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to become a woman, and
then to—but you read
for yourself the story of

MY UNIQUE CHANGE

By HEDY JO STAR/CARL HAMMONDS

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UNUSUAL AND PROVOCATIVE
AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF LILI ST. CYR
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SOME OF THE POIGNANT
AND PASSIONATE LINES
FROM THIS UNIQUE
AUTOBIOGRAPHY....

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*“NATURE HAD
PLAYED A CRUEL
TRICK ON ME ... I'D
MAKE UP MY FACE ...
I BECAME MORE
AND MORE
WOMANLY ... THE
SEXUAL ME HAD
NOT DEVELOPED ...
HE PUT HIS ARMS
AROUND ME ...
FATHER CAUGHT US
MAKING LOVE ... I'D
BUY PANTIES AND
BRAS ... I HAVE A*

CONFESSION TO
MAKE ... WE DROVE
IN A SQUAD CAR ...
A MAN APPROACHED
ME ... BRING YOUR
FALSIES ... HE WAS
KISSING AND PAWING
ME ... I WAS LINED
UP IN A
WHOREHOUSE ... I
COULD NEVER
SATISFY A MAN
SEXUALLY ... I
WOULD HAVE TO
TELL MIKE THE
TRUTH ... SHE
UNBUTTONED HER
BLOUSE ... A SIMPLE
OPERATION GAVE
ME A 42 INCH
BUST ... THE
NOVELTY OF MY
BREASTS WORE OFF
FOR ME ... IT WAS
ILLEGAL TO
REMOVE MY
TESTICLES BY
SURGERY ... I WAS
FRIGHTENED ... IN
OUR MOMENTS OF
PASSION ... I FELT
ROTTEN DOING
THAT TO RAY ...

THE WOMAN HE
LOVED WAS REALLY
A MAN ... IT WAS
TOO LATE ... I
DROVE MY FIST
INTO MY GROIN ... I
TOOK SOME
SLEEPING PILLS —

MY

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UNIQUE

CHANGE

By HEDY JO STAR/CARL HAMMONDS

a Specialty book

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One

Grandma Vinson held her six-month-old grandchild in her arms. She tenderly stroked the child's skin and gently examined its tiny fingers. Then she looked up at her daughter and son-in-law who were smiling proudly at their first-born.

"This is no boy," said Grandma. "This is a

girl.”

When my mother told me this story a few years ago she said she had at first thought Grandma was joking.

“Don’t be silly, Mother,” she’d said, with a laugh. “I’ll take the diaper off and prove it’s a boy.”

“You’d have a hard time proving that to the doctors, Grandma,” joked my father. “If he’s a she, then someone told me the wrong facts of life.”

But Grandma Vinson wasn’t joking. “This baby’s got the feel of a girl,” she said. “It’s in the skin and the fingers.”

My parents laughed at Grandma, but she was right! I had the feel of a girl.

Physically, I was a baby boy. Anyone with eyes could see that. Inside, though, I was a girl . . . a girl trapped within a prison of male flesh. But my glands were pouring out female hormones . . . hormones which in time would make more than just my skin and fingers look and feel like those of a woman.

These hormones were to give me soft, round breasts, a slender waist, graceful hips and legs that would be called “whistle bait.”

They were to give me a body any girl would be proud of . . . and any man would desire.

But nature played a cruel trick on me. It made me almost a woman. The maternal instinct was there, the beginnings of a graceful feminine body were there, the emotions that make a woman were there. But the sex organs were not there.

Where there should have been female sexual organs, there were male organs!

But that was many years ago ... years of heartache, social rejection, loneliness and sexual frustration. Years I spent as half a woman, leading half a life. Years when I would love and be loved by men only to suffer the agony of sexual unfulfillment.

Today this agony has ended. Today I am a whole woman. With the help of sympathetic doctors my body has changed until it gradually became less and less a prison and more and more a reflection of the woman within. Then, through surgery, I was physically made a woman. A woman who will never bear children, but who can know and enjoy physical love.

This is my story ... the story of Hedy Jo Star, formerly Mr. Carl Rollins Hammonds. The story of the first sex change to be performed in America. The story of the birth of a woman from the body of a man.

I was born to Bertha and Charles Hammonds on February 10, 1920, in Prague, Oklahoma. Except for being one month premature, there was nothing abnormal about my birth. And, but for the suspicions of Grandma Vinson, there was nothing physically unique about me to distinguish me from any other normal, healthy baby boy.

But, as I grew older, my mother began to realize that there was something in Grandma's pronouncement that "This is not a boy, this is a girl." I wasn't a roughhouse player like most boys, much to the disappointment of my father. Instead of playing cops and robbers or cowboys and Indians around our farm with boys my age, I was content ... in fact, overjoyed, to play "house" with my sisters.

Mother has told me since that she knew then that I was feminine. My mannerisms, my tastes, the way I spoke, the kind of games I liked to play . . . all pointed to femininity.

She was so concerned about me, in fact, that she didn't want me to start school. She dreaded what the other children might say or do to me.

Her fears proved justified. The children at school were cruel. Even six-year-olds are terribly conscious of femininity and masculinity. I didn't like to run around the school grounds playing tag. Instead I'd jump rope and play other girls' games.

Poor mother would watch me walk slowly and dejectedly up the path to the house and she'd know I'd spent another miserable day at school.

Mother would say to me, "Carl, why don't you play with the boys?" And I'd tell her, "I don't like playing with boys. They're too rough. I like to play with girls."

When my father heard this he would go into a rage. He couldn't understand how a boy could want to play with girls. Here was his first-born . . . a sissy!

"What's wrong with you, boy?" he'd say. "Why don't you be a man?"

I didn't know then that I couldn't be a man because I wasn't a man . . . and that I played with the girls because I was a girl.

When I was five or six I used to live for the days when my parents would leave me along in the house while they went shopping. I'd run up to mother's room, put on a dress and high-heeled shoes and make up my face with powder and lipstick. Then I'd strut around the house pretending

to be what my instinct told me I was.

Sometimes I'd use a sheet or an old curtain to make an evening dress for myself or one of my sisters. I was always very creative in this way. Often I'd play house with my young sisters and brothers. I, of course, was always the mother. It was during these periods of childhood make-believe that I felt I was being what nature intended me to be.

But when father came home and saw me parading around the house in mother's clothing, there'd be hell to pay. He'd become angry and sometimes even struck me. "Why can't you be like your brothers?" he'd shout. If he only knew how much I wanted to be like my sisters.

Mother would look sympathetically, but helplessly, at me. She knew I was different. She knew that inside me I wasn't a boy. As I grew older she could see how even my body was being made to conform to that inner force. She saw how my waist tapered slightly and then gracefully curved into the fullness of a woman's hips. But she didn't know what was causing this, nor did she have the money to have a doctor tell her.

When I was nine, the family moved from the farm into the city of Prague. If anything, the change was for the worse. Now, instead of being isolated on a farm, I was thrown into a world of people who didn't understand me and whom I didn't understand.

I was now at the age when the boys begin to participate in school sports. But I didn't like sports, which didn't help my acceptance at the new school. What I excelled in were the "sissy" activities. I was wonderful at art, sewing and

knitting. In fact, I earned many jealous female enemies because I, a boy (they thought), could cook and sew much better than they.

Each night when I went to bed I would dream that during the night a fairy princess would visit me, wave a magic wand over me and make me a woman. But there were no fairy princesses and each morning I'd look in the mirror and stare at my almost-female form. Then I'd cry my heart out.

It was only within my family I could find any sympathy. I had three younger sisters and two younger brothers -- Betty, Ethel, Movita, Billy and Leonard. My brothers and my father rejected me completely. To them I was a misfit. My father used to ask me to join him and the boys in a game or a trip to the ball park, but he asked half-heartedly. I didn't blame him then and I don't blame him now. He just couldn't understand that I was a boy only by virtue of sex organs.

My brothers felt the same way. They were ashamed to admit that a brother of theirs would rather play with dolls than with guns. If I met them while they were with a group of boys, they'd ignore me. They'd never admit to anyone that I was their brother.

My sisters were different, though. They not only let me play with them, they accepted me for exactly what I was. To them I was a big sister, and to this day I don't think they've ever thought me anything different. It was they ... and my sympathetic mother ... who made my childhood bearable.

There was one other person who stands out in my mind as being sympathetic towards me. This

was my English teacher. Because I wasn't like the other boys in the class (little did she know how unlike them I was), she took a liking to me. She regarded my gentle ways as qualities to be prized rather than be ashamed of. It was nice to have someone accept me for what I was. It was a change from the neighbors who referred to me as that "strange Hammonds boy."

As I grew older, I became more and more womanly. I think I was about 13 years old when I fully realized that I not only wanted to be a woman but that deep down inside me I was a woman. Besides the rounding out of my hips and the slenderness of my legs (when I got into a gym uniform the boys would whistle and say, "Ain't she sweet"), I noticed that my breasts were filling out. At first, this didn't surprise me, because I just assumed this happened to everyone. But when I saw that this didn't happen to other boys, I was convinced that I was different from them physically as well as emotionally.

It was about this time that I first asked my mother if I could let my hair grow long. She was shocked. "Why can't I?" I asked her. "Because you're a boy, not a girl," she answered.

But whenever mother and father were out of the house, I would set my hair in curlers or wear ribbons in it.

Once mother caught me and gave me a scolding. But I couldn't take it any longer. I threw myself on the couch and sobbed, "Why was I ever born like this? I should have been born a girl."

Mother gave me the only answer that seemed plausible to her. "Because God put you in the

world the way he did.” Of course, it was not an answer, and mother knew it. But what else could she say?

I was 14 then and thought I had nothing to look forward to except a life of physical and emotional frustration. Little did I know that within the year I would be loved by a boy for those feminine qualities I felt were suffocating within me.

Two

I was 14 when I entered junior high school in Prague, Oklahoma. For those 14 years of my life I had lived a miserable existence. Within my half-male, half-female body was imprisoned the heart of a woman ... a heart I thought would die of suffocation and frustration.

I wanted to cook and sew, to dress in gay party dresses, to wear my hair in the latest style, to brighten my face with cosmetics. I wanted to do all those things that make it fun to be a woman.

But most of all I wanted to feel love towards a man. I wanted to know what it was like to be excited by a kiss, to feel a strong hand holding mine, to collapse into arms that wanted nothing else in life but to hold me tightly. I wanted to know these sensations, both emotionally and physically. But I couldn't.

I couldn't because I was torn between two sexes. I knew what I wanted to be and what my body was struggling to attain. But the sexual me had not yet developed.

I remember my first -- and only -- girl friend. Her name was Ruby. She was a very sweet person and I suppose if I'd been a real boy I would have felt very strongly towards her. But I did not feel I was a boy. As far as I was concerned, there was no real difference between Ruby and me except for a useless set of male genitals which I possessed.

I liked Ruby as one girl likes another. She was just a good friend whom I enjoyed being with. She was one of the few people in my youth who genuinely liked me, so naturally I clung to her friendship. It was wonderful to finally have someone to talk with and walk home from school with.

But Ruby liked me in a different way. She liked me as a 14-year-old girl likes a 14-year-old boy. She thought I was "cute" and all that stuff. When we went to parties, she always liked to sit close to me and, as we walked home, she would hold my hand. One night she kissed me on the

cheek and said, "You're different, Carl." Poor Ruby didn't know how different I really was!

I didn't return Ruby's affection. I couldn't. As a friend, I thought she was wonderful. But beyond that, nothing. After all, she was a female and so was I.

Ruby helped, but junior high school was still agony. Each day I loathed going to school to face the stares. Whether people actually did stare at me, I didn't know. But when I was 14, I was convinced everyone looked at me and wondered if I was a boy or a girl.

I burned to let them know I was a woman. I wanted to show them those parts of me that were feminine. I wanted people to notice the soft swell under my shirt, my slender waist and moulded hips. I would have given anything to have walked down those school halls in a skirt so that everyone could see and admire my legs.

I wanted to feel my hair swaying around my shoulders, to feel a sweater tight across my breasts, to have a charm bracelet jingle from my wrist. All these things I wanted to do so that everyone would know I was a woman.

I wanted to sit with the girls after class and talk with them about the latest hair styles. To giggle about boys and swoon over Clark Gable. I wanted to go to Woolworth's and buy an armful of lipsticks, then sit around with a couple of girl friends and try each of the lipsticks.

I wanted to do all these things and more, but I couldn't. I knew people wouldn't understand. Even my parents didn't understand and they loved me.

My father, who lived with us and who surely must have known the change I was experiencing,

could never accept me, even as I grew older. To him I was a failure. "Be a man," he'd shout at me. "Go on out and play with your brothers. How come you're always playing sissy games with your sisters?"

No. He didn't understand. Or maybe he didn't want to understand. Maybe his shame at rearing me was so deep he couldn't accept me.

But, then, how could he? I couldn't even accept what I was ... or rather, what I wasn't. Each night I prayed silently that when I woke the next morning I would slip my hand between my legs and be smooth. I would be a woman! But it never happened.

Yet I knew that some day it would happen. It had to happen. I could see the changes in my body and feel the changes taking place deep within me. I knew that every day I was becoming more and more a woman, that every day my male genitals were becoming more and more a farce. They were a haunting reminder of the joke nature had played on me.

Then one day I met Gregory (I've changed his name because today he is married and the father of five. It would cause him great embarrassment, as you will see, if I used his real name). He was a neighbor in Prague.

I used to watch him walking down the street in front of me. He was tall for his age, very well-built and terribly handsome. Most of the girls in school were crazy about him. He had one steady, Betty, whom he walked to school each morning.

I don't know how it happened but somehow Gregory and I met. I felt from the beginning that he was physically attractive, but I must admit he

didn't excite me sexually. There wasn't that shortness of breath, that giddy feeling a woman gets when she meets an attractive man. But then I wasn't a woman . . . yet.

For a long time we were just walk-to-school friends. Then one day Gregory asked me to go swimming with him. So I went, and for the first time in a long time had fun. I still didn't look upon him as a possible lover, but when I was with him I did feel like a girl. At the pool I splashed around and tussled with him and even gave a girlish scream when he threw me into the pool.

On the way home from the pool some bully whistled at me and said, "Gee, but ain't you got cute little legs." He had hardly finished the sentence when Gregory gave him a black eye and sent him running.

From then on we were really close friends. Gregory even stopped seeing his steady, Betty. Of course, this made Betty and all her friends furious with me. But what could they do? I had Gregory and I couldn't even offer him all they could!

Even the guys at school stopped making wise cracks at me. Besides the fact that Gregory was a school hero, he was also very strong. No one ever challenged him. He became my protector and my confidant. I told him my innermost secrets and he comforted me.

I think I was 16 and he was 17 when we became romantically involved. We were at the swimming pool splashing around when suddenly I became all sullen and emotional. He put his arm around me shoulder and asked me what was wrong. Then I

told him, "If I were a woman, I'd want to marry you."

He looked at me for what seemed ages, then said, "I love you."

At first I couldn't believe what he said. I looked at him and my expression must have given my thoughts away because he nodded and smiled. Then I smiled happily. It was a wonderful feeling to hear someone say "I love you." It made me feel all warm and soft inside.

After that, Gregory and I were together all of the time. We'd go to school events, to the movies, bicycle riding and for long walks in the country.

One walk we took I shall never forget.

It was the first time a man kissed me on the lips and it was probably the first time that I felt a woman all over. Here was a man... tall, handsome, masculine ... who was kissing me because he thought I was a special woman.

I was thrilled, but I was also rather shocked and embarrassed. "Why did you do that?" I asked.

"Because I love you very much," he said.

He kissed me again and this time I let myself go and enjoyed it. It was wonderful to be physically thrilled by a man.

The next four months were the happiest I'd ever known. I'd get up in the morning, look out the window and there would be Gregory waiting for me. It was really wonderful to see him there. I used to try extra specially hard to look attractive for him. I tried to look as feminine as I dared. Gregory liked me that way. In fact, he always regarded me as a woman.

I never thought that Gregory regarded me as

anything other than a woman. Whenever he would start to daydream, he'd say, "When we run away, you can dress as a woman and we can live together as man and wife."

When we walked he'd hold my hand just like a lover holds his sweetheart's hand. Occasionally someone from school would see us holding hands, but they never said anything. Once some of the girls cattily remarked, "How come we can't have a handsome boy friend like you?" They were really very jealous of me. And they had every right to be. Gregory loved me.

