



*Kyle Clifford Brooks and Katherine Christine Brooks are making their way in the country music scene. Finding their way, and overcoming defined gender norms, they find love and success as KC Brooks. It's Serendipity.*

## **KC Music**

By Emily Ashcroft

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A woman with long dark hair, wearing a brown cowboy hat and a dark jacket, is shown in profile, playing an acoustic guitar. Her eyes are closed, and she has a serene expression. The background is a warm, bokeh-filled night scene of a city street, likely Nashville, with blurred lights and a building visible in the lower left. In the upper left, a silhouette of another woman in a cowboy hat playing a guitar is visible against the bokeh lights. A glowing neon sign with the word "NASHVILLE" is positioned over the woman's guitar. The title "KC Music" is written in a white, elegant cursive font across the middle of the image.

*KC Music*

NASHVILLE

EMILY ASHCROFT

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# I

My maternal grandfather is Kyle Holcross, and my paternal grandfather is Clifford Brooks. When I was born, I was named Kyle Clifford Brooks in their honor, but as long as I can remember everyone has called me KC or sometimes, Ky. My mother is named Lynn Anne after her grandmother, and daddy is named Carl. My sister Trisha is four years older than me, and my brother Jacob is five years older.

Growing up; life was easy. Daddy worked as an Attorney specializing in business law and mother was a loan officer at the bank. In school, both Trisha and Jacob excelled. He would eventually become a veterinarian, and she became a nurse. I did OK in my classes, but my brain wasn't quite engaged academically. Mother and daddy pushed me, but mostly C's and a few B's were my best. What I was interested in was music.

The first instrument I ever had was a little toy xylophone. It was a pull toy on wheels with ten colored bars and a ball shaped striker. I played with it so much, mother would occasionally hide it to get a few minutes of quiet. When I was five, we moved into a new house, and the previous owners left behind an old upright piano; I claimed it as mine. It was moved to a back room in the basement, and I spent hours there tinkling the keys. My fascination was such that when I turned six, mother signed me up for lessons.

Learning to play came easy to me, and when I started school, mother and daddy would have to insist I did homework and study before I could sneak off to the piano. For Christmas when I was seven, I got a digital keyboard, and it opened a whole new world of music for me. When was nine, I became fascinated with the guitar and used the birthday money from my grandparents to buy a used acoustic guitar and added another set of lessons. When I was eleven, I added an electric guitar, and then at thirteen I picked up a banjo. That's when mother and daddy finally agreed I might be on to something.

Along the way, I picked up a couple of harmonicas, but it was when I asked about an accordion daddy said, "Enough! You're going to be a freshman next year and you need to focus on your classes. If you show us that you can get at least all B's, I'll get you the accordion." That was all the incentive I needed and for my next birthday I got the accordion. Along the way, I joined the orchestra and picked up a loaner violin. I started as last chair in the second violins but was soon moving up.

Sophomore year, I joined the choir. I had to give up my study hall to make room in my schedule, so I had to spend more homework time to keep up with all B's. Being in the choir, two things happened. First, while I knew I could sing, I discovered I had a pretty good voice. I ended up as the only boy singing in the alto section. Secondly, I ended up singing in solos or duets, and it helped me to become more comfortable performing and built my self-confidence. As a result, I began making new friends, mostly girls.

I was six weeks premature when I was born. Mother was stricken with some evil virus and was hospitalized. The doctors decided to perform a caesarian section to keep her safe and hopefully me as well. It worked OK, but when I was delivered, I weighed 4 pounds 6 ounces and was 15 inches long. While my small size didn't create any health issues, I maintained my smaller stature as I grew.

Jacob was 6 foot 6 inches tall and muscular, loved sports, went to UT on a basketball scholarship, and studied biology, before moving to UGA for veterinary medicine. He had recently joined a practice in Springfield and was engaged to his girlfriend Courtney. They met in college, and she was teaching high school biology.

