

Performance



Joanne Wilson

A "Her TV" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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PERFORMANCE

By Joanne Wilson

My name is Corey Markham. Ever since I discovered I could sing sweetly and in tune when I was twelve and was coerced into joining the school choir, I harbored an ambition to become a pop star. By the time I was fourteen I had put together a small, modestly talented band of school friends and was singing at school and other local functions. It was a start and I acquired a small group of local followers who came to all our gigs.

By the time I was around sixteen we were performing professionally, although to be truthful there was no way we could have made a living from what we were being paid. Our little band broke up because none of the others had any ambitions to go on with it. I was a singer only because I had never learned to play an instrument. I started looking out for existing bands who needed a singer, and I was eventually picked up by a group called “The Trumps.” They were good and we managed to get more work and slightly better pay.

I had a voice a little like a cross between Lou Reed and Michael Jackson, not really falsetto, not boy soprano but somewhere in between. Even after my voice broke it was still light and I could easily reach quite high notes. If I had a problem it was that I was not a very imposing figure on the stage. Although I was considered quite good looking, I was also small of stature and slightly built. But we had developed a good sound and found ourselves increasingly popular, performing cover numbers with a sprinkling of original songs written by other band members and myself.

After one gig in a nearby town we were approached by a woman who introduced herself as a producer with Monument Records. Her name was Julia Mathews; she was about 30 and a looker. She made us an offer which was simply too good to be true. She said if we could put together a collection of the right numbers she would put down a tape for us and perhaps press it into a CD. We were over the moon.

When I told my mother, she was astonished. She had been trying for years to convince me to get a proper job. I was sure we were on the verge of stardom and she caught my enthusiasm and decided to get behind us. My mother was a widow. I had been a late child; when I turned seventeen, she was already fifty-six. She had been a battler all her life and more so since my father died when I was only nine. She worked as a bookkeeper for a nearby grocery store and I knew, although she had doubts, she badly wanted me to succeed.

We assembled our material and Julia made an appointment for us with a studio and we cut the tape. It sounded pretty good and Julia convinced the record company to release it. Several live gigs were arranged for us to promote the record and although we always had a good turnout for these performances, we didn't

get much press or radio coverage and the record was only a modest seller. But it did well enough to convince Julia that we should persevere.

Julia had already become our greatest supporter and she was keen for us to do well. In her spare time, she elected herself our manager and worked on organizing gigs for us. We traveled far and wide at this time and, although we drew reasonably good crowds everywhere we went, the record remained a modest seller and the cost of our traveling meant we were not putting much in our pockets.

In private conversation with Julia she was sure that the problem was the band. She spent a year or so trying to convince me to quit the group and get together with a better known, more professional band. I was reluctant to do this because the guys and I had worked so hard as a team. But I was beginning to believe her. She also kept insisting that I needed a gimmick, some special thing which would produce strong PR and attract the crowds. She came up with some wild schemes during this time and although we talked them around, I remained unconvinced.

But while Julia and I were working on this, the boys in the band had independently decided I was the problem with the group and they showed none of my faithfulness by dumping me without notice. I was deeply hurt and turned to my mother and Julia for consolation. Mother went back to her old theme of trying to get me to quit the music industry and get work. But Julia was adamant that I could make it.

I had been without a gig for a month while she tried to get me together with another group to no avail. Then one afternoon while I was sitting at home moping and trying to write some songs she came bursting in, all smiles and full of enthusiasm.

“Corey, I have it,” she announced. “I know how we can make you famous and I’ve got the backing group.”

I’d heard this before but I was willing to hear her out.

“We need to do some gender bending,” she said eagerly.

“What? That’s old hat, Julia. You mean like Boy George and Bowie and the New York Dolls?”

“Well yes,” she said hesitantly, “but more so. Now don’t go silly on me and throw this out before you listen. I’ve found a group who are really good. Really, really good. And they need a lead singer badly.”

I leaned forward in the chair. “Uh huh. Go on.”

“It’s an all-girl group.”

“So?”

“I want you to join them.”

“What’s so special about a boy with an all-girl band?”

“Well that’s just it, that’s the gimmick. We will make sure they know you’re a boy but we’ll have you look like one of the girls.”

I blinked. “With makeup and stuff?”