How do I know? I know not only because he told me but because he was never ashamed to be seen with me. No matter what people said about me, he was always there at my side.

He loved me as a woman, even though I think today he was too young really to understand that inside I was a woman. Sometimes he would hold my breasts in his hands and wonder aloud, "Why are you so like a woman?" Then he'd laugh almost knowingly.

But he was also sexually excited by those parts of me that were womanly, like my breasts which he liked to fondle and my legs which he stroked.

But he never touched my genitals. To me, this was what convinced me that he loved me as a woman and not as a man. I always believed that he refused to touch my genitals because he felt it would spoil the illusion.

Once when he was kissing me rather passionately his hand unconsciously slipped upwards between my legs. But then he stopped and sobbed, "If only you'd been born the woman you are, we'd be happy forever."

My romance with Gregory went on for almost two years. It wasn't always smooth sailing. Once when he was sleeping at my house, my father caught us making love in the bedroom. He went into a terrible rage and told Gregory to get out and never to come back.

But in spite of my father's anger, Gregory and I continued to see each other. After school he'd walk me home as far as he dared. At night I would go to the public library where we would study together. On the weekends I would use any excuse to get out of the house to see him. We were in love and we had to be together.

But then it happened: We were walking home from school one day when he told me that his family was moving out of town. I can still remember the tears burning my eyes. I didn't want him to leave. My world was built around him and his love. Gregory was the only person who had ignored what no one else could; that sexually I was a man. What will happen when he is gone? I asked myself. Without Gregory I could foresee nothing but unhappiness.

And my fears proved to be too true. When Gregory left, my happiness left. Once again I dreaded to go to school, and for good reason. I remember clearly the first day of school without Gregory. It seemed that all the hate and bitterness the students had for me poured out that one day.

"Where's your lover, cutie?" the boys mocked. One came up to me and said, "How about a date, baby?" Then he broke into hysterical laughter and ran back to his friends to report the joke. The girls just ignored me. Without Gregory at

my side, there was no reason for them to cultivate my friendship.

At home life became even more unbearable. It wasn't that things got worse. It was just that without Gregory the protective aura of love was gone and I was open to the full brunt of my father's shame and my mother's sadness.

I tried harder than ever to make father understand why I was a "sissy." "Father," I'd say, "I wasn't born to be a boy. I was born to be a girl."

"Tell your mother. Don't tell me," he'd reply. "Because I don't believe it."

I did tell Mother and she did try to understand. If it hadn't been for her understanding, I think I would have gone mad. She was so convinced that something was wrong with me that she took me to doctors for physical examinations. Even Mother couldn't ignore the fact that, small though they were, I was developing breasts.

She took me to a number of doctors, and none of them could give her very comforting news. She didn't tell me until recently, but a couple of the doctors who examined me said that I would probably not live past 35 because of my dual sexual nature. One doctor told her that even if I did live a normal life span, I would probably go insane.

He couldn't see how it was possible for a woman to keep her sanity while trapped inside the body of a man!

Mother then took me to a brain specialist for tests to see if mentally I was normal. The tests proved I was not only normal mentally, but that even my brain was shaped like a woman's. The specialist suggested an exploratory operation to

see if I had female sexual organs. But Mother was frightened that something might happen to me and refused to give permission for the operation.

But my trips to the doctor did prove one thing. They proved to my mother that beyond a doubt I was half-man and half-woman. They proved her suspicious that my "sissiness" was really in-born femininity.

But neither Mother nor doctors could convince Father that I was anything but a "weakling" and a "sissy." When Mother told him what the doctors had said, he snorted, "Impossible," and went back to his newspaper.

What was impossible for me was life in Oklahoma City. We had moved there from Prague just a few months after my 16th birthday. But, except for the change in scenery, everything was the same. In gym class at school the boys would say, "Why don't you wear a bra?" The girls regarded me as some sort of "weirdy" and the neighbors thought I was "odd." At home the situation didn't change a bit.

I was so miserable that I decided I had to get away from home.

When I decided to leave home, I went up to my room and dressed in the women's clothes that I had accumulated over the years. With a scarf over my head, no one would ever guess that my name was Carl.

I was very excited as I crept out the back door. For the first time in over a year, I wasn't self-conscious as I walked down the street. When I dressed as a boy, I invariably drew questioning stares from the men. But dressed as a woman, I

attracted the kind of stares any woman likes. I remember one boy even whistled at me. It made me feel terrific, even though I blushed.

If I'd had time, I might have stopped to try out my feminine charms on him. But I was too excited to think about men. I had my freedom and I was using it to take me to the city of Stroud, Oklahoma, where there was a carnival. I hoped I could join the carnival as a dancer.

Dancing had always been my greatest love. Since I was 13, I lived to dance. In fact, I think if it wasn't for dancing, I might have gone mad as the doctors said. In dancing I found I could give expression to the femininity within me. This femininity came out in the form of graceful body movements and creativity.

I was a "natural" my dance instructor, Catherine Duffy, told my parents. After one year of instruction I was teaching Miss Duffy's acrobatic class and in exchange was given free dancing lessons.

Miss Duffy wanted me to stay on with her. She planned to send me to New York for intensive study and then have me return and become a full instructor in her school.

But I couldn't accept Miss Duffy's kind offer. Even in dancing school I couldn't escape the taunts and the whispers. Parents would bring their children to the school, see me dancing and then drop their children from the school. They never said why, but I'm sure it was because they thought I was a homosexual. When they looked at me I could feel them thinking this. And if anything upset me, it was to be thought a homosexual.

As I hitchhiked to Stroud, I thought of the humiliation I had suffered and thought also how simply I had remedied it. A skirt and blouse instead of a shirt and pants had changed me completely in the eyes of the world. Instead of being an effeminate male, and possibly a homosexual, I was a normal, 17-year-old girl. Now I looked what I felt I was.

When I got to the carnival in Stroud, I walked around for a long while just looking at the exhibitions and trying to build up enough courage to ask someone for a job. Finally, I went to the freak sideshow and started a conversation with the barker. I told him that I was looking for a job and he said he'd see what he could do. He went inside the tent to talk with the show's owner and, after about five minutes, came out.

"We've got a spot for a half-man, half-women person," he said, with a laugh. "Do you think you can do it?"

To him it was a joke, but he didn't realize that I was half-man, half-woman. It seemed quite ironic that this should be the first job offered me.

But I needed a job and thought it would be fun to work with a freak show. Happy Loter was the barker's name. He took me to the dressing room and handed me my costume.

"Slip into this," he said, "and see how it fits."

I stood there trembling as he handed me the suit. I started towards the dressing room, then stopped and turned to say: "I have a confession to make. I'm really a boy."

I expected him to get angry, even kick me out of the tent. But the news hardly seemed to bother him. "No kidding?" he said. "Anyway that's good

because the only half-man, half-woman costume I've got is for a man. Not I won't have to alter it."

I was a bit stunned. Here was the first person I'd ever met who didn't think that a man who dressed as a woman was unusual. But I was also happy. I just about had the job. If the suit fit, I'd be hired. It did, and I got the job.

The costume was made of rubber and was attached to a pair of trunks. The rubber part of the suit fit from the waist up and covered the left side of my body. It was flesh-colored and had a very natural looking rubber breast and bra attached to it. The "female" side of my trunks had a slim waist and a large hip. The "male" side had a larger waist. My female leg was shaved clean and on my male leg hair was glued. Hair was also glued on the male side of my chest.

Under natural lights, I looked a sight. The first time I saw myself in the costume I couldn't help but laugh. I looked ridiculous. But under the special stage lights, I actually looked like a "normal" half-man, half-woman. Then Happy's description sold me to the audience: "Joe Ann, the a-maaazing hu-man phее-nom-e-non. Straight out of Believe It Or Not. See before your very eyes, brother and sister noined as one."

While Happy talked, I just stood under the lights and tried to look half-man and half-woman.

After my first night, I was very pleased with myself. It was the first time I'd earned money in show business and I was quite proud of it. The first thing I did after the show was to call mother, tell her where I was and that she wasn't to worry.

But next day, after six shows as "Joe Ann," I began to tire of my freak status. It wasn't that I didn't like doing it. What really bothered me was that I couldn't go out of the tent as long as there were people on the carnival grounds. The customers might not appreciate it if they paid 25¢ to see "Joe Ann" and then saw only Joe walking around the grounds!

Besides this, I wanted to join the French Frolics, a girlie show that was touring with the carnival. During one intermission, I slipped out of my suit and snuck over to the French Frolics and rehearsed a dance number with the girls. The producer of the show was very pleased with me and said he was going to talk with Happy about my giving up my Joe Ann number to join him as a dancer. Because I looked so much like a girl, I would just dance as a girl. The girls didn't strip all the way and with a wig I would be as pretty as any of them.

I ran back to the freak show and slipped into my costume. I asked Happy what he thought of it but he said he'd tell me after the show. I couldn't wait to get out of that rubber suit and into a dance costume.

I was really overjoyed at the thought of becoming a professional dancer. I knew my excitement was showing because Happy kept giving me funny looks. His half-man and half-woman, "who, lay-dees and gen-ta-men, ne-va smiles because of her great grief," was smiling from ear to ear at the audience.

But when my eyes accustomed themselves to the bright lights and I could see the audience, my smiles stopped. There, at the back of the tent,

were my father and the police.

I began to tremble and tried to signal Happy, but he was too engrossed in giving his pitch. Suddenly, panic got the best of me, and I turned and ran off the stage.

I ran to the dressing room, tore off my costume and started packing my clothes. But before I could get out of there, the door opened. It was Happy, my father and the police.

"That's him," said my father.

Happy was the first one to speak to me. "You really only 17, kid?"

I nodded.

"That's tough," said Happy, rather sadly. After all, he was losing his "Joe Ann" who brought in about a quarter of the freak show's income.

Then the police told me that I was a runaway and would have to come with them to the station. I didn't want to leave the show, but what could I do? They were the police. My father was clever to have brought them with him. He knew I wouldn't have gone with him otherwise.

I was just about to leave the dressing room with them, when Happy stopped me. "Can't we talk about this?" he said to my father. "Mr. Hammonds, you don't know how talented your son Carl is. He's as good a Joe Ann I ever had. Besides that, the guy who runs the French Frolics could put him to work as a dancer. The kid's a terrific dancer. With the right training, he could make a name for himself."

My father didn't even bother to answer Happy. He just grabbed my hand and pulled me out the door after him. "Let's go, officers," he said. And we went.

We drove in a squad car to the police station and then the police released me into my father's custody. Father and I walked to the bus stop. He still hadn't said a word since we'd left the carnival.

But I hadn't shut up for one minute. "Why do I have to go home?" I asked. "I can't get a job at home. Nobody wants me there. All I'll do is run away again."

On that whole trip home, my father spoke only once to me. He said: "If you'd straighten up and be the man you were born, you could get a job and stay home and make us all happy."

After that, I knew it was no use talking to him any longer. He didn't understand me and he never would.

At home my mother was overjoyed to see me and so were my sisters. But whenever I brought up the subject of show business, she changed the subject. She was determined to make me forget it and she was determined to keep me from going into show business. In fact, the first thing she told me when I got home was that she'd gotten me an office job in Oklahoma City.

Reluctantly, I agreed to take the job. The only reason I agreed to it was because I knew my father would have the police pick me up again if I did run away to the carnival.

Because I had no friends in Oklahoma City, and because life at home never was satisfactory, I took up roller skating. Just as with dancing, I found I had a natural grace and ability. After about a month of skating three or four times a week, I was one of the best skaters at the rink.

One evening a man approached me at the rink

and asked if I'd like to join his skating act. Of course I was thrilled and accepted. For the next month I worked out every evening with the Fuller family -- Mr. and Mrs. Fuller and their young daughter. Finally, we got our routine down perfectly.

Then Mr. Fuller told me he had a booking in Los Angeles at the Hippodrome Theatre. He said if I could get to L.A. and meet them, I could continue as part of the Skating Fullers.

I told him I'd love to, but besides the fact I didn't have enough money, my parents wouldn't allow me to go.

So the Fuller family went on to Los Angeles and the Hippodrome and I went back to my office job.

But the first night I went to the roller rink after the Fullers had left, I realized something: I knew then and there that if my life was going to be worth living, I'd have to live it myself. I was going to have to make something of it. If I listened to my parents and lived at home, I'd live a frustrated, unfulfilled life.

What was the sense, I thought, of learning to dance if I could only dance in a dance studio with a bunch of kids who couldn't care less about dancing? What was the use of learning to skate if I had to skate alone every night? Obviously, dancing, skating, even being "Joe Ann" in a carnival, were what I was cut out for. As corny as it might sound, show business was in my blood.

So the next day after I got my paycheck, I walked out of the office, went home, packed my bags and started hitchhiking to Los Angeles to join the Skating Fullers and start a new life.

As soon as I got to L.A., I went to the Fuller's apartment. But I was too late. They had had their audition and had been hired. The booking agent said it was all right if I joined the team, but they weren't going to pay any more money for me. So, as I didn't want to work for nothing and the Fullers couldn't afford to keep me on their salary, I had to look for something else. But I decided that I wasn't going to look for just anything. I was determined to get a job in show business. I went down to the night club section of town and looked for work. The first place I saw was a strip joint, so I went in and asked for a job.

"What can you do?" the owner asked.

"I can sing, dance and do female impersonations," I said.

"OK, you're hired as a singer. Now let's hear you sing."

I had never sung before and when I sang for him, it sounded like it.

"Awful," he said. "You're terrible. But maybe you can dance better."

He showed me the dressing room, gave me a wig, a stripper's costume, a pair of falsies and told me to be ready in five minutes.

Well, I danced for him, and he thought I was terrific. At first I was going to be billed as a female impersonator, but then he decided I'd probably attract a lot of homosexuals to the place, which he didn't want. So I was billed as a female exotic dancer.

At the club I was in constant contact with men. One of my jobs was to talk with the customers after each number. I wasn't a B-girl. In fact, I wasn't allowed to solicit drinks. All I had to do

was talk with the men and give them a sympathetic ear. By the end of the evening, I usually had about a half dozen offers for dinner after the show. I never accepted any of them.

The girls I worked with were terribly jealous of me because I was popular with the customers. At the time I wondered why I was so popular. Most of the other girls were at least as attractive as I and many of them were much prettier. Looking back, I think the reason had nothing to do with physical beauty or sexual attraction. The fact was I was more of a woman than the others.

To me, being a woman was a wonderful privilege, one I had been denied most of my life. I was like a person born with a beautiful voice but denied the right to sing. But, when finally allowed to use his gift ... and womanhood to me was a gift ... the singer sings so that everyone will know how much he prizes his gift.

I felt the same way about womanhood. I had been deprived of the right to display my femininity for so long that when given the chance to exhibit it, I wanted to show it at its best. I wanted everyone to know how beautiful it was to be a woman.

The other girls, though, took their femininity for granted.

There was another thing the girls didn't appreciate ... my success as a dancer. Within a few weeks I was given top billing with the show. If the girls disliked me before, now they hated me. They talked about me behind my back, ignored me and, if given the slightest opportunity, would complain to the boss about me. The last straw came when the boss decided to give me a private dressing room. That really brought the

cat out in the girls. Once I even found my costumes ripped to shreds. That did it. I couldn't lick them and I wasn't going to join them, so I quit the club.

In spite of this unfortunate experience, and my realization that I'd meet a lot of this in burlesque, I still wanted to dance. So I got a copy of Billboard, found out which carnival the French Frolics was traveling with and wrote the owner asking for a job. Three days later I received a wire: "Bring your dancing shoes, G-string, and falsies. You've got a job."

I didn't even bother to go to the club to get the few clothes I owned. I went to the Salvation Army where I bought a bright red dress and a cardboard suitcase. I put the dress on and started hitchhiking to Texas. I was sure I wouldn't have trouble getting a ride if I wore the dress. How many men do you know who would pass up a woman hitchhiking in a tight fitting red dress?

Three

And just because I did look sexy in the dress, at night I changed back into my men's clothes. I felt I'd be safer traveling as a man at night. That's how I was dressed when a trucker picked me up at ten at night.

"Hop in, kid," he said. "How far you goin'?"

"Corpus Christi, Texas," I answered.