Trisha was a swimmer and won several local competitions. At 5 feet 9 inches she had a lithe lean body. She finished nursing school and was working in the orthopedic ward at Vanderbilt Children's Hospital. She had several guys who chased after her, but she was in no hurry to marry, preferring to focus on her job. She had an apartment near the hospital and was a huge fan of the Nashville scene.

By the time I graduated from high school, I had reached 5 foot 7 inches and while I once topped the scale at 132 pounds, I generally weighed in closer to 125. Although I was in excellent health, several times over the years, doctors had suggested HGH and testosterone injections but with my parents' guidance I decided not to do it. If my health had been at issue, it would have been different, but I was fine, small for a guy, but so what? I had strawberry blonde hair I had let grow to my shoulders, and large bright green eyes. Mother would say my looks were wasted on a guy, and a lot of girls were jealous.

When it came to college, I didn't have scholarships coming my way. I had maintained a B average but had no idea what I wanted to study. What I really wanted was to play music. I was taking classes at the community college, sociology, philosophy, and every

## *KC Music*

music theory class they offered. I still lived at home and found a job as a QC Associate at a company making LED circuits for advertising signs. I knew nothing about the technology but when they sat me at a bench told me to connect the red wire here, the green wire there, flip the switch and watch the meter, I could manage it. A reading between 15 and 21 was good and the part moved on. Anything else and it was returned for rework. I made good money and was shocked by the simplicity of the job.

In addition to my job and school, I joined a band. I teamed up with four other guys and we formed Borrowed Time, a country rock band. Three guitars, keyboards, and a drummer. We were good enough to get a few paying jobs, but also worked at a few of the bars in Nashville earning tips only. I mostly played lead guitar and sang backup vocals with my higher range voice. We covered songs by Charley Daniels, and Alabama, to Lynyrd Skynyrd, on the country side, and Journey and Kansas on the rock side.

One of the clubs we played was more country and less rock, and I met a lot of other musicians. It didn't take long before I was approached by a couple of country players who were looking to put together a band. Josh played drums and Tiffany played keyboards and sang a bit. They had two guitar players, one who also sang, and wanted me to play guitar, keyboards, and fiddle, but also to sing.

Tiffany was very excited. "We heard you sing *Dust in the Wind*, and *Hold on Loosely*, and you were spectacular. The violin part from *Dust in the Wind* was heavenly. But when I first saw you and heard you sing, I thought you were a girl. You're adorably cute and your talent is way beyond us, but we'd love to have you join us."

The timing was perfect, as Borrowed Time was running out of time. The guys were at a breaking point, some ready to give up and the others wanting to move on. So, we did two final appearances, and that was it.

I connected with Tiffany and Josh the next Saturday and they introduced me to Derek and Boone who were the guitar players. We all clicked and were soon practicing three times a week. Our first appearance was at a local music fest, and then we moved into the Nashville bars playing for tips.

We played a lot of classic country but also blended in the current offerings. Tiffany wanted to include songs by the female country stars, and we brought in a few classics by Dolly, Reba, and Loretta, but she wasn't comfortable singing them. One Saturday after we'd practiced, she asked me to stay behind and talk. "You know, with your

voice, you could do any of these songs. You could even do versions of some of the songs by Miranda or Carrie and we could even cover Little Big Town or The Band Perry. Let's try something." She sat at her keyboard and started to play 'Girl Crush'. I knew the words, but she had to push me into singing it. From there, she went to 'Just a Dream' by Carrie and before we were done, she pushed me further. "This will really test you, but if you can pull this off, it's a done deal." She played the opening chords of 'I Will Always Love You' by Dolly.

I had to think about the words, but as the music played, they seemed to flow. It's such a moving song I could feel my emotions boil to the surface as I sang. When the song was done, we stood there looking at each other. "Wow!" And she jumped into my arms. This is gonna work, but we've got some work to do. Have you every worn a dress?"