“Yes but the whole way. These girls are all lookers and they present well. Not like the average scruffy band of today. I don’t mean they wear uniform gear or anything, but they dress well. Sort of classy tarty.”

I was beginning to catch on. “You mean I would look like one of them?”

“Exactly. A boy lead singer with a girl band who dresses as they do.”

“Don’t be silly, Julia. Are you seriously suggesting I should wear a dress and everything. I’d make a fool of myself.”

“Oh no you wouldn’t. You would look terrific. And it’s new. Not just playing at the gender bending bit but the whole hog. A glamorous boy.”

“The New York Dolls did that.”

“Not the same way. For a start, they looked like drag queens. You won’t. You’ll look glamorous and well-groomed and, well, very special.”

“Nonsense.”

“It’s not nonsense, Corey. Just imagine it. A truly lovely boy singer, using his own lovely voice, looking like a beauty queen, backed by a talented group of equally lovely girls.”

“But Julia how in heaven’s name are you going to make me look like a beauty queen?”

She smiled. “If I can do that, will you give it a try, meet the girls, work out with them?”

“God, I don’t know. It sounds mad.”

“It’s mad enough to work, honey. You want to be a star, don’t you?”

I thought for a moment. I did want to be a star very badly but this was crazy. I figured she would never be able to make me look good enough and then she would drop the idea.

“What do you want me to do?” I asked.

She grinned broadly. “Good boy. Ok right now, come with me. I’m going to turn you into a beautiful girl.”

I shrugged. “I’ll bet you can’t.”

I picked up my keys and I drove with her to her apartment. She talked as we drove.

“I think you’re underestimating yourself, sweetie. It’s probably a little difficult for a boy to accept that he might make a pretty girl but you have all the right attributes. I figure we’re about the same size so I’m going to get you into some of my things, something glamorous. You must let me do it all properly. OK?”

“OK, I guess,” I said unenthusiastically.

We arrived at her apartment, which I’d visited before. It was of moderate size but beautifully decorated with some class, which suited Julia’s style. I knew now that she was 31 although she looked younger. She was about 5’7”, my height, slim and attractive with good legs and a shapely body. Her thick natural blonde hair cascaded around her shoulders. Despite the difference in our ages, I was attracted to her as any young red-blooded male would be but I never made any moves in this direction. She was my manager. But as I followed her up the single flight of stairs to her apartment, watching those shapely legs in sheer black nylons and high heels, I experienced a very odd thrill to think that in a short time I would be wearing her clothes. It seemed somehow erotic and appealing, but I put the thought out of my head almost immediately.

Once inside she went to a linen cupboard, took out a towel and threw it to me.

“Take a shower,” she instructed. “Do you have any hair on your legs?”

“Yes, of course.”

“There’s a razor on the vanity. Take it into the shower with you and shave your legs. And your armpits. And your chest if you have chest hair. Show me your forearms.”

“God, is this really necessary?” I complained.

“Yes. Come on now. You promised. Show me your arms.” I did so. “They’re OK. You’re not very hairy. That’s good. How often do you shave your face?”

“About twice a week.”

“OK, do that too when you get out. And shampoo your hair and leave it wet. When you’re through, there is a house gown on the back of the door. Put it on and come to my bedroom.”

Grumbling to myself, I went into the bathroom. My hair was a couple of shades darker than Julia’s but about the same length. I spent half an hour in the shower accomplishing all her instructions. When I got out and dried myself, I was surprised how cool and smooth my legs were without their covering of fine hair. My chest had very little hair so that didn’t really feel any different. I shaved my face and reached for the house gown. It was white but it was clearly a woman’s garment. I put it on and padded out and along the hall to Julia’s bedroom. There were things — female things — strewn across the bed. I balked.

“All that?” I cried.

“Yes, all that. Come on, don’t be a wimp. This is for your future. But first, we have other things to do. Sit here.”

I sat at her dressing table with my back to the mirror. She picked up a bottle and sprinkled some liquid

onto her hands and wiped my face with them. It smarted.

“This is an astringent lotion. It closes up the pores.”