"Me too. Why don't you hop in the sleeper in the back and get some sleep. You look tired."

I couldn't thank him enough. I was tired. After hitchhiking for ten hours and then standing on the highway for two hours without a ride, I was exhausted. So I crawled into the sleeper just behind the driver's seat and within a few minutes was sound asleep.

When I woke up, we were parked by the side of the highway and he was trying to make love to me!

He was kissing and pawing me. I fought him off but pretty soon he found out for himself that he wasn't going to get anywhere with this highway doll.

He went into an absolute rage. "You tricked me. You're not a girl."

He climbed into the front seat of the cab while keeping his hand tight around my collar.

"But how did I trick you?" I asked. "I never told you I was a woman. I'm wearing men's clothes, aren't I?"

"Yeah, but I thought you was a woman wearing men's clothes."

The more he talked the madder he got. I could tell that he felt I'd made a fool of him. "You tricked me," he kept mumbling to himself. "You tricked me."

Then he reached under the front seat and brought out a revolver. He turned on the light in the cab and pointed the gun at my face. "You see this gun, kid? You see the five notches on the handle? Well, you're gonna make it number six."

That was all it took. I started to cry. "Why are you going to kill me? I haven't done any-

thing to you.”

Finally, after I'd cried myself dry, he said, “OK, kid, I won't kill you. I'll just put you out on the road. Then the coyotes will do the job for me.”

To me that was even more terrifying than being shot. It was pitch black outside and not a single car or truck had passed us on the road since he'd pulled over. Outside I could hear the coyotes howling. I started crying again.

After he decided he'd scared me enough, he said, “OK, I'll take you to the next town. But when I get there, I'm gonna turn you over to the cops. They know how to handle perverts like you.”

For the next three hours we drove through the night. I sat as close to the door as possible. Between us was his gun. He didn't say another word to me and I hardly dared breathe.

The next stop we made was at a state police weighing station. Even before the truck came to a stop, I jumped out of the cab, ran into the station and told the troopers on duty what had happened.

They kept me in a back room while they talked to the driver. Finally, they released him but said I could spend the night at the weighing station.

The next morning the police got me a lift with another trucker who brought me to El Paso, Texas. He said it would be easy for me to get a lift from there. But he was wrong. I waited for almost five hours as the cars and trucks whooshed by me.

Then I decided I'd have more luck as a woman. So I went behind a billboard and changed into my red dress. The very next car that came along picked me up. After that, I decided I'd never again wear men's clothes. And to this day, I

haven't.

When I got to Corpus Christi, the driver dropped me off in the suburbs and I caught a cab to take me to the French Frolics.

"You know, they don't open for another week," the cabby told me. "I suppose you need some money?"

I was disappointed that the show hadn't opened yet and I did need money. So I asked him if he knew where I could get a job.

"Matter of fact, I do," he said. "It's a nice little place and the work's easy. All you have to do is dance and entertain some men."

"Fine," I said. "Lead me to it."

He took me to a house in the suburbs and introduced me to a woman. "Got a girl here that needs a job," said the cabby. "Think you could use her?"

The woman gave me the once-over and then asked if I had any other clothes. I explained I only had a skirt and sweater in my suitcase.

"Well, that's OK, honey. You go in that room there and pick out a dress that fits you. Then come out here. You've got yourself a job."

As I went to the room I looked around and saw the woman giving the cabby a five dollar bill. The significance of this didn't dawn on me until later.

When I came out, the woman took me into a parlor where there were about eight men and six women. All the women were dressed in evening gowns or cocktail dresses. They seemed to talk for a few minutes with each man and then move on to another. So I did the same.

I got a drink from the bar and went over to a man whose escort was just leaving. I asked if I

could join him and we spent a pleasant ten minutes sipping cocktails and talking. When I saw another gentleman was free, I excused myself and went over to him.

I was thinking what a terrific job it was when the woman who seemed to be running things came over to me. "Say, honey," she said, "the fellow in the blue suit you were talking to.... Well, he's taken a liking to you. You're lucky. He's got a lot of money and pays well. Here's the key to room seven. It's at the top of the stairs. Have fun."

Then it dawned on me ... I was in a whorehouse and the madam had just lined me up with one of the customers!

If the truck driver wanted to kill me when I hadn't even led him on, what would they do to me here if they discovered I was really a man? So I said to the madam: "I have a confession to make. I'm in the middle of a period."

"Well, that's OK, honey. The washroom's right around the corner. Go in there and fix yourself up."

"Fine. Thank you."

I went into the washroom and fixed myself up all right. I locked the door and then crawled out the window. While my date was waiting patiently in room seven at the top of the stairs, I was running down the street in a frilly pink cocktail dress. I was so anxious to get out of the house that I left behind everything I owned ... even my red dress. The first cab I saw I hopped in and told the cabby to take me to the French Frolics.

When I got to the carnival, I found that the French Frolics had started and that the first cabby had just given me that line so he could get

a commission from the madam. I didn't tell the story to anyone there, even though I thought it was hysterically funny. I kept it quiet because I didn't want anyone to know I wasn't a woman. There were only a couple of people who did know I was a man and I knew they wouldn't say anything. They seemed to think that if I wanted to be a woman, it was my business.

My dancing in Los Angeles had helped me a lot. It wasn't long before I was teaching the other girls their routines. Within a week, I was billed separately as Hedy Star. (This was the first time I used my present name. Later I added Jo because my mother liked the sound of "Hedy Jo Star".)

I dressed with the other girls in the show as we had only one dressing room. I had to be careful so they wouldn't discover my secret, but it wasn't very difficult. After all, if you were dressing with six other women who were strippers, would you ever look closely to make sure they really were women? My hair was long by this time, I wore falsies and my body, already feminine, was getting more so every day.

Most of the girls in the show dated men from carnival. And many of them lived with the men they dated. For the first month I lived alone. Then I met Mike.

Mike had his own show. He was billed as a fire eater. Often I saw him watching me during rehearsals. But I didn't talk to him. I didn't want to get mixed up with any man.

But Mike had different ideas. For three weeks he watched my shows, then he introduced himself to me and asked me out.

It wasn't love at first sight for me. In fact, I never loved Mike. But it was like love at first sight. He was very nice and had an easy way about him. He was kind and thought a great deal about me, which any woman likes. For about two weeks we went out every night. We'd go into town for dinner and then talk for hours. He never tried to make love to me, nor did he try to kiss me.

He seemed content to just hold my hand and be with me. I loved to be treated as a woman, to have a man fuss over me and get jealous when other men talked with me. It made me feel special.

But I knew that Mike's feelings toward me were growing stronger. And I knew I wasn't being fair to him. I wasn't encouraging him, but I felt that just going out with him was leading him on. Emotionally I knew I probably was what he needed. But I could never satisfy him sexually, and without sex a relationship between a man and woman ... if it's any relationship at all ... just can't last.

Four

Then, one night, I decided I would have to tell Mike the truth. We had returned from dinner in town and were sitting holding hands and talking outside his tent. We talked about the show and how well it was going, about mutual friends in the carnival and, finally, about each other ...

our hopes, our plans and our needs.

Suddenly, there was a beautiful silence. It seemed to hold us up and away from the world. It was a silence as tender and as reassuring as the caress of a lover's hand.

"Hedy?"

I looked into Mike's eyes.

"Hedy, you know I love you and want you," he said. "Will you come to live with me?"

At once I was filled with happiness. He wants me, I thought. He wants to love me.

But as quickly as it had come, my happiness disappeared. I felt guilty and ashamed of myself. Guilty because I had led Mike on and ashamed because the idea of being loved meant more to me than being loved by Mike himself. I felt I had led him on so I could prove to myself I was a woman and that a man could love me as a woman.

I was too confused to make a decision that night so I kissed Mike on the cheek and said I'd give him his answer the next night.

All night I was tormented by the prospect of facing up to the truth. I knew if I went to live with Mike, he'd only discover his lady love was no lady. On the other hand, if I told him I didn't care for him, I'd not only be lying, but I'd hurt him. So I decided the best thing to do was to tell the truth and face the consequences. He might hate me for it, but at least he couldn't accuse me of deceiving him.

The next evening Mike and I went into town after the show. As soon as we arrived at the restaurant, I started drinking. I knew I'd have to get pretty tight to tell him what I had to.

Finally, after a couple of hours of drinking, I

gritted my teeth and said, "Mike, I have something to tell you."

He had a big smile on his face and his eyes sparkled crazily. "What, Hedy?" he asked.

I looked away from him. "Mike, it'll never work between us."

"What are you talking about?" he said. He put his arm around my shoulders. "Not work? You kidding or something?" Then he laughed and took a drink.

I squirmed away from his arm. "Mike, I'm serious. It won't work. You don't understand. I'm not ... I'm not normal."

"Yeah, I know. You're a bit nuts. But I don't mind," he laughed.

"I'm serious, Mike. I'm not a woman. I'm a ..."

But I couldn't get that word out. I couldn't say, "I'm a man."

I took another gulp of my drink and blurted, "I'm a morphidite, Mike. That's why we can't live together and that's why you shouldn't love me. I'm not a real woman."

"You mean you've got both sex organs? I don't believe it. What is this, some kind of a joke?" he said angrily.

His anger gave me courage.

"Mike, I'm not even a morphidite. I'm a man."

I said the words almost in a whisper, but they seemed to echo around the room. The shock of the words showed on Mike's face. For a few seconds he was stunned. Then he shook his head slowly. "A man," he said softly to himself. "A man. Can you beat that ... a man."

"Mike, if I hurt you, I'm sorry. If you think I led you on, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I like you

a lot, Mike. I don't love you. But I could love you easily if I ever let myself. I want to love you. I know it's hard to understand. I don't understand it myself. Between my legs I'm a man, but inside me I'm a woman. Inside I feel all the things for you a woman would feel. I want you to want me as a woman, Mike."

Mike looked into his drink and shook his head. I knew he couldn't understand it. And there was no reason why he should understand it. How would you react if the woman you loved, the woman you had kissed, whose body you had desired, turned to you and said, "I'm a man."?

"Mike," I said, "there's nothing more for me to say. I like you and I need you. But I don't expect you to feel the same way about me now as you did five minutes ago. If you want to forget me, tell me and it'll be over. I won't hold it against you. No one will ever know."

The rest of the evening was spent in strained silence. The waiter brought our meals, but except for a few forced forkfuls, our plates were untouched. Finally, Mike said, "Shall we go now?" Those were the last words he spoke to me the rest of the night.

The next morning when I got up, I found a note pinned to the flap of my tent. It was from Mike: "Meet me tonight after your show. We'll have dinner together in town." Well, at least he's still talking to me, I thought. That was something.

The next night Mike picked me up and we took the bus into town. To listen to him talk you'd never have guessed anything had happened the night before. But I didn't say much. I had my guard up. I wasn't sure if Mike was just keeping

his spirits up to keep me happy of if it was a sort of giddy nervousness before the storm that was to follow.

We went to the same restaurant and sat in the same booth. Mike ordered a couple of drinks than settled back into his seat. "I had a good think last night, Hedy," he said.

"Yes," I ventured meekly, "and what did you think?"

"About you, of course. You and me, that is."

"What did you decide?" I asked.

"I decided ... I decided that I love you no matter what you are. Then he put his arm around me and looked into my eyes. "Hedy, as far as I'm concerned, you're a woman. And I want you to be my woman. I love you. I can't help it. I can't change my feelings." Then he brushed his lips softly over mine. "See? I just love you."

"I'm glad, Mike," I said, "I'm very glad."

That night Mike asked me to live with him. At first I hesitated, but then I decided I might as well. It would be fun living with someone who cared for you and wanted you.

But after one night in Mike's tent I told him that as much as I liked him, his tent was a bit too primitive for me. So, without another word, Mike called a hotel in town and got us a room. When we went to our new room for the first time, he carried me over the threshold.

"Well, this is home for a while," he said.

Our first week together was like a honeymoon. I still didn't love Mike, and he knew it. But I liked him very much and this seemed enough for both of us.

But after that one week, "like" just wasn't

enough. Sexually I couldn't satisfy Mike and there is no substitute for physical love.

Of course we tried to make love together, if you could call it that. We kissed and petted, but all we succeeded in doing was working ourselves into a dead end. What could we do? While my heart could like a man, my body couldn't love him. For Mike it was the same. He wanted to give himself to me. He wanted to be absorbed into me, to blend into me, to be physically a part of me. But that was impossible.

So what began in happiness, ended in frustration. What began full of hope, ended in despair. What began with promises of bliss, ended in barren unfulfillment. We were sexually incompatible and our feelings for each other were not strong enough to overcome this physical vacuum.

I should have expected it. I should have been prepared for it. But I wasn't. The day I saw Mike go into our hotel with one of the girls from the show, I was crushed. I felt betrayed and abandoned.

My relationship with Mike had left much to be desired. But at least it had been a relationship. Now it was gone.

But it was my fault, and yet it wasn't. What seemed to me so terrible was that I had lost Mike because of something over which I had no control. I couldn't rush into his arms and say, "I'll change Mike. It's my fault."

It was my fault, but I couldn't change. Physically I wasn't a woman and Mike needed not only a woman's emotional affection but her physical affection as well. And this I couldn't supply.

I turned away from the hotel and walked around town for hours. I felt terribly alone. There was

no home for me to go to. No shoulder to have a good cry on. After an hour of walking around town, I went back to the carnival.

But when I got to my dressing room, things had changed. As soon as I walked in I could sense it. The girls looked at me strangely and one of them who had just taken off her bra hastily pulled a towel around her breasts.

No one spoke to me. In fact, no one spoke at all. One by one, as they finished dressing, they walked out of the tent. Finally, only Reba was left ... the girl I had seen go into the hotel with Mike.

I watched her reflection in the mirror. She was putting on her costume very slowly and carefully. She seemed to be relishing every uncomfortable and humiliating moment she was causing me.

Finally, she turned to me and smiled almost wickedly. She played with her veil, examining it closely as she walked towards me. She stood behind my chair and watched me in the mirror as I combed my hair.

"You know what I did today?" she said.

I shook my head.

"Oh, come on, take a guess."

I bit my lip and shook my head. It took all my strength to keep from bursting into tears.

She leaned over my chair and looked at me in the mirror. "I had sex with Mike today." She waited for the full impact to sink in. "He's nice." There was an agonizing silence, then she said, "But then you wouldn't know, would you, Hedy? Or maybe I should call you 'Henry'?"

She knows! That was the first thought that

rushed into my mind. She knows! How could Mike have betrayed my secret? How hateful must a person be to do something like that!

For a moment I felt sick to my stomach. But just as quickly, I sprang to life. If they pushed me, I would push back. If they hurt me, I would hurt back.

I stood up and smiled at Reba. It took all my strength, but I smiled as catlike as I could. "I've got a man's body, Reba, and that's the only reason why Mike had sex with you. And it was nothing more than just that -- physical hunger. When you're hungry for food, you grab a sandwich. When you're hungry for sex, you call Reba. You don't call her for love, you call her for sex." Then I put on my cloak and walked out of the dressing room.

I walked past the other girls and held my head high. The smile was still on my lips. I walked across the midway and into a small park. Then I sat on a bench and cried my heart out.

No matter how cheap and inconsequential Mike and Reba were, they had hurt me deeply. Not by making love behind my back or by knowing my secret, but by showing me how impossible it was to live as half a woman.

I knew I had more talent and imagination than any of them and that one day they'd be coming to me for a job. But both Mike and Reba had one thing I didn't have. They had a sex. They were a man and a woman. I was neither.

That night after the show I went to our hotel room.

Mike tried to kiss me but I turned from him.

"What's wrong? Have a hard night? Sit down,

I'll make you a cup of coffee."

He turned and started towards the kitchen.

"No, Mike," I said, "you sit down. I've got something I want to talk about with you."

He sat down. "What?" he said, quite innocently.

"You know what, Mike. Reba. I saw her come into the hotel with you this noon and tonight she told me she had sex with you."

"That all?" He got up and started to walk to the kitchen.

I was enraged. "What do you mean, 'Is that all?'" I said. "You make a fool of me in front of the girls and then say it's nothing."

"Well, what do you expect?" he said, turning on me. "You're not a woman and you can't satisfy me. What do you expect me to do? I'm a man, and so are you, almost!"

"And only you knew that," I snapped back. "Why did you have to tell Reba? Now everyone in the carnival will know it. The girls already know it. You didn't have to tell them, did you?"