I cringed when Tiffany mentioned a dress, and she knew, so I had to confess. "Only twice. When I was a freshman in high school, I wore my girlfriend's cheerleader outfit for Halloween. The other time was for a charity show in college. It was a crazy show and at one point featured four guys dressed as Cancan dancers. The other three guys chickened out, but I was again cajoled into it by my girlfriend. That's it, I swear. I grew up with Aunts and cousins telling me I was too pretty to be a boy. My mother would even tease me by saying my looks were wasted on a boy. But that's it."

Tiffany had a mischievous grin on her face, and she reached over and grabbed me pulling close and kissing me. "Two o'clock tomorrow I want you at my apartment We're going to try something. You just be there. I can hardly wait."

Sunday afternoon I almost called Tiffany twice to cancel. I had a pretty good idea where this was going, but I was more than a little attracted to her. So, at precisely two, I knocked on her door. She pulled me in and kissed me deeply. "OK, no delaying it. Let's get started. Strip!"

I was down to my boxers, and she walked in a slow circle around me. "Oh, this is going to be so much fun and easier than I thought." She handed me a pair of pink panties and a matching bra, then pointed to the bathroom. "I had to guess at the sizes, but I think they'll be close."

As it turned out, the fit was perfect. When I walked back into her bedroom, she handed me a jeans skirt. It flared a bit and had a ruffle at the hem. I stepped into it and zipped it up while she slipped a colorfully printed peasant blouse over my head.

## *KC Music*

Stepping back and looking at me she produced a set of foam pads, slipped her hands under the blouse, and tucked the pads into the bra cups.

“OK, this is going to work. Take the skirt off.” And she produced a pair of pantyhose and helped me step into them and carefully slide them up my legs. At the feel of the silky material against my legs I shivered. “Feels good, doesn’t it? Now pull your skirt up and put these shoes on. Then sit over here and let me see what I can do with your hair.”

The shoes were blue with wedge heels and easy to walk in. I sat at her vanity, and she started brushing my hair. Then I heard the snip of scissors and pulled away. “Hey, get back here. I’m not doing anything drastic, just evening it out a bit.” When she was done, she had tapered my hair from front to back. It really looked great, but a big piece of a boy was on the floor with the clippings. She finished with two barrettes before allowing me to look in the mirror.

I was still studying my image in the mirror when she was ready for the next step. “OK beautiful, time for makeup. You’re so damn cute already it won’t take much.” She applied foundation with a sponge before brushing it over. A wisp of blush, green and grey eye shadow, mascara, and grey eye liner were added, before finishing with plum lip gloss.

Clipping on earrings, fastening a necklace around my neck, and handing me two rings, Tiffany pronounced me complete. “Alright girl, ready for the big reveal?” Leading me across the room where there was a full-length mirror attached to the back of the door, she let me see the final product.

I stood there looking at my reflection in the mirror and was shocked. After hearing my mother tell me my looks were wasted on a boy, I kind of expected to look OK, but still like a boy in a skirt and blouse. But the image I saw had no resemblance to a boy. I could tell it was me, but I would challenge anyone who did not know me to see a boy standing there.

About the time I was regaining my senses, Tiffany walked back in the room and handed me a purse. “You don’t think I’m going to let you hide here, do you? Let’s get lunch and then hit the mall.” I hesitated, but she kissed my cheek, took my hand, and we were out the door.



Our first stop was a little café where we were greeted by Sandy, the hostess. “Good morning, ladies. We’re featuring our soup and salad buffet today. There’s a lovely table available in the garden or you can wait a few minutes for a table to clear inside.”

Passing the scrutiny of the hostess and walking through the crowded Café gave me a big boost of confidence. We enjoyed our meal with Tiffany constantly giving me little instructions on girl etiquette. When we were done, she insisted on visiting the ladies’ room which sent my heart rate through the roof, but I survived.