I sat there quietly while she toweled my hair and then began to roll strands of it onto hair rollers. I'd seen my mother do it before so I knew what was happening. Once this was done, she sprayed my hair with some kind of lotion and placed the bonnet of her hair dryer over my head and switched it on. She took out a pair of tweezers and began to pluck away at my eyebrows. I started to protest but she held up a finger and gave me a dark look so I shut up and sat quietly. She plucked away for some time. I worried that it would be obvious. Then, using all sorts of things which were only vaguely familiar to me, she began to makeup my face. This took about twenty minutes and she kept standing back to survey her handiwork and smiling happily. Finally she finished.

“OK, stand up. Don't look at the mirror yet.”

I did so. She proceeded to dress me. She gave me a pair of tight-fitting, high-sided panties first and I put them on under the house gown. Then the gown was shed and I was put into a black bra, sheer black pantyhose, and a pretty, soft black teddy. All this time I still had the dryer whirring again on my head and I carried the unit itself on a strap over my shoulder. She took out a pair of black high-heeled stilettos and placed them beside the dressing table stool.

“Put the gown back on, sit down again, and slip your feet into these. You can get used to the feel of them while I finish your hair.”

I sat and slid my feet into the shoes which seemed to fit just fine but felt very odd indeed. Julia removed the dryer and the rollers and spent another twenty



minutes brushing and combing my hair. On one occasion when I had my head down I became aware of my legs, exposed when the gown fell away. In the sheer nylon and clear of hair and with high heels on my feet, they looked like girl's legs. Pretty, feminine legs. I felt the same odd twang of pleasure I had felt earlier watching Julia climb the stairs. Julia finished with my hair and put the final touches to the makeup — lipstick.

“Up again,” she said. I stood and she took out of her wardrobe a full-length gown in gunmetal material which shimmered in the light. I stepped into it and she drew it up over my body, closed the rear zipper, and came around the front to adjust the shoulders and the wrist-length sleeves. I noticed that the skirt had a long slit in it which came way up my thigh. I still had not seen myself at this point but I felt quite strange. My legs had been a shock. Now I was aware of the feel of the teddy and the soft fall of the skirt along my legs. The feeling was not at all unpleasant. Julia had padded out the bra cups with a pair of stockings and I was conscious of the protuberances. While I was thinking about these strange feelings, she added a strand of pearls around my neck and some pearl clip-on earrings to my ears. Nothing if not thorough, this woman. She stood back and she was smiling.

“You’re going to very surprised,” she said in a sing song voice. “Take my hand.”

I did so and followed her, with a little difficulty in high heels, across the room to where there was a long mirror attached to the wall. I moved up to it and was immediately aware of this vision, this image, one which I at first didn't believe and then when I came to believe rocked me to my very foundations. I experienced an extraordinary rush of mixed emotions. Despite myself, I loved what I saw and this made me

fearful. Why I wondered, would I like it? I could see little or no signs of the ‘me’ I knew for nearly eighteen years. This person had finely arched eyebrows, glowing skin, sparkly eyes and rich, red, pretty lips. And the hair, normally lank and rather thin looking, had body and shape and style. The gown had a scoop neck and sat on the edge of my shoulders. My exposed upper chest was smooth and creamy. I had breasts — or appeared to. The gown skimmed my waist and touched my hips making me look curvier. My left leg was exposed by the slit almost all the way to my crotch. The oddest emotion of all was that I found this creature in the mirror attractive. She was tall and slim and very pretty. She had shape. She was all of the things I found attractive in Julia and other girls. All these things raced through my brain in just a few seconds. Suddenly I was aware of Julia at my side.

“I win, huh?”

“What?” I mumbled.

“You look perfect, don’t you?”

“Julia, I...” I didn’t know what to say.

“No cop outs now. You have to do it, Corey. You have the voice and the style and now you have the look. You will be an overnight sensation.”

“What will my mother say?”

“Does your mother want you to succeed?”

“Yes, of course, but...”

“She’d be home from work by now, wouldn’t she?”

“What’s the time?”

“Five-forty.”

“Yes.”

“I’m going to call her. I’ll send a cab for her. Let’s find out.”

