

## Debut

*by Janice Slykbuis*

**J**IM JACKSON sauntered into the room. The soft, subtle beat of the band drifted through the air. He heard the chatter of the girls in the wallflower corner hush as he entered. He flashed his even white teeth in their direction before letting his long legs carry him to the opposite, the stag line. His huge shoulders tilted forward slightly as he walked on the balls of his feet. His heavy, black brows shielded the light from his deep blue eyes.

“Hi, Jim!”

“Barney, how are you?”

“Fine, glad you could make it.”

“The one stag of the year? Wouldn’t miss it!” Jim folded his arms and rested one of his huge shoulders against the wall. He glanced at the opposite corner.

Barney grinned. “Which one is it going to be?”

Jim flushed and flicked a speck of lint from his Madras sport coat. “Haven’t decided.”

Barney grinned and leaned against the wall. He tapped his foot in time to the music.

“Drivin’ my big, long Cadillac

And fightin’ the girls off my back.”

“Cool music!”

“Man, you said it!”

Jim glanced across the room. “I wish they wouldn’t all clump together.”

“Yeh! It’s bad enough when there’s just two or three, but fifteen!”

“Well, at least we have a choice.”

“You got a point there, Jim.”

“What did you think of the game?”

“Lousy! What happened to Martin anyway?”

“Just an off night, I guess. He couldn’t hit a . . .” He stopped at Barney’s low whistle. He turned and repeated the compliment. “Who is she?”

“I don’t know. . . must be new in town.”

“She is *really* neat.”

“Well, why don’t you ask her to dance?”

“No, Barney, I couldn’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“Because you saw her first.”

“I don’t mind, Jim. Go right ahead.”

“Really, Barney, it wouldn’t be fair.”

“What isn’t fair?”

“For me to ask her to dance when you saw her first.”

“Look, Jim, I don’t care. If it will make you feel any better, we’ll flip on it. Ah. . . got a quarter?”

Jim dug into his pocket and produced the coin. He flipped it and slapped it on the back of his right hand. “Heads or tails?”

“Heads!”

Jim uncovered the quarter and forced a grin. “See you, Barney.” He slipped the quarter back into his pocket and started across the floor.

The girls of the wallflower corner lowered their voices. The room seemed to have a thousand eyes and all focused on him. The protection of the stag line was gone. His forehead felt moist, his lips dry. He shoved his big hands into his pockets to keep them from vibrating. His long strides became shorter and shorter as he approached her. All too soon he was there. He felt the hard lump in his throat wrestle with the knot of his tie. He swallowed.

She looked up and smiled. The lump zipped back up to

his mouth. "Dance?" His voice squeaked. She hesitated. Then he realized that the band had stopped playing five minutes ago. It was intermission. He flushed. "Er. . . ah. . . may I get some punch. . . for you?"

She smiled. "Yes, thank you."

"Ah. . . be right back!" He managed a nervous grin and rushed to the refreshment table.

The table glittered with its array of crystal cups, silver, and tiny cakes with pastel icing. He picked up some napkins and silver and proceeded to the cakes. He picked up a plate and placed a cake on it. He frowned. How was he to carry the other plate. . . both hands were full. He hesitated and then stuffed the napkins and silver into his pockets. The cups rattled as he picked the plates up. The red liquid slipped over the edge and soaked one of the cakes. He set the plates back down, picked up the two cups, and started back.

He walked slowly, trying not to spill the punch that danced so merrily in the cup to the tune of his "all thumbs." He gripped the handles more tightly, but that only seemed to increase the liquid's tempo. He tried walking more slowly. The few yards to the sidelines stretched into miles.

At last! She grasped the cup in the nick of time. He sighed in relief. He had made it. He smiled and released his grip, but his forefinger wouldn't budge.

"It's caught," he said blankly.

"What?"

"My finger . . . it's caught in the handle."

"Oh. . . . Can't you get it out?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe if we set it down. . . ." She set the cup on the side table. "There! Think you can get it now?"

Jim tugged at his finger. "It won't come. I think it's swelled."

"Maybe if you wet it. . . ."

"Maybe. . . ." He leaned down and ran his tongue over his finger near the handle. He straightened, then gave a tug. The punch slopped over; the finger slipped out. He breathed a sigh of relief.

The band was returning now. The drummer picked up

his sticks. Oh, no! Not a fast one! He looked at the girl helplessly. "Do you want to dance this one?"

"Well. . ."

"Marsha! I didn't see you before. Where were you hiding?"

"Grant, how are you?" She looked up at the intruder in relief.

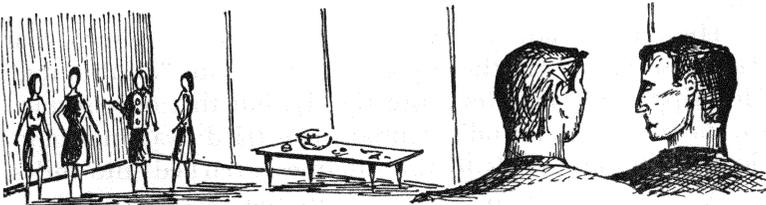
"Fine! Ah. . . is this dance taken?"

"Well. . ." she looked at Jim.

"Oh. . . go right ahead," Jim blurted out.

"Sure you don't mind?"

"No! It's just fine!" He stepped back and watched as they whirled away. She was laughing. Her dark eyes sparkled beneath the black lashes. Jim shoved his big hands into his pockets and walked out the door.



## Right Chanel

*by Jocelyn Renard*

I squeeze you dear and hold you tight.  
 You're touched by my devotion—  
 But no, it isn't you I love,  
 But just your shaving lotion.