



Reluctant Press presents:

A Unique Ecstasy

Philippa Peters



A 'NEW WOMAN' E-BOOK

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Reluctant Press TG Publishers

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A UNIQUE ECSTASY

by **Philippa Peters**

I. WAR HERO

I've tried writing this part of my life several times. I've tried writing it in the third person, "Lee Otis did this, etc, etc," or "Lee Otis said that," and so on and so on. But it's probably a lot easier if I just set it down the way I think it happened to me.

I know it's going to shock a lot of people out there, all the fan clubs that still keep on going even though I am retired from the business now. You'd think with all the biographies written about me, it's funny that not one has been written about her, that there wouldn't be room for another.

But this won't be one of those pap biographies, written by a studio flack, that you're used to. This is a warts and all story about me. It's part of my autobiography. Only a part, though. This is the part no-one has ever written about. After all, who could tell it but me – and her. And, if you keep going to the end, you'll read why that's just me who's left to remember it all and to tell about it.

I could go on a lot about the war and so on, and what a hero I was – and Timmy Lindemann - but it would be untrue. I did fly a few combat missions in bombers over Germany, as the bios say about me, but they were milk runs by the time I got over there. And who cares if Timmy Lindemann was a gunner in one of the Fortresses I flew? No-one's heard of him anyway.

I didn't know him well even though he hung around the crew of 'California Honey'. He was spare crew but flew with us almost every time we went out, I think. We were operating out of England and it was always raining. Someone was always sick with colds or flue.

I knew Timmy well enough to buy him a beer or two, which I recall doing after the Dresden run, our deepest and furthest over Germany. It was after that one that I was rotated back to the States, finishing up where I started, ferrying planes for Transport Command.

I don't know what got me into acting. I mean, I know the steps I took but I don't know why I let myself get co-opted into doing what I did. It was like, after the big one, I was just waiting around for it all to start up again, waiting for what was going to happen next. I was just passing away the time, spending money as fast as I got it, and making out with every girl that I could.

My last job left me off at Vandenberg and that was it. I was used to strutting out the old uniform with the few ribbons I'd genuinely earned. It pleased the girls to be going out with a 'war hero'. "You ought to be in pictures," more than one of them squealed at me before I moved on them really seriously and then it was more than squealing.

The studio's invented a few myths about how I broke into bigtime acting. I really like the one about my stunt flying and being so photogenic in the stills. It was nothing like that at all. I was dating a 'starlet', she called herself that, an 'extra' I'd call her now, who had a call for crowd scenes at Western. I think the movie was Man from Washington, but it could have been any of those moody spy stories that were all the rage after the war.

We had quite a night and I drove with her down to Western's big lot, out on Miller, as they called the 147 then. We said tender goodbyes in the cab but then I realized that I wouldn't have the fare back to town.

I didn't want to look like a cheapskate in front of Doris, I think that was her name, so I conned her into thinking I wanted to see her work. When we got near to the checking off point – it was six in the morning – this assistant director guy was really narked because the light was right and there weren't enough extras to make a decent crowd.

Of course, I was glad to walk through, change hat and coat and stroll back with Doris making up for the lack of fresh people on the 'street'. Some other stuff with Chris Channing and old Walter Mountford was going on at the time but I never paid any attention to it. We had to walk through about six times before they got it right, I remember that. I also remember that we were paid off right there and, as I recall, I blew it all on another night with Doris. An indefatigable one, as I think I remember it.

Which doesn't move the story forward about Timmy, does it? I found the 'extra' scenes easy to do after Doris – no, it was Dora – Dora Purcell. She did finally make it as an actress in a few B movies in supporting roles. Well, it was Dora who got me onto a few lots and making a little money, even picking up some of the vernacular of the trade. But it was Timmy who pulled me up the next step. At the time, I never knew what a big step it was, from 'extra' to 'speaking part'. I was really green in every aspect of the business.

It was on the set of *London Calls* that I saw this slim, blonde girl. She had a speaking part, a girl friend to one of the main actors, I think. We came off the set together, me after a casual walk through as usual. She looked me right in the eye, how bright and blue they looked, her mouth really red, and then she did this very funny double-take as she looked at me. Then she blushed and looked down and away from me.

She obviously knew me from somewhere and was very embarrassed at seeing me again. She turned away, her lovely pearl earrings bobbing, I don't know why but I saw that she had pierced ears and her silk dress swirled about her legs, nice legs even if they were thinner than I usually liked them. I liked stockings with straight seams up their calves on my girls and that was what she wore above black, shiny-leather high heels.

She was supposed to go back into the scene but she flubbed it. The director, it was Mike Kane, as I recall, got real mad at her and chewed her out right there. She was trembling and biting her lip, looking like she was little girl who might cry at any moment, but she glanced at me and I knew.

I mean I knew it wasn't the director's chewing her out that was affecting her so badly. No, it was me, that's what it was! She was shocked, scared, upset, by the sight of me. Then some big, old guy, to me that's what he was, came out of the crowd. He was mostly bald with some white hair and wore glasses. Later, I found out that he was the producer, Joseph Mann.

Mann said something real cold to the director – I didn't catch it, like his name – but it stopped the ranting right there. Some guy next to me said, "Don't fool with the producer's girl, right?" and then he laughed.

"Right," I agreed, staring at the girl, trying to figure out where I had seen her before. I couldn't remember having a girl like her. Maybe without the makeup, I mused, but I'd have to have been hard up. I mean, she wasn't stunning or anything. That's the way I remember her then, pretty ordinary, for starlets that is, fitting in with the other girls around her.