She left the room with my protests ignored. My eyes were drawn back to the mirror. I just stood there staring and into my ears came the sound of wild cheering and cat calls and whistles. In the mirror I saw me, on stage, my arms raised, a wide smile on my face and in the background were five pretty girls, two with guitars, one on keyboards, one on drums and one with a sax. The cheers went on and on. I closed my eyes and when I opened them again the vision had gone but I knew that Julia was right. This would really work. The pretty girl in the mirror smiled at me. I turned around and began to pace back and forth. I had to learn to walk in high heels.

Julia came back into the room. “She’s coming over. I told her we had an idea we wanted to discuss with her. How do you feel?”

“It’s OK. You’re right, I know you’re right. This will work.”

She hugged me. “You’re beautiful.”

“I noticed,” I said, trying to smile.

“That gown is a bit over the top to greet your mother in. Take it off.”

She unzipped me. I removed the gown and she replaced it with a simple, black silky blouse and knee-length, straight black skirt. It didn’t, of course, make me look any less like a girl. While we waited for my mother, Julia decided to paint my nails and added a couple of rings and a bracelet watch. We waited then in the living room. When my mother arrived, Julia ushered her into the room.

“Mrs. Markham,” she said, proudly, “I want you to meet our latest superstar.”

Mother smiled and stared and then suddenly threw her hand up to her mouth. “Oh my God!” she exclaimed.

It took an hour and a half to get her to finally agree. Julia did all the talking. She was amazingly persuasive. I sat, nervously fidgeting or paced up and down, during which time I was self-consciously aware that Mother was watching me. But somewhere after an hour I began to hear her say ‘yes’ more than ‘no’ and, finally, I knew Julia had won. I knew because my mother stood up and came to me. I stood as she approached and she put her arms around me.

“Corey, I understand. It’s all right now. It was just a bit of shock that’s all.” She looked into my eyes. “Darling, I never had a daughter but if I had, I would have been very proud of her if she was as lovely as you are. Corey, you’re a handsome young man but you make a beautiful woman. Go get ‘em, darling.” She turned away from me. I was a little overwhelmed.

“Julia,” my mother said. “Is there anything I can do?”

“Do, Mrs. Markham?”

“Yes. Can I contribute in any way to my son...” She turned to me and smiled. “...and my daughter becoming a star?”

“Well, yes, there is actually,” Julia said. “Could we all sit down a minute.”

We did so.

“Corey, the girls in the band, which is called ‘Moonlighting’ by the way, are working out of town

until the end of next week. I want you to meet with them and I want you to do that as soon as they get back. I want you to meet them looking as glamorous and beautiful as you do now."

I sighed. Doomed.

"Mrs. Markham, Corey looks the part but he must play it as well. He must move, act and behave like a beautiful girl, a model even. We're not keeping any secrets here. When we put them together as an act, everyone will know that Corey is a boy, because we want them to, but they mustn't believe it. She must be stunning."

"She!" I screeched.

"Sorry, *he*. That's important too now that I think about it. He must be 'he' all the time."

"So what can I do?" Mother asked.

"I'm going to lend you some clothes, Corey. I don't want you out of them for a second. Clothes, makeup, hair, walking in heels; they all have to become second nature to you. That's where you can help, Mrs. Markham. Your son needs some lessons in becoming a complete young woman."

My mother stood up. "Well," she smiled. "I always wanted a daughter. It looks like I've got one, for a while at least."

Mother and Julia went off into her bedroom and I followed. Julia took down a large suitcase and began to pack it with items of her clothing; underwear, a couple of dresses, shoes, (all with high heels I noticed), skirts and blouses, makeup, everything.

I just stared forlornly, wondering what I got myself into. I had it in my mind that when they finished

packing, I would be allowed to change back into my male clothes to go home. But nooooo!

“I’m sure that’s enough for a bit over a week,” Julia said, closing the suitcase. She was speaking to my mother as though I was suddenly incidental to this exercise. “What do you think, Mrs. Markham?”

“Oh yes, I’m sure,” my mother concurred, “and please call me Loretta.”

They smiled at each other, these two women who were restructuring my life. “I’ll call you a cab,” Julia said.

“Wait!” It was my turn to speak. “I have to get out of these first.”

“Why,” Julia asked?

“Well...because... You mean you want me to go home like this? In public?”

“What’s so public about a cab?” Mother asked. “Besides you heard what Julia said. No boys clothes until we have you doing it all right.”