"Look, what difference does it make? You can still live with me. Anyway, it's me that should be worrying what people will say."

I kept thinking that if I couldn't have a satisfactory relationship with a man that I merely liked, how could I ever have one with a man I wanted to love physically as well as emotionally? It was bad enough hearing Mike say all this to me, but what would it be like when the man telling me was someone whom I loved dearly; someone who didn't want to just "have sex" with anyone, as Mike did, but wanted to have sex only with me?

Finally, I got up and told Mike good night and

good-bye. It was silly, I told him, to go on this way. He could have his sex with any girl he wanted, but he wouldn't find me waiting for him at home when he finished.

For the next few months my life was hell around the carnival. Now that my secret was out, I had to dress by myself. The girls in the show didn't talk to me because they felt I had tricked them. Of course, none of the men talked to me or even came to see me dance. I was no longer a woman to them but rather a freak of nature. I became the butt of everyone's bad temper. More than once I found my wardrobe cut to shreds. Why they did it, I don't know, unless it is that people generally tend to hate what they don't understand.

But if their object was to force me from the show, they miscalculated badly. The harder they pushed me, the harder I pushed back. I worked to become the best dancer in the show, and I made it. I wanted to learn the business of running a carnival, and I learned it. I wanted to be independent, and I was.

By the end of the season, everyone was Hedy Jo's "friend." They knew that I had ideas and that I had guts. They knew I was going places and they all wanted to hang onto my coattails . . . or maybe I should say "G-string." When the show closed for the season, I decided that I was going places, and I did. But I went alone.

Five

The French Follies ... The World's Most Beautiful and Exciting Girls.

That's what the sign over the tent read. It was my tent and my show. The girls were trained by me and paid by me. But it was more than just my business. It was my independence.

I couldn't force people to accept me as a woman, but now I didn't have to work with people who took pleasure in reminding me of my misfortune. If a girl wanted to call me "half a woman," she could do it. But she certainly wouldn't get her paycheck from me.

My private life had been hell for twenty-two years. I didn't have any illusions. It would probably be hell for the next twenty-two years . . . if I lived that long.

I could never forget the verdict of the Oklahoma City doctor who examined me when I was 16: "Mrs. Hammonds," he'd told my mother, "if your son lives to be 35 it will be a miracle. And if he does live that long, the chances are he'll lose his mind. A person just can't exist emotionally a woman and physically a man and keep his sanity."

I decided the best way to avoid the doctor's prophesy was to lose myself in my work. The best way to avoid a broken heart was to avoid romances that could end in nothing but frustration and unhappiness.

The first couple of years on the road I worked harder than I had ever done before. I painted the scenery for the show, created the dances, trained the girls, made their costumes, and even was the show's barker. I worked hard, but it was worth it. By the end of two years the show had earned enough money so that I owned my own tent, costumes, scenery, truck, car and a house trailer.

I was proud of my achievement.

But there were things no one could understand about Hedy Jo Star. Why was she so aloof? Why did she keep to herself? Why did she ignore the

men who asked her out? Was Hedy Jo frigid? Was she more interested in money than in men?

Nobody ever asked me these questions to my face, but they didn't have to. It was always implied in their other questions. It was obvious in their looks and whispers in the dressing room. But in spite of it, I ignored all men.

The winter after my second year on the road I spent at home in Oklahoma City. I was twenty-three years old and the owner of a successful show. I was independent and, outwardly, very happy. When I went home I had all this and was proud of it.

Even my parents were proud of me. My mother had gotten over her distrust of show business and had resigned herself to the fact that it was my life. My father, though, while he accepted the fact that I was a dancer, still couldn't accept the fact that I was not a man. He still grumbled, "I can't understand it. Just can't."

Father hadn't changed really, but I had. I could understand now exactly how he felt about me. After all, here was his son with long black hair that swayed around his neck and with a wardrobe that contained not one article of men's clothing.

He not only couldn't understand why I dressed this way but I'm sure that deep down inside he felt it was perverted.

"Dress like your brothers," he begged me. "Don't shame your family."

The fact was that I didn't shame my family. I might have shamed my father, but the rest of the family had gotten used to my ways. I'm sure they thought something was "wrong" with me, but they weren't shamed. In fact, my youngest sister

knew me only as "Sister Hedy."

The neighbors in Oklahoma City thought I was a woman and I never gave them any cause to think otherwise. As soon as I arrived in Oklahoma City with the girls from my show, I got them and myself jobs with a strip show in town. I'm sure our neighbors knew I was working there and I hardly think they suspected that under my bra was a set of falsies and that my G-string hid male genitals.

Of course, I don't know what they thought of my working in a strip show. My father, I can tell you, didn't care much for it. Twice I had to salvage my wardrobe and costumes from the trash pile where he had thrown them. Once he even succeeded in burning some of my best costumes.

My work at the show wasn't too exciting. As far as I was concerned, it was just a job for the winter. After the performance I came right home and sewed costumes for the next season. I can only remember one night when things got a bit exciting.

I was standing in the wings waiting to come on when I looked out into the audience and saw my grandfather! I really panicked.

But I calmed myself when I realized that Grandpa hadn't seen me for nearly six years and didn't know I was living as a woman. While I danced I directed my flirtations as much as possible to Grandpa. I could tell from the expression on his face that he felt rather proud of himself. After all, he was surrounded by men much younger than himself and the stripper had singled him out.

That night after the show I went home and found Grandpa there. He didn't recognize me as the dancer nor did he recognize me as his grandson. When mother told him I was Carl, he looked surprised. Then he broke into a big smile and gave me a hug. He didn't find anything peculiar about my dressing as a woman. Infact, he thought it was rather fun. If I wanted to dress as a woman, he said, then that was my business. My father's comment was a loud "Ba," and with that he left the room.

Then I asked Grandpa where he had been that night.

"Oh, to a show," he said.

"Not to the strip show by any chance, Grandpa?" I asked.

He looked embarrassed for a few seconds and then said, "Well, yes. I did stop by for a few minutes."

"And how about that blonde (I wore a wig for the show) who was giving you the eye?"

"How do you know about that?" he said.

"Because it was me."

He could accept me dressing as a girl but he couldn't believe that I was a dancer at the strip show. Every time I saw him after that, I'd kid him about the blonde at the strip show, but he never believed it was me. "You may dress like a woman," he'd say, "but you couldn't have all those womanly things that blonde had."

The next year on the carnival circuit I kept to my word: all work, no romance. I made up my mind that I would have the best show in the business and it took every bit of my time to accomplish this. In fact, I made sure it did take

all my time. This way I wouldn't have time to get involved with any men. My experience with Mike had hurt me badly and I didn't intend to get hurt again.

Of course, the easiest way to keep the men away would have been to let it be known I was a man. But even among carnival people who could accept almost anything, life would have been unbearable if the truth about me was known. I knew from experience that I would be accepted neither as a man nor as a woman.

But, by dressing and acting the woman I felt I was, I could reject any man's advances and at the very worst be thought frigid or prudish; and at the same time I could be accepted as a woman by other women. I could gossip, talk about love and babies, go shopping for clothes, and even share the same dressing room with them.

Physically it wasn't as difficult a job as you might think to pass myself off as a woman. To begin with, I had the shape of a female. Though my breasts couldn't be considered normal sized, I wore a special set of falsies that looked remarkably real. In all my years as a dancer no one in the audience ever guessed they weren't real. Then I always wore a G-string that covered up my male sex organs.

But no matter how well I fooled the people around me, I never fooled myself.

I had one close girl friend who knew my secret: Cassandra. She was a dancer in my show and we became very close. One day she found me crying in the dressing room and asked what the trouble was. I had to tell someone so I told her. I knew it might destroy the only real

relationship I had with another person, but I had to take that chance.

She was stunned, but then wouldn't you be if your best girl friend told you she was a man? But happily her shock was surprise rather than disgust. She didn't feel I had deceived her. She understood completely that if I had told her my secret from the beginning, our friendship would never have had a chance to grow.

I can't tell you how relieved and happy I was when she said she understood. Now at last I had someone in whom I could confide. Someone who would soon have to help me through one of the most trying periods of my life.

Six

I was on the stage making final preparations for the opening of the show when I saw him. He wasn't a big man, but he was husky and he had a mop of bright red hair. Out of the corner of my eye I could see him staring at me. He followed every move I made. Then he called me.

"Hey, you Hedy Jo Star?"

"Who wants to know?" I answered.

"Me ... Red," he said, jerking his thumb to-

wards his chest. "I've heard you're a man. That the truth?"

I smiled teasingly at him. "My show opens tonight. Why don't you come and see for yourself?"

He watched me closely for a few seconds, smiled and said, "Maybe I will." Then he turned and walked away.

I watched him walk down the midway and I didn't stop looking until I realized my heart was beating wildly. I liked him. There was something about the man. I didn't know what, but whatever it was, I liked it.

That night while I was barking my show, I watched for that wild head of red hair. And when I saw it, I put on the best show I think I've ever done.

Every step across that stage had sex in it. Every word I spoke to the crowd, daring them to come inside and see the girls of the French Follies, I smothered in sex. I was a woman and that night I wanted everyone to know it ... especially Red.

When I saw him buy a ticket for the show, I was sure I could get him. After I danced my number, I knew I had him.

Every move of my body, every teasing sway, every beckoning look was directed at him. I watched him closely, very closely. I saw him smile when I clucked the chin of an old gentleman in the audience. But I saw his eyes flash almost angrily when I stroked the cheek of a young man.

And that was what I wanted. I wanted him to react as any man would react to a woman. For

all I knew I might never see him again. But I wanted to be sure that when he left the tent, there would be no doubt in his mind that Hedy Jo Star was a woman. As I finished my dance, I knew there was no doubt in his mind. No man ever looks at another man the way Red looked at me.

After the show I went back to my dressing room and there on the door was a note: "I came, I saw, you conquered . . . Red."

What can a girl do after getting a note like that? I just went into my dressing room, sat down and smiled and smiled and smiled.

The next day I discovered that Red worked for one of the shows in the carnival. I also discovered it was his birthday and that there was to be a surprise party for him. I got an invitation to the party and then went to town and bought him an armful of gifts.

I put all the gifts in a large box, tied the box with a rope and wrote on the side with lipstick: "To Red, from Hedy Jo." Then, in small print at the bottom I wrote, "I think I love you."

I really wasn't sure if I loved him or not, but I knew I liked him a lot, though I hated to admit it to myself. My experience with Mike was still fresh in my mind and I didn't want that to happen again. I was just about to push the box full of presents into the closet and forget about the party when my friend Cassandra came into the room.

"All ready?" she said. I didn't answer. "Come on, we'll be late." Then she grabbed the box and started towards the door.

"I don't feel well," I lied.

She put the box down. "Too bad. Can I do

something for you?"

"No, I just don't feel well."

Then she saw what I had written on the box of gifts. "Do you?" she said.

"Do I what?" I answered.

"Do you love him?"

"How can I?" I snapped. "I hardly know him."

"Well, find out about him. It's his birthday party. You can talk to him."

"I'm afraid to, Cassandra. If I do love him, what then?"

"Well, if I were you, I'd go. Look at it this way: if you don't go, you'll be unhappy. If you do go, you might be unhappy. Chances are you'll at least have a few laughs, which is more than you'll have around this joint."

I went with Cassandra but my nerve was short-lived. I stayed just long enough to put my box of presents on the table with the other gifts, then I slipped out before Red came.

But I didn't leave because I was afraid of the consequences if I did love Red. I left because I was embarrassed at my forwardness. What could Red think when he saw the gifts I'd gotten him? Maybe I should have played hard to get? I thought. But then, if you like a person, why play games? It took every ounce of courage I had to leave the box there, but I didn't have enough to stay around to see Red's reactions.

Cassandra left the party with me and we went to the carnival's cookhouse to have something to eat. Just as we were finishing dinner, Red and a friend of his came in. They asked why we'd left the party and I told him I hadn't been feeling well.

"Too bad," said Red. "Say, why don't I go

back to the party, see that things get going and then when it's noisy enough, leave? Bill and I can come back and try to cheer you up. OK?"

"Sounds fine," said Cassandra. "Doesn't it, Hedy?"

I was looking at Red who was smiling at me. "Wonderful," I said. "We'll see you in my trailer. You can cheer us up there."

He winked a good-bye and left with his friend, Bill.

About an hour later Red and Bill joined us in the trailer . . . and they did more than just cheer us up. We had a wonderful time. I put a stack of records on the phonograph and we danced for hours. Then, about three in the morning, Cassandra and Bill left -- and Red and I went to the tent where the party had been held. It was empty except for the table with the presents.

We pulled a bench up to the table and sat and talked while Red opened his presents from me. After he unwrapped the last present and oohed politely about it, he read what I had written on the box: "To Red, from Hedy Jo . . . I love you, I think."

He looked at me and I could feel myself blushing. "Well," he said. "Come to a more definite decision?"

All I could do was feebly shrug my shoulders and blush even more. Then he put his hand under my chin, lifted my face and kissed me.

Then it happened. I felt all weak and soft. I didn't hear bells ring . . . I was a bell! I could feel myself trembling and I hoped that kiss would never end. I knew I was in love with Red.

That night as I lay in bed I didn't think of what

would happen when Red found out about me, though I knew inevitably he would find out. Maybe one day I would be sorry that I had fallen for him. Maybe I'd hate myself for hurting both him and myself. But that was the future.

Quite possibly the future was only a month away, even a week or maybe a day. But it was the future and for the present I was happy, very, very happy. And no one can take happiness away from you. They might stop your happiness, but they can never take from you what you've already had. And I had the happiness Red had given me and I was enjoying every second of it.

That whole night I dreamed of what might be as if it could be. I saw myself as his wife and lover.

During the next week I saw Red as much as possible. After work we'd go into town for dinner. Then he'd come back to my place and we'd dance and talk into the early morning. Every time he held me I got the same weak feeling. Every time he kissed me I wanted to be kissed again. And every time he left my trailer to go back to his bunk, I wished I could catch his hand and say, "No, stay here tonight with me." I never did, of course, because my dream world had limits. Go beyond those limits and the dream would become a nightmare.

About a week after our romance began, the dream was threatened. I had a contract for another carnival. The show Red was with was going off in another direction. I knew the chances of our meeting again that season were remote.

When I told Red I was going, he said: "You can't, Hedy. We've just met. You just can't run off and leave me like this."

I told him that there was nothing I could do. I didn't want to go but I had a contract that couldn't be broken.

"Well," he said, "what if I say I want to come with you. What would you say to that?"

"I'd say, 'Pack your bags, Red, you're hired'."

So, two days later, I was on my way to a new carnival, and driving my truck was my new manager and lover. I was happy as we sped along the highway. And why shouldn't I have been? I was living in a beautiful dream.

We'd been at the new carnival about a week. Red and I were listening to records in my trailer and talking about how nice everything was working out. Then he pulled me to him and kissed me long and hard.

"Hedy?" he said, "Hedy, why don't we live together as man and wife? You know I love you very much. And who'll know we're not married? We'll be moving around so much it won't make any difference anyway. What do you think?"

I couldn't say anything for a few seconds. Reality, a rough hand, had shaken me from my comfortable and wonderful dream.

I knew there were no alternatives. I didn't have to tell Red the truth now, but if I didn't it would be worse later. But how do you tell a man you love and who loves you that you have deceived him? How do you tell him he has been kissing a woman who is sexually a man?

Yes, I did tell it to Mike. But Mike was different. I didn't love him, and I did love Red.

