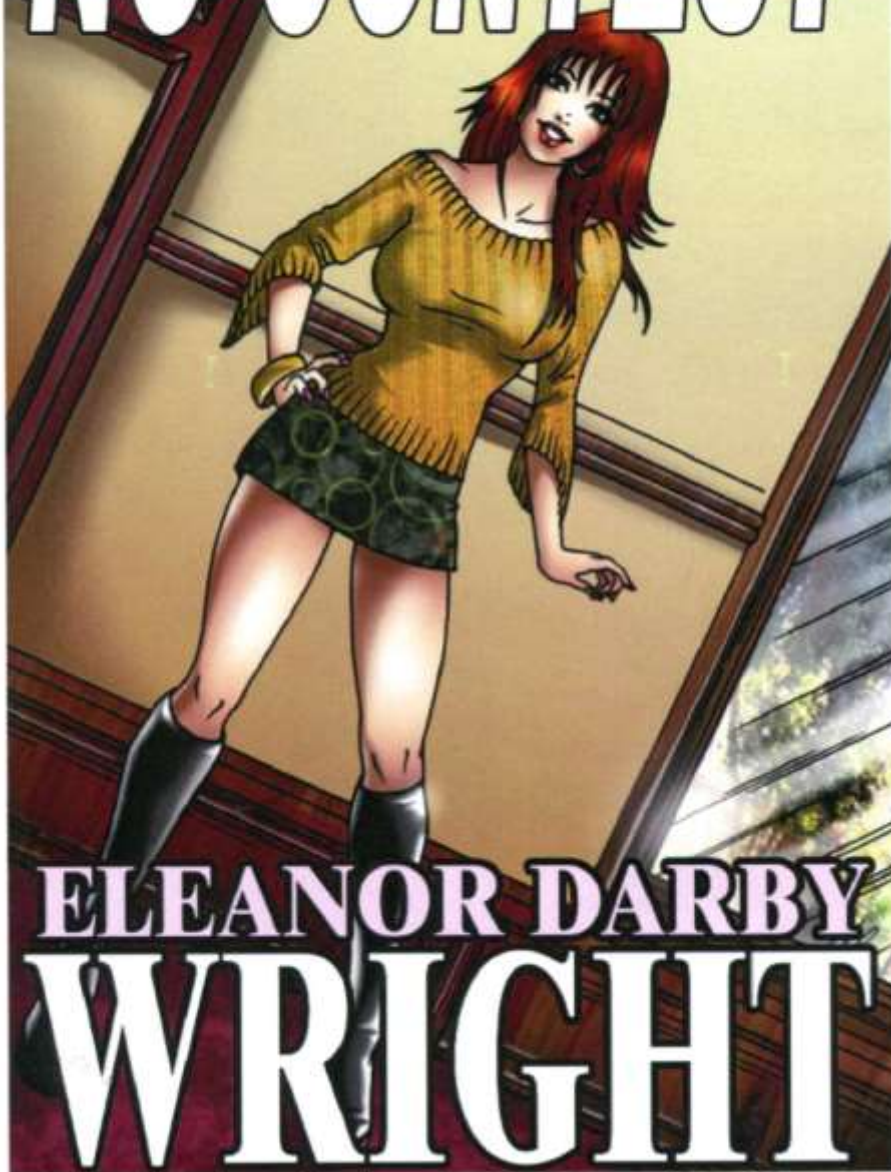


NO CONTEST



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WRIGHT



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NO CONTEST

by Eleanor Darby Wright

I. MISS RADFORD

The eleventh contestant sashayed daintily down the ramp, in every way her movements just like the other girls. She swirled on very high heels, holding her head still, like a model. The sash over her long evening gown proclaimed her 'Miss Radford', just like the sashes of the other girls.

Grant Leyden stirred restlessly as the auburn-haired girl, her hair so fashionably long and waved, pinned back from her face, kept a fixed, glossy-lipsticked smile towards him and where judges would have been seated.