I was about to protest further but it was plain to see it would be a waste of time. Julia called the cab and we walked to the front door.

“Work at it, honey,” Julia said. “We have to make this a winner.”

Mouth dry and heart thumping, I accompanied my mother out to the curb. She carried the suitcase. That in itself was unusual. Normally I would have done so. There were a few people around but no one took any notice. Apparently the image I’d seen in the mirror was not unrealistic. The cab arrived a few moments later and the cabbie got out and took the suitcase from Mother and placed it in the trunk.

“Where to ladies?” he asked once we were aboard. I was pleased he couldn’t see me blush.

We were only ten minutes from home. Once we had arrived, Mother suggested I make room in my wardrobes and drawers for the extra clothes. Unpacking them I was, despite my misgivings, fascinated by the thought that I would be seeing quite a lot of them in the next week or so. I laid out the makeup on my dressing table. I would have to get used to using that as well. There was a pretty feminine nightgown and housecoat in the collection. Julia was being very thorough. When I’d put everything away I went to my full-length mirror. Nothing had magically changed. There was still a girl in the mirror and it was still me. The material of the blouse was see-through, and the straps of the bra and teddy showed through. I watched my ‘breasts’ rise and fall gently as I breathed. My eyes dropped to my hips, smoothly encased in the black jersey skirt and then further south to my legs in sheer stockings and high heels. I flicked back to my face and hair. I had been protesting this transformation instinctively. I was a boy, wasn’t I? But the truth was that I liked what I saw. The girl in the mirror was pretty. She was even sexy and I was certainly boy enough to appreciate that. This was exactly what I had felt when I had first seen myself in the glamorous gun-metal gown Julia had tried on me. I could see all sorts of reasons why her idea might work and I suddenly felt that dressing as a girl for a bit might not be all that unpleasant. I resolved to stop complaining and cooperate. It couldn’t hurt me, I thought. Through my thoughts, I heard Mother calling me.

“Coming,” I called back and went out to the living room.

She had made coffee and the steaming cups were sitting on the table with a plate of cookies.

“Let’s talk a minute,” she said and I sat down opposite her. “How do you feel about this?”

“I feel fine now,” I said. “At first I thought it was a crazy idea but I think maybe, it can work. Sure it’s a gimmick but most top stars have something like this going for them. Jackson may be mad but he’s huge. Prince may be more of a Princess in some ways but it hasn’t done him any harm. Tina Turner has her legs. Madonna is probably as weird as she appears to be. But it all works.”

“Yes, that’s about the way Julia put it. I’d have had different thoughts if you didn’t look so good. You make a lovely girl.”

“Thanks, I think.”

“What did you think when you saw yourself in the mirror?”

“I... well...I thought I looked pretty good. It was a surprise.”

“I believe you,” Mother grinned. “Well if we are going to do it, we must do it right. There’s lots to learn.”

“Sure, OK,” I shrugged. “So teach me.”

She laughed. “We’ll start in the morning before I go to work and we’ll continue after I get home. During the day you can practice. In the meantime you can begin by accepting some daughterly duties and help me get dinner.”

That night when it was time for bed, I undressed and put away the things I’d been wearing except for the pantyhose and panties which went to the laundry. I put on the nightie and house gown and the bedroom mules Julia had also provided and set to take off my makeup. I’d seen my mother do this many

times so it wasn't a difficulty and Mother had given me a jar of cleanser and moisturizer to use. I thought, watching myself for the first time, that I actually looked quite like a girl even without the makeup and especially with my hair still set. I went into Mother's room to say good night. She was in bed reading. She smiled.

"Gosh, it will take a little getting used to," she said, "but you still look quite pretty."

I smiled back, quite pleased with her compliment. I kissed her and returned to my room and slid into bed. The nightie felt so much nicer against my skin than my normal cotton PJs. I thought I could get used to this quite fast.

Mother woke me at seven with instructions to arrange breakfast while she prepared for work. While she was eating I had to shower and wash my hair again. We had to fit all this activity into the period before she left for work. I put on a white bra and panties and the house gown and mules and sat at the dressing table while she showed me, slowly and thoroughly, how to set my hair in rollers.