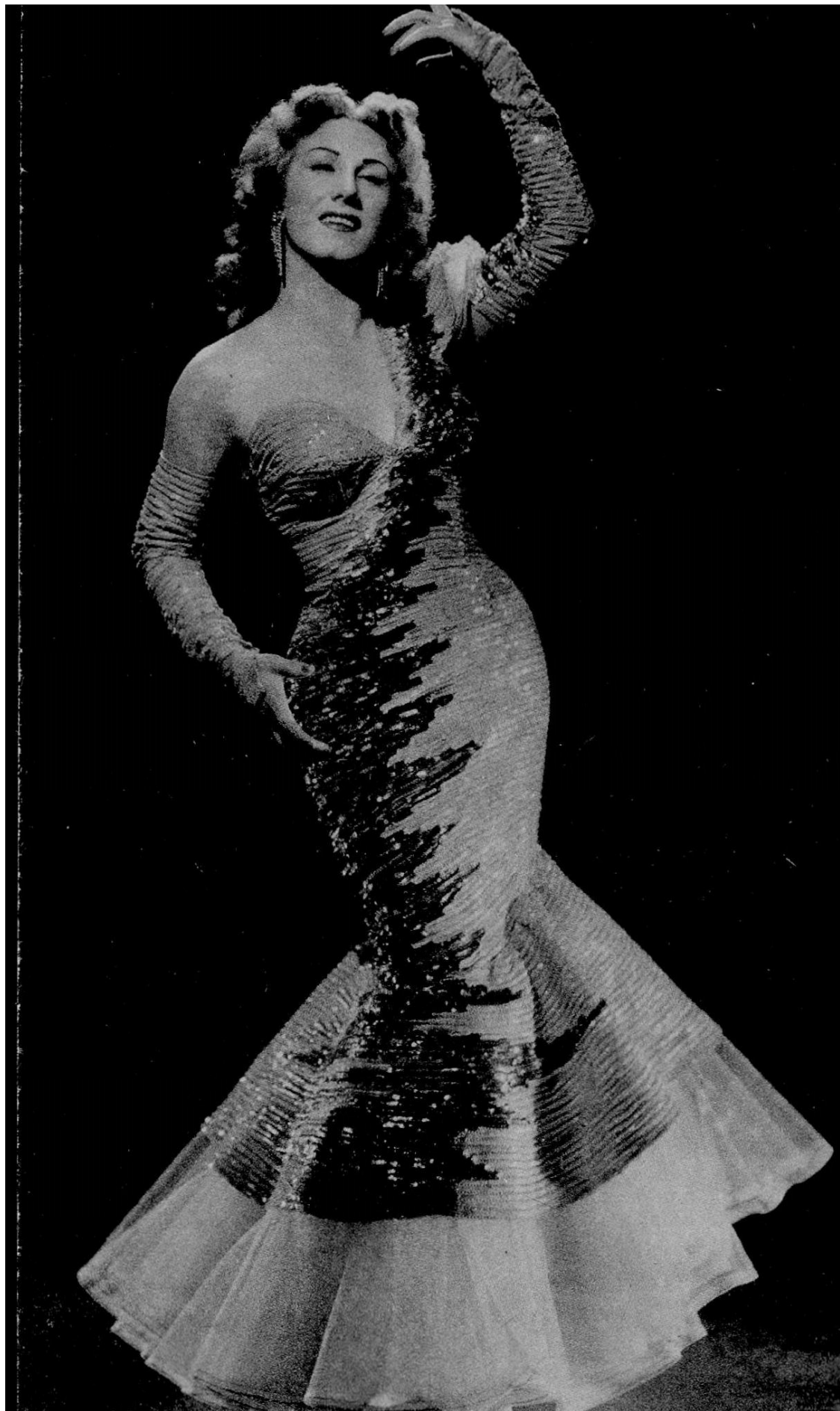
I braced myself, took a deep breath, looked Red in the eye and prepared to tell him the truth no matter what the consequences.

A
HEDY-JO
STAR
PICTORIAL
STORY



*Hedy, after the operation,
hair still male-style, doing her
famed night club act ...*







*Carl as a boy before he
became the glamorous Hedy.*



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EDWARD J. BRUNNEN, M.D.

February 24, 1959

Miss Hedy Jo Starr
50th and St. Clair Avenue
Trailer Court
East St. Louis, Illinois

Dear Miss Starr:

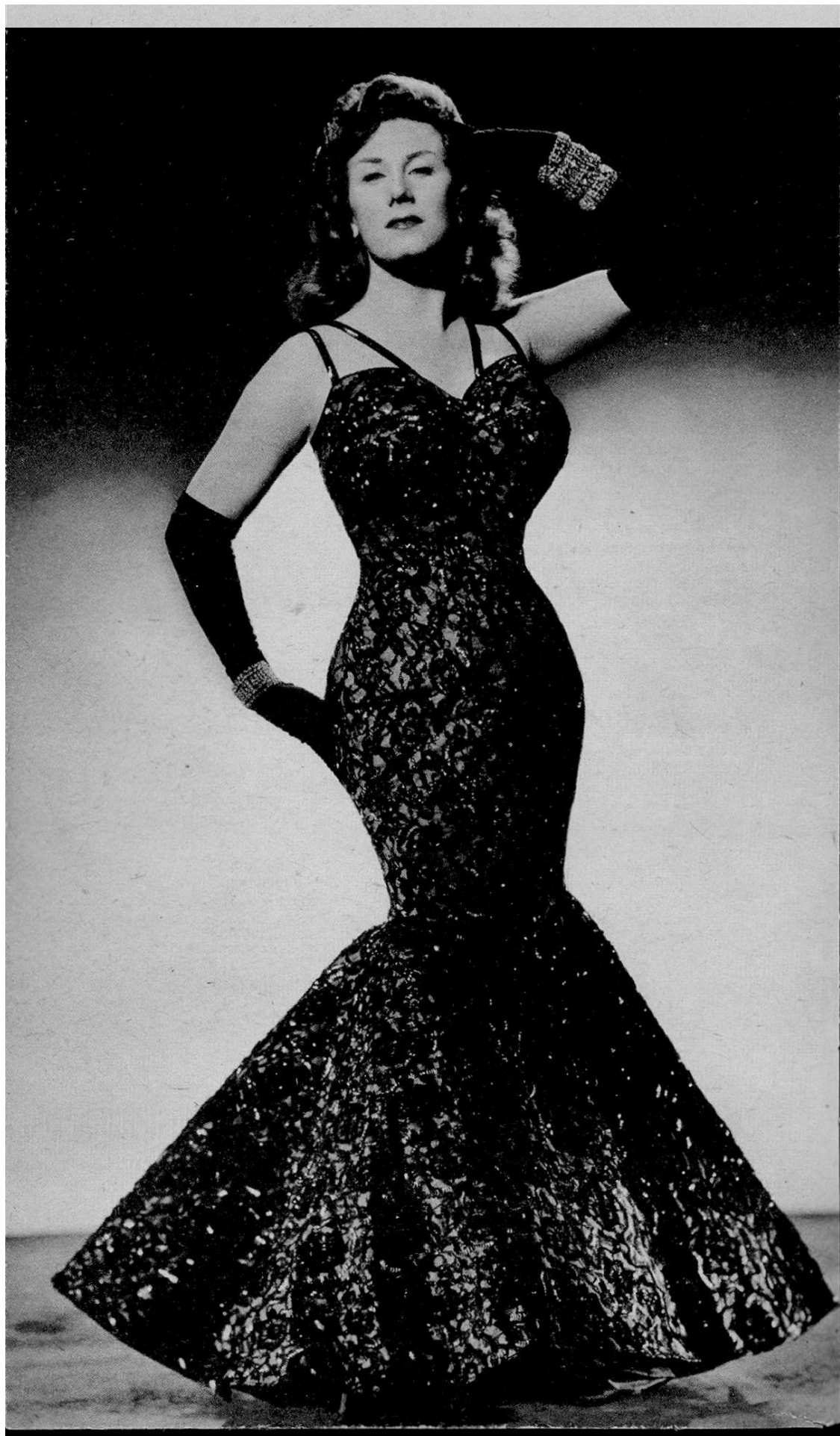
I know you have been anxious to know what decisions should be made in the case of your request for possible plastic surgery. We have been delayed in answering you because of the importance of this problem to you and our desire to try to arrive at a wise decision. I have had an opportunity to sit down with Dr. Eugene Meyer, Dr. William Scott, Dr. Hampson and Dr. Shaffer and we have tried to draw together all of the findings as result of your recent visit to Hopkins.

For a number of highly complex reasons, we feel that we should advise you not to go ahead with the conversion type of surgery that you seek. This decision was ultimately the unanimous decision of all members of the group and it was not made without careful consideration of your feelings in the matter.

To begin with, there are a number of surgical considerations including the fact that the bony pelvis, in your case, is quite small and that any attempt to reconstruct a vagina would be complicated by even less room than usual in which to perform surgery. In addition, there is some possibility that you might be troubled with urinary difficulties and these could be a considerable handicap in your career as a dancer.

The studies that we have made would all indicate that your basic structure is anatomical male and that we would not be likely to find any evidence internally of ovaries or other female structures. We do realize that you have been psychologically more comfortable in your role as a female and perhaps it would be wise for you to continue as you have in the past if you find this makes your social adjustment more comfortable. You deserve considerable credit for having been able to adjust as well as you have to some of the difficult

*Failure ... but a prelude
to success?*





*Hedy and first post-change
(and former) sweetheart, the
talented Ray Milo ...*

Seven

"Red, I'm a morphidite."

"A what?" he said. The surprise and confusion showed on his face.

"I'm a morphidite," I repeated. "I was born with both male and female sex organs," I lied. I couldn't get the truth out. I wanted to tell him that sexually I was a man, but it just wouldn't come out.

“Are you kidding me?”

“Honest to God, Red, it's the truth,” I lied again.

“You mean you have male sex organs?”

I nodded.

“And female organs, too?”

I couldn't answer. I felt sick to my stomach. You've got to tell him the truth, I told myself. Tell him now before it's too late.

I was trembling all over, beads of sweat blossomed on my forehead. I wanted to scream out the truth. I wanted to get the pain over with, but I couldn't.

“And female organs too?” he asked again.

“Of course,” I snapped. “I told you I was a morphidite. Of course I have female organs.”

“OK, OK,” he said, putting up his hands. “No need to get violent about it. Take it easy.”

I ran my fingers through my hair, regained my composure and told Red I was sorry. “You can't imagine how hard it was to tell you, Red. I don't want to lose you. I love you.”

He sat down beside me. “Lose me? You kidding? You'll never get rid of me Hedy, never.”

That should have made me feel better, but it didn't. It didn't because I hadn't told Red the truth. If anything, I'd made things worse by deceiving him.

That night in bed I decided I just couldn't go on lying to him. I could get away with it for a month, maybe longer. But what was another month? Nothing but borrowed time. I couldn't even live for the moment any more. I couldn't because it wasn't only my happiness that was at stake. Red's was too. And I loved Red and I didn't want

to do anything to hurt him.

The next morning I asked Cassandra if she would tell Red the truth about me. I admitted to her that I was a coward. "If I told him and he turned from me in disgust, I think I'd die, Cassandra. I couldn't stand to see Red hate me. If you tell him and he never wants to see me again, then at least I'll be spared his look."

Cassandra could understand my point, but she wasn't too happy about talking to Red. "He doesn't particularly like me," she said, "and he'll probably just think I'm lying."

And she was right. Red did think she was lying. Cassandra told me later that she said to Red, "You know you've been making love to a man?"

Red just called her a liar. "You trying to break us up? I'd have thought you could think up a better lie than that one."

After Cassandra talked to Red, he came over to the trailer. He was a little amused by Cassandra's "lie" but he was angry also that she'd even say anything so "ugly."

"You know what your so-called friend Cassandra told me? She said I was living with a guy ... and she meant you. I always told you I didn't like her. She's a damn liar."

"Red, she's not a liar."

"Don't try to defend the bitch. She said I was living with a guy. I heard her, you didn't."

There was a short but awful silence as I fought with myself, trying to get the truth out of me. "Red," I said, "Cassandra wasn't lying. I'm not a whole woman, Red. I'm a man. I'm having a sex change. If you want to leave me, go ahead. I'm sorry if I led you on, but I loved you. And I

still love you, no matter what you do now."

I don't think Red did more than just give a couple of startled blinks. He looked at me for a few seconds and then announced, "I don't give a damn what you are or aren't. I love you and I want to live with you as your husband."

My life with Red began in a burst of love. Red just didn't move into my trailer and start calling himself Hedy Jo's husband, we got "married."

There was nothing official about our marriage. We just said we were married and that was that. But aside from this unconventional "marriage," we were like any other newlyweds. Red bought me a wedding ring and as soon as the carnival season was over we took a trip to Florida for a "honeymoon." We took a honeymoon suite and looked like any other newlyweds at the hotel.

I wrote to my mother in Oklahoma City and told her that I was "married." Surprisingly enough, she was very happy about it, although my father wasn't.

I was so proud and happy about being "married" to Red that I went home to see my family for the first time in years. They were all happy to see me and they loved Red. My brothers and sisters called him "Uncle Red."

Father, of course, snorted and scowled about the whole thing. He still couldn't admit to himself that he had fathered a son who was more a woman than a man. While mother was overjoyed that Red and I were living together, father thought it was, at best, sinful.

I remember one morning Red and I heard my father and mother talking just outside our bedroom door. "Well," Father said, "at least Hedy

can't get pregnant."

Red and I laughed when we heard it, but I wouldn't have laughed six years later. In six years, the fact that I couldn't have a baby, because I wasn't a complete woman, was driving Red and me apart.

For six years we were very happy together. But then trouble began. It would manifest itself in little things, like blaming each other if a show was bad or fighting over money. But these weren't the real problems. The real problem was the fact that Red and I couldn't sexually fulfill our love.

After all, Red was a normal man with a normal sexual desire, and I was a physically abnormal woman with emotionally normal wants. I had the sex organs of a man but the sexual feelings of a woman. I knew I could never be fulfilled the way I was, nor could I possibly fulfill a man sexually. If I was ever to be happy, I had to be a woman completely.

I was in Augusta, Georgia, giving a show when I met a woman who changed the whole course of my life. It was she who made me realize that a physical sex change was more than just a dream.

I was rehearsing the show when she came up to me and introduced herself. (I can't reveal her name for personal reasons.)

"Are you Hedy Jo Star?" she said.

I nodded.

"Are you the one who wants to have the sex change?"

I couldn't believe my ears. I knew that many people in the carnival business knew that I was only half a woman, but I hadn't realized the

rumor was that widespread.

"Let's go somewhere private," she said. "I want to show you something."

We went to my trailer where she unbuttoned her blouse and slipped off her bra. "See these?" she said, pointing to a beautiful pair of breasts. "I was born flat-chested and a New York doctor gave them to me. Nice, aren't they?"

I was astonished.

"Know something else?" she said. "She can make you a woman." She watched my reaction and then smiled understandingly. "No, I'm not joking. I'll call her for you tonight and make an appointment if you want. All right?"

All I could do was not and fall into a chair.

How long had I waited for a break like this? Since I'd met Red nearly seven years before, I'd talked to scores of doctors about a sex change. Most of them said there was nothing that could be done, others gave me little more than a glimmer of hope . . . hope that maybe a doctor they'd heard of could do the operation. All this time my relationship with Red was fraying. All this time I dreaded that others would discover my "secret." The only thing that kept me going was the hope that one day I would find a doctor who could and would do the operation. Now it seemed the day had come.

It was the end of the 1956 carnival season when I went to New York to see the doctor. I was scared. My stomach was tied up in knots for days before I left. I wasn't frightened of the operation, or the pain. I was frightened of what she might say. Would she say what all the other doctors had said to me? -- "No."

But all my fears dissolved as soon as I went into the doctor's office. She was a slight, female doctor with a very kindly way about her. We talked for hours before she even got around to examining me. She asked about my life, my sorrows, joys, fears, frustrations, and hopes.

Then she gave me a complete physical, including a hormone and a skin tissue test. The results were a vindication of my life; both hormones and skin were undeniably female.

The doctor was excited about the other test results. She said she could probably do the operation within a short time, but first I'd have to think about it and give her my decision. To begin with, the operation was really a series of operations and their combined effect upon my body would be shattering.

"I want you to know," she said, "that this is dangerous, very dangerous. It might even kill you."

I knew I didn't have to think about it, that my answer could be nothing other than yes, but she insisted. So I waited for three days before giving her my final decision, and during that time I never had one qualm.

At my next appointment there were other doctors who examined me, but I couldn't identify them.

My face was covered during the examination with a sheet. Then my doctor and her colleagues examined me. Later my doctor explained to me that what she was planning to do was illegal under New York law, which is the reason the other specialists she had consulted wished to remain anonymous. It was all right, she said, for

a doctor to straighten a cripple's twisted limbs, but not all right to straighten a sexual cripple.

She had at first thought that because my body was undeniably female, there would be no objections to the operation. But her colleagues said no. As I was, she could get into legal difficulties. In fact, they said, there wasn't a single hospital in New York that would take the case.