Just as she promised, we headed to the mall. Tiffany took the lead dragging me into every store looking at everything from dresses and shoes to lingerie and jewelry. She did convince me to have my ears pierced and I left the mall with a tiny gold stud in each ear.

We returned to Tiffany’s apartment, and she allowed me to change back into my boy clothes and helped me remove the makeup. “I want you here two hours before practice on Tuesday. We’re going to set the guys on their ears!”

I headed home with my brain spinning. I knew what Tiffany had in mind, and if truth be told, it had been a great afternoon. Granted, a big part of it was due to her kisses but seeing myself dressed in her skirt and blouse hadn’t been bad. I guess it was the realization of what others had said being true. I actually made a pretty girl.

When I walked into the house, I headed to the kitchen to grab something to drink and almost bumped into mother. She was busy making dinner and we collided in front of the refrigerator. I started to apologize but she cut me off. “KC, what have you done to your hair? And you’ve got your ears pierced... and are you wearing mascara? Come with me, dinner is on simmer, and I think we need to talk.”

Taking me by the hand, she led me to the living room and pointed to the sofa. “Sit.” She sat next to me and turned my head examining my hair and face. “I guess we need to talk. Are you going to explain, or do you want me to guess?”

I started but didn’t get far. “Mother, it’s not what you think.” And that was it.

“What I think is my son has been playing dress up today. You’ve managed to get yourself a very cute hair style, you’ve got pierced ears, you didn’t do a very good job of washing off the makeup because your lashes are still thick with mascara and if I had

to guess at anything your lip gloss was a shade of plum, or something close. How's that? A pretty good guess? Because that's what I think. Now, you want to explain it to me before your father and brother get home from their golf game and Trisha and Courtney arrive for dinner. Come on upstairs and I'll help you wash off that makeup properly while you explain yourself to me."

I started to explain what had happened, and mother laughed a little. "Somehow, I knew there was a girl at the bottom of this, and I don't mean you, although I'll bet you looked adorable. So, tell me what else."

Doing my best, I told her about singing for Tiffany and what her reaction was. "Somehow, I let her convince me to get dressed. I thought she was just going to brush my hair a bit and this is the result. Then once I saw myself all dressed in the skirt and blouse with makeup on and my hair styled, I just let myself get carried away. Going to lunch and the mall just seemed to happen."

Now, mother was a bit shocked. "You mean to tell me you slip into a skirt and blouse and you're ready to go out in public? Weren't you the least little bit afraid someone might figure out you were a boy?"

I knew I had to do a better job of explaining what happened, so I just started talking. "You've told me a thousand times my looks were wasted on a boy, and Aunt Betty always says I'm too pretty to be a boy. What I found out today is, maybe the two of you were right." I wanted to cry, but I couldn't let myself. I just stood there in front of the sink as she used makeup remover and finished washing my face.

"OK, I guess I've had that coming, but I certainly hope it's not the only reason for today, and why your hair and the ears? I'm guessing there's more to this than you're telling me. So why don't you pull your hair in a ponytail and come help me finish dinner while we talk. At least then we only need to explain your ears, and a lot of boys now have their ears pierced, so no big deal."

We walked in the kitchen, and instead of prying, mother started giving orders. "The roast is almost ready; it just needs some time for the potatoes and carrots to get tender. I'm going to slip the green bean casserole into the oven, and you can start putting the salad together. If you're going to be my daughter now, you'll have to start helping in the kitchen." But she was smiling, and I knew she was teasing.

I started chopping the lettuce, slicing tomatoes, and chopping onions, while trying to pull together my thoughts. "It started the other day when Tiffany had me sing for her.

I felt good singing all the songs, but when I sang ‘I Will Always Love You’, something really clicked. My voice fit the song perfectly. I knew what my range was, but the song just made it work. And as I sang the words, I felt my emotions boil to the surface and something magical happened. So, today when Tiffany wanted to dress me as a girl, I didn’t object, it felt right. It doesn’t mean I want to be a girl, but I’m not sure what it means. I really don’t know.” And this time the tears came.