"Now I'm off," she said. "When I've gone I want you take the rollers out and do it again, then again after that. Keep your hair damp before you put the rollers in. When you think you've got it right, leave the rollers in for an hour or so until your hair is dry, then see what you can make of brushing it out into a style. You can dress then and," she smiled, "maybe use the day to do some housework for me. OK?"

I nodded. She collected her things together. I kissed her goodbye at the front door, went back to the dressing table, unrolled the hair rollers and repeated the exercise as closely as I could to the way she had done it. Then I let my hair down, brushed it out, dampened it and did it again. I left the rollers in this

time, then stood up and removed the house gown and thought what I might wear for a day at home. I chose a white cotton, sleeveless, day dress and put it on. I thought to wear no pantyhose and would have worn flat shoes, if had I any. Julia had left only heels and I gathered that this was to get me used to them. I slipped my feet into a pair of white courts, then wondered about makeup.

“I guess a girl would wear makeup at home,” I thought. “Mother does. But not much.”

I applied a small amount of mascara and filled in my lips with a soft red lipstick from the collection of three colors Julia had packed.

“No jewelry,” I thought.

When I checked the mirror again, the girl was still there. There was nothing unusual about the hair rollers. Mother often wore them around while her hair dried. I felt decidedly underdressed compared with what I had worn the previous day but I figured girls aren't always glamorous.

I set to then to do the housework. I turned on the radio and hummed along with the various tunes, feeling quite relaxed and pleasant. Mid-morning I checked my hair by letting go one of the larger rollers; finding it quite dry, I released the remainder and took up the hairbrush. I was, soon enough, quite proud of the result which looked as pretty as the effect Julia had achieved. I was so much more attractive with my hair done. I went into the kitchen and made myself a sandwich. I sat in the living room, picked up a copy of “Vogue” and began to thumb through it. I had never before read through a women's magazine but I found myself interested. Admiring various fashions, I suddenly realized I was wondering how I would look in this or that dress or gown. This female business was contagious. I had done all the housework that

needed to be done so I decided to begin to teach myself how to use cosmetics. I took the magazine into my bedroom, laid it down on the dressing table and began to experiment with various 'looks' by trying to copy the cosmetics ads. I would do one style, cleanse it off, then try another. I was genuinely surprised at how various colors and accents could change my looks. I became so engrossed in what I was doing I lost track of the time until I heard the front door key and realized it must be after five because Mother was home. She called and I responded and she came into my room.

"I've been working on various makeup styles," I said. "What do you think?"

"Very clever," Mother said. "And you've done a nice job with your hair as well."

"And I got all the housework done," I said proudly.

"Good girl," Mother beamed.

"Girl?"

"Well I can't really say good 'boy,' can I?"

"No I guess not," I said. But actually I was quite pleased. She was sort of right. I looked like a girl and I'd been doing girl things all day and I certainly felt like I imagined a girl would feel. So different it was from being a plain old, boring boy.

"Have you been wearing heels all day?"

"Yes I have."

"How are your feet?"

"Now that you mention it, a bit sore."

“Take them off then. Julia didn’t pack any flats but I think we’ll be the same size. There’s a pair of white flats in my wardrobe.”

Now my Mom may have been fifty-six but she didn’t wear “old” people’s clothes; her shoes were quite fashionable and I had no problem deciding that wearing them would not be out of place. I replaced the high heels with her flats with pleasure and they did fit quite well. I thought, perhaps, that most of her things would fit me. I stored away the knowledge for another time.

Before dinner she insisted on some deportment lessons and I spent some time walking and sitting, standing again and walking some more under her tutoring while she made comments and suggestions. Then we prepared a meal together.

“Same routine tomorrow,” she said. “Hair in the morning. The more you do it, the better you will get. And there’s no reason you shouldn’t practice your makeup skills. And think about what I’ve been telling you about your bearing and deportment.”

Julia rang after dinner to see how we were doing. I gave her news.

“I’ve been writing outline press releases all day,” she said. “It’s looking pretty good. I phoned Marion Chambers who is the leader of The Moonlighters this afternoon and told her what we were doing. She and the other girls think it’s a hoot. They’re really keen to meet you now. Keep at it, kiddo. I want a boy who is more girl than the girls. OK?”

“I’ll try, ” I said.

“Good girl,” she said and rang off.

Girl again! I was not offended.