After she explained this to me, she said: "Well, we'll try something else. It might take longer, but we'll get it done yet."

Her "something else" was a plan to change my body with female hormones until there could be no doubt in anyone's mind that I was a woman and that my sex organs were not only a freak of nature but detrimental to my mental and physical health.

There was, though, one part of the operation I could have which was legal and which would do much towards making me more physically a woman. This was having bust implants.

My breasts were developed, but I was hardly a Jayne Mansfield. In fact, I'd always worn falsies as a dancer. They weren't ordinary falsies. I'd had them specially tailored for me and they looked very natural. So natural that in over eighteen years of dancing no one had ever guessed I wore them. But then who could possibly think that a stripper had either the guts or the gall to wear falsies?

I liked the shape of the falsies so much that I asked the doctor if she could shape my breast implants like them. She said she could and made an appointment at the hospital for me for the next week.

Eight

I remember waking up after the operation and looking down towards my feet. But I couldn't see my feet.

Between me and the end of the bed were two great, bandaged mountains ... my new breasts! The doctor later explained to me how the oper-

ation was performed. Incisions were made under my breasts and the two plastic implants ... modeled after my favorite falsies ... were slipped in. The extra skin to cover the implants came from the loose skin which they stretched from under my neck and arms.

Two days after the operation I was released from the hospital and within ten days I was in the doctor's office having the bandages removed.

"They're beautiful," I said, as the last bandage was removed. I held them gently in my hands. It was hard to believe. A simple operation had given me a 42 inch bosom.

"That's just the beginning, Hedy," the doctor told me. "We'll start you on massive doses of hormones ... both shots and pills. You'll take these for about a year then come back and we'll see what progress you've made. But let me warn you: it won't be easy. The hormone shots will have a powerful influence on your body."

At the time I couldn't have cared less about the ill effects of the hormones. I was on my way to becoming a complete woman. I was disappointed that I couldn't have the operation immediately, but at least I knew I was heading in the right direction. I knew that eventually I would have the change and that was all that really mattered.

It took me a while to get used to my new breasts. You can imagine -- one day taking a 38A bra and the next taking a 42C. I still woke up every morning and reached for the falsies that weren't there. It took me over a month to break myself of this habit.

My new breasts were like a toy. I took wonder-

ful delight in wearing sweaters and low-cut dresses. I bought dozens of frilly bras and transparent blouses. My breasts became a badge of femininity and I showed them as much as I dared.

My new breasts did much to help me psychologically. I was a little less afraid now of someone accusing me of being a man. How could anyone in their right mind accuse a person with a 42 inch bust of being a man?

Then, of course, I thought of Red. I still loved him and I believed that once I was changed our troubles would disappear and we'd be married as we'd always planned. My breasts would, I hoped, not only give him more sexual satisfaction but would also show him that it wouldn't be long before the change was complete.

But I was wrong. Just as the novelty of my breasts wore off for me, they wore off even more quickly for Red.

"You can't love a breast," he'd say.

The implants had brought me a step closer to womanhood, but in the larger picture, it was a very small step. I still had a year in front of me of taking massive doses of hormones. And after that . . . who knew what would happen?

The shots were going to be my salvation, the doctor said. But until they were my salvation, they would also be my hell. At times, the physical and mental effects of the shots were unbearable. If I didn't have a shot I would be thrown into fits of depression, depression so deep that I doubted the value of life itself.

I remember one horrible night in a small Texas town. I was just a few days past the time

for my shot, but I was already becoming irritable.

This time my need for a shot was so great I had to skip a show and go into town to find a doctor.

The first doctor I went to wouldn't give me the shot. He couldn't understand why anyone needed such a massive dose of female hormones. It didn't make any difference to him that I had a prescription. "Nobody needs this much," he said dogmatically.

Well, there were other doctors, I thought, so I didn't give him an argument. But neither would the second doctor I visited give me the shot, nor the third. I began to panic. I had to have the shot, I had to. I didn't know what to do and I wanted someone to tell me what to do. Someone whose shoulder I could put my head on, whose arms I could fall into. Someone who would care for me.

But there was no one I could turn to. Even my friend, Cassandra, I felt was against me. And Red... The bastard, I thought. He was probably using my trailer right now to "entertain" some girl he'd picked up. Maybe I should go home to Oklahoma City, I thought.

But I dropped that idea almost immediately. Home was hundreds of miles away. And besides, I didn't feel I had the right to ask for understanding at home.

Face up to it, Hedy, I thought. You're a freak ... nothing more. You can't satisfy a man and you don't want to satisfy a woman. You're a mistake ... one of nature's rejects that somehow slipped by the inspector.

I was sitting in my car, parked in front of a

doctor's office. It was after 10 p.m. He won't come now, I thought. It's too late.

But I couldn't face up to going back to the carnival, so I decided to get a room.

It was a small hotel, with a hall-like lobby crowded with overstuffed chairs. At the end of the hall was the registration desk. A little man sat behind the desk reading the local paper. He looked at me over his glasses and then pushed the book towards me. I signed: "Carl Hammonds."

He turned the book around and read it. Then he took the pen from me and added an "a" on to "Carl."

"Upstairs and to your right, miss," he said, handing me a key.

I went to the room, lay on the bed and cried. I must have cried for hours. I felt there was nothing to live for. I wished I were dead, buried and forgotten. I was so depressed I called my doctor in New York. I talked to her for nearly an hour, and she listened, even though it must have been three or four in the morning in New York.

When I finished talking, she said: "I'm sorry, Hedy, there is nothing I can do. I can only tell you that if you don't go on with the hormone shots, you will never be what you want to be. It won't be easy either way. But one way you can look forward to a normal life, the other the kind of life you have lived so far."

She didn't have to tell me any of that. I knew it for myself. But listening to her say it, it did give me strength. At the least, I knew that someone was interested in me, even if it was only as a patient.

I stayed overnight at the hotel, though I didn't sleep much. My mind was a bit more at ease, but my body needed the hormone shot. I tossed and turned, and prayed for daylight to come.

When it did, it had a calming effect on me. I even managed to sleep about an hour. Then I went to the last doctor in town and waited in front of his office. I waited from ten in the morning until two in the afternoon. Finally, he came.

I gave him the prescription and he read it carefully. "Awfully big dose, isn't it?" And when I agreed, he studied it again, looked me over and then said, "Come into the next room and I'll give you your shot."

I sighed with relief.

If he had said "no," I don't know what I would have done.

* * * * *

At the end of the season, Red took the show's equipment back to his home in Georgia and I went on to New York to see my doctor.

I was quite proud of myself when I walked into the doctor's office. The shots had done wonders. The hair on my arms had all but disappeared while the hair on my head had gotten thicker. My hips were broader and my waist slimmer. The doctor noticed the change immediately.

"You've progressed very well, Miss Star," she said. "I think now we won't have any trouble having the operation completed."

But again, to my bitter disappointment, the doctor was wrong. Twelve different doctors examined me and each said I should have the

change. But when my doctor went to the New York State Medical Society for advice they told her it was illegal in New York to remove testicles by surgery. And since this was necessary before the rest of the operation could even begin, it seemed I was frustrated again.

But the doctor wasn't ready to give up. "Stay in New York," she said. "I'll begin to give you even more massive doses of hormones. These will shrink your sexual organs. Meantime, I'll look for a doctor who will make the change."

This was November, 1958. I was lonely and fed up with everything. But I knew I had to hang on. I'd come that far, I couldn't give up now.

So I lived in New York for three months and during that time had the hormone treatments. The earlier shots had made me depressed, but these new shots made me suicidal. I would be thrown into deep fits of depression and actually contemplated suicide a number of times. When I would get these urges, I'd call the doctor and beg her to do something for me. But there was nothing to do, she said. "A few months and it will be over, Miss Star. Just a few months."

But those few months seemed like years to me. Every day dragged by slowly and painfully. To walk on the streets was like some medieval torture. I was sure everyone knew I wasn't a complete woman.

My depressions even affected my work. If someone in the audience happened to laugh while I was on stage, I was convinced he was laughing at me. If one of the girls said something I didn't quite understand, I was convinced there was a hidden meaning behind her words. I forced my-

self to work only because I needed the money.

The shots were expensive, the constant medical treatment was expensive and the operation, when it came, would be expensive.

But finally that day came when I boarded a plane for Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. My doctor saw me off. "Don't worry, Miss Star, everything is taken care of. There is only one answer the doctors can give you now."

I hoped she was right. I believed she was right. The hormone shots had done wonders. My testicles had all but disappeared. My penis had shrunk considerably. My physique was completely female. How could they refuse me?

Nine

For five days I was at Johns Hopkins Hospital and during that time I was interviewed by psychiatrists and examined by physicians in every field relating to my case. After five days of examinations, they told me to go home and wait for their answer.

I went to East St. Louis, Illinois, where I'd set up a kind of off-season home. For five days I sat in my trailer. I left only once -- to buy some food.

Then the letter came.

I was still in bed when the flap of the mailbox squeaked open and I heard the letter fall to the floor. I could see the return address clearly: "The Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore 5, Maryland." I was frightened, more frightened than I had ever been in my life. I could only think: What if they say no? Then what?

I couldn't answer my question, and that's why I feared the letter.

I picked up the letter, opened it and read:

"Dear Miss Star:

"I know you have been anxious to know what decisions should be made in the case of your request for possible plastic surgery. We have been delayed in answering you because of the importance of this problem to you and our desire to try to arrive at a wise decision. I have had an opportunity to sit down with the doctors that assisted in your examination and we have tried to draw together all of the findings as result of your recent visit to Hopkins.

"For a number of highly complex reasons, we feel we should advise you not to go ahead with the conversion type of surgery that you seek."

The word "not" was underlined, and my eyes were riveted on that underscored word. I dropped the letter on the bed and turned my head into the pillow. I didn't cry. I just tried not to think. I didn't want to have to face the question: Where do you go from here, Hedy Jo Star? Right then

there was no answer for me.

I read the rest of the letter:

“This decision was ultimately the unanimous decision of all members of the group and it was not made without careful consideration of your feelings in the matter.

“To begin with, there are a number of surgical considerations including the fact that the bony pelvis, in your case, is quite small and that any attempt to reconstruct a vagina would be complicated by even less room than usual in which to perform surgery. In addition, there is some possibility that you might be troubled with urinary difficulties and these could be a considerable handicap in your career as a dancer.

“The studies that we have made would all indicate that your basic structure is anatomical male and that we would not be likely to find any evidence of ovaries or other female structures. We do realize that you have been psychologically more comfortable in your role as a female and perhaps it would be wise for you to continue as you have in the past if you find this makes your social adjustment more comfortable. You deserve considerable credit for having been able to adjust as well as you have to some of the difficult situations that you have encountered in the past. Finally, there are numerous reasons both from your standpoint and from the standpoint of the surgeons involved that would suggest that the performance of this type of surgery might in actuality constitute mayhem and you must consider that possibility quite seriously before embarking on such a program.

“Sometimes the best advice the doctor can

give a patient is to avoid some type of medical treatment and we hope you will consider this advice with the same degree of sincerity in which it is offered. I would appreciate it if you would keep us informed in the years ahead of how you manage to get along, whether or not you seek further treatment, and hope you will call on us for advice if you feel we can be of help."

My first reaction after finishing the letter was: "I'll show them."

I didn't feel any malice towards the doctors. After all, they were only doing what they considered best for me. But I was sure they were wrong.

Not wrong as far as the possible medical consequences of the operation. They might have been right about that, though it didn't matter to me. I would have gladly given up dancing in exchange for womanhood. Dancing wasn't my life, it was my occupation. Occupations you can change. No one can stop you from doing that. But your sex ... that you can't change without medical help.

Rightly or wrongly, I felt their decision had been based more on "moral," psychological and legal reasons than on medical reasons. Certainly, there was a risk involved, but I felt that I should be the one to decide whether I wanted to take it or not. They were wrong to deny me this decision. But in denying it to me, they only increased my determination to do -- somehow, somewhere -- what I knew had to be done.

That same day I called my doctor in New York and told her the Johns Hopkins' decision. She was disappointed, but not discouraged. "I'll keep looking," she said. "I know of a doctor in Spain

that might be able to perform the operation.”

With this bit of hope to keep me going, I flew to Georgia to join Red.

Things had gone from bad to worse between Red and myself. The fact that the Johns Hopkins doctors had turned me down didn't help. But I still lived with Red, though I neither made love with him nor loved him. I lived with him for purely practical reasons. He was my business partner and he was also a sort of link . . . albeit weak . . . to the life I wanted. Our relationship as “husband” and “wife” was terrible, but at least it was a relationship. Without Red, I would have been completely alone.

My two friends among the girls in the show, Corine and Cassandra, knew what I was going through and gave me all the understanding and comfort they could. But it still wasn't enough. Understanding wasn't the same as a strong pair of arms around me, even though I wasn't fond of the man at the other end of those arms. But in our isolated moments of passion or lust, whatever your values happen to be, Red treated me like a woman.

As kind and generous as Cassandra and Corine were in their understanding, it wasn't something I could feel. In the back of my mind there was always the thought that they pitied me as a sort of freak that hung awkwardly between the sexes. Red, for all his bad qualities, treated me as a woman. When he kissed me, I know he kissed me for the woman he saw in me. Why else would he? He certainly wasn't a homosexual and he had his pick of most of the girls in the carnival. He was physically attracted to me, and that was that.

But his attraction towards me was sporadic. When it came, it was intense. When it wasn't there, the utter contempt he showed for me was equally intense.

"Well, this is it," he said. "I'm going."

Finally, even the benefits of our relationship weren't enough to compensate Red for the disadvantages. One day he came to me and said he was finished.

I told him that if he left now I'd never take him back. But he didn't answer. He walked out. A few months later, in East St. Louis, Red called and asked if he could come back. My answer was short. "No, I'm happy living alone."

And I meant it. I was happy living alone. I had to be happy because I believed that for the rest of my life, unless I ever caught my illusive dream, I would be alone.

I worked in East St. Louis for a few months after selling my show, then flew to New York to see my doctor. She examined me and told me that the only thing male about me were my useless male genitals that had been shrunken by the hormones. She was confident she could find a doctor in New York who would do the operation. But, again, she was wrong. There was not a single hospital in the city that would take the operation.

"Well, you'll have to go to Europe and do it," she told me.

I had wanted to have the operation done in the U.S., but now it seemed my only hope was Europe. She contacted a doctor in Madrid, Spain who would do it ... for \$2000.

But I knew it would cost me much more than

that, and I just didn't have the money. After travel expenses and hospital fees, I figured it would come to at least \$4000. There was nothing for me to do but go back to work until I saved the money for the operation.

I was disappointed because I couldn't have the operation immediately. But I was heartened that somewhere there was a doctor who would do it.

It was a relief to know that the only thing standing between me and the change was something I could actually do myself . . . earn money.

That same night, after the doctor told me the news about the Madrid surgeon, I had a date with a fellow I'd met on one of my earlier trips to New York. It was just a date for a friendly drink in the bar in my hotel. I was finished with love, I told myself. From now on it was hardhearted Hedy, or so I thought. But two days later I was in love with a handsome New York bellhop.

Our first meeting was on the night of my date in the hotel bar. My escort forgot to help me on with my coat, and a voice from a nearby table rather rudely reminded him of his gentlemanly duties: "Aren't you going to help the lady with her coat?"

My date blushed, and so did I. But on the way out I saw these dark, flashing eyes and smiled a "thank you."

The next day I was in the bar again, this time with a female dancer from New York. I had mentioned to her the handsome fellow I'd seen in the bar the night before. Just then he walked in and my friend could tell by my expression that he was the one. As he walked by our booth she stopped him. "My friend would like to thank you

for last night," she said, pointing towards me.

"Oh, that's all right," he said, looking at me.

I blushed to the tips of my toes.

"Care to join us?" she asked.

He sat down and introduced himself as Ray Milo, an aspiring comedian. As soon as he started talking, I knew I liked him. He had an easy way I found attractive. I guess it was just plain honesty. There was no phony big-deal talk about being "between shows" or being "too high-priced for New York." He was unemployed because, "Frankly, I'm not good enough yet. So I work as a bellhop while I brush up my routines."

Ray and I sat in the bar and talked for nearly two hours. I couldn't remember when I'd had such a good time just talking. I'd forgotten that communication between two people could be so much fun.

