

Excerpt from *Juliana, the novel*
by
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Chapter Eight

The limousine bumped and shook over the cobblestone on its way past Wanamaker's department store. We turned off Broadway onto Eighth Street.

"Max, you know we could have just walked. It's not far."

"Maxwell P. Harlington does not—"

"Walk when he can take a limousine and look like a complete donkey. I know."

"That wasn't exactly how I would have put it, but you have the spirit of the thing."

I opened the window trying to catch a breeze. I didn't feel comfortable driving in a limousine like a grand lady. Last week after work, I walked up this street to the Whitney Museum 'cause I don't know much about art and I wanted to educate myself. Sam's Deli was across the street so I got myself a cheap salami and cheese sandwich. It seemed to me that in a neighborhood where you could get a cheap salami sandwich, you didn't need to arrive in a limousine.

Timothy, our limousine driver, pulled the car over to the curb in front of an awning that said Tom Kat Klub. He opened the door for us. Timothy was a muscular man in a black jacket with a cap on his head. He bowed, "Good evening, Mr. Harlington. Evening, miss."

Max yanked the long coat off me and threw it in the backseat. Timothy drove off leaving me standing on 8th Street where everyone could see me in pants. Max held the door of the Klub open, and I slipped inside looking straight ahead so I wouldn't see people pointing at me. I followed close behind Max trying to keep my legs pressed tight together, but I kept knocking myself over.

This place was even smaller than the other club and not as bright. It was just as noisy, though. I hurried to sit down, relieved that sitting meant no one could see the bottom half of me. The ceiling fans whirred, pushing around the heat.

Max said this place was called a supper club and proceeded to order us two bologna sandwiches to go with our Manhattans. I learned much later that supper clubs had to serve food 'cause New York law required places serving liquor to also provide food even if it wasn't anything more than a crummy bologna sandwich.

Soon the mistress of ceremonies came out on the tiny round stage. She was the tallest lady I'd ever seen with big wide shoulders and big hands she flapped around like fans. She had blonde hair that was piled higher on her head than Miss Virginia Sales, and she wore a dress that twinkled. She winked at people in the audience and moved her hips like Mae West. I leaned over to Max, "I've never heard of a lady announcer before."

Max grumbled, "That's a man."

"Really?"

"I hate that. Men parading around like women. Undignified."

"That lady is a man? Wow!" I sat back in my chair. What an amazing place this New York City was.

The man dressed like a woman, the mistress—no, master of ceremonies—sang some Broadway show tunes that I knew from the radio. Then he told some smutty stories. Max looked all around the room like he was nervous about something.

We had to sit through a comic, a juggler, and a man singing love songs while sweat rolled down his nose. Finally, the mistress/master announced Juliana. There was polite applause in between talking and silverware dropping as Juliana floated onto the stage looking untouched by the eighty-eight degree

heat. She wore a silky royal blue dress that fell to her midcalf. Before leaving the stage, the master of ceremonies said something about his phony breasts compared to Juliana's real ones only he used a different word for them that I didn't like to use back then. I didn't like that man dressed as a woman saying that to her, but the audience thought it was hysterical. Juliana blew him a kiss as he lifted the hem of his dress to exit.

She leaned against a pole that was in the center of the stage, and the piano in the back played the introduction. She sang into the microphone starting off slow, then the tempo picked up and she moved away from the pole and danced while singing. She danced close to the edge of the stage and I gasped afraid she'd fall off, but she didn't. Max looked proud of his protégé.

She finished the song with a flourish. I applauded so hard I thought my hands would fall off. Max didn't clap; he just stared at her. "Such a beautiful woman," I heard him whisper, but he wasn't talking to me.

Juliana leaned against the piano and began "Ten Cents a Dance." Max slapped his hand against the table. "I told her never to sing that song."

"Why not? I think it sounds good."

"You would. Can you picture that woman actually working for ten cents a dance, having men slobbering all over her?"

I had to admit he had a point, but I didn't *want* to admit it. "It's just a song."

"Just a song?" He shook his head. "Don't talk to me." He grumbled through the whole song.

When she finished, he crossed his arms over his chest, scowling, his mustache wiggling on his upper lip. "Come on, Max, clap for her. She was good."

"How would you know? You've got stardust in your pants."

"What?"

We had to sit through a few more acts, but I don't remember what they were. None of them were like Juliana. A couple times the fortune-teller stopped by our table wanting to tell our fortunes, but Max shooed her away.

When the lights came up, Max got out his wallet to pay the bill. Timothy, the limousine driver, rushed up to the table. "Mr. Harlington, Mr. Harlington, there's an emergency. Come right away."

"Can't it wait, Slag, uh, Timothy? I'm right in the middle of—"

"It's urgent, sir."

"Oh, well, in that case. Al, get in that line over there? That's the line to Juliana's dressing room."

"But you said you'd introduce me."

"I would. But there's an emergency. Hurry. You don't want to miss her." He threw some bills on the table and ran out with Timothy.

I sat there thinking I should forget it and go home. Still, I *did* go to the trouble of buying the slacks *and* wearing them in public.

I stood behind a man and a woman who chatted cheerfully, talking about how wonderful she'd been and predicting she'd soon be a star.

Another couple turned to talk with them. "Wasn't that impersonator funny?" the woman in a hat with a feather bobbing up and down said. "I just love fairies."

"You don't see many anymore," a man in a business suit and a big belly said. "Used to be there were lots of clubs where you could see the pansies and bull daggers, but not so much anymore. Used to make a man glad to go home and make love to his wife."

"George. We're in public," the woman who I supposed was his wife said, hiding her face with her gloved hand.

George laughed. "You know what I mean." He nodded at the other man, who chewed on a cigar.

"I surely do know," the man said, with a slight Southern accent. "Those fairies made a man glad he was normal."

Juliana opened her door. She was all pink and white in her dressing gown, her lipstick, red, and when she spoke her voice was like a velvet ribbon floating on a breeze.

"To Vivian. Is that correct?" I heard her say as she scribbled on someone's program.

"Tom?" she asked the man standing next in line. "Well, aren't you a dear, Tom." Tom walked off happily caressing his program.

As she handed back a signed program "To Barbara," the male impersonator came running up to her. He didn't have his wig on so it was easier to see he was a man, but he was still wearing the dress and high heels. It was scary seeing him look like a man *and* a woman at the same time.

"Juliana, darling," he said, "I simply must speak to you." He took out a handkerchief to wipe tears from his eyes. "I don't know what to do. Oh, that man. Can you spare me a teensy weensy?"

Juliana smiled. "Of course, dear. Go in." She turned to those of us on line. "Sorry. No more tonight."

A woman walking past me said to her friend "Can you believe that? Wearing trousers in public."

I quickly pulled my legs together. In my hurry, I'd forgotten what I was wearing.

Her friend in a hat with floppy flowers agreed. "Like a farmer. What is the younger generation coming to?"

I felt my face getting hot. Before Juliana disappeared with the master of ceremonies, she pointed. "You."

"Me?" I asked.

"Wait. Will you?"

"Sure."