



*Reluctant Press* presents:

# GIRL BAND

Charlotte Mayo



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A 'HER TV' E-BOOK

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# GIRL BAND

**BY CHARLOTTE MAYO**

## **Prologue**

The great orange orb beamed through the plate glass window and bathed the whole of the tenth floor Los Angeles office in sunlight – there was no hiding place for shadows. The crystal blue sea splashed against the shore and tanned surfers flexed supple muscles before claiming their boards and making for the white speckled waves. Others, less adventurous, lounged on the beach, occasionally stretching out weary hands to grab sun lotion. It was a hot summer's day. Very hot.

For a moment, Samantha Norman watched the scene before her. Then she took a draw string and pulled the blind across the office window, immediately eclipsing the sun. Sam turned on her heel and walked over to the air conditioning unit which she turned up a notch. Instantly, the room felt a few degrees cooler. Walking steadily, Sam returned to her tidy desk; as she trod the soft carpet, she was conscious of the lessons she had been taught in her deportment class: head up, look straight ahead, lift the foot right up, don't shuffle or scuff. After a number of lessons, she liked to think that her gait was superior to that of most women. Indeed, the admiring glances she often received when out confirmed to her that she was seen as a sophisticated modern woman about time, no small accomplishment in the posh end of LA.

She ran a hand through her short ash blonde hair, took a sip from a bottle of water and looked at her computer screen which, now that it was shaded from the brilliance of the afternoon sun, was once again visible. She worked in silence for a few minutes. The phone rang,

"Meverick Entertainment, can I help you?" the soft voice answered.

"Sam, Darling, Leo's on his way up. He'll be there in five. Just thought I'd warn you," Meverick breathed, a slight jingle of a chuckle in his voice.

Sam's heart missed a beat. Leo was Meverick's newly-appointed right-hand man, a handsome womaniser who balled anything in a skirt. For a long time, he had tried his charms — unsuccessfully — on Sam but she knew it was only a matter of time before the leech pestered her once more and ended up with more than he bargained for.

Meverick loved the conflict – Sam knew that – between the office sex pest and the clean cut, attractive P.A who didn't have a boyfriend. Meverick got a sadistic enjoyment from watching Sam quiver and squirm under the ever more ambitious advances of Leo, just as Meverick had gained pleasure, all those years ago, when she first met him and had fallen under his spell.

She got up from her swivel chair and opened the door of the bathroom. The long slender mirror revealed an equally slender girl – maybe a woman – mid-to late twenties. She had short blond hair, and wide, violet eyes. Though her makeup was heavy, her clear complexion shone through and her soft, delicate, feminine features, which clearly benefited from the plastic surgeon's knife, were certainly attractive. Sam's long painted finger nails made a pull at her short white PVC mini skirt – though there was nothing to pull – the skirt was too short and the PVC would not stretch. She always dressed in the uniform Meverick requested. Today's had been a PVC jacket, matching skirt and white PVC boots. It was part of the 21st Century image Meverick wanted for his company.

Sam looked at the expensive jewelled encrusted watch on her wrist; the small dial told her that Leo would be up soon. There was no one else about, no one to save her. Freddie was on lunch and Julie was off sick. She took a deep intake of breath and closed her eyes. Leo would chase her around the room again, grab her and push her up against the wall and wrap his arm around her waist so she could not flee. He would press his lips against hers and she would feel the deep hard vein that was his erection pushing against her sex. Then his free hand would wander to the hem of her mini-skirt. He would slap away her frantic hands which would try in vain to stop him. His passionate fingers would probe ever deeper between her thighs and up her smooth legs – finally they would touch her knickers..... and then what?

## Chapter One

It happened like this. I lived with Cally Holmes in an untidy bedsit above a shop in the middle of town. We looked out onto the High Street and every night we got woken up when the pubs and bars closed and people spilled onto the street to throw up, to fight or just to talk loudly – very loudly. Cally and I slept in the front room, overlooking the High Street, on a mattress on the floor. Things were pretty basic but the flat was self-contained. Though shabby, it was the first home either of us had had and we were happy. Cally is pretty, beautiful, fit – its amazing what professionally makeup will do. As time has gone on, she has grown even more beautiful. She has become gorgeous, divine, iconic even, but back then she was just a slim, twenty year old girl with long blonde hair and one hell of a strong voice. She didn't turn heads in the street as she wore jeans, trainers, T-shirts and no makeup . Before Meverick got hold of us, I can honestly say she never wore a dress in my presence.