The auburn-haired girl was as curvaceous as all the others, her dark evening gown clinging to a rounded, feminine figure. Grant had always been partial to blondes, like numbers one, four, seven and eight but he would not have minded branching out with the auburn-haired girl. When she gave her demure, secretive smile, she looked like the kind of girl he would enjoy arousing, if his sister gave him half a chance.

"You didn't have to parade all of the candidates in front of me," Grant complained to his enigmatic sister, writing copious notes on her 'evaluation' forms. "I only have to meet her and I'll know if she has a chance of winning."

Jill Leyden turned to face her brother, adopted like herself. Jill had been a beauty queen before she had even entered college and she would not have been out-of-place in the parade of lovelies taking place before her lawyer brother, his athletic career over now but his reputation and good looks making many of the girls cast him flirtatious looks, just as Jill had known they would.

"You have to spot the one I have trained to be a winner," she said mischievously to her elder brother. "Because if you can't, then I won't need your services as a lawyer when this is all over after all."

Jill stood and waved to the first girl who had led the parade along the runway. "All right," Jill called, pushing her own, long, thick blonde hair over her shoulder. "Strip to bra and panties and we'll go through this next part as if it is the bathing suit section. You should all keep your sashes in place."

No Contest by Eleanor Darby Wright

There was giggling and rustling as the sorority girls at the far end of the stage glanced at Grant, who was busy setting up a scorecard of his own devising. They began to take off their dresses, some more enthusiastically than others, and assist each other. Most were wearing garter belts and stockings beneath long slips and some took them off slowly and sensually as they looked at Grant, while his sister chivvied them all to hurry up and disrobe.

Jill set up some new, sultry music on the sound system and signaled to the first girl to begin the parade anew. The first girl, a thick-thighed blonde, minced down the center of the stage, smiling a little in embarrassment at the Leydens.

“She wouldn’t stand a chance,” murmured Grant, in an aside to his sister when the girl couldn’t have heard him. He smiled nicely to the girl who did have a very pretty face.

Jill raised her program in front of her as she gestured for others to follow the first. “Then she couldn’t be the one, could she?” Jill whispered back from the corner of her mouth, conveying her annoyance to him in the controlled tone of her voice. “Think about it, Grant. Concentrate,” she went on bossily as she always did in Grant’s opinion. “It will make everyone’s job here much easier.”

Each of the girls followed in turn, swirling in front of the Radford Students’ Union President and its ‘Legal Counsel’. Some were clearly embarrassed by the parade, perhaps wondering how they had ever got themselves into such a spot. Some, like the last, the auburn-haired girl, wore black, lace-edged lingerie, and had slim, well-shaped legs. But only the last girl was neither heavy-bosomed like a chorus girl nor flat-chested like a boy.

“I wish you would just tell me,” snapped Grant Leyden at his beautiful sister. “I hate guessing games.”

Jill ignored his petulant remark. “Thank you, girls,” she said to the nervous, swaying line-up across the stage. “Of course, we will let you know the results, privately and strictly for your own use, and if we will be reviving our participation in the Inter-College beauty contest. But I do know that I would be proud to have each and every one of you representing Radford and your sorority. Even though some still oppose what we are thinking about doing here, the scholarship endowments earned for the university could be put to so much good use.”

Jill then sat and began to fill in the columns of numbers in front of her.

“Do they really believe that?” scoffed Grant, watching the girls putting on their dresses and, chattering with one another, smiling in encouragement to him. He nodded to some as they left the little theatre and headed back to the Formal that was taking place in another part of the Union.

“They always believe everything I say,” said Jill after a pause, her concentration on her paperwork unbroken.

“Why only ten papers?” Grant asked pointedly.

“One of them, of course,” said Jill Leyden, frowning at her brother’s constant distractions, “knows that she is only rehearsing for the big day. Did you spot the real Miss Radford?”



Grant’s face clouded. “Oh, Jill,” he snorted, sitting up very straight in his seat. “Tell me that this can’t be true. You can’t really be thinking of going through with this. A beauty contest? This will put women’s causes at this university back into the Stone Age. How could you,” he stressed the pronoun, “my sister,” an even greater stress on the words, “sanction an entry from Radford University, one of the homes of feminism, into a beauty contest?”

