance panties or dance trunks or whatever they were just as she caught hold of them. Handling her dance things was another thrill as we scrambled to get everything back into her bag. I reached for what had to be a pair of panties; powder blue soft nylon with thin elastic bands at the legs and waist. It would have been exciting just to touch something that she had worn against such intimate parts. We all but bumped heads. I peered down the front of her man-tailored blouse. I wasn't sure if she was wearing a training bra or a tank top undershirt. She started to cover the gap at the top of her shirt as we made eye contact. Each of us tried to keep back a big grin until we giggled like little kids. Her embarrassed smile was both innocent and seductive.

This supple, agile sprite sat back on her heels. She spoke in short intense spurts, like bursts of machine gunfire. She was trying hard to keep from crying.

"I was so scared they'd hurt me; really, really hurt me... I wish everyone would just leave me alone." The last was said with an intensity that was beyond anger. She fought back tears as she sobbed softly and took a couple of deep breaths. It struck me that her blouse wasn't a blouse at all but a regular shirt that buttoned left over right just like any guy's shirt.

Now it made sense. I knew why they had called me a faggot lover. This sexy kid was a boy! What was totally weird was that this realization did nothing to lessen the attractiveness of this elfin enchantress. I knew I had to be in trouble because I was thinking of him as an enchantress! An enchantress my eye; this was a boy. And yet I couldn't shake the sensation of being turned on. Our fingertips touched as we got up. Oh, shit! He's gonna hold my hand. Then I realized that he was about to shake my hand. It should have come as a relief that this strange kid wasn't going to hold my hand, but I still wasn't sure that I wouldn't rather hold hands with him; hold hands like you hold a girl's hand when you really care about her.

"Hi, I'm Chester Thornton. New here. My friends call me Chessie; at least that's what I would like them to call me if I had any... friends that is."

"You seem awfully nice. Really. Oh, I'm Matt." I held onto his hand longer than I would have meeting ordinary guys but this was different. Her, there I go again, his hand was narrow with long fingers and incredibly soft skin. It felt good.

"So nice to meet you. You came along at just the right time." A frown punctuated the pause. "Thought it might be different here...Really, I shouldn't run off at the mouth. Mummy used to say there are times when she thinks I must have been vaccinated with a phonograph needle."

Another pause as Chessie looked at the floor as if seeing things that happened a long time ago. "Poor Mummy..." She sniffled and came back to the here and now. "Thanks again. I won't spoil your reputation by staying around you."

"Look, Chessie..." I had to pause, to get my bearings. The sensations that Chessie generated in me were unlike any I had ever experienced. But then again, Chessie was different from anyone I had ever met. "You come off as really neat and I don't much care what my reputation is. Besides, Anne asked me to accompany the dance group in the talent show. Let me walk you to the auditorium."

"Matt, I couldn't. You heard what they called you already. I can't let you do that to yourself."

"Chessie. You said something about friends or lack of. Well, I'm going to try to be your friend, but you have to let me."

Chessie turned to me and looked up into my face. I felt his sweet breath. "Thanks ever so much."

If he were really a girl, I would have kissed him. As it was, I wanted to. That scared me.

Our fingertips brushed as Chessie turned and started for the auditorium. My heart was pounding so hard it felt like it would leap out of my mouth. It looked like spending time with Karen Cohen wasn't going to be the only gain I would get from having agreed to accompany this dance thing.

All of a sudden, I felt scared. This was too much to take. Meeting Chessie was a definite turn on! That's not me. I'm into girls.

I sat in the bleachers overlooking the nearly deserted ball field. Exhilaration mixed with fear. Maybe it was a fluke that I

was sort of turned on by Chessie. Hell, I'm no queer. Maybe this is just a fuckin' dream. If it is a dream, it's pretty close to damn nightmare.

I took a deep breath and turned my mind to Karen Cohen. She was unreal. Thinner than a lot of the girls but she had all her curves in the right places. Her mother must have real clout because she went to our school even though she lived way on the other side of the park. There was a quiet confidence about her, a kind of calmness that really attracted me. Once when she was confronted by a couple of bad ass types she wasn't rattled, just stared them down seemed to almost intimidate them. She was self-sufficient and independent of everyone else, boy or girl. Lately she had been spending time with Anne and Ruth, the two arty types who were the entire modern dance club. Then again, Ruth had that kind of toughness about her so it figures that Karen would have to hook-up with her and Anne.