Dinner went without a hitch. Nobody said a word, but I did get a look from Trisha. I knew we’d be talking later. After the meal, we moved out to the patio and enjoyed pecan pie for desert with Irish coffee. We talked for a while about the news, the weather, and daddy’s golf game. Jacob and Courtney were ready to leave, and mother and daddy were walking them out when Trisha pulled me aside.

“OK, spill it. You can’t hide the earrings, and what did you do to your hair.” She reached up and released the ponytail and my hair fell to my shoulders in the new tapered style. “Oh my God! What’s going on? Who is she, or who is he? I know you didn’t just decide to go femme. What’s going on?”

For the next 30 minutes, I retold the story to Trisha. She smiled and giggled and hugged me. “Just promise me the next time you get all dressed up you will let me know. I’ve got to meet my new sister. I’ll bet you’re adorable. We’re going to have so much fun together.”

For the next two days, I fretted over what to do. I really wanted to make this group work but was afraid of what the guys would think, and what they would say. But there was a big part of me still confused and fighting to get past last Sunday. I really enjoyed the day and when I had sung for Tiffany, I had gone somewhere I wanted to go again. In the end, I had to do it.

Tuesday afternoon came, I took off work early and was so nervous I couldn’t eat lunch. I wasn’t anywhere close to ready for what Tiffany had in mind. When I arrived at her apartment, she had everything ready. “Take a shower and wash your hair. Use the shampoo and conditioner on the sink. While you’re in the shower use the razor and shaving cream to get rid of any stray hairs. Based on what I saw the other day there aren’t many. When you’re done, meet me in my bedroom, and don’t get any ideas. We’ve got work to do to make you beautiful.”

Tiffany had me step into a pair of panties, then helped me into a bra and inserted the foam pads. Next, she had me sit at her vanity while she put rollers in my hair and

worked on makeup. She handed me a pair of panty hose and helped pull them up my legs. Then she shocked me by handing me a petticoat helping me to pull it up to my waist and secure it with a ribbon. Finally, the dress. It was a classic country girl dress. The material was light green with small bunches of flowers scattered across the skirt. The neckline was round and cut low revealing just a hint of cleavage created by the bra. The skirt was full and round supported by the petticoat and rested three inches above my knees.

I sat again as Tiffany removed the rollers from my hair and brushed it into soft curls. She tied a green ribbon into a bow above my right ear. Then, it was jewelry. Green dangling crystal earrings, a gold chain necklace holding a crystal heart and two small gold rings. I sat patiently as she polished my nails then sprayed me with a healthy dose of rose scented perfume. She slipped my feet into a pair of nude color shoes with two-inch heels and pulled me up to stand in front of the mirror.

I thought I looked good on Sunday, but this was over the top. I was in a daze. I looked amazing. But Tiffany didn't let me stand there long. She handed me a small purse. "Come on gorgeous, we've got to go meet the boys and introduce them to the newest member of the band". And we headed out the door.

When we walked in the rehearsal hall, actually an old barn on Josh's grandfather's farm, the guys were already there. Josh was not in a good mood. "All right let's get started. Where the hell is KC? We've got songs to work on and his backup vocals are about an octave too high. He's got to grow a pair of balls and bring it down, and who the hell is this you dragged in?"

The whole time Josh was ranting, Derek and Boone were checking me out from top to bottom. I felt like a museum display and could see them mentally undressing me.

When the yelling finally died down, Tiffany took over. "You guys are pigs. Just look at the way you're acting! I'm embarrassed to even be around you. If you can manage to pick your tongues up off the floor and put your eyeballs back in place. I'll introduce you to the new and improved KC Brooks."

Tiffany took my hand and pulled me forward closer to the guys. I didn't know what to do, so I smiled, picked up the hem of my skirt a little, curtseyed and said, "Hello. Hope you like the new me."

