



Reluctant Press presents:

The Queen of Rock & Roll

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A 'HER TV' E-BOOK

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The Queen Of Rock & Roll

By Philippa Peters

I. ONE BLIND MOUSE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II. THE NEWEST PURPLEHEART

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There was a gasp from the other girls.

"Hey!" snapped Brenda.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Hey!" I objected.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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