

ABBY

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Chapter 50 - Singing

One Sunday Pastor Lucy led everyone singing *Magic Penny* during her Sermon. I had been singing that on my own and enjoyed joining right in.

A few days after that I worked with the Financial Board on minor irregularities in allocating expenses. The phone in that room rang. One of the Board members answered it, and half a minute later handed the handset to me. That annoyed me with the interruption, but I brought my voice under control. "Hello. Mansion House. Cindi Metzler here. How may I help you?"

The call came from Lucy the Senior Pastor wanting me to attend a Music Board meeting. Lucy's call came across to me as a command as it came from such a powerful person with God as a Pastor. My peer group worked with me later to overcome my reaction, but I remained in cowardly awe of Pastors for a long time. I had a hospital Foundation Donor meeting that same evening. Lucy didn't give up so easily. The same thing would be coming up with the Deacons so could I come with Kittie to the next Deacons' Meeting a few weeks later?

I continued being secretly afraid the Deacons had an agenda about sinners even though the Deacon with a pony tail clearly did not. Kittie had told me they did not. In my fear I hid in an overstuffed chair in the furthest place back in a corner. Kittie had heard spouses shouldn't serve on a Board together, so she sat elsewhere in the circle of chairs away from me.

Both Pastors came which I thought they never did. Some other Board, Task Force, or Committee had to be meeting somewhere; didn't they? But those other Board Chairs were soldiering on without them, and both Pastors were here. The Deacons greeted each other quietly as they passed out minutes, agendas, and handouts on their budget. Even the PonyTail Deacon didn't push the hugs, but he did come to me and lean over giving me one.

I had a secret moment I had never had before of being tempted to give him a girl style kiss on the cheek or neck. I didn't. I became mortified with the thought.

The Chair interrupted him from giving a hug to Kittie with the opening prayer and approval of the minutes of the prior meeting. One of the Deacons had a devotional reading. Next were the Pastors' concerns of members in the hospital, upcoming Baptisms, marriages, memorial services, and anybody needing anything. "Ah, Els and Roger, come in."

The music director with the Belgian name and the organist were hesitant crossing in front of everyone to the available chairs.

The Chair handed papers to another Deacon who went around the circle passing those out.

Pastor Lucy didn't wait. "This is a special request of the Music Board, but it will affect the Service, so we need Deacon approval too."

Pastor Stephanie sat at the end of a sofa next to the overstuffed chair with me. She reached across the little table with a lamp and held out her hand. "We've heard you have a tradition of holding hands for difficult discussions, and we have a request of you."

I took her hand wondering what this could be all about.

Kittie sat straight up becoming very alert.

"Els, Roger, Lucy, and myself all noticed something when you sang *Magic Penny*. You used your full voice when you forgot not to."

The Music Director grew a demure smile. "Cindi; you're not breathing deeply. Not singing with your power. You have a beautiful voice; the best on the choir."

I had no idea what to say, so I said nothing.

"That surgery didn't just give you a new voice. They gave you a wonderful new singing voice, but something is wrong as you won't use it; won't give it volume. Roger and I want to work with you."

I puckered up.

The PonyTail Deacon's smile went from one ear to the other.

Which they did. My singing voice grew rapidly helped by an interview with the Surgeon. We had a delightful time. He showed me everything he knew about how human speech and singing is formed in the windpipe, larynx, throat, and mouth. He felt especially proud of how he had fashioned my new voice box. He told me that during my surgery he had focused that cyberknife machine on my vocal chords several times, but couldn't bring himself to touch those. Instead he had carefully shaped my voice box and reduced the diameter of my windpipe to a woman's smaller dimensions, which is why healing took so long. He hadn't been so sure surgery in my windpipe would heal, and felt relieved and delighted it had.

If that didn't work well enough he could replace my vocal chords from a cadaver which made me shiver just at the thought.

He smiled. Without telling anyone he had lifted my larynx higher up with titanium staples. Everything combined had raised the pitch of my natural voice. He gave me a thorough exam. "Everything healed nicely. You're ready. Sing all you want. Use your new musical instrument to the fullest. Put all the air you can through it." Clearly he had pride from having crafted a musical instrument inside me.

Three months later the Music Director and Pastors asked me to be the soloist. I would sing instead of the Choir for the hymn in the middle of the service.