We did the scene again and she gave me a wide berth. Next time, the star actress blew it and, boy, was the director ever different. He was so understanding but he did glare at the slim, blonde girl as if it was still her fault. When we finally got through that scene, a break was called while makeup was freshened and the leads got ready for the next group of scenes.

The slim girl would have walked away from me but I grabbed her arm. There was real fear on her face when she turned to look up at me. Then she looked down fearfully, her eyelids all blue eye shadow, her eyebrows really thin and finely shaped.

"Look, you," I said, more roughly than I intended.

"Please," she whispered in that funny sort of voice she'd used in the film. "Please don't say anything. Please let me go."

I was mystified. I held onto her arms, while she just shivered in front of me, looking at the ground, her white-gloved hands holding on to her purse.

"I'm not going to say anything," I said

Her mouth formed a pretty, red 'O' in relief and she gave me a quick look. "Thanks," she said huskily.

"For now," I added as she tried to pull herself free of my hands and get away.

She had turned partly away. Now she turned back and gasped. I saw her in profile and, I don't know how or why, but suddenly it hit me. I remembered that so polite gunner who always said "Thanks" just that way, you could almost never hear him, Timmy Lindemann.

II. JENNIFER STERLING

As the thoughts reached from my mind and were projected onto my face, as I realized just who the 'girl' who I had my hands on must be, so 'she' must have seen the recognition bursting out of me. She wrenched free of my hands and darted away, through the crowd of extras and technicians.

I was absolutely floored. Tim Lindemann? Here? In a dress! Dressed up like a girl! A hot flush went through me, and I know I shuddered. One of the light men noticed and said something about it being real cold for the time of the year. I nodded, still dumbfounded. I didn't know what to say or who to tell. As I thought about it, I didn't even know if I had to tell anyone. Then, as I thought more about it, I knew I had to tell someone. I mean people can't do that, can they? Not in movies!

I didn't get a chance to tell anyone anyway. As I was heading with the crowd to B stage where the paymaster hung out, I saw 'her' standing on the steps of the trailer talking to the old, bald guy, the one someone had said was the producer. I remembered the remark then about 'her' being the producer's girl. The old guy had his hands spread out and was shrugging. She looked about ready to cry. She pulled a little hankie out of her purse, turned and almost walked right into me as I bore down on 'her'.

The bald guy had gone into the trailer and I thought more about what that guy had said on the lot. The producer's girl? Ugh, I thought of her with him. Perverts, that's what they were. I imagined Timmy simpering after him the way 'she' was supposed to simper after her boy friend in this little pic we were making. Awful!

"Well, Tim," I sneered at 'her'. "You got a lot of explaining to do, don't you?"

'She' closed her pretty, feminized eyes as if she was in pain, or, possibly, as if she was conjuring up a spell to make me vanish. She opened her eyes and I was standing there looking 'her' up and down. I couldn't believe the fancy, female stuff she was wearing.

He must have shaved his legs, Timmy boy, just like a woman, to have legs that looked that smooth in nylons like those. He must be wearing a garter belt, too, to keep them up, and that curvy waist? Must be he was wearing some kind of corset under the silk dress. He had on open-toed high heels I could see now as he faced me and his toenails were painted red.

He'd taken off a glove to go into his purse and I could see that his fingernails were like his toenails in color, a deep scarlet red, but his fingernails were also long and pointed, shaped like a girl's. They hadn't been like that when I had passed him pints of beer to share with the crew in England.

Timmy had such a nice, slim figure, too, not buxom, but definitely there beneath the clingy, yellowish silk that also set off his golden-streaked hair. I had noted how slender he was in the shoulders when he was firing a gun in the belly of the aircraft I flew. I wouldn't have mentioned it to him. It would have been insulting to him as a man. As a woman, he looked to be shaped pretty well, slimmer than I liked most of my girls. 'She' was fashionably slim, I suppose, though I'd call it thin, really.

"There's noth-nothing to explain," Timmy said hoarsely, as the crowd went away from me, in search of their paychecks. He was trying so hard to keep his voice at a high pitch while I grinned, evilly I'm sure, at him in his pretty yellow dress, trying so hard to be womanly to his old crewmate.

"You were a boy when you served in the One-Six," I sneered at 'her'.

She was remarkably composed. "Yes, Lee," she said, and her eyes met mine, sadly, defiantly, for the first time, really. A strand of long hair drifted across her cheek and in a feminine manner, she pushed it back into place. "I was a boy then but now I am a girl." Her voice was incredible. I had expected it to be all squeaky like the girl she was playing in the movie but it wasn't. It was actually pleasant, like an educated woman's, a controlled, womanly soprano.

I was stunned. I mean, it was if someone had clobbered me with a two-by-four! I mean, that couldn't be! It was downright unnatural! It couldn't happen. Then I realized what this 'nancy' was saying, this queer, this pervert. I drew back my shoulders to deck him and I think I would have punched 'her' in her lipstick when suddenly she dropped her eyes and seemed to slump, too.

"Go on," she said quietly. "Go ahead, Lee, the macho man. I deserve it, don't I, for being so different. Hit me and tell everyone what a hero you are! Saving the world from queers like me."

"What?!" I sneered again. My fist stayed down.