Sam paused. We met at college and at the time I didn't realise she was in a band – a heavy rock band. She played lead guitar and was the lead vocalist; though the band did mostly covers, they had started to pen their own material. That's one of the reasons she liked me. I was, she said, the first male she had met that supported her, encouraged her, worked with her, not against her as her previous beaux had done – no doubt feeling slighted by her talent, her looks and her voice.

Anyway, one day at college, I was sitting with her and some of our mutual friends when she passed over a scruffy bit of paper to her mate with some lyrics on it. After her friend had taken a look and uttered a glib compliment, I took the lyrics and read them carefully, then started to tell Cally what the muddled-up verses about teenage angst meant and how they could be improved. She was impressed and really cool about it.

"Do you write?" she asked, flicking up the top of her cigarette lighter.

"Only my car off," I joked. For the first time – but not the last - Cally didn't laugh at one of my feeble jokes. Rock 'n' Roll was a serious "biz" to her. God had placed her on this Earth to make her into a huge megastar. That was where it was at, man. She was gonna be big, and boy, how right she was!

"Song lyrics, do you write songs?" she clarified.

I blushed to the roots of my dyed blonde hair. I'd never really liked talking about my inadequate guitar playing and self-obsessed songs filled with self-loathing and maudlin about a teenage boy who hadn't yet lost his virginity and couldn't make it with girls.

"Yeah, I play and write."

"Let's jam. Bring your guitar down to Hugh's place and we'll hang out and see what's going down."

So, that was how we met. Cally asking me along to a jam. She must have liked my playing and lyrics because soon we were dating and I felt like a million dollars. Me, the college jerk had pulled a really attractive, confident girl like Cally. When we finished college, we got a little flat – or apartment as you'd say – and I helped her with her lyrics and gave her constructive criticism. that was the artistic side. On the menial side, I cleaned the flat, cooked, ironed, washed and generally looked after the place while Cally rehearsed with her band or sat at home, strumming her guitar endlessly, musing about life and the unfairness of everything and moaning that no one had "discovered" her. But, like the mad sap I was with big love eyes and a head full of romantic notions, I took it all in. I stroked her fragile ego and she supported mine by just being there – it was as simple as that. After a while, I even became a roadie for the group, humping and lugging the equipment around.

I was not a bad guitarist myself and, once I had finished the chores, of an evening Cally and I would sit around and jam together. An advantage of living over a shop was that there was no one downstairs to disturb and we could make as much noise as we liked! They were fun times; Cally and I goofing about, playing guitar together, smoking (cannabis and nicotine), making love and generally thinking we were "it". Most weekends, there was a gig, after which there was often a party. Sundays? Well, they were reserved for hangovers. Once a fortnight, we trudged to the unemployment office and signed on and collected our Giros – we were both officially unemployed. Being artistes, neither of us

worked; we relied on state handouts to provide our weekly support. Our belief was that one day, some day, we were going to make it BIG. When I say “we,” of course I mean Cally and her group. I loved Cally so much that if she was successful then I was successful. I guess in that way I was different from most men who don’t want to be in the shadow of their women. I guess that was a large attraction to Cally, for what she desired most in life was success. Men were definitely second to her ambition.

I hadn’t been dating Cally long before I got to meet the rest of her group, Gonsoon. There was Helen; a slim, brown-haired, softly spoken girl who played keyboards. Then there was Vanessa who was Chinese, she played drums. Vanessa had waist-length black hair, an attractive figure and long, shapely legs. Next up was Fiona who was a mid-twenties brunette from New Jersey with more jewellery than the average High Street jewellers; she played lead guitar with some gusto. Lastly, there was the tall, mannish Levi; she had curly red hair and a serious attitude problem. Levi played bass guitar and shared the vocals with Cally, throwing her mop of hair around in a frenzy to try to steal the limelight from Cally.

I suspect it has taken you less time than it did me to realise that the Gonsoon was, in fact, an all-girl group. Innocent that I was, it took me a while before I realised that Cally played in an all-girl band; that was partly due to the fact that it was quite a while after our first date that I actually saw the band perform. Though I met various members at parties, etc., I never saw them altogether until I saw them perform and then I assumed that Levi was male. It wasn’t until I actually met them backstage after the first gig I attended that I realised that Cally was part of an all-female ensemble. Another thing that had made me assume that Levi was male was that Cally was always moaning about her; I assumed Levi was a male name. “Levi’s bossy.” “Levi talks incessantly.” “Levi wants to be in control,” Cally would say. She was a good bassist, though, and had been with the group from the start, so Cally put up with her moods and her challenging her to be top dog.