“Well,” Jill said, wrinkling her petite, bobbed nose, giving him a sardonic smile. “I myself didn’t find them as bad as all that when I used to win them. After all, my beloved brother should know where the scholarship money to allow me to be here came from. And this is what it is all about, scholarship money.”

Grant would have gone on and given his sister a lecture, repeating words Jill had used, on what she had called her youthful blunders, an excuse she used frequently, for her earlier triumphs. He became aware, suddenly, however, that someone was standing in the wings of the stage, either listening to them or waiting for them, or both.

“Oh, Nancy,” said Jill, looking up from her task. The auburn-haired girl, who had been the last contestant, came forward with a shy smile. She had changed to a yellow sweater, which showed off her nicely shaped breasts. Her short, dark mini-skirt showed off her lovely, smooth, long, shapely legs. Her dark, high-heeled boots made her legs look even more slim and beautiful. “I’ll be along in just a moment, dear,” Jill added, writing a positive comment on the last form even as she placed a girl in the Runner Up category. “Would you take Grant out to our car?”

The girl, Nancy, nodded, her auburn hair falling about her lovely, well made-up face. She had performed a very creditable song-and-dance routine in the ‘talent’ portion of the little show that Jill had organized first before the glamorous parade. To avoid protests, Jill had told the girls that the actual choosing of a Radford girl to represent the university was being done on a strictly private basis. They had believed her, as she said they would.

Nancy led Grant quickly and confidently through the intricate maze of new buildings to the recently constructed Students’ Parking Structure on the west side of the Union. She attracted a lot of looks and Grant also felt himself being checked out, both for being with such an attractive girl and by several striking women who should have been in the Miss Radford contest as well.

That was so amusing to someone as liberated as Grant Leyden thought himself to be. He was glad he was dressed in suit and tie, however, as Nancy led him through several crowded areas. Still, they avoided the raucous noises coming from various bars and venues in the Union, the sounds of a swing band coming from the largest ballroom where the Fall Formal was being held.

Grant was surprised when the girl clicked on her high heels right up to the familiar old Volks and opened the door with a proprietary air. Perhaps when Jill had said ‘our’, she hadn’t meant her brother and Jill, as Grant had thought she had. Nancy set back the front seat and climbed in the back, confirming to Grant that she was rounded in the right places and was still wearing black lace panties to accentuate her femininity.

Grant smiled to himself as he got into the passenger seat. He knew now who Jill’s candidate to be ‘Miss Radford’ must be. He half turned and studied the

pretty, auburn-haired girl more closely who gave him a brief, nervous glance of her own. He caught the fragrance of her perfume again and breathed it in, in satisfaction. He loved the smell of expensive perfume on a woman like Nancy.

Nancy had excellent bone structure, high cheekbones that could be easily enhanced by makeup. Her eyes were large and green, her mouth a trifle wide but she had full, generous lips. Her features were highlighted by the heavy makeup she wore, particularly about her large, thickly-lashed, black eyelashes. Nancy was aware of his scrutiny of her and looked away shyly.

“You’ll have to cure yourself of that habit,” said Grant testily.

“W-What?” she gasped. Even Nancy’s voice was timid.

“If you want to be a beauty queen,” snapped Grant, “you can’t look away just because someone looks you over. You are merchandise,” he sneered and was happy as the pretty girl shrank back into her seat, crossing her legs with a rasp of nylon on nylon. “You’ve got to get used to being inspected like prime beef.”

The girl’s slim hand, tipped in softest pink fingernail polish, opened her purse and Nancy hunted for something very nervously. The rouge and powder on her cheeks hid her color from Grant’s prying eyes but he didn’t doubt that Nancy was blushing. She finally found her compact and opened it to shakily study her face and her hair. Her lipstick was retouched with the same exquisite shade as her fingernails while Grant admired the pout she had to make to apply the lipstick slowly. She trembled visibly as he studied her and the feminine way she redid her makeup. She pushed her long, thick hair off her shoulder and tried to look Grant back in the eyes, but she kept breaking off under his blatant, jaded inspection.