When Ray ran out of money, I invited him up to my room for some coffee. It was nearly four in the morning before he left. And during those hours together, I got twelve years of pent-up frustrations and heartaches off my chest. Of course I didn't tell him I was having a sex change. I was Hedy Jo Star, exotic dancer, ex-owner of the French Follies, costume designer and a woman unlucky in love. I was in New York seeing a doctor.

When I told Ray about Red, he said: "I don't understand how you could have lived with him without getting married. All those years ... seems funny."

"I never wanted to get tied down," I lied. "I like my freedom too much." I lied because I didn't want to encourage him. I wanted him to

think that I was a headstrong, independent woman whom you should never get serious with.

When he said good night he kissed me. "Terrific talking to you. Maybe we can get together again?"

"Would you really like to?" I asked cautiously.

He gave me a big smile. "Sure, but would you? You kind of frightened me off with this modern woman talk."

"I didn't mean to," I said. And I really hadn't meant to. I was just being defensive. I didn't feel like getting kicked around again.

"Tomorrow -- about eight?" he said.

But it wasn't "about eight," it was closer to seven. I was just getting ready for our date when Ray called and said he "couldn't wait until eight" so he'd come around earlier to see if I was ready. I wasn't, but it was a nice feeling to know your date had arrived an hour early to pick you up.

But if Ray enjoyed himself that night as much as I did, it was worth coming early. I had the best time I'd had in years. It was terrific to go night-clubbing on the arm of a handsome man, to take pictures together in a do-it-yourself photo booth in a drugstore, to ride around Central Park in a cab ... to be in love.

Love crept up on me. I didn't want to fall in love, though I won't deny I liked the feeling of loving Ray. But I was frightened. What would happen when I told him I wasn't quite a woman? How would he take it? Ray wasn't like Red. Red was hard, but Ray was terribly sensitive. He was the kind of person who loved once, but loved hard. And if that love was shattered, it would take a long, long time for him to get over it.

That night in my hotel room after I realized I loved Ray, I made one of the most difficult decisions of my life: I was going to give up Ray. I loved him and I needed him, but I couldn't sacrifice him to my own needs.

When he called the next day, I left a message saying I was out. He called five times that day, and each time the clerk told him I was out.

He came over that evening and called my room. But I didn't answer. He even came up to my room and knocked, but I sat in my darkened room and listened to him calling at the door, "Hedy? You home?"

For three days I played this game, then when he called the fourth day I told him, "Ray, I'm leaving. I'm going home."

"You've gotta be kidding," he said. "You can't leave New York. At least let me see you before you go ... please."

"I won't be at the hotel all day. I have to see the doctor this afternoon, then I'm coming back just long enough to finish packing."

"Look, I won't get in the way, Hedy. I just want to see you. Really, I can't understand it. What's happened? What did I do?"

"Nothing. I just have to get home. I'll be here around four if you want to say good-bye." Then I hung up.

I felt rotten for doing that to Ray ... and to myself. I felt I was throwing away the only bit of happiness I'd had in years. But in the long run I thought it would be better.

My romances had always ended in ruin. This one wouldn't. It would end "normally" with a good-bye between a guy and the woman he'd pick

up in New York.

I came to the hotel an hour late, hoping that Ray would have gotten tired of waiting and left. I was relieved when I didn't see him in the lobby, though I felt a bit disappointed in spite of myself. But just as I got in my room, there was a knock at the door. It was Ray. As I let him in, I noticed a vase of roses on the dresser.

"From you?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "A going away present."

I turned and began to pack my bags. Suddenly I snapped the bag closed and turned to him. "I love you, you know."

For a moment he was shocked, then started to answer but I grabbed a single rose from the vase and ran out of the room.

I ran out of the hotel with Ray following. There was a cab waiting at the curb. I turned towards Ray and he held me in his arms. "I love you, Hedy," he said.

"I love you too, Ray." Then I jumped into the cab and was off to East St. Louis.

I hated to leave him. I loved him. But I knew there was no other choice I could make. It was either unhappiness now or agony later.

Ten

I watched Ray from the taxi window. "I love you," I said, silently, over and over again to him. He was waving to me from the curb and I waved back with the rose he had given me. Then the taxi pulled into the traffic.

Will I ever see him again? I wondered. Should

I have left him? Would it have been better to drain all the happiness out of our relationship? Wouldn't that have made up for the unhappiness that had to follow?

These thoughts crossed my mind, but I knew I had done the right thing. I had done what all the Ann Landers would have told me to do. I could just see their answer to my problem:

"Dear HJS: As sympathetic as I am towards you, as much as I know the importance of this relationship to you, I can't help but feel you did the right thing by cutting it off. It could only have ended in unhappiness as have all your other loves. I suggest you see your family doctor or your minister of guidance."

By the time my plane arrived in St. Louis, I had resigned myself to the fact that it was over between Ray and myself.

When the doctors corrected nature's blunder and made me a woman, then, and only then, could I love a man without fearing that day when I had to explain to him I had the sex organs of a man.

But I wasn't home more than an hour when my resolution to forget men was shattered by the ringing of the telephone. It was Ray!

"Hedy, I had to call you," he said. "I want you to know I love you. I don't know why you left, but I'm sorry you did. As far as I'm concerned it's just starting for us."

Of course, I also realized that by accepting his love I might eventually hurt Ray terribly. I wanted to tell him that night on the phone just what I was but I couldn't bring myself to do it. I'll wait and tell him later, I rationalized. Until I have to tell him, I'll live our love to the hilt.

And Ray and I did just that. We wrote every day and we called twice a week. He wired flowers to me and I sent him gifts. Once he sent me a record of love songs with a note enclosed: "I thought of you while I played these songs. Maybe you'll think of me while you listen to them."

I practically wore the record out in a week.

In every letter Ray begged me to come back to New York. "Give me one good reason why you can't come to live here," he'd ask.

I couldn't give him a good reason because I couldn't tell him the truth. I didn't go to New York because I felt that as long as Ray was nearly a thousand miles away, our love was safe. By mail and telephone we could enjoy uncomplicated emotional romance. This separation also made my dreams easier to believe.

If we were together in the same city, I knew that we would become more than emotionally involved. I would want to make love with him and no doubt he'd want to make love with me. If I succeeded in fighting the temptation to let myself go in his arms, he would think I was either frigid or didn't care about him. On the other hand, if I did forget myself in a moment of passion, he would have to discover that the woman he loved was really a man.

No, I couldn't allow either of those alternatives to happen. I would have to stay in East St. Louis, and Ray would have to stay in New York. This was the only hope that one day we could have a lasting love together.

Then, one night, just as I was going to the club, Ray called.

"Hedy, I'm coming to East St. Louis. I've got

just enough for bus fare. I can't live without you, Hedy. What do you say?"

What could I say? I was terribly confused. If I said "no" or made up some shallow excuse, Ray might get fed up and decide to try and forget me. If I told him to come he would probably in time discover the truth about me and then, like the rest of the men in my life, leave me.

"Hedy, you there? Hedy?" I could hear Ray calling me from the other end of the wire. I had to make up my mind, but my mind wouldn't work so I let my heart speak for me.

"When will you be here? I'll clean out a closet for you. You can stay at my place."

"Tomorrow night, Hedy, I'll see you tomorrow night."

When Ray hung up my mind started working and it was calling me "foolish." Maybe I was, I thought, maybe I was. I was taking a chance. But I felt in my heart that Ray was different from the other men I'd known. The other men had wanted to live with me, but Ray wanted to take care of me. He wanted me to be his wife and not his mistress.

The next evening I went to the depot and waited for the New York bus to get in. Would he really be on it? At first the thought that he might have changed his mind made me sigh with relief. But the thought of going back to my trailer alone, without Ray, made me feel terribly alone. He had to be on that bus, he just had to.

And he was!

I ran into his arms and kissed him. And as I stood there in Ray's arms, I could only think how nice it was to love and be loved.

Ray and I had a wonderful, hectic life for the first month we were together. During that time we became great friends and lovers, though our love was only spiritual. I knew what might happen to our relationship if he discovered what I really was.

It was difficult, but I forced myself to keep our relationship as platonic as possible. I slept in the bed and he slept on the couch. We would kiss and pet but I would never allow myself to be carried away. If I thought Ray was becoming carried away, I would stop. When he asked me why, I told him that I couldn't make love properly because I had "female trouble." I had been in New York, I explained, to be treated by a physician and I probably would have to go back in the near future to complete the treatment.

I wasn't fooling myself, though it might seem that way. I was sure that within a year or so I would have the operation. Then, and only then, would I tell Ray the truth. And then, I hoped, it wouldn't matter.

I wasn't being over optimistic about having the operation, even though I'd been thwarted for years. I knew now that if worse came to worse I could always go to Europe and have it done. The only thing preventing me from going immediately was money, and that problem would soon be solved by work ... lots of it.

One reason Ray and I were able to live in the same room together without becoming intimate was the fact that we often weren't there. I danced at a club in town from eight each evening until nearly five in the morning. Ray usually came with me to catch the show and keep me company

between acts.

After the show we had breakfast and returned to the trailer. We'd sleep until noon when I got up and started sewing. I had started a costume and dress shop to pick up some extra money for the operation.

For our first month together, Ray didn't work. Then, one night at the club, the regular comedian was sick. I told the owner to let Ray have a go as I always thought he was a natural comedian. He said OK and Ray was a hit. After that he shared the stage with me on the regular comedian's night off.

I was proud Ray was a success as a comic at the club. But his success also brought trouble. Some of the people at the club knew that I really wasn't a woman. All of them were my friends and before this had no reason to tell Ray the truth about me.

But Ray was handsome, and now that he was in the show, he came into contact with the other girls.

Gina, in particular, had her hat set for him. I could tell by the way she talked about him in the dressing room and how she said hello to him. Ray, though, didn't care for her at all. To him, she was just another dancer.

This infuriated Gina. It burned her up to see us together. In a way, I could see her point. She knew that sexually I was a man and it probably was a blow to her pride to know that in spite of what I lacked physically Ray preferred me to her. I must admit that I didn't notice her attitude at first. It was Ray who brought it to my attention.

He said to me one night: "Say, what's that Gina got against you? She looks at you as if she

were going to rip you to pieces.”

I told him he must be mistaken. I hardly had anything to do with her. But once Ray brought it to my attention, I noticed it myself. In the dressing room she'd never speak to me unless it was absolutely necessary. Then, when she did, it was with a thick coating of sarcasm.

I didn't return her viciousness with viciousness. I returned it with kindness. Not that I felt particularly kindly towards her. It was because I feared her. I knew that if she wanted, she could tell Ray what I was. I had met too many girls like her in my days. When it came right down to it, they used every bit of ammunition at their disposal . . . even other people's handicaps.

I suppose I was a fool, but I went out of my way to be nice to her.

It didn't take me long to discover the mistake I had made. But by the time I did discover it, it was too late.

Each day was agony for me. When will it come? I thought, when will Gina tell him?

If there was a phone call at the trailer, I'd rush to answer it. At the club I kept close to Ray and tried to steer him away from Gina. I even resorted to feigning illness and missing a few shows. When this happened, I insisted Ray stay home and take care of me.

But this couldn't go on. The nervous strain was too much. I was becoming terribly irritable. I had to tell Ray the truth.

I remember that night so clearly. Ray wasn't feeling well so he decided to skip the show. I was glad he wasn't coming because it gave me time to think. I didn't know exactly how to go about

telling him. I'd had to tell two men before what I was, but Ray was different, much different than either Mike or Red.

Ray was terribly sensitive. With Ray I always had the feeling he'd given himself to me completely, just as I'd given myself to him. He had complete faith in me and before this I'd given him no reason not to have faith in me.

I cursed myself for having taken the gamble of not telling Ray just so I could enjoy a few weeks of happiness. Now I stood to lose everything and ruin the happiness of someone I loved. But if he really loves you, it won't matter what you are, I tried to tell myself.

He'll forgive and forget.

I didn't know. But then that wasn't the point. He might forgive and forget, but it didn't change the fact that I'd lied to him for all these weeks.

I went on like this all evening, hating myself, then rationalizing, then facing up to the problem, then backing down. And with each mood, I had another drink. Even when the last customers left the club, I was still at the bar. I stayed so late that one of the cleaning ladies had to let me out.

I took a cab back to the trailer. It must have been six in the morning. I thought Ray would be in bed, but he wasn't.

Eleven

I could tell Ray was angry even before he spoke. "Where the hell you been?" he demanded. "I've been worried sick."

I held on to the door to steady myself. "Ray, I've got something to tell you. You'd better sit down because this'll knock you down."

I thought I sounded serious and solemn. After all, you have to sound serious and solemn when you tell the guy who loves you that sexually you're not a woman; that your real name isn't Hedy Jo Star but Carl Hammonds.

But the drama of the moment didn't seem to register with Ray. Maybe it was because I was drunk. He put his arms around me and led me to the bed where he sat me down. Then he got my nightgown from the dresser and put it into my hand. He helped me up and steered me into the bathroom. "You'd better get to sleep before you pass out," he said.

I can remember standing in the bathroom with my nightgown in my hand, sobbing. I kept saying to myself, "Why do I have to tell him? Why? Why?"

When I came out of the bathroom I sat on the side of the bed. Ray was sitting on the couch.

"Ray," I asked, "have you ever heard of Christine Jorgensen?"

"Of course," he said.

"Ray ... I'm like her."

I looked at him after I said it. I expected shock, but he was smiling.

"Yeah, sure. Now go to sleep."

I wanted him to believe me. I wanted him to know the truth but he wouldn't let me tell him. I began to sob again. "Listen to me, Ray. I'm not joking. I'm like Christine Jorgensen." Through my tears I could see the expression on his face had changed.

"You mean you're changing into a man?" he asked.

"I'm changing into a woman, Ray, a woman."

He stared at me, not knowing whether to be-

lieve what he had heard. Then he walked over to me. "Prove it, Hedy," he said.

I pulled my nightgown down between my legs. I didn't want him to see my sex organs.

"Prove it to me," he said again.

I turned from him, still holding my nightgown between my legs. Then I felt his hand on my shoulder. He turned me over and pulled my hands away. Then he lifted my nightgown. I didn't see him look at me, but I knew he had. He dropped the gown almost immediately. Then, without saying a word, he poured himself a drink and left the trailer.

I cried bitterly. It was bad enough having to tell Ray my secret, but the shame of him seeing it for himself was too much. I felt humiliated and degraded. At the same time I felt sorry for Ray. If it was a shock for me, what must it have been for him?

As I lay there crying, I didn't know what had happened to Ray. Had he left me? Would I ever see him again? Would I ever hear from him again? I remembered how Red had told me immediately that it didn't matter to him what I was. It must matter to Ray, I thought. Otherwise he wouldn't have left me.

The thought of never seeing Ray cut deeply into me. I cried until my tears were exhausted. And all the time I drove my clenched fist into my groin, into those bits of useless flesh that had turned my life into a hell.

I hadn't heard the trailer door open, but I felt someone was in the trailer with me. I turned and saw Ray standing over me. Maybe he'd come back for his clothes? I thought. I tried to apolo-

gize but nothing would come out. Finally, I asked, "Are you going?"

"No," he said.

I couldn't believe my ears. "Why are you staying?" I asked.

He sat next to me on the bed and stroked my hair. "Because I love you. I met you as a woman and I love you as a woman."

I put my arms around him. "I'm very glad," I said. "Very, very glad."

Then he asked me about the change and I told him the whole story. "All I have to do now is find the right doctor to perform the operation. When it's all over, I can love you like I want to."

He smiled. "You want to love me more than you have this past month?"

I held him tightly in my arms. "Yes, I do, I do. I want to love you until your toes curl."

"Funny," he said, "in a way I'm almost relieved that this was the reason you were going to that New York doctor. I thought for sure you had a serious illness. I was really worried. I thought that was the reason you used to get into your moods."

"No, my moods were moods of doubt," I said. "I felt I was leading you on, and I didn't want to do that. At the same time, I thought if I told you the truth, I'd lose you, and I didn't want that either. I love you, Ray, I love you a lot."

We talked until we fell asleep in each others arms. But when we woke, we didn't talk about it any more. It was forgotten. We went about our lives almost as if nothing had changed. But one thing wasn't the same and it worried me. Before I walked to Ray, he had regularly proposed to

me nearly every week. Now he never mentioned it. Was his silence a symptom? Could it be he didn't really love me as he once did?