I would've been feeling really good about this chance to spend time with Karen except that I was all hot and bothered by Chessie. Why was it so easy for me to think he was a girl? And why did he have panties in his dance bag? I mean it's weird enough for a boy to be carrying a dance bag even without panties in it. I know I wasn't mistaken. Those were panties! Goddamn. Maybe I was turning queer. If that's true then why am I so attracted to Karen?

Words like faggot, homo, queer, fairy, fruit, cocksucker ran through my mind.

Maybe those weren't panties that fell out of his dance bag. Shit, who am I kidding? My cock twitched as I remembered how his cute little butt looked framed by the panty lines that showed through his chinos. No way around it. He was wearing panties. Yeah. That's got to be it. I'm not queer because he was turning me on before I knew he was a boy. Now that I know he's a boy I can

just forget that I ever got a charge looking at him. If that's the case, why am I still thinking about him like this?

I felt something hit the back of my neck and turned to see Karen sitting a few rows above me with a box of Mason's Dots in her hand. Her shapely legs were highlighted by the lightly tinted stockings she wore. She put the box of Dots down next to her handbag and drew her knee to her chest, rested her foot on the edge of the bench and proceeded to retie the lace of her Keds tennis sneaker. In the process I caught a very liberal glimpse of the back of her curvaceous thigh nestling in a sea of petticoats.

"Hi, Matt. I hear we're going to be spending some time together working on the dance project. That's so super. Come on up and join me or do you like the view from down there?" She winked at me as she patted the bench next to her. Damn! This had to be a dream. Meeting Chessie and having my existence noticed by Karen weren't things that happened in the waking world.

"Hi," I answered as I bounded up the bleachers to park myself as close to Karen as I could. A late September breeze blew across the field as a cloud blocked out the sun. Karen reached for the sweater that lay across her books.

"Sit close to me, Matt. I feel chilly." I expected the alarm clock to go off any second now and end this dream. As Karen wrapped her cardigan shawl like over her shoulders, she turned to face me. I felt myself flush as her breast pressed against my arm. She made no move to pull away. This was nuts. Karen rarely bothered with anyone at school and never with boys. The sour grapes rumor was that she was a lesbian. "Mattie, Anne told me about what you said. I'm surprised you agreed."

"Hey, you're an incredible pianist so why wouldn't I want to play bass for you?"

"Not for me; with me. We'll be partners in this thing. Okay? I thought you'd avoid me like everyone else does because of those disgusting stories about me."

Karen paused to watch the football team filing out of the building and onto the field for afternoon practice. "Matt, let's get out of here. We can go somewhere where we can talk." She took my hand and pulled me to my feet.

We wandered distractedly in the general direction of the park. "Mattie, Anne told me what you did for Chessie. That was really so gallant. Most boys would have beaten him up too."

"Why would I beat him up? Promise not to tell anyone. I mean not tell anyone to your grave...Sorry. I didn't mean to be so old world Italian with you..."

"No need to apologize. It's kind of cute when you talk like that. Anyhow, I promise."

"At first I thought those guys were ganging up on another guy and then when I saw Chessie I thought he was a girl. Didn't realize he was a boy even while I was helping pick up his stuff. He's different, kind of nice though. Guess we'll get to know him better while we get ready for the talent show."

"Are you looking forward to that?"

"I guess I am. No, I really am looking forward to being his friend." "Even though the hot stuff crowd will start nasty rumors about you like they did with me?"

"Karen, what do I care about what any damn crowd says or thinks? I'd feel like a real bastard if I hurt someone just because the so-called in crowd doesn't like it."

"Chessie really thought you were so sweet by helping him and not decking him when you realized he's a boy. He thinks you might not want to work on the dance sequence because he's in it."

Figures no real guy would want anything to do with him, especially one who could scare off a couple of bullies."

"Chessie told you all this? How did he know I'm involved with the dance sequence?"

"He didn't tell me. He told Anne and she recognized you from the way he described you. Chessie's really, really upset. Thinks he ruined things for Anne and Ruth. I saw Anne leaving school. That's why I looked for you."

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph! I take a liking to... I mean I do a nice thing for the poor kid and he thinks... Ah, hell. Wish I could clear things up."