Cally and I had been dating eight months when the bust-up with Levi happened. Cally came back from a Friday practice session in a foul mood (Cally could be a touch temperamental which I put down to her artistic temperament). She walked into the kitchen and banged cupboards and bashed around and I knew the day would end with a row.

“That Cow!” she shouted at a cupboard. “The stupid, stupid bitch!”

It turned out that Levi was none too happy about Cally’s leadership of the band and on the eve of Gonsoon’s most important gig – as support act to a band who had already signed a recording contract and had just released a debut single – Levi had walked out and told the others she was joining another group, a three-piece where she would be lead singer and song writer. Cally was furious.

“What the hell are we going to do without her?”

“Can’t you borrow a bass guitarist from another band on the circuit?” I offered. All the local groups knew each other and it was not unusual for members of one group to perform with another.

“No, I want to showcase my songs tomorrow; there’s going to be some R & A men present. They’ve got to see not only how good we are but that I’m a really great songwriter

too who has got real talent and who can take the group to the top. We won't get anywhere doing covers."

Cally sat on the sofa rubbing her hands together – always a prelude to the lighting of a cigarette. I sensed her need for nicotine, lit one, and passed it to her. In that instant, I changed my life forever.

"Of course, you know all my songs," she blew out a cloud of smoke.

"Yes... but...."

"You can take Levi's place. It's only for one gig."

Cally had made up her mind. That was what was going to happen so that was what did happen.

Vanessa drove the mini-bus around to our address and I loaded up the instruments as I always did (being the de facto roadie). this time, though, when I got onboard the bus, it was as a temporary group member.

"Sam is going to stand in for Levi," Cally announced.

"Right. Good," Helen answered and the rest nodded in agreement.

That was it. No question. Cally was in control. I was in the band. For one night only.

There was no talk of an all-girl band and me having to do or wear anything different. I went on stage in my jeans, Iron Maiden T-shirt and black leather jacket and my long mousy hair hung loose about me. I played my bass and Cally sung like she had never sung before and the gig was a huge success.

Later that night when she slipped into bed next to me, she said, "Sam, I really loved you being behind me tonight. Hearing the your bass lines was so reassuring . You're so much more reliable than Levi and you didn't compete on vocals. Levi was much too harsh. With you, it's like we're physically connected. You just know what I want on stage... and off it."

I laughed, rolled on top of her and we made love. Fun days indeed!

Gonsoon had a few more gigs lined up and I joined them for those too. I'd never been in a band before and the thrill of being on stage, playing live, having an audience chant and sing-a-long – well, it was addictive. I loved it. No one said anything about the fact I was the one male member of an all-girl group, no one said a word. It was great being with Cally and hanging around together during the day and practising. Gradually, I showed Cally some songs I had written. To my surprise, she liked them. The group played one of my songs when we next performed – though, of course, she strongly disputes this, claiming the songs were all hers.

So, I became a member of Gonsoon. I played for the group for about a month as the band started to build a small but loyal following. Everyone agreed that we were sounding better than ever. It was then that Meverick walked into our lives.

He just walked in on our rehearsal and stood watching us, not saying a word. Meverick had seen us at the Velcro Club that first night I played with Gonsoon and he had been keeping tabs on us ever since. At first, I thought Meverick was an angry neighbour going to tell us to "shut up!" but no – Meverick was a manager. He came walking towards us wear-

ing a long, red suede coat which flapped around his ankles, leather trousers and a waistcoat which was so tight over his large stomach that it seemed the buttons would pop. A silver buckle was pinned onto his shirt at his neck, like a ladies brooch, his black shoulder-length hair was lank and unwashed, his wandering eye seemed to swivel constantly and, like David Bowie, his pupils were different colours. When he smiled, he revealed a row of tarnish and stained tombstone teeth.

"I've been following you guys around for some time now," he said in a West Coast American accent. "I've made a few enquiries and I know you don't have a manager so I'm going to take you on. I've got friends at a number of record companies and I'll have you signed up in a month."

"Excuse me!" Cally said. "Who says we want a manager? I look after this group!"

Meverick smiled. "Yes, I can see that and I can see you know diddly squat about managing a group and taking them forward." He went on to list some of the groups he had managed. "Now, I'm offering my services to you guys as I see your potential. If you don't want me to help you... so be it."

He turned on his heel. His footsteps resounded off the cold, hard floor.

"Wait," Cally said. "Tell us more... about your management expertise..." the words trailed off and faded away. Round one to Meverick. He turned, came back towards us and indicated that he wanted us to gather around him. For a few minutes, he talked about his groups, what he could offer, what we could expect. Cally was quiet. Then with a flourish, Meverick produced a contract and we all put pen to paper and signed our lives away. It was as easy as that.