I finally got up the courage to ask him. "Do you still love me, Ray?" I asked.

He said he did.

"But why don't you ever mention marriage any more?"

"If you could pass the physical, I'd marry you tonight. But who'll marry us now? We've got to get that operation for you before we make any more plans."

The operation ... I had to get it. I knew our love couldn't survive as long as I was what I was. It wasn't that I doubted Ray's love. I was as sure of his love for me as he was of my love for him. But how long could emotional love survive without physical love? How long too could Ray take the snide remarks of the people around us who knew what I was and that we were living together?

From the moment Ray had come to live with me, he wanted me to quit dancing. He was terribly jealous of the men who came to watch me dance. It used to send him into fits of temper if someone in the audience said something off-color as I was dancing. More than once he came home with bruised knuckles.

But no matter how much it bothered Ray, I couldn't give up dancing. He wanted to support me, but support wasn't enough. The operation was going to cost money and it was more than one person alone could save out of a paycheck. So we decided that we would both work as hard as we could to get the money.

We allowed ourselves one holiday that year.

We flew to New York to spend Christmas with Ray's family. It was the first Christmas in nearly eighteen years that I'd spent with a family. I can't tell you how wonderful it was to be surrounded by happy people who liked me, to open gifts bought especially for me and, most important, to have Ray's parents accept me into the family. It was the nicest Christmas I have ever spent.

But after our two week holiday, we were back working at the club and in our costume shop. Ray handled the business end of our firm and I handled the creative end. Though we were around each other constantly, and though we both worked incredibly hard, our feelings for each other never frayed. We had a common goal: our happiness. And we knew there was only one way we could attain it.

Then, one day, by just sheer luck, an old friend of mine brought our dream one step closer. I was at home when I received a call from her. "Congratulations, Hedy Jo," she said, as I answered the phone. "I've heard the news and I think it's just wonderful."

"What news?" I asked.

"That you had your change, of course. One of the girls from your old show told me that a New York doctor made the change for you."

"How I wish it were true, Marge, but it isn't. I haven't had the change. I've only had the bust implants and now I'm on hormone shots. But so far I haven't found a doctor who will do the operation for me here in the states. And I don't have enough money to have it done overseas."

Marge herself had had a sex change in Spain.

Now she was married and had two adopted children.

"Hedy Jo," she said, "I can't tell you how sorry I am. I've thought for the last year you had the change. I was just passing through town with my husband when I thought I'd call to congratulate you. Can you see us? I may have a doctor that can help you. He treated me in New York and then arranged for the European operation."

We did meet Marge and her husband and she did tell me about her New York doctor. In fact she arranged an appointment for me with him. Marge gave both Ray and me more than just a lead on a doctor. They showed us how wonderful a marriage could be between two persons. Marge had been changed for more than three years. She'd met her husband well before the operation. He knew all about her. Now they were happily married and led a perfectly normal relationship. This was what Ray and I had to look forward to.

Two days after Marge left, she phoned me from New York.

"Everything's arranged, Hedy," she said. "I've told my doctor about you and he's anxious to see you as soon as possible."

"I'll be there tomorrow," I said excitedly. And I was. I caught the first plane out of St. Louis and within a few hours I was sitting in the doctor's office in New York.

"Miss Star," the doctor told me after the examination, "your body is completely changed. You've done as much as you can do. Now we just have to find a surgeon for you."

Unfortunately, the surgeon which he knew in California was a little out of my price range.

"I think he could do it for about \$4000," said the doctor.

My heart sank . . . \$4000. With the transportation to and from California, the hospital fees and extras, I figured the whole thing would come to over \$6000, which I just didn't have. I thanked the doctor for all he had done and told him I'd keep in touch. Then I went back to East St. Louis and started working to save the money for the operation.

Just after I returned, I met an old friend, Tony Midnight, who for years had been one of the biggest costume designers in show business. He wanted to go into the costume business with me. After talking it over with Ray, we agreed and left East St. Louis for Chicago where we opened a shop.

We were in Chicago about a week when I received a phone call from Marge. She'd been trying to contact me in East St. Louis and had just discovered I was living in Chicago.

"I've found a doctor in Chicago who wants to see you," she said. "He thinks he can arrange the operation for you."

I wasn't as enthusiastic this time as I had been before when Marge fixed up an appointment for me. Though I was convinced in my own mind that one day I would have the change, I honestly didn't think it could be done in the U.S. I'd been disappointed so many times that I no longer believed it would ever happen. No one else had ever been able to have the operation done here, why would I be an exception? And besides, the prices I'd been quoted were too far out of reach for me.

But Marge insisted. "This may be the one," she said. "It can't hurt just to see him."

I did see the doctor and I have never regretted it. He examined me and told me immediately that he knew the man who could do the operation. Within a few minutes he had placed a call to a hospital in Memphis, Tenn., and the appointment was made. I was going to have the change made in the U.S. within the week.

Twelve

"I can't believe it," I said, squeezing Ray's hand.

"Well, it's true, Hedy," he said. "You'll believe it in another few hours."

I kissed Ray good-bye. It was a nervous sort of fumbling kiss. In a few hours, I thought, I'll be

in Memphis. And by tomorrow at this time I'll know for sure if they'll perform the operation.

I felt confident the operation would be performed. My doctor had talked to the specialist who was going to operate on me.

"Everything is all set, Miss Star," he told me. "The doctor not only can do the operation, but he's anxious to do it."

Ray put his hands on my shoulders and turned me towards the plane. "On your way, Hedy, before they leave without you."

I turned once -- to wave good-bye, then boarded the plane. In a day, maybe two, I thought, I'll be a real woman.

It was so hard to believe. After all those years of examination, tests, shots and treatment, I was at last on my way to have the final operation that would change me sexually into a woman.

It was June 19, 1962 when I went to the hospital in Memphis. I waited nervously in the waiting room for the doctor. When the nurse called my name I fairly leaped to my feet.

The doctor sensed my nervousness and put me at ease by talking as if the operation was settled and all but completed.

But when he examined me, I knew he had reservations. I could sense his doubts in his furrowed brow and in his probing questions. "To be frank, Miss Star," he said, "this operation is much more difficult than I had imagined. I'm afraid I'll have to call in some of my colleagues." And he did call them in; three of them. Each examined me and when they finished, I was told to go back to my hotel room and wait until I was contacted.

I left the hospital with dampened spirits. My confidence had been whittled away by the pessimistic looks of the doctors. I wondered if I'd be told to go home and await their reply as the doctors at Johns Hopkins had done. I didn't think I could face that. It chilled me to think of getting off the plane in Chicago and having to tell Ray I'd been turned down.

I waited in my hotel room for nearly twenty-four hours. I didn't leave once during that time. I watched television, read and paced the floor as I listened for their call. I tried to sleep, but it was impossible. I was too nervous. Finally the call came through. Could I come to the hospital immediately? the doctor asked.

Around the doctor's desk sat the three other physicians who had examined me the day before.

"To begin with, Miss Star," the doctor said, "the operation is much more complex than I had supposed. It can be done, but it will take the assistance of my colleagues."

It can be done!

Those were the words I wanted to hear. I didn't care if it took a dozen doctors and a dozen separate operations. That it could be done was what was important to me.

"But," he continued, "and it's a very big 'but,' the operation is extremely complex and, for that reason, dangerous. Before you decide to go ahead with it, you must consider what might happen."

He spoke each word very precisely. I knew he wanted to impress upon me the dangers that might be involved in the operation.

"First," he said, "if the operation is a success, it is possible you might never dance again.

It is also possible that you might never walk. Also, it is extremely doubtful that you will ever be able to have a sex life. I don't want to frighten you, Miss Star," he continued, "but if the operation is not a success, or if the effect of it upon your body is too severe, you might not survive." He looked me straight in the eye. "You may die," he said in a cold and clinical voice.

I didn't blink. My expression hadn't changed once while he was speaking to me. In my own mind I had also suspected that the operation would be dangerous. How could it not be dangerous?

"I don't care what happens, doctor," I told him. "Anything is better than living the misery I have lived my whole life. I realize it is a gamble, but the pot's too big not to take a crack at it."

"We appreciate your feelings, Miss Star, but I think you should give this more careful consideration. Besides, my colleagues and myself are not yet sure whether we should perform the operation. It can be done, but whether we will do it will take more thought. You can expect to hear from us tomorrow."

I was stunned for a few moments. I had thought it was all agreed and now they spoke as if there was some chance they wouldn't do the operation. I wanted to plead with them right then and there. I wanted to make them change me. But I realized anything I said now could only hurt my chances. They knew how I felt. So I got up, thanked them all and told them I'd be waiting at the hotel for the answer.

That night was another twelve hours of hell. Success seemed to be at my fingertips. I dreaded

the thought of losing it. They had been sympathetic toward me. They said it could be done, yet they had doubts about doing it. If they turned me down, I thought, how could I expect anyone to change me?

When morning came I was still dressed and sitting in the chair I'd sat in when I returned from the hospital.

I went for a walk around the block and then came back to the room. I waited next to the phone for their call.

Finally, it came.

"Have you changed your mind, Miss Star?" the doctor asked me.

I told him I was more determined than ever to go through with it.

"And you, doctor? What have you decided?" I asked.

"We have decided, Miss Star," he said, "that if you want the operation we will perform it. We have no doubts, as to its success, though you must understand there are certain unpleasant possibilities that might occur."

That noon I checked into the hospital and was put through a series of tests. Then I talked briefly to each of the four doctors who were to operate on me.

Just before dinner that night I called Ray and told him everything was set. He wished me luck and said, "All our problems are over now."

All through the evening the doctors and nurses who were to take part in the operation stopped in to talk to me. They all tried very hard to put me at ease, but I was already at ease. I didn't have one fear about the operation. I understood com-

pletely what the consequences might be.

I took some sleeping pills, but they didn't help. I could only think that tomorrow at the same time it would be over. I would be a woman.

At one point I questioned whether I was doing the right thing. Was I going against nature, I wondered? Was it wrong for me to change the body I was born with? Often during my life I had heard people condemn those who wanted to change their sex. "God made you a man and that's what you should stay. It is wrong to tamper with His work."

I had never been religious in the conventional sense, though I did believe in God. It did bother me that I might be doing the wrong thing. But in my heart, I sincerely felt I wasn't. If I was, then let me die on the operating table, I prayed.

The next morning things happened very quickly. I had just managed to fall asleep when the nurse woke me to give me some pills. Then the doctor came in and examined me. It'll be over soon, I kept thinking. It'll be over soon. I was getting drowsier and drowsier. Then all I remember was the doctor standing at the door as I was wheeled away.

"Good luck, buddy," he said.

I was on the operating table for five hours as four doctors worked over me. The chief surgeon later explained to me how the change was completed. First they removed the penis and the scrotum. Next an opening was made through the pelvis. A vaginal tract was built from what was left of the penis. Above the vagina they reconstructed the urinal tract. This was held together with a plastic tube until the tissues grew

together

When I woke in my room after the operation, the doctor was there at my side.

"Is it over?" I mumbled.

"Everything went perfectly," he said.

I slid my hand down between my legs, but all I could feel were bandages. Soon the effect of the anesthesia wore off and the pain began. It tore through my pelvis, down into my legs and up into my back. It became so intense that they gave me sedation. For four days I was drugged. Then on the fifth day, when I was feeling better, the doctors removed the bandages.

The first time I saw my new body, I was disappointed. My first impression was that it wasn't exactly what I wanted. But then the doctor explained to me that the distortion was due to swelling which, in time, would disappear.

But the worst of the operation wasn't over yet. On the ninth day the doctors were examining me internally when the urinal tract was accidentally punctured. Now I had no control over urination. This would have made a normal live nearly impossible, so they decided to operate once more. This time I was on the table for two hours. During the operation the doctors grafted a small muscle around the urinal opening in order to keep it closed.

It wasn't until six days later that I was finally able to get up and walk around. Now that the swelling had gone down and the urinal operation had been a success, my spirits soared. I called my mother in Oklahoma City and asked, "How does your new daughter sound?"

She was thrilled that I'd had the operation,

though it wasn't a surprise. Ray had told her I was in the hospital and she figured I'd gone to have the change. She wanted to come and see me but I told her no. I'd come home.

During the next few days each of my brothers and sisters called to congratulate me and tell me how happy they were for me. They had planned a family reunion in my honor as soon as I was well enough to leave the hospital and come to Oklahoma City.

Forty-five days after entering the hospital, the doctors gave me a final examination and told me I was a perfect woman. The only flaw, they said, was the fact that I'd never be able to lead a normal sex life. But one of the doctors dissented from this view. He told me that if I was careful and followed his directions exactly, I would, within a short time, have as normal a sex life as any woman.

On that optimistic note, I left for Oklahoma City and the home I hadn't visited in over seventeen years.

When I got off the plane, my whole family was waiting for me. My mother rushed up to me, hugged me and said, "Welcome home, daughter." My sisters and brothers kissed me and said, "Hi sis, how are you?" My sister, Jerri, pouted in jest and said, "I used to be the oldest girl in the family, but I'm not any more."

For four days I went from one party to another, looked through dozens of family albums, watched reels of home movies, met nephews and nieces, visited old friends and did everything that one does during a reunion. It was wonderful

fun and it was also the first time I'd ever been completely relaxed with my family.

On the plane headed for Chicago I began to think of my reunion and how I had felt during it. I had a new buoyancy, a new confidence in myself. The last time I'd visited my family I'd been terribly self-conscious and guilty. It didn't matter that my sisters treated me as a sister, for I knew they knew I wasn't really their sister.

Before the operations I'd always been acutely aware of what I was and what I wasn't. It didn't matter that the people passing me on the street would probably never guess that under my dress were male genitals. I knew it, and this self-knowledge influenced every minute of my life.

But now, suddenly, this fear was gone. The fear that clung to me for over thirty years was suddenly removed. I was a different person because I had a different image of myself.

I wondered what other changes there were that I hadn't noticed. Maybe there were changes that wouldn't be for the good. And Ray? How would he react to these changes? He loved the old me, but would he love the new me?

I didn't know the answer to that question. Even after I met Ray at the airport and spent hours that night telling him about my two months away from him, I didn't know the answer. He was happy to see me, he was as kind to me as ever, but I felt there was a barrier between us that hadn't been there before.

We were together about two weeks before the strain finally broke me.

I was watching television with Ray when sud-

denly I burst into tears. He rushed to my side and asked if I was all right. I nodded.

"Something must be bothering you," he said.

I nodded again.

"Come on, tell me," he said, as he stroked my hair.

"You don't love me any more," I sobbed.

"Where'd you ever get that idea?" he said.

I told him that he'd hardly kissed me since I'd been back. And whenever I undressed near him, he'd turn his head away so as not to see me.

"Don't you like me now that I'm changed?"

He sat on the floor at my feet and held my hand. "Hedy, you've got to realize that the change was as big a shock for me as it was for you. It'll take some time to get used to it. Besides, the only reason I've kept away from you is because I know what the doctor said. You've got to be careful and you've got to take care of yourself. I just want to keep out of your way until you're better."

And soon I was better.

About three months after being released from the hospital I called up the doctor in Memphis who had told me that, if I followed his directions, I would have a normal sex life. I described my condition to him and then he said that everything sounded fine to him.

That night, for the first time, Ray and I made love. It was a night I'd dreamed of my whole life and that Ray and I had dreamed of since I confessed to him that I was a man sexually.

Since the change and my adjustment to it, my life has flowered. Each day I discover something about my new self. Each day I gain even more

confidence in myself, more interest in myself, and above all, more self-respect. Life has taken on a new look. It has become something to be enjoyed and lived, rather than a burden to make the best of.

Yesterday my future was a collection of dreams that always kept well ahead of me. Today I've caught up with those dreams. I no longer regard my future as dreams but as plans, and these plans include a husband and family. I can never have children of my own, but when I do marry I hope to adopt a family. Ray and I are no longer going together -- love, like sex, changes, too -- but I know that somewhere there is that ONE man for me. And that "me" is ME.

Today I can make these plans with complete confidence, and I can live as a normal human being because I am no longer Carl Rollins Hammonds. Nature and doctors have changed my body and the courts have changed my name. Today I am Hedy Jo Star. Today I am a woman.