"Go ahead and call him. You're not afraid of what might happen between you two, are you? You just said you don't care what anybody thinks." She handed me her books and took a memo pad from her pocketbook and scribbled something on it. "Here's his phone number."

She stepped in front of me, tipped her face toward mine and pressed her fingertips to her moist lips and lightly touched mine. "Call me and let me know how it goes." She wrote a second number down and tore the page from the memo pad. I folded it and put it in my wallet.

"Karen, I owe you big time."

"Just keep doing the right thing. Here comes my bus. Gotta run." I watched Karen mount the steps of the bus. Despite being shortish and on the skinny side, she had great legs. My face grew warm as she glanced back over her shoulder to catch me eyeballing her calves.

"Mattie, what if those rumors about me turned out to be true?" She pursed her lips in a silent kiss as she winked.

SPECIAL NEEDS

Karen sat with her legs demurely crossed at the ankles, her books and handbag resting on her thighs, her hands folded on them. The sweater was over her shoulders, held in place by the top button. A wry smile enhanced her already pretty features. More than one male passenger cast a sidelong glance at the girl's lovely legs. Karen liked that for the sense of power it gave her.

As the bus emerged from the tree-shaded park, Karen reached up and pulled the signal cord. She moved to the exit door and alit at the corner of her street. It was only a few hundred yards to the large Victorian facing the park. Karen walked through the open gate and pushed open the side door.

She walked up a few steps and back to the kitchen where a maid was rolling out dough. Karen stood watching her from the kitchen doorway.

"Oh, Miss Karen. Didn't hear you. Tea or cocoa? Madam wants dinner at seven and asked that you wait for her."

"Just cocoa, but after I practice."

"Jenna called. She seemed more upset than usual. I wrote down her message."

"Thanks. I'll call her after I practice...At least I'll think about calling her. "

A few minutes later Karen sat at the piano running scales in every key. Then it was arpeggios. Only later would she play compositions, compositions that allowed her release her passion and her aggression.

When Karen finally paused to rest her aching fingers, her eyes were watery. Her head filled with thoughts that were uncannily similar to the conflicted feelings that went through Mart's mind earlier that day. "What am I? I mean I really care for

Jenna and I get just so excited thinking about her. Damn it all, I still don't think any boy could ever get me off like when we pet. I don't care what anyone says so why the hell am I thinking about a jerk like Matt? Chalk it up to curiosity."

Matt walked home, his mind still racing from the recognition he got from Karen. He would actually be spending time with this girl, something that would ordinarily have driven him wild. The potential joy was dampened by Chessie. How on God's earth could he be thinking about this skinny boy when Karen had thrown him the crumb of her friendship? Too weird!

He walked into the non-descript semi-detached two family that had been his family's since his grandparents had it built. Matt, his mom and his dad lived on the first floor. His sister and her little girl lived upstairs.

He washed up and looked at the paper until his father came home and they sat down to eat.

"Matt, I hear you been walking around with some stuck up girl they say is butch."

"Where did you hear that?"

"Sal saw you. He was coming back from a delivery."

"Yeah, so?"

"Mattie, don't be fresh to your father."

"Sure, Ma. I wasn't being fresh. So I was walking with a girl. No big deal."

"Well at least she isn't one who jumps around on the stage showing everyone her drawers like those two you hung out with last spring."

"Come on, Dad. They're dancers. Dancers do that stuff. Okay?"

"Ain't right what you're doing. You get your head out of all that arty stuff and back into learning the business. You'll be the third generation."

Matt knew not to argue with his father. He kept his thoughts to himself. His father meant the comments to be good-natured razzing about Karen although he strongly disapproved of Matt's friendship with Anne and Ruth. He didn't have an inkling of how hurtful his comments were to his son. If he did, he would have borne down all the harder in hopes of breaking Matt of what he thought to be unmanly interests. Matt sensed this and stopped talking about his interests except to his older sister. No way would he ever talk about Chessie in front of his parents.

"I'm gonna go upstairs and talk with Marie. She needs..."

"She needs, she needs... Not enough we let her live upstairs practically for free."

"C'mon, Dad. You know she works for you practically for free. You get more from her than she gets from..."

"Just go."

He went up to his sister's but not before checking to see he had the slip of paper Karen had given him. "Hey Maria. Lemme use the phone in your room. I'll take Gina out for a walk after."