“That’s my sister’s bracelet,” Grant said suddenly, eyeing the silver charm bracelet that dangled loosely from the girl’s wrist. It was made up entirely of foreign coins as the ‘charms’, many of which had been furnished by Grant. “You’re wearing her earrings as well.”

Nancy nodded. “Jill is v-very k-kind t-to me,” she stammered, averting her eyes from Grant.

Surely, thought Grant cynically, those eyelashes are false. And the girl now seemed more pumped up that she had been in her black lace bra and panties. Perhaps the eyelashes weren’t the only things false about ‘Miss Radford’.

The car door swung open unexpectedly and Jill slid into the drivers’ seat. “Okay, kids,” she said with a smile. “Nancy, you were just great. Let’s go home and get a bite to eat.” Jill seemed very jovial.

II. THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GIRL ON CAMPUS

“Didn’t you agree, in Women Students’ Caucus meetings, last year, that you would end these, quote, stupid cattle auctions, unquote? I do believe you were referring then to beauty pageants for co-eds or was I wrong?” demanded Grant Leyden, finally unable to hold back his curiosity and his dismay at his sister.

“Here I am,” Grant went on as his sister only grinned at him, “not even out of post-graduate work a year and my sister, of all the people in the world, a committed feminist, is now conspiring to be a Benedict Arnold. You know you were elected to follow a feminist agenda, not to renege on everything the last five or so Presidents, including your own flesh and blood, have stood for. You are making me think that I was just wasting my time.”

Jill relaxed on an old chesterfield, her feet up on a foot stool, while Nancy, in a pretty white apron, cleared away the remains of take-out chicken, which they had just devoured, from an old coffee table that had seen better days, too.

“You’ve got it just a little bit wrong,” said Jill, with that amused smile on her face that she’d had since Grant had met her earlier in the afternoon. “I think you’ll agree,” she said lightly, “that we agreed, in the Women’s Caucus to destroy the Inter-College Beauty Pageant.”

“I heard about the promise you made which you are now renegeing on,” growled her brother.

“Not quite,” said Jill, her smile as sardonic as ever. “Oh, thank you darling,” she smiled brightly as the elegant Nancy slipped a glass of chilled white wine in her hand. “Come and join us, Nancy. Grant wants to talk about beauty contests. So, we’ll need a referee.”

The shining auburn hair shivered and trembled. “N-no,” murmured the pretty girl, refusing to look at her roommate’s brother. “I-I’m tired. I-I’m going to bed now.” She slipped her hand from Jill’s sudden clasping, flicked her thick hair back over her shoulder and gracefully backed away, a tremulous smile on her still glossy lips. She turned as she reached the bedroom door, a definite feminine swing to her hips, Grant was pleased to note but, when she went into the bedroom, the feminine fragrance in the living area of the apartment seemed to die right away.

Grant eyed his sister coldly as Jill stared pensively after Nancy. “I won’t be getting in the way of anything, will I, staying here?” he asked sarcastically.

Jill laughed. “No,” she said, merriment in her voice, a glint in her eyes, which at least relieved Grant of the thought that his sister might have lost her old sense of humor. “You have the bedroom on the left. I’ll be the one sharing with Nancy tonight.”

Grant lifted and eyebrow archly. "Well," he said. "I never thought that my little sister ..."

"Oh, quit it, Grant," Jill said, putting her glass down. "I'm not a lesbian, like half of the women in our Caucus, and neither is Nancy. Don't start with me. Tell me, though, what you thought of Nancy. You know, with my coaching, and your critiquing, I think that she can win down East."

Grant relaxed and sipped his beer. "I don't care, quite frankly," he told his sister, letting his disgust with the whole business color his voice. No, he would advise her. She couldn't be recalled or booted out for breaking a campaign promise but she shouldn't run again for political office anywhere because she would be unelectable after this.