Were they out of their mind? I didn't want to wear my coral colored skirt-suit as

too over dressed. Kittie didn't buy my protests, but made a compromise by asking the seamstresses what else they could make for my singing. Kittie suggested both of us study a woman country singer's rendition on YouTube of *How Great Thou Art*. Kittie had the beauticians use that makeup airbrush on me that morning. The lipstick she used on me matched my new skirt-suit. She brought my hair forward over my right shoulder the way that singer had on YouTube.

In the Service I almost tripped as my legs went rubbery on the elevated levels of the Choir's platform. Roger the organist picked up an electric guitar and a music stand. He moved to the front of the chancel off to one side putting me in the center. When Pastor Henry rolled his wheel chair front and center down below I saw the front pews were filled with Deacons and their families. *Oh my God* I silently prayed as my eyes watered. With those real tears I used everything I had learned from that singer as the opening. My right hand held a new professional singer's microphone as my left index finger went to my eye. "Pastor Henry, you started a flood. I hope I can get through this."

He had been badly damaged in a car accident and required a wheel chair. "In you I have the faith of Christ."

I wept even more.

Kittie helped by being up in the balcony at the back with the audio crew fiddling with the electronic filters.

My voice started femininely soft with "Oh Lord my God," and then rose "with I in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds thy hands have made." Roger altered the cadence of his playing to match my singing. I don't know how he did that so easily, but he did as I made little pauses for breathing in more air modeled on that performance on YouTube. Kittie became masterful back there with the audio crew as they grew my voice slowly. "I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, thou power throughout the universe displayed". They must have pushed those control knobs for all they were worth for that soaring refrain "then sings my soul". They moderated it for "my savior God to thee".

Roger played solo in the break between the first and last versus I would sing. In that break I did everything that singer had done with her left hand patting her sternum and flinging her head around fighting back the tears. Even the elbow of my right hand holding the mike moved around. Instead of my tears embarrassing me, this time they were part of the show. They were part of my magnetism. Just like the one we saw on the Internet. I gave my voice all the power I could towards the end almost yelling into that microphone.

All my doubts about whether this Congregation could be ready for such an emotional experience evaporated with the standing ovation started by the Deacons. I wept as I gave Roger a hug rivaling what that singer had done with her musician after her performance.

Kittie had us watch the YouTube video again and my performance. "You were terrific. You were just as a professional."

I wagged my head I couldn't be that good.

Kittie didn't buy my protest. "You are going to have that gray sparkling sequine dress. You are going to be just as feminine form perfect."

That took me back. I patted my sternum at her words and frowned. "You're kidding." No, she had not been kidding. I wiped my face. "My eyes are different."

She made that dress blue for my eyes, and wouldn't tell me how she had those shimmering shining sequins applied which annoyed me. She fit that dress snugly to my new shape with the sequins in swirling patterns accentuating my new curves.

The Music Director and the Organist kept right on coaching me and my singing. I became a monthly soloist. The Choir reacted badly to my doing what the Pastors and the Music Director told me what to do projecting emotions. The Pastors intervened with Choir much to my relief. Els would flip a thumb at me to walk out front. Kittie and I had donated a professional microphone which had been parked discretely nearby. I moved to the front center. After starting I would take the steps down to the main floor. I would find someone to sing to, bend a little, and look them in the eye over that microphone. I would give them everything my voice could project into that microphone. Pastor Henry asked me to sing directly at him sitting right in front and others would join in around him. Kittie had another dress made for me of the same royal blue with broad white lapels at the top as the Choir's robes. But she had it shamelessly styled below exposing my knees. In the back of the Choir I appeared to be one of them when out front I became magnetically sexy. I became afraid the Congregation or the Choir would throw a fit at the sexuality, but they didn't. A few quoted modern biblical research with a phrase about Jesus and his "sexual expression". OK, I answered the call for the good of the cause. I hoped they knew what they were doing.

We even tried my singing *Amazing Grace* the way a YouTube video had. I felt I blew it, but the video didn't show any such mistakes.

Our Cap'n Jackie's restaurant started an open mike night, and Kittie found more. The Jaycees had a party where she embarrassed me to tears making me wear that sequined dress and carry our professional microphone. The hem came scandalously above my knees making me afraid to sit down for fear of showing my diaper bulge. Our choices for my pop style country, hymnal, and Swamp Pop singing stole the show at the party. A few women Jaycees started a campaign that evening for me to be the Jaycees Chapter's next President.