"Beating up queers is what we servicemen did for kicks, wasn't it? I suppose the present day soldiers and airmen do it, too, since we taught them, didn't we?" 'she' asked bitterly, her voice steady and becoming once more that 'normal', female voice. "I saw it happen in London more than once. We always bought drinks for the heroes after they rid the bars of the 'puffs', didn't we?"

A little breeze was wafting her blonde hair about her neck and face. I seemed to gain then the aroma of a very feminine scent, delicate, like roses. I realized, in dismay, that it was 'her' scent. She smelled like a woman! I swallowed very hard, repelled but fascinated, I can recognize that in me now, by this feminine figure in front of me, a feminine figure whom I had drunk with and pounded on in all the stupid games airmen, so relieved that they aren't dead yet, play on each other. This 'girl' was a serviceman, for goodness sake, who had slept in the same barracks as me in the Services.

"Timmy Lindemann," I said slowly, watching the darkly madeup, vivid eyes wince slightly as she watched me fearfully and my still balled-up fists.

"Jennifer Sterling," 'she' said, her voice pitched lower but not unfeminine at all. "That's what I call myself today."

I gulped again. I mean, what do you say to a female impersonator who really wants to be taken to be a pretty female. Small talk about our war experiences was definitely out.

'She' was the one to glance around. "Everybody's gone," she said. "Didn't you have money to pick up, too?"

I nodded. I hadn't noticed. Now I would have a hard time getting my pay for the day. How could I prove to the paymaster that I had been there, one of the crowd? I had no contract and they didn't look at the rushes.

We were in the middle of B Street, having edged away from the trailers. The cavernous B Stage was deserted, I could see that and a glance back at the trailers where 'she' had come from showed no lights. I remembered the old, bald guy.

"So you're the producer's girl friend?" I asked with a leer, starting off to where the paymaster usually was. Who knows? He might remember me.

"W-What?" Jennifer Sterling gasped and I could hear her high heels clicking on the tarmac as she scurried after me. She grabbed my arm to hold me back as I headed into B Stage. "What, what, did you say?"

"You're the producer's girl friend, honey," I sneered yet again as I easily stepped away from Jennifer's frail grip and went on to B Stage. "Everyone calls you that," I shouted over my shoulder as I jogged across the setting for some desert B movie 'epic'. Even though I

ran, there was no-one there, nor on E Avenue. The guards said I was the last coming through and sort of pushed me out of the wire gates so that they could lock up.

Timmy, Jennifer, whoever, was waiting for me at the end of the long walk, past the parking lots, that led down to Miller Street proper. She sat behind the driver's wheel of a chrome-finned Chevy. I'd lost Dora in talking to 'her' and was resigned to a long wait for a bus back to town.

She rolled down the window as I stopped and glared at her. She'd cost me a day's pay and a ride. "I-I'll give you a r-ride b-b-back to t-town," the guy who called himself Jennifer Sterling stammered to me.

I didn't want to ride with the little queer. It would have been bad enough if he hadn't been dressed in such expensive women's clothing, his hair womanly and his face made up like a woman's. But what they say, I thought grimly. At least, I could save the fare, more drinking money, and be back in town at least an hour earlier, too.

"D-did you say anything, t-to anyone?" Jennifer/Timmy asked, nervously checking her mirrors, as we sedately went at five below the limit along Miller. I could guess that the little 'femme' didn't want to be stopped by any big, burly policemen.

I admired her silk stockings and shapely legs again, neat and trim ankles and smooth, rounded calves, slim and not muscled like a guy's, like most airmen and GIs I knew. I let her suffer for a little while.

"Say anything about what?" I finally said, playing really dumb.

Jennifer gave me a fierce glance, her first real look at me since I had gotten into her car. Despite the makeup and long hair, I could see Timmy Lindemann in 'drag' in that look.

"You know," she said, turning back to concentrate on the Studebaker in front of us that was just ambling along, ten below the limit. As I expected, she was too timid to pass. "A-About me being a man," she said at last as I still took my own sweet time about answering.

"Oh, that!" I exclaimed. I was going to lie and then, I thought, heck, Timmy might start doing something stupid and speed up the car. I let the little fruitcake down easily. "Who'd believe me?" I asked. "And who could I have told in such short a time anyway?"

'Jennifer' thought about it for a while. She dropped back even more behind the Stude as traffic began to pick up slightly going out of town. "I would like to mention something to you," she said suddenly, jerkily, as if she had been thinking something over for a while and didn't quite know how to say it.

"You do want to get into pictures, don't you?" she went on in a rush before I had a chance to cut her off. "I-I can get you a bit of a break since, well since, since I know Mr, Mr Mann. He, he can get you a, a bit part in Sierra Wind."

For a moment, Jennifer Sterling took my breath away. I was impressed. Joseph Mann usually had one or two movies shooting on different lots at all times. Sierra Wind had started shooting on Western's back lot. There was a permanent Western town there as one oater after another followed in production there. The extras there were almost permanently employed. Dora had told me that it didn't matter if I could ride. I shouldn't bother to apply there. There were too many cowboys around the movie lot as it was. I'd never be able to get a job there, Dora predicted, not that I cared.

"If, if that works out," the girlish Jennifer Sterling babbled on, her voice rising in pitch, almost squeaking in her nervousness, I think, "I-I know it's only three or four lines but I could t-talk again t-to Mr Mann."

"Your sugar daddy," I interrupted her and she was startled.