## Chapter Two

Meverick wanted changes. He saw us in his London office a few days later and laid down the law,

"Your image doesn't fit the music you're writing. We want to dispense with the covers and get you playing your own stuff. The heavy rock numbers you do are good but rock chick groups have been done to death, they're passé. The stuff you write is softer. You need a softer image."

"But..." I began, amazed that Meverick thought I was a girl! Cally squeezed my leg. Hard.

"We've got to dress you up, make you look pretty."

"No way!" Cally was up now, standing over Meverick... "I won't compromise my artistic principles. This group is my group. We are free spirits. We dress as we please. We're not going to become sex objects for masturbating men."

Cally was young and she liked to shock but shocking Meverick was no easy task. He laughed. His laugh said "little girl" and I knew it was Round Two to Meverick.

"So you all wear Levi jeans, ah, and designer T shirts. Some free spirits!" Meverick said.

That broke the tension, the others laughed, Cally knew she was outnumbered and sat back down.

Meverick continued. "Leave it to me. I'll get you gigs and you'll start earning big. We'll do private parties and you'll be on a straight 500."

Mouths fell open.

"We've never been paid that much," Vanessa said. "That's 100 for each of us – wow, that's big bucks."

It was Meverick's turn to laugh. "I'm talking 500 each, baby. Boy, you girls are sure naVve! First, though we've got to dress you up. Prettify you."

When we left the office, Cally was still banging on about her artistic principles being compromised. In all the fuss, they seemed to have forgotten what gender I was! I was a boy, Goddamn it, why would I want to be "prettified," as Meverick put it.

"You'll have to get a new bassist. How can I be in an all-girl group?" I slammed.

Vanessa smiled. "I don't think Meverick means it like that, I think it's just a shorthand. He knows you're a guy - of course, he does. Don't worry about it."

Cally agreed, but was still seething about her "artistic credibility."

"Meverick can go hang. I'm not putting fame before my principles."

"Come off it, Cally, we've been gigging for two years and this is the first serious break we've had" – this was Fiona.

Cally sighed. "Well, are you happy wearing a frock and being all girly-girly?"

"What about me? I'm not wearing a frock! This is madness!" I interjected.

“Get a life! Loser!” Cally shouted. “No one’s asked YOU to wear a frock, have they? You’ll still be in your jeans and T shirt – the moody male.”

I was stunned; Cally had never been so rude to me before. She pulled a face and shook her head. “We’ve got to decide now that this is the wrong direction for Gonsoon.”

There was quiet all round.

“I’m prepared to let Meverick manage us the way he wants,” Vanessa said.

“If it gets us a recording contract and some money, who cares what we look like? I agree with Meverick, chick bands are so last year.” This was Fiona.

“Oh shut up, Fiona,” Cally snapped. “You don’t know what you’re talking about. You know nothing about the rock industry.”

And with that she was gone, leaving me, Helen, Vanessa and Fiona standing around in silence. I pressed my hands into my coat pocket and blew out some cold air. I needed a cigarette.

“Cally has one hell on an attitude problem. Sorry, Sam,” Fiona said.

I smiled, I liked Fiona. We often gave each other reassuring smiles on stage as we both lacked the self-confidence and self-belief of Cally.

“No, no, I know what you mean; I have to live with her.”

They all laughed. Now seemed like a good time to bring up what was on my mind.

“What do you think Meverick will do with me? Do you think I will wear male garb? You know I don’t want to leave the band, but I think he has clear ideas for an all-girl group that sings and dances. I don’t think he sees us as a rock group at all.”

Helen punched my shoulder playfully. “We’re a rock group. We’re Gonsoon, and you’re one of us. Meverick can’t change that. You’re one of the girls.” And with that, she winked.

I didn’t sleep well that night – not with Cally still going on about her artistic principles being compromised and my worries about what Meverick had in mind for me. We met up the next day and got down to jamming and no one said a word about me being a guy in an all-female group so I kinda got used to the idea. I was being stupid and paranoid – of course Meverick didn’t want me to wear a frock! I had been a fool. It was a crazy notion; no group could survive with a man in their midst pretending to be a girl.

But he did want changes. Over the next few weeks, we were brought into a recording studio. We all sang solo, then we were teamed up to do harmonies – no instruments. He had a really cool bunch of session musicians work with us and I suddenly realised how amateurish we were; Cally reluctantly went along with it but I could see her mood deteriorate as the weeks went on. Finally, Meverick sat us down,

“Right, as I thought, as a singing combo your harmonies are spot on. We have a nice deep bass from Sam, the light treble of Helen, the gravely lead singing of Cally and the falsetto vocals of Vanessa and Fiona. We’re keeping the keyboard in the act, Helen, but for the rest of you, the instruments will go.”