The residents of the Mansion House asked for a show, as did the immigrants. The organist Roger found charity concerts where we could perform. Kittie always went to the audio crews making those little improvements and audio adjustments.

We fiddled and faddled with hymns and songs as we went.

Kittie returned from the Banking Committee late one night. She slammed the door hard, and came right at me with her fists in the air.

'Aw oh, now what'. I grabbed her wrists. She struggled with that. She made a half hearted effort at stomping my feet which told me she knew what she had been doing making such a struggle. She tried yanking her wrists out of my hands, but I held on. As we swayed in every direction I moved her to our bed with the straps already in place for our BDSM fun. I had her bent backwards over the mattress edge but she didn't help. Not at all.

I flexed my knees lowering my upper body slightly and threw her up there. Mostly up there. She kicked me fairly hard in the gut. I threw myself on top of her holding her down with my body as I managed strapping down her wrists. Wiffle balls went in her

hands which were taped closed.

"Honey." I had hardly ever called her honey. "You're not screaming so I know you have some self control. Want a pacifier so you can scream?"

She yelled "no" so loudly I became afraid security would come in, but they didn't.

She kicked and yelled "no, no, no" as she threw her head back and forth.

Finally I got tired of that, grabbed her ankles and strapped them down as she got a few kicks into my forearms. After securing her wrists and ankles I gently pinched her nose. When she opened her mouth to breathe I pushed a pacifier in her mouth. "Let me know when you're ready to talk."

She didn't take long before she stopped kicking which signaled for removing the pacifier.

"What has that been all about?"

She cried. "We had a disaster in the medical clinic. No, nobody has been hurt or died, but everything ran amok. The sedatives had been moved; the bandages were in short supply; they sent the wrong doctor; the monitoring equipment went somewhere else. I couldn't get them to do any one thing right. An important light even burned out."

"Do you know what you just said?"

She shook her head for 'no'.

"You just said 'I couldn't get them to do any one thing right'. Do you know you actually said that?"

More tears. "No."

"Yes, you did. Do you know what that means?"

She used a pouty voice. "No."

"You tried taking over, and they wouldn't do what you wanted them to do when you knew you were right."

Kittie's legs gave a few pulls and kicks against the straps.

"That's a sale, kiddo. Getting them to do what you want is a sale. Just like getting those pledges for the hospital and the church. That's a sale. You ready for a hug?"

She was.

After releasing her and having that hug we sat on our bed where I took both of her hands in mine. Soaked diapers had wet those bed clothes before and my skirt was washable. "Do you remember when you said you had to make me 'feminine form perfect'. Remember that?"

She wouldn't admit to that in her distress right then.

"Well, you did. You made me into a blond because they would do more of what I said if my hair became blond."

Kittie continued sniffing back her tears.

"You've done all this work on me for a long time. Isn't it time you let me coach you? Remember when you said I couldn't be a girl anymore, or something like that? That I had to be a mature sexually attractive woman?"

She wagged her head for 'no', but I knew she would remember later on her own.

"It's time for you to become your own version of the mature attractive woman. Whether you like it or not, it's time."

We talked late into the night. The next day we saw Tara and had another long talk. She called in Dr. Christina.

Kittie watched seven top women country singers do *Coal Miner's Daughter* all together on YouTube. They seamlessly passed around who had the lead and sang it as if they had created it as their own song, which it wasn't.

I nudged her arm. "Go make yourself singer gorgeous, and let's do it."

Kittie gave me a look of complete disbelief.

"Really, Kittie, it's time for you to stop hiding out of sight. Let's do that song. It will bring just as many tears as the hymns."

She hung her head in complete defeat.

"I've never done this before, but the time has come." I put my hand under her chin with my fingers around her jaw lifting her head. "It's time, sweetie. When you are done pouting, we'll have a crew for our makeup and preparation, just like that singer talked about in the interview."

Kittie slapped my face and ran out.

I felt taken back, but only for a few minutes and brought down my shock and anger. All the way down. I became so pleased with myself I sang my heart out on upbeat country songs. That didn't stop my roller coaster fears that Kittie would never come back, or worse, hurt herself.

She had been gone for hours before she came in meek as a mouse and asked for a hug.

"Of course."

"How can you be so forgiving, Cindi?"

"Takes work. Lots of practice and ever more work. Where did you go and what did you do?"

"Saw Dr. Christina and Tara. You know what they said?"

"No idea. What?"