"Oh, he's not," she said and I could see her blush as she clenched the wheel. She wore one white glove that concealed the pretty, painted nails I had seen earlier. The car wobbled as she sped up and we finally passed the Studebaker and swerved back into the driving lane. "He's, he's just, just someone who knows m-me."

"Well," I said, amused by what 'Jennifer' said but not believing a word. I idly wondered what they got up to in bed at night and then figured that I really did not want to know. "Thanks, Miss Sterling," the car wobbled again as I emphasized the words. "But no thanks."

Jennifer Sterling was really surprised and upset. It was amazing how easy it was to think of her by that name and not as Timmy. She seemed paler to me and she gripped the wheel even more firmly.

"You don't have to worry," I said. No, I didn't want to be beholden to someone like the little fruitcake Timmy Lindemann had become. "I won't fink on you, Miss Jennifer Sterling, nor on your sugar daddy."

I had let the disgust reach my voice. I was pleased to see that I reached 'her' and that she was hurt, too. The hand without the glove showed white knuckles in vivid contrast to her shaped, so red, lacquered nails.

"And when I need a break," I finished. "I'll get it myself, not from some fairy and some fairy-loving morphredite freak."

I stopped, not caring for the way I sounded. We drove the rest of the way in silence. I think Miss Jennifer Sterling was shaking when she let me off on Hollywood. She wouldn't look at me as I saluted her like we did in the Services in thanks and headed off to Morton's where they had television. You could watch the afternoon ball games from the east and bet on them if you felt like it. I was still pretty flush after all, following the days I'd worked.

III. PAYOFF

That night, a messenger from Western left a package for me at the rooming house on La Jolla. In it was a contract for four weeks work on Sierra Wind. There was a script for me to read as well. 'Jennifer Sterling' had lied. The speaking part actually had seven lines. I was also in several scenes, part of the crowd, and I knew how to do that.

I did hesitate before I signed it, knowing that I was being bought off, but that was the way it was in California in those days. And, what the hay, two hundred a week regular for four weeks was top dollar since I also got my meals for free. If she wanted to buy me off, or her sugar daddy did, why shouldn't I let them? I had no intention of ratting on 'her'. Who did I know who would care, anyway? It wasn't like she was Hepburn or anything like that. And, also, I didn't think that I would ever see 'her' again.

Jennifer Sterling, geesh I had a hard time thinking of 'her' that way, hadn't told me that she was also in Sierra Wind. She was one of the dance hall queens. How appropriate, I thought sardonically, when I first heard her described that way. I caught her looking at me and she seemed to read my mind for she looked quite ill for a moment.

It was quite a sight to see 'her' and these other girls doing a can-can on the stage of the 'Last Chance' saloon. 'Jennifer' fitted right in. It was supposed to be the girls singing and I wondered how she would fake that but they all did, fake it, I mean. The singing was really done by a little group of fat, old ladies (really!), who did the squeaky, 'cutesy', little girl voices the girls mimed to.

It was kind of neat to watch, particularly when they swished their skirts up over their heads, petticoats too, and revealed their stockings, black garters and frilly panties, all the time wiggling their pretty fannies. I got a charge out of it, I can assure you and I think a lot of the guys around the stage did, too. The girls were hit on by the guys after the shooting ended and I could see that they enjoyed it, too, breathing heavily, their bosoms rising and falling after the fifth run-through for whatever reason.

I watched Jennifer being propositioned by a cowboy bit actor, a guy like me, and she turned him down prettily before she froze seeing me watching her, a knowing smile on my face. Being the producer's girl would make that easy for her to turn down persistent guys. I thought of going over and making her life miserable but then I did have the job because of her and so I left her alone as another guy approached her and put his arm about her thin shoulders.

Jennifer Sterling wore a wig with masses of blonde hair and it suited her which is why the guys were trying to hit on her, I expect. She had pink flowers also in her hair to match the pink and black, can-can dress she wore. She was very heavily madeup which enhanced her average looks and made her sort of beautiful. Even I thought so. The beauty spot by

her mouth was also intriguing. I had to shake myself for a moment and stop contemplating the things she showed about her as if she was a girl, really. I did, after all, know better.

I was surprised at how well she danced with the other girls, showing off her stockings and garters as she smiled as if she was really enjoying it like the other girls. I watched when it came to the part where they turned their backs and threw their dresses over their heads and wiggled their derrieres in their pretty, white, frilly panties. I lost track for a moment and couldn't tell which one was Timmy and which the real girls. I saw the movie when it came out and they really cut the scene in editing. I guess it was a little too sexy for the censors then.

"They all look pretty good," I heard the director say after the fifth take to an assistant. "We'll have them do one more and see if we can pick one out as the best." It was stupid, I thought, but I didn't mind. The brunette girl on the end of the line, Dolores, had smiled at me as several guys tried to get her to sit at their tables in the makeshift bar we'd setup way off the set.

Jennifer finally talked to me after the second week when I was sitting in the bar having a coffee, bored out of my mind with waiting for the lighting to be right for some outdoor, background shots. I'd already taken out Dolores and Anita from the dance hall queens, and laid them both, and was angling for Connie, the most buxom of the group, though she was everybody's favorite.

Jennifer also had a coffee and was leaving the mobile cafeteria line, cup in hand, a dark raincoat over her pretty pink dance hall dress, pink flowers in her hair, when she saw me. She froze a little but there was hardly anyone sitting at the tables and so she couldn't pretend she hadn't seen me. I think she had done that a few times before.