"Come on, Grant," Jill said crossly. "Humor me in this. I really do need your opinion, a man's opinion."

Grant sighed. He had been the one to find the right coaches for Jill when she had been in the beauty business and he had learned a thing or two about it all. It was natural for her to turn to him for advice but Grant had still no clear idea what else she was planning. She had asked him some very provocative questions about the Pageant contracts both pre- and post-show. He had no doubt that she was planning something, his activist little sister, and no doubt that it involved Nancy in some way but he didn't at the moment know what.

"Well," Grant Leyden said, stretching it out. "She is gorgeous, Jill, but there's lots of work still to do with her. She's far too nervous to win anything big like the Collegiate." He frowned, recalling all that Jill had said on previous occasions about 'meat markets'. "It's become very big these last few years, very glamorous. Nancy might actually embarrass Radford by her awkwardness or naiveté." A sudden thought came to Grant. "Is that what you are trying to do, Jill? Make it so embarrassing that Radford will never be asked back ever again?"

"Oh, we won't be asked back. That's for certain," said Jill, looking very thoughtful herself. "I thought Nancy carried herself off very well in the parades, didn't you? Especially since it was her first time in doing such a thing. I must get the tapes of her and we can go over them minutely. Was there something else that makes you think she'll be too nervous to win it all?"

Grant shrugged. He knew it. He knew his sister had something underhanded planned. "She could hardly talk to me," he said, finishing his beer. "Nancy doesn't like to be stared at, not by me, anyway, and she's got to get used to that if she expects to win. You do intend her to win, don't you?"

"A win is guaranteed," Jill said calmly. "But it has to be close. Nancy has to be a good candidate. But thanks, Grant, for your opinion. Now I know what I have to work on with her to get her to win the Pageant."

Grant's stifled reply was about how he at least was not going to be doing anything illegal and Jill must not, either, if she wanted his involvement in such a project.

"Oh, Grant," smiled Jill. "You know how we fixed the Cotillion so that I could win. It's amazing how some favors have to be paid for again and again."

Jill was not able to tiptoe softly into the right bedroom for quite some time. Grant had to be brought up to date on the judges of the Inter-College Pageant and then he began to nod in understanding. Then he had wanted to be brought up to date on university matters, his and her friends, who was sleeping with whom, and other hot gossip.

Nancy was not asleep. She watched Jill undress and ready herself for bed. Nancy looked most alluring in the soft light as her mass of auburn hair ran over her shoulders and the tiny straps of the lace-edged nightie she was wearing. A smiling, naked Jill flicked back the covers and slid in quickly beside the other girl, gently caressing Nancy's tented chest as she slid up beside the silk-clad girl.

Nancy's shapely thighs were warm as Jill slid against her. Nancy settled back as Jill partly lay across her, demanding her mouth for a kiss, which she accepted most willingly. She didn't stop Jill's cold hands from caressing and fondling her body nor for 'assisting' her to get out of her nightie so that she lay beside Jill in just her black silk and lace panties.

Jill ran her hands through Nancy's long, soft hair, so much longer now than her own. She liked to bury her face in the soft, feminine fragrance that covered her gentle roommate's so soft skin. Nancy shivered as Jill ran her hands over her lovely figure, stopping slightly on Nancy's aroused breasts, hardly able to find the healed scars of her breast augmentation. It was marvelous how the nipples too had been enlarged. They were so womanly and Jill had to kiss them as her hands strayed over Nancy's hips and between the girl's soft thighs while Nancy hummed with pleasure and curled into Jill's equally womanly body, their breasts touching as Jill took possession of the other's girlish mouth.

"Did you tell him?" asked Nancy fearfully as Jill buried her face in the elegant, perfumed neck before her.

"No. I couldn't," murmured Jill, stroking the girl's panties as she edged them over wide, smooth, rounded hips. "This just isn't the right time. But I did get some suggestions on how to make you an even better woman than you are now."

"Jill," pleaded the soft, auburn-haired girl but her whisper was cut off by a long, smoldering kiss.