"Oh Cindi. Stop that. It's maddening the way your inner therapist kicks in. You know you're right, of course. Now give me a hug again and let's plan this. I felt kicked."

We did. Kittie came up with quite a list of upbeat country music we worked ourselves to a frazzle over.

Kittie seriously considered becoming a blond on my coaching, but she found a look she liked even better for herself. She modeled herself on a popular woman country singer from a performance Kittie had seen on YouTube as they had the same eyes. Kittie had the beauty salon look at that video for matching auburn hair. She also used the heavy eyeshadow that I thought could be a bad idea, but as Kittie said, she had to be her own woman. She watched and watched and on her own adopting the smiles, mannerisms, and speech of a singer who could sound Appalachian for a few words. Kittie had family in Appalachia and could do that too. When we sang *Coal Miner's Daughter* together she would do the parts solo needing that accent. She might adopt those looks, but she worked on all of their mannerisms making herself true to herself. She became particularly good at throwing her shoulders around like two of those singers.

She became the most attractive woman on the Finance Board. With time they encouraged her singing softly around the Mansion House as they came to support her growing physical magnetism. When residents or staff went recalcitrant they called in the new Kittie who told them she learned it all from me. But I knew she watched YouTube as she invented herself on the fly as the circumstances called to her.

Pastor Stephanie's eyebrows bounced up when she heard what had been going on. At a Baptism Stephanie put that professional microphone into Kittie's hand for the *Borning Song* right there in front of the parents and family. Kittie gave it a glance appropriate for a snake. Stephanie gave her a forbidden pat on the butt in front of everyone and God Herself and lifted Kittie's wrist up. Kittie's face expressed feeling trapped and then she got it. That microphone came up and she launched into it singing the full length version with Roger at the organ followed her lead all the way. That audio crew must have learned a few things working on me as Kittie's singing came out of the speakers with a new passion. Applause erupted.

One afternoon my cell phone played the opening bars to *Coal Miner's Daughter* which meant the call came from Kittie.

"Sure, honey, what's up?"

"Come as quick as you can to Squirrel and Pickle in the shopping mall. You're in good clothes for the Foundation, aren't you?"

"Of course; that's how you dressed me. I have to finish first. Maybe five minutes here, and a few more on the way. OK?"

At the Squirrel and Pickle Kittie sat at a big corner booth with several people in business clothes. Their clothes screamed 'sales rep' at me which they were. They were from the liquor distributor. Kittie pulled me by the hand down into the booth. She continued grilling them for her surprise they knew of Wine Fairs in other big cities.

Kittie's face glowed. She became animated.

That evening we threw ourselves into how we could have monthly wine fairs with other people renting booths for their businesses. Ernie of the gunshop liked the idea. So were the farmers' markets. The list grew.

We did require the wine booths to have good looking people without that sagging skin of alcoholics. Sorry, but no. We also drove them nuts with requiring a flier at their booths for treatment of alcohol and drug abuse. Wine is good; buy all you want; but watch for too much consumption too fast. They actually screamed at Kittie on the telephone of their fear about lost sales. Kittie stood her ground. You want in "our fair" you have to be good community citizens. "If you don't like it go watch a Judge give civic lessons at the center stage. If not her, there are first responders walking the grounds. The State Police are there for clearing gun sales. You obey the rules or else. Got it?"

Kittie and I made so much money we made major donations. We paid that as a donation to the Hospital Foundation, and pledged to the church among others.

Kittie wrote songs with us singing the parts as she made them up with occasional suggestions of my own. She wrote "Busted" about a recovering drug addict, and "New Baby" about a dirt poor family giving birth at home in a snow storm. Without her having to admit a thing, I got a glimpse into her family's hard scrabble life. She created "Country Lawyer" about a man who kept helping people down on their luck, but who couldn't pay enough to keep his office door open. She kept expanding it until it came together all over again as a ballad series of the poor country people he helped. Sometimes the lawyer Danielle Pierce became a he as Dan Pierce. Kittie wrote edgy pieces about modern life that we found didn't fit country audiences, but did for the university crowd. She tried several ideas for a song about a transsexual, but we both didn't like any of them. She wrote to a singer whose agent wrote back. Those songs weren't for her repertoire, but he sent us to another agent whose Spiced Apples group made them into what they could use.

Kittie and I sang their version.

How could I ever feel as successful again as I felt about what I had done building Kittie's self-esteem?