She hesitated and I waved to 'her' to come over. Jennifer came warily and sat down gracefully, smoothing her dress beneath her, the rustle of her petticoats such a feminine sound. It produced goose bumps on me. I wondered idly what it was like for her. And then thought of her underwear, the black stockings and frilly white panties. Ooh, that must be something else for a 'girl' like 'her'.

"H-How are you, Lee," Jennifer asked very nervously. It was that female voice again. It was similar to the Timmy I had known but it was also very different. Although it was lower pitched at times than many of the girls' voices, it was definitely female-sounding.

"Fine," I said with a grin, looking her over. She blushed. "Things couldn't be better." I thought of the girls, dressed like her, whom I had dated. I leered at Jennifer and she winced.

"I thought you wouldn't be here," Jennifer began softly, gripping the cup in both hands and sipping from it like a woman. I admired her nails and hands, so feminine as well. "Not anywhere near me."

"I got over my stupid, male pride," I said cheerfully, only slightly emphasizing the word 'male' but I saw that she caught it by her slight grimace. "Not wanting to accept help from a woman," I added. "You know how it is."

I couldn't help the extra stress I also gave to the word 'woman'. Jennifer Sterling blushed again and the coffee cup trembled noticeably despite the feminine way she held it in both hands.

"Hey," I said, feeling a little sorry for my remarks. She had left me alone, hadn't she? "Don't take everything I say so personally. That's no way to be a big star. You might be a famous actress yet."

I was kidding her. There was no way she could be a leading actress. Some guy would only have to feel her up once in a clinch and she was a goner. And as for sleeping your way to the top, well, if this was all Joseph Mann was going to get for her, she'd never make it further.

"Some go in by the door marked 'Push'," Jennifer Sterling said, a shiver in her narrow, feminine shoulders and long, blonde hair. She nodded and glanced down, looking anywhere but at me, "and some go in by the door marked 'Pull'."

"Huh?" I said. Yeah, I'm a real smooth talker sometimes.

"It's a quote from Winston Churchill," Jennifer said, giving me a quick glance with those heavily outlined, black-painted eyes, the blue seeming brighter by the enhancements of feminine eye makeup, like eye shadow and mascara. I noticed how thin and shaped were her eyebrows. If she had had those in the One-Six, I thought, she'd never have made it out of basic training.

"Mr Mann has seen the rushes," Jennifer went on, the tiniest of shakes revealing what must be her inner tension at talking to me. "He thinks you have quite a presence. He, he suggests you take drama lessons, Lee. You, you aren't already signed up with anyone, are you?"

Me? Drama lessons? I was staggered. I know I laughed at Dora and Dolores as they talked about their teachers and hurried off to classes in the evenings and at weekends, cutting into my time with them. Which is why Anita, if you were wondering, when Dolores just had to go to her class. It struck me hard. Joseph Mann thought I had some talent, no, not that, 'presence'. That was what Jennifer had said. What the heck was that?

A slight smile crossed her scarlet lips as she now looked at me, trying to find out how I would react, I guess. Jennifer should easily have been able to read the astonishment in my face. I didn't conceal it. She carefully set down her cup. She had been carrying a tiny purse dangling from a bracelet, enough for a lipstick and compact, I thought. She opened it and took out a card. She passed it gracefully, like a woman, to me, her hand soft and smooth as she touched me. That made her hand jump back to her lap as if she had been electrocuted.

Some actress, I thought. Miss Jennifer Sterling was definitely going to have to learn to touch a man if she had any dreams of being any kind of movie star. She was going to have to learn more than just touching a man, I thought sardonically. I looked at her beautifully painted lips and wondered how she, Timmy as she used to be, would get along in the love scenes that all actresses had to go through.

The card read, 'Edwin Bird, teacher of dramatic arts.' I'd heard others talking about Bird. He was supposed to be very, very good. Only took on the best, it was said. Could make anyone a star, others agreed. But he wasn't taking on anybody new these days, said another.

I turned the card over and it had a signature on the back. It took me a while to work out that it said 'Joseph Mann', so fancy were the letters. I thought it might be what they called Gothic script or it might be German. I had seen similar lettering on many war souvenirs.

"Edwin teaches me, too," Miss Jennifer Sterling, budding actress, said carefully. Why was I not surprised? "But, but don't worry, Lee. You won't be seeing me for a while now and certainly not at Edwin's. I, I have some, some work to do before you see me again."

Jennifer sounded so anxious that I wanted to reach out and take her hand and find out what was troubling her so much. She stood up and swished away from me, taking off her coat and disappearing into a crowd of girls dressed just like her, in frilly pink skirts and black garter belts and stockings. Luckily, I remembered who she really was and so I saved both of us from a great embarrassment. Or so I thought.

IV. JENNIFER'S PROPOSAL

I started with Edwin Bird the following week, on my day off from filming. I tried to ask him about 'Jennifer Sterling', but he just stared at me as if I had committed a huge mistake, like missing lines in his sketches. Then, a second time and he got very angry and made me work harder and harder.

I'm always described as Bird's last protégé, which is true, by and large. But then, most people aren't aware, as I am, that it was Bird who transformed Timmy Lindemann, son of a producer he owed favors to, into 'Jennifer Sterling', actress. Bird finished with me long before he finished with 'her'.

Bird never spoke to me of Jennifer's past though he knew I knew who 'she' really was. That's why, I think, he worked us together so intensively, more for 'her' benefit, I thought with some conceit at the time. Now, I'm not so sure. I learned how to play to 'her', a woman I knew was a man. From that, I guess, I learned how to act to anyone in any part they cast for me.