“You’re not thinking of backing out on me now, are you, girl?” asked Jill, getting her legs inside the other girl’s and pushing her quivering legs outside her own with soft, lingering caresses.

“N-No,” gasped Nancy as her hair swept across both of their faces.

“We’ll tell everybody at just the right time, just as we’ve always planned it,” whispered Jill as Nancy now began to cling to her and to timidly return Jill’s caresses with her own. Nancy’s mouth found Jill’s breasts as Jill completed the removal of Nancy’s panties.

“Just wait till you win the Pageant and are crowned as Queen,” gloated Jill. “Then we’ll let everyone know how they have been fooled. It will end this contest once and for all,” she exulted, “once they find out that the most beautiful girl on campus is a man!”

Nancy wasn’t listening to Jill’s reminders of her fate. As usual, he, that is Nancy, was quivering with emotion and intensity at the thought of making love to a woman as beautiful, as intelligent and as strong-minded and tolerant as Jill Leyden. He would do anything for a woman like Jill, a woman who knew all about him and his terrible secrets and who loved and encouraged him to be a woman just like her.

III. NANCY

I was in only my first year and in the big city for the first time. A million times I asked myself why they had to have such an obvious strip joint so close to the university. I was actually shocked the first time I saw it. I thought that Pepper’s Lounge was just a normal strip club. I passed it a couple of times with the pictures of the half-naked women on the front and thought nothing more of it until some drunk in one of the pub crawls I joined for the company mentioned that so-and-so looked as good as one of the female impersonators at Pepper’s.

I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t walk by the place then without a lump in my throat. I never dared to stop and look at the photos on the front message boards. Other groups of men and women stopped and many laughed and smiled and made ribald comments about the ‘girls’ they looked at. I didn’t dare. What would people have thought of me? I could just hear it. “Murray Moss is a girl! Murray is a girl!” and worse “Murray Moss is a fag! Murray is a fag!”

It had taken me a year to live that down when I was eleven and had spent one glorious Halloween night in my sister’s clothes and her makeup, being mistaken for a girl everywhere, until I started to act like one. Jimmy Bandell and his gang that had stolen my bag of candies, and those of the little kids I was shepherding about, had called me names then and for about a year at school after that.

No Contest by Eleanor Darby Wright

I knew my parents were disappointed in me for not standing up to Jimmy but what could I do? He was so much bigger and more muscular than me. The fact that I had dressed up like a girl and gone out was all over school and I got teased a lot. The worst thing was that I wished it had been true. Not the fag part. The girl part.

I wished that I had been a girl. I had loved it. I had loved the way the little kids had thought I was a princess and had held onto my hands as we skipped along, my skirts rustling about my stockings. I even got extra for being such a beautiful princess but now in hindsight I think that was probably people laughing at me.

I never went out on Halloween again. I did give out candies, even to Jimmy Bardell and his gang who came all dressed up in their sisters' clothes the following year. I tried to put them down by giving them extra for being so pretty but they all just laughed at me and went prancing off, so pleased with themselves. I wished I could have thought to behave like that the year before. But I didn't and I knew why.

Dressing like a girl was a serious business for me. I had found out what I was. The library is a wonderful place for that. They can't keep certain words out of the dictionary and so I knew that I was a transvestite. I was so relieved to find out that I did not have to be gay, either, to be a transvestite. I would have loved to have dressed in my sister's clothes but I didn't dare and so, although I knew I was a crossdresser, I did nothing about it, and pushed it forward in time, knowing that someday, one day, I was going to have to try it out.

Why did it have to be so close, this Pepper's Lounge? I had to pass it on my way from the subway to the university proper. I had to pass it on the way home. Oh, the lovely, female shapes in the glitzy photos. The colors in the photos! Lame dresses in silver and gold and pink and red and dark blue! And the head shots were so much like women, the makeup so expert, the hair so well done. I loved Martina for days after her photo appeared and I slowed as I walked by to see her picture but not be seen stopping and ogling as so many did. I thought about it but never dared to go into the place. One look at the ecstasy on my face in being there would have given me away to anyone who knew me.