Then the dirt blew through. Josh lost it. He went straight after Tiffany. "This is bull. We're a country band with a male lead. You do the high harmony and we brought

'him' in to round out the instrumental side and help fill out the vocals. We're not going to become a girly band especially with some fag in a dress." And he stormed out.

So, the band came to an end. Derek and Boone shook their heads and apologized, but also walked out. Tiffany pulled me to her and hugged. "I'm so sorry. I can't believe Josh is such an ass. There was no reason for Boone and Derek to leave either. Damn guys, so insecure in their masculinity. I'm done with the lot of them."

We ended up back at Tiffany's apartment and two bottles of wine later Tiffany decided we should check out a new club nearby. "They have an amateur night every Tuesday. It's like a fancy version of karaoke. Let's go have some fun and impress a few people."

I should have known better, but between the wine and Tiffany insisting we needed to have some fun, we were off to the club. We were smart enough to call for a ride and were soon walking in the door of The Orion Club. The club was within walking distance to Vanderbilt and the location should have been a red flag, but I totally missed it. It was early, so we got a table off to the side of the stage. The server took our order for margaritas, and we sat to talk.

Tiffany was still fuming. "Those three jackasses have no idea what they're missing out on. Typical male bigots. Someday soon, they're going to be very sorry."

As she finished her rant, the server brought our drinks. I pulled out money to pay, but the server shook her head and pointed to two local college boys and smiled. "Let them buy you a drink or two. They'll be talking about it all week."

As the server left, the guys sauntered over to the table. They were kind of cute and trying hard to act all grown up, but not quite making it. The taller one with shaggy brown hair appeared to be the most confident. "Good evening, ladies. I hope you don't mind our intrusion. I'm Grant and this is Sonny. Don't think we've seen you here before. Are you new in town?" And as he talked, they managed to sit down at the table. "Do you mind if we join you?"

I was afraid to say a word and sipped my drink while Tiffany took the lead. "We don't come here often but decided to try something different tonight. How about you two? Will either of you be singing tonight?"

## *KC Music*

Her question was all it took to pull Sonny out of his shell. “Actually, we’ll be singing together. We do this Brooks and Dunn thing. It’s pretty good, even if I say so myself. What about the two of you? Do either of you sing?”

Tiffany giggled and I smiled, but felt I had to say something. “We both sing a little, maybe after a few more of these, we’ll give it a shot.” I lifted my glass for a toast, we all clinked glasses and laughed.

The guys ordered another round of drinks, our margaritas and theirs, something called Orion’s Max Punch. They talked more, mostly extolling their vocal skills, but fell quiet as the Emcee took the stage. There were several acts, some good and some not so much, as people took their turn on stage. It didn’t take long before the guys moved to the stage for their turn.

Wobbling onto the stage, they dove right into the predictable ‘Boot Scootin Boogie’. It wasn’t bad... it was really bad. When they were done, there was a mixture of mild applause, and heavy booing.

It was a bit later and one more drink before Tiffany dragged me on stage. She’d been checking the files for songs where the backup music was available, and she picked ‘Mama He’s Crazy’ by the Judds. I wasn’t sure of the words, but we worked through it and received generous applause.

Before we could leave the stage, Tiffany handed me the microphone. “Go get ‘em. This one’s yours.” I stopped for a few seconds and heard the music. I was surprised by her selection. I thought she would have chosen something current, but she went way back, Crazy, written by Willie Nelson and made famous by Patsy Cline. It was another one of the songs which pulled out every bit of emotion I had, and I poured myself into it.

When I finished singing, the audience was silent, and I almost ran from the stage. Then after about ten seconds the applause started, and it didn’t stop. There was hooting and hollering and cheering. I stood there, frozen in time for a full minute and then thanked the crowd, and as I mouthed the words, I curtsied to the audience eliciting more applause. I was just about to leave the stage and looked back to the audience and there at a table in the second row was Trisha sitting with four of her friends. We made eye contact, and she smiled wide while I turned and ran off the stage.