Should I list now the dykes and lizzies I played to as if I really was in love as the script said I was? Or the other old bats I had to make up to in order to make it big in this business? Still, that's what film acting is all about, isn't it? Detesting someone and making everyone else believe that you really love them. I fooled many of the old bats, too, thanks to those sessions Bird put me through with Jennifer. It was worse for her, I know.

After Sierra Wind, however, I didn't see Jennifer Sterling again for a year. My movie 'career', though I didn't think of it that way, began to inch forward. I got bit parts in other films at Western, not always produced by Joseph Mann. The first few were, though, and I was well on my way to being the first henchman, sidekick to the real actor who played the principal villain, in B movies.

Edwin Bird ignored that, however, and worked me by myself and in groups, on stuff I could barely read. He made me go outdoors and rant for hours, working on speeches from Shakespeare, O'Neill, Goethe (in translation), or poetry, and then I'd turn and there he was watching me. He talked to me more about the poets and their intent than how to say the lines and then he would have me do it again, tell him about the author and what he wanted, and do it again, and again.

I asked him why once and he said I was learning to 'get the English right'. Then it was dialects, and Williams, or maybe it was Mark Twain, Fitzgerald and *Gone with the Wind*. It was a heady period of my life. It was my education, I realized later, and it was then that I also began to think about the future. For goodness sake, I did have a shot at being a real actor if I could only produce and control the 'big' voice Bird was trying to get out of me.

At first, I didn't recognize Jennifer Sterling when she came back to Edwin Bird's. She was sitting demurely on Bird's studio sofa when we entered his workshop after spending time outdoors again.

"Today, we work with the big voice," said Bird in his Mid-European accent. "But we see how you control it when you play to another, to a pretty woman," he indicated the blonde on the sofa. "What happens to that big voice with her to distract you?"

The blonde smiled and didn't lift her eyes to acknowledge me. Despite her bulky blouse, her tight skirt and wide waist belt, I could see that she had a most curvaceous figure. She wore her hair in the pageboy style so popular then and was wearing very little makeup.

She looked up and smiled at me, her lips soft and pink and very, very kissable, I thought. Oh, those would distract me, I thought. Then, I'm sure, my eyes must have seemed to bug out of my head, just like in a cartoon. She was Jennifer Sterling. But this was a Jennifer whom I would never have known was Timmy if I hadn't seen her as Jennifer before, or him as Jennifer before.

It's too complicated, this 'he' and 'she' stuff. From now on, I'm going to refer to Timmy as Jennifer, call him 'she', and use 'her' to describe him. After all, I never saw her as

Timmy again and I never saw Tim in any of the gestures she made or the looks she gave me. From that time at Edwin Bird's, she was Jennifer Sterling and I didn't think of her as anyone else. Well, almost all of the time, anyway.

Jennifer had had subtle work done to her face. Her nose was thinner and bobbed a little, a very feminine nose and it so altered her looks. She'd had something done to jawline, to her chin and even her brows. They were definitely flatter, not jutting out, like mine.

When she stood, I realized, too, that she had also done something to her body. She was still slim but her hips were wider, I was certain and her chest? Could it be, could it really be real? Did the movement and swaying of two definite breasts and the cleavage I saw at the v-neck really be real? Could he really have been changed into a she?

Jennifer didn't help me at all. We were straight into Bird's improvisations and she was a delicate maiden. "My lord and master," she said in a clearer, higher, more confident voice, a lovely female voice, in fact.

I flubbed what I had to say which exasperated Bird. We had to do it again as Jennifer went through a series of different types of female responses in male 'heroic riffs' that Bird used all the time in class to break down our preconceptions of male and female roles. Jennifer's humble, graceful, sly femininity deflated my pomposity several times which pleased Bird.

He had us do the first scene from Romeo and Juliet which I fumbled so badly, my voice all over the place as I sounded like a teenager seeing a girl for the first time just as his voice was breaking. Bird had a twinkle in his eye as he laughed at me.

"He was not prepared, this one, for such a ravishing Juliet," Bird said gallantly, helping a blushing Jennifer to her feet as I remained gibbering, trying to recall the next line.

"Nay, tis not so, my lord," said Jennifer, improvising easily. She curtsied in her tight skirt to the older man, who seemed delighted, then kicked off her high heels and put her arms about him and gave him a big hug. For a moment, I was jealous. Then I was astounded that, even for a moment, I could be jealous in regard to Jennifer Sterling.

I began my Romeo lines again but Bird waved me off. "Enough for today, Mr Otis. Enough," he intoned to me like a Gregorian chant. We had worked on those the week before. To increase my range, Edwin said. He was patting Jennifer's back, holding her against him and looking at her most fondly.

"And for you too, my darling Jenny," he said, hugging her back as Jennifer smiled at him. "Bring me the scripts of your father's big project and we'll run through it with the young gunslinger here."

I felt like an idiot. Lindemann. The spelling alone should have given it away. Joseph Mann. Jennifer's father, of course. He had just dropped the first part of a surname that sounded too German. I wondered what Bird's name had been before he changed it?

Jennifer's father had to be Joseph Mann. No wonder he would do anything to keep his daughter from being exposed as his son. I don't know why but I felt a lot better looking at her and thinking that she didn't have a sugar daddy after all, just a daddy.

Jennifer and I left together and I noticed her nervousness return for the first time. Her Chevy was parked next to my Ford on the street in front of the low, three-storey building that had Bird's studio on the first floor.