THE DANCE CLUB

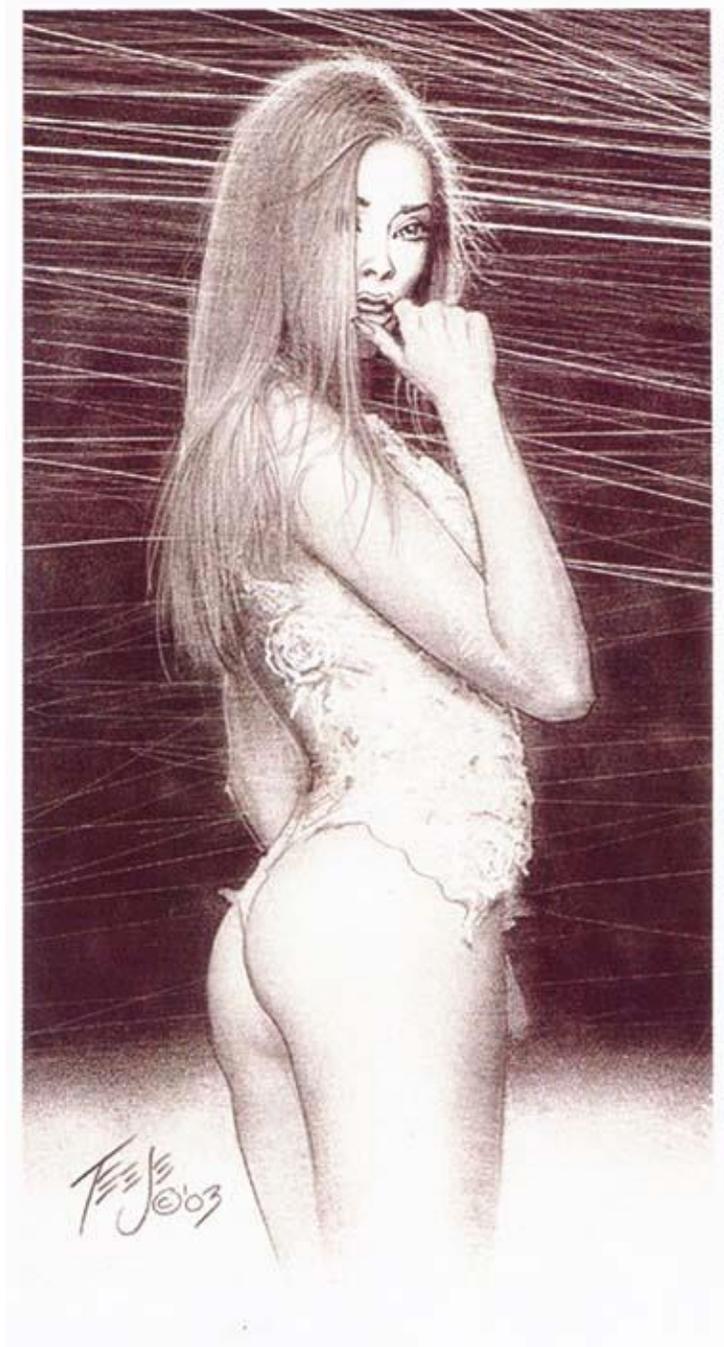
Chessie sat with Ruth in the first row of seats as Anne faced them from the auditorium stage. She arched her body gracefully, raised her loosely fitting skirt to gain freedom of movement, and extended her leg slowly to the side. She had no qualms about exposing her inner thighs, the edge of her panties to Chessie. Suddenly, she exploded into movement as she leaped high into the air, her hips thrust forward. The thin fabric of her baby blue cotton

panties pulled taut over her mons as she reached the zenith of her leap.

"We take four beats and then start like that. Really, really eye-catching."

"Sure," laughed Ruth. "What could be more eye-catching than your pussy pushing against your panties?"

"Grow up, why don't you? Don't embarrass Chessie with your sewer mouth."



Chessie laughed but it was a tense, bitter laugh. "Don't worry about me. Just think of me as one of the girls. Everyone else does." He turned his head so they wouldn't see his eyes water. A janitor poked his head through the door.

"Four o'clock. Sorry but you have to leave. We have to clean up early today. Next week you can start staying later and you'll be able to use that little exercise room off the girls' gym for your dancing."