I was bereft when Martina was gone, replaced by a Darlene, and I had never seen Martina perform. It dawned on me that I had never seen anyone going into the club, either. I saw parties of people, men and women, laughing there, but I always scurried on and I had never actually seen anyone go in or come out. I had certainly never seen one of the performers and that made me think what it would be like to meet a female impersonator on the street. Would they look like men or like women? I didn't know.

Everybody at Radford knew Jill Leyden. She was an ex-beauty queen and looked like it. She was so gorgeous in ordinary student's clothing. Then, when she smiled at something, or someone, she was irresistible.

No Contest by Eleanor Darby Wright

I was half in love with her from first glance and, when she and her sorority organized pub crawls around the university neighborhood, I went along on the edge of the crowd. We didn't, of course, go into Pepper's, but we did pass it by on the run from one bar to the next. I was at the back and gave the photos what I thought was my usual surreptitious look as we were passing by. We were in a crowd and some were making jokes and so I felt quite safe.

"Have you ever been in there?" a sweet girl's voice beside me asked and I suddenly realized, as my arm was touched, that someone was talking to me.

I whirled about and must have looked really frightened. Oh, no, I thought, remembering Jimmy and how they had acted when I had been caught on Halloween. But Jill Leyden, the organizing sorority president, was smiling at me and clearly expected me to answer her question.

"No, no," I stammered, shaking my long, fashionable, but scruffy hair.

"Neither have I," Jill had said, giving me her irresistible smile, squeezing my arm in friendly fashion. "But I would really like to go. Why don't you take me tomorrow night? It'll be a Dutch treat, of course. Nine o'clock at my residence. I'll make reservations if we have to have them."

I don't know how I got through the rest of the pub crawl. I'm sure my heart rate was setting a world record in beats per minute. Whenever I saw Jill Leyden it surged again, even more. I didn't know how to tell her that there was no way that I was ever going to go to a female impersonator club, with her or anyone else, but each time I moved to her, she smiled that smile at me and I felt as if I had been kicked in my stomach. Many people with her looked around, and were startled, I think, to see who she was smiling to. Several guys took her arm possessively and sort of pulled her away from talking to me.

I got drunk but I do recall quite clearly hearing Jill talk to me as she passed me by after we all staggered out of the last 'Cockroach and Maggot', the name some bright kid had hung on all the generic bars in the neighborhood.

"See you at nine, Murray Moss. Don't be late," I heard Jill Leyden calling across the parking lot to me. I remembered that even if I don't recall seeing her very clearly as I staggered off to get a taxi to the basement rooms my parents had procured for me in the big city.

I wasn't late at Jill's residence to pick her up but I was petrified. All that day, my thoughts had been occupied by what I was going to be doing that night. I promised myself that I was not going to go. I was going to stand her up, that Jill Leyden. I would pretend that I hadn't heard her. I would take on a Jimmy Bardell attitude. What, me, say I would go to a club with you, a female impersonation club? Lady, I must have been drunk and you must have been dreaming!

Of course, I said nothing of the sort. For one thing, Mrs Polevski, my parents' choice of the ideal battleaxe to keep an eye on a boy on the loose in the big city, told me a girl had phoned me, gave me the phone and dialed the number of the first girl who had ever called me in my lodgings that year.



“Oh, Murray,” sparkled Jill Leyden and I’m sure Mrs. Polevski could hear her as well. “I just had to call to tell you that I have a reservation for us at nine and you have to wear a jacket and tie. Is that a problem?”

“No, no,” I said quickly before I thought about it and what I should have said which was, of course, yes, that I did have a problem.

“See you at nine, then,” Jill said again, good humor in her voice and she hung up on me.

She must already have mentioned it to Mrs. Polevski because that worthy had already pressed my dark suit and ironed a white shirt for me. Mrs. P was positively beaming as she ushered me out of the door to the taxi she had ordered for me.