"I can't give you a lift then," Jennifer said and her smile was bright. She waved to me gently, just lifting her hand as women do.

"Hey, Jennifer," I called after her as she looked like a perfect woman in silhouette as she unlocked her car. "I just have to ask," I said as I went up to her. I blurted it out. "What's happening to you?"

"Well," she smiled and a dimple appeared in the smooth, creamy skin of her cheek, "I have the second female lead in Bachelor Suite."

"No, not that," I snapped at her pretty face. Yes, Jennifer was now pretty. She'd be a standout among all the girls that I saw trying to get parts at the studio. "That's not what I meant. You know what I'm talking about."

I wanted to know how she had become so female, so rounded, so much of a woman that I was having a hard time not making a pass at her. Was it possible that she had really changed? No, that couldn't be. I'd known Tim in the war anyway. But I didn't have any doubt that the girl in front of me had once been Timmy Lindemann, a machine-gunner in the US Air Force.

"Do you think I would tell you here?" Jennifer asked lightly, arching a thin, shaped eyebrow. There were people on the street and a car hovering, waiting for the parking spot.

I took her by the arm and waved the car off. "Over a drink then," I said brusquely. Jennifer was startled as I took her keys and took her to the passenger side of the car. "We'll take your car," I said as she got in nervously, swinging her shapely legs in gracefully. "I'll get a cab back for mine."

Only when we were driving, me behind the wheel of her car, putting it through its paces as she never did, did I realize how much I was treating her like a woman, and yet I knew!

Dunbar's Rest has private booths, surrounded by wood-framed Tiffany-like mosaics, lots of plants and as it promises, a quiet, restful atmosphere. Though Jennifer hadn't noticed, I'd seen the admiring looks the waiter gave her as we were escorted to a table in the restaurant. I'd requested a quiet booth far from the piano, and that's what we got.

She took off her gloves and laid them on her purse while I ordered martinis, very dry. Jennifer smiled at my order. We'd regarded martini-drinkers as British 'poofsters' during our stint in England.

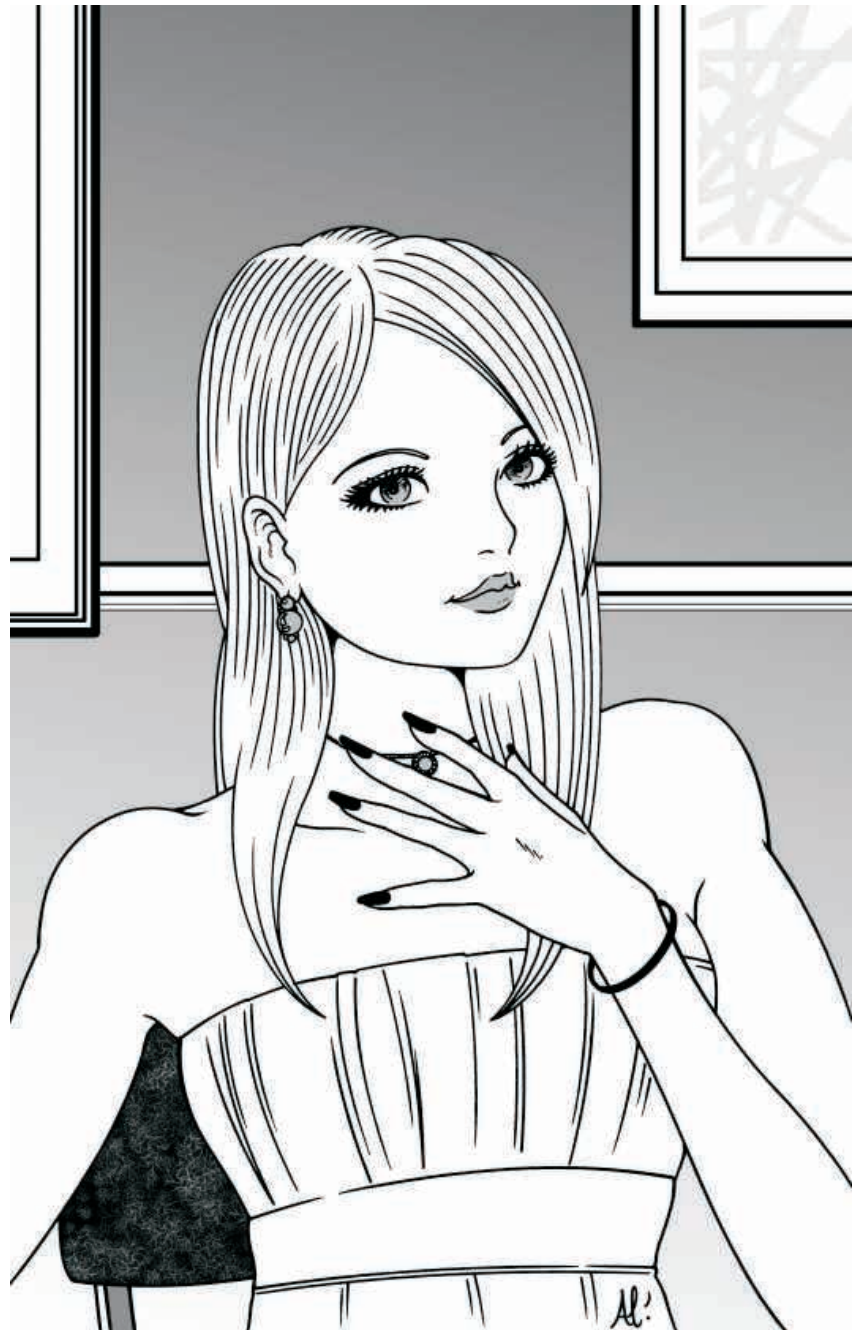
"So I've changed my drinking habits," I said. "You've changed a lot more than I have. You were going to tell me about it."