"I suppose a low slung guitar across my shoulder will ruin my pretty frock!" Cally thundered.

Meverick remained calm. "If you want to make it, stick with me and follow my advice. If you don't, then go your own way."

Cally stood up. "Well, there's no way in the world I'm going to stand on stage in a frock and sing slushy pop songs. Come on girls – we're off."

No one moved.

"Listen to Meverick," Helen said. "At least hear him out."

Cally snorted; she looked at me, at Helen, at Vanessa, at Fiona, for signs of support.

"Fuck you all!" she shouted and stormed off.

To this day, I don't know why I didn't follow her but I didn't: I just sat there. Meverick smiled his bare-mouthed smile and continued, completely unfazed.

"Right, one down. Anyone else want to give me the banging door treatment?"

We all shook our heads.

"Well then, what I have planned is this. From now on you will be known as The Ravalolas. I will dress you in sexy clothes. You will stand on stage and sing slushy pop songs, some of them of your own making. Helen will use the keyboard for intros and middle eights but, by and large, the five of you will take the stage as a unified commercial all-girl-band."

"The five?" Helen queried.

"Oh yes, Cally will be back. Don't worry. She's an integral part of my plans. She and Sam write songs together."

For the first time Meverick looked at me. Sized me up. Surely he knew I wasn't a woman?

"I want you to perform at private parties to get the act nice and tight. Then, when you are ready, we will release you onto the general public. Now ladies, I'm very busy. Could you leave me, please, and we'll talk again tomorrow."

As the others filed out, I slid nervously to the edge of my seat. I needed to have it out with him. When the door closed, I said,

"Meverick, you do know I'm a guy, don't you?"

Meverick smiled in that way of his.

"Sure. What of it?"

"Aren't The Ravalolas going to be an all-girl group?"

"I guess so."

I shrugged, "So where do I fit in?"

"Listen Sam, when I first saw Gonsoon, you were happily playing bass in an all-girl group. The audience, everyone, thought you were a woman..."

"But..."

Meverick raised his hand to stop me. "I don't know how long you've been in the band. Sure, I know you and Cally are an item, so I guess you wanted to be part of her scene. All I know is you were happy to be a part of an all-girl band then, so what's the difference now?"

"The clothes," I stammered. "I wore my own clothes, not girly clothes."

Meverick laughed. "Your love of male clothes will stop you from making a million dollars, will it?"

"No... no ... but... what about the public?"

Meverick leaned over his desk and whispered very softly. "The public won't know and when they do, they'll love it. There's no bad publicity in rock 'n' roll – no bad publicity, do you understand me?"

My heart was beating like Vanessa's drum.

"You mean you want me to masquerade as a girl on stage?"

Meverick leaned back in his chair. "No, I mean I signed an all-girl group called Gonsoon. It said they were an all-girl group on the posters when I went to see them, it said they were an all-girl group in the contract," Meverick lifted his hands expansively. "Man, how was I to know I'd signed four vaginas and a penis?"

"I can't do it."

"It's up to you. The band wants you. They like you. You're like a rock to the others – you give them confidence – even Cally. You calm her down. You're stable. You don't have PMS. For one, maybe two years, you could be top of the tree – in a frock, for sure, but top of the tree nonetheless. You'd make money. Forget Cally's naïve, stupid dreams about "artistic principles" He made quotation marks with his fingers. "The music business is first and foremost about making money – always has been always will be – all that artist stuff is bullshit. You have the chance now, Sam, not tomorrow, not next year but now, to make big bucks. There's a market for an all-girl group – The Spice Girls have split and there's a vacancy. That vacancy will soon be filled, so you wear a frock. Who cares? You'd be making plenty of bucks and you'd be the real deal. How old are you now?"

"Twenty-one."

"By twenty-three, you'll be a millionaire. Guaranteed. Gonsoon or The Ravalolas will have vanished into the pop ether and you'll have girls and money aplenty..." He leaned over the desk and whispered, "And all because you put on a frock for two years and followed the advice of Meverick."

"But I..."

He pushed his chair back and began chewing a pen. "An actor dons breaches and a doublet and plays a Sixteenth Century rogue. Is he a rogue? Is he from the Sixteenth century?"

"Of course not, he's an actor," I said.

"And what are pop performers? The Beatles, the nice guys, the Rolling Stones the bad guys? They're actors – it's an image – a media creation – nothing more, nothing less. An act."