“Your young lady said it was an extravagance but that she didn’t want to walk through the campus in her sparkly dress,” said Mrs. Polevski, pressing over a hundred dollars into my hand. My parents had left her money for ‘special emergencies’ for me. I really don’t think going to a female impersonator club was what they had in mind but then I wasn’t about to tell Mrs. Polevski my ultimate destination.

I was sweating and swallowing hard as I went up to the girls’ sorority house. Several girls were going out together, giggling, and several turned to look at me provocatively as I entered the waiting area in my suit and tie. Jill was waiting for me, talking to her friends. She jumped up and came towards me, smiling, while several of her friends, as nicely dressed as her, gaped at me.

“See you later, Charmian,” said Jill gaily, putting her arm under mine. “Don’t wait up for me, though. I have a late key if I need it.”

I swallowed the hard lump in my throat again and tried to greet her and ask her if it was all right with her that I had changed my mind.

But Jill eagerly pulled me after her to the cab, sitting down in a rustle of silky petticoats. “The University Avenue Plaza,” she told the cabbie, taking my hand in hers. I felt her long nails run over the back of my hand as she squeezed it. “Nervous?” she asked me then, leaning into me to whisper into my ear.

“Y-Yes,” I said and could have kicked myself again. I should have said ‘No’. I just couldn’t seem to stop myself giving out the wrong answers.

Jill paid off the cab with an outrageous tip and she took me by the hand and called me to look at a display in a boutique window until the cab moved off. Then, with a grin, while I began to shake, too dry-mouthed to talk, she pulled me briskly up to the forbidden door and we entered the female impersonators’ club. We went into a warm, red-lit passageway with a heavily made-up blonde woman, old and overweight, sitting in a booth at the end.

“Reservation for Leyden,” said Jill, putting down bills which I learned later were a cover charge.

The woman pulled a dark shawl about her shoulders, bare but for the straps of her sparkling, black evening dress. She pressed a button underneath the table she was sitting at and a red, baize-covered door opened. Another heavily made-

up woman, over six feet tall came out and raised a thin eyebrow at the older woman.

“Pearl will show you to your table,” said the older woman in a man’s baritone voice. The tall woman smiled and the Adam’s apple at her throat bobbed. Jill only smiled while I just gaped and shuddered at what I realized were men in dresses, the first I had really seen ‘in the flesh’.

“This way,” ‘Pearl’ said and I got a whiff of a very strong, female perfume. I kept hold of Jill’s hand as I stared at two men dressed as women, female impersonators as I thought of them. What have I got myself into, was all I could think, as frightened and stunned, I followed Jill, who was batting her eyelashes at Pearl. Jill, chatted with the tall, muscular man in a padded, black and white evening dress and bouffant, platinum, femininely-styled hair as if it was the most ordinary thing in the world for us to be shown to a table by such a person.

Luckily, there were a lot of women in the club at different tables with their husbands or boyfriends. I didn’t feel so out of place then as I sat with Jill and she chatted with our ‘waitress’, who knew Jill right away, as Dolly was a student at Radford when ‘she’ wasn’t a waitress.

“Murray isn’t so nervous now,” said Jill to Dolly who poured her a glass of white wine from the carafe she had ordered. “Now he can see how many other couples there are in here. I think he thought I would be the only woman in here tonight and so be greatly embarrassed.”

Dolly put the beer in front of me, allowing me to see down the front of her dress and the lovely mounds that were compressed together there. “Actually,” Dolly said in her lilting whisper as her long hair fell forward over her neck and chest, “I do think, Jill,” she glanced around impishly, “that you are actually the only woman, a genetic woman, that is, in the club tonight.”

I looked about at the smiling, attractive women at all the tables and felt the blood draining out of me as Jill and Dolly had a good laugh, mostly at my expense and the horrified, shocked look on my face I was certain. A piano trio, all women, oh, I hoped that they were, began to play light tunes and some of the couples got up and danced a waltz.

“I’d like to dance,” said Jill with a smile. “Come on, Murray. Dance with me and then I’ll tell you why I insisted on you bringing me here.”