The blonde-haired Jennifer Sterling flicked her long hair back about her neck and gave me a look of surprise. "I was?" she said quietly. She was expertly made up. The mascara was not overdone, nor her eye makeup, as she had for the movies we had been in together. Her eye makeup was light but it was her skin that was so changed. She seemed healthier. There was a soft glow to her face that couldn't all be makeup, surely. Her lipstick was a subdued shade of red but I couldn't have named it. Her fingernails matched. Her jewellery was smaller, too, little golden bells at her ears and a thin necklace with a small, golden charm.

"Well," Jennifer said, toying with the olive on its toothpick. "Well," she said again, looking up at me. She licked her lipstick nervously and then plunged in. "You can see by my face that I had to be away quite a while." Her gorgeous blue eyes regarded me steadily.

"You've had surgery," I said, pressing.

She nodded, her earrings moving gently on her ears. "On my nose, of course," Jennifer said slowly. Lots of girls were having their noses done, I knew. Plastic surgery had come a long way after



the war. She touched her lovely, smooth neck. "The adam's apple, of course, my vocal cords, and here and here, shaving the bones back."

I grimaced as she said that. No wonder she had been away so long. She must have had her face laid open but I could see no scars.

"Electrolysis on my skin, removing all my hair. I don't have to shave any more," she went on. "Dr Gerhard is such a wonderful surgeon, years ahead of his time. Of course, his clinic is in Mexico, so I had to go there. My father has helped to set him up there since the war is over."

"I finally figured that out," I said as if it hadn't been just hours earlier. She gave me a nice smile then.

"Only child," Jennifer said softly. "Daddy spoils me."

I ordered more drinks. Our waiter hovered, making sure that everything was all right for her. He seemed completely bemused by Jennifer's fragrance, that delicate hint of rose blossoms about her. The waiter wasn't alone. So was I. He left very regretfully while she looked a little flustered.

"And the rest of you?" I asked, indicating her figure.

"Oh, come on, Lee," Jennifer murmured, blushing. "You must have come across a girl with false," she indicated her chest with a hurried gesture, "implants, that's the word."

Most of the girls I met with falsies put them in a drawer, I thought. If she had falsies, they were mighty good. Those I'd like to see, I thought, and again had to kick myself for thinking such about another man.

"I've known girls with falsies before," I agreed. "But you've done more." I was thinking of her rounded hips. That surely couldn't just be padding.

Jennifer shook her lovely blonde hair and sighed. "It's all padding, really," she said with a nervous blush. "Dr Gerhard wasn't sure it would be so good for me but he's pleased with the results, too. He thinks lots of other girls can benefit from the same surgeries now."

I didn't understand that. I never thought to ask her whom she meant by 'other girls'. I don't think we were talking the same language for a while.

"It does make me feel good, though, and I've been practising all the time," she went on earnestly, wanting me to understand her, I guess.

You hear what you want. I was somewhat relieved. Padding, I knew what that was, something you put in and took out. I heard Jennifer saying that she was a regular guy, really, who'd had plastic surgery, but underneath all that feminine shapeliness was Timmy

Lindemann, unchanged. Which was true. I just didn't understand what she meant by padding. I didn't know what they could put under the skin.

"I-I did come to Edwin's on purpose to see you today," Jennifer stammered, twisting the barely touched glass in front of her with both hands. I waited. "I-I was asked to put, to put, a proposal to you."

"I have an agent now," I said, which was true. I'd been in what, ten films in the last year, each part a little better, a few more lines, than the last. It was steady work and my agent said he was angling for parts in some really big cowboy movies that were going to be made in the upcoming year.

"You, you shouldn't be typecast as a cowboy," Jennifer said, still staring at her drink. "There's a part for you in Bachelor Suite, if you want to take it. I think they'll change the title because it is a film about a murder."

"Oh," I asked stiffly. "I don't need more parts from you. I'm not blackmailing you at all, am I?"

Jennifer shook her lovely, blonde hair. "No," she whispered. "You've been wonderful to me."

I gaped at that and the girl I now knew as Jennifer Sterling blushed as she used to when she had first seen me on the movie lot.

"You would play a doctor," Jennifer went on hurriedly. "He, he's actually the murderer so you get a range of emotions to play. Doctor Bird, Edwin, says that you are ready to branch out."

"Getting regular reports on your old Air Force buddy, are you?" I snapped. The hurt look on her feminized face was priceless. She could have been a woman, the way her bright blue eyes teared up.

It suddenly struck me. "What part do you play?" I asked.

Jennifer bit at her lower lip. "The doctor's wife," she whispered and I think she was blushing again.

"And we get to ...?" I asked suggestively.

Jennifer actually shuddered. She couldn't look at me but she nodded.

"How many times does the doctor kiss his wife?" I asked harshly.

"A, a lot," Jennifer whispered. She reached for her purse and gloves. "You, you're right. I c-can't do this." She stood up in a rustle of nylon and silk to go. I sensed her wonderful, feminine fragrance as well.