When I made it back to the table, Grant and Sonny were gone. I grabbed Tiffany's hand and told her we had to leave, but when I turned Trisha was standing there. "Hey little sister. Looks like you've got some explaining to do. Start with, who's your friend here?"

I started to explain but didn't get two words out. "I'm Tiffany, KC and I are, I should say were, in a band together. We had a sort of falling out with the guys today, so we came here to get drunk and sing a little where people might appreciate it."

Trisha couldn't resist the opportunity and jumped right in. "Nice to meet you. I'm Trisha, and KC is my little 'sister'. I knew when I saw her the other day there was another girl in the mix some way or another, I'm glad it's someone as nice as you seem. The two of you were incredible singing together, and KC... Oh My God, you were amazing. Do mother and father know about this?"

I didn't get to answer because we were interrupted by the Emcee. "Miss, I'm sorry to bother, but we've had several requests to have you sing again. Could I convince you to honor us with another song?" Between Trisha and Tiffany, I was nearly carried to the stage, so I had no choice.

I quickly looked through the music list to see what they had available. Something I knew so I could do it justice. I didn't want to be sight reading off the teleprompter. The song I settled on was "The House That Built Me" by Miranda Lambert. It was the kind of song I could sink into and sing from my heart.

While I was singing, I wasn't aware that Trisha and Tiffany had moved to the front of the stage and were swaying gently to the music Tiffany taking pictures and Trisha taking a video. But I wouldn't find out about that for another day.

At the end of the night, the three of us staggered to Trisha's apartment, thankfully only four blocks away. As we bobbed and weaved and stumbled our way, Trisha had a hundred questions. There was no way in my current condition I could answer them. When we finally made it to the apartment, Trisha barely made it to her bed. Tiffany managed to crash on the bed in the spare bedroom, and I fell back and slept on the sofa.

It was late morning before any of us were awake, and it was only due to the excessively loud and obnoxious ring tone on Trisha's cell phone. Trisha made coffee, and we sat at the kitchen table all looking well worn. Trisha was wearing a tattered night shirt

emblazoned with the saying 'It's My Rodeo', while Tiffany and I were still in our rather rumpled dresses.

My hangover was monumental. I wasn't accustomed to drinking so much and I gladly accepted the aspirin bottle when it was passed around. Trisha managed to find her voice first. "I can't remember having a night like this forever." She looked directly at me. "I'm blaming you! Look at you. And did you hear yourself last night? I knew you could sing, but I never knew you could sing like that. Damn, girl!"

It took another two hours before we were stable enough to move. We washed up a bit but had no choice for clothes. Trisha agreed to give us a ride back to Tiffany's so we could take a shower and change into presentable clothes, but she couldn't resist teasing me. "KC, I can just give you a ride home. Touch up your makeup, and I'll drop you off. I'm sure mother and father would love to meet their youngest daughter."

It was 4:30 in the afternoon before I made my way home. I made sure to wash my face with makeup remover twice so there was no recurrence of Sunday. I knew mother would be upset, as I rarely stayed out overnight and she was always mad if I didn't call, so I was already going to get a lecture. When I arrived, Trisha's car was parked in the driveway, not a good sign. She was a gossip of the first order and couldn't keep her mouth shut.

When I walked in the front door, mother, daddy, and Trisha were sitting in the living room talking, and before I could sneak by, mother called me. "Kyle Clifford!" And I knew immediately I was in trouble. "Would you like to join us? We're having quite an interesting family discussion and Trisha just downloaded a video she promises will be very interesting. Here," she patted the seat, "come sit beside me and we can all watch together. I'm sure it'll be enlightening."

Using her cell phone, Trisha had set up a blue tooth connection with the TV. There in full living color was a picture of me on stage, all she had to do was hit the play button. As I sat next to mother, she put her arm around me. "Now, won't this be fun?" And Trisha hit play.

For obvious reasons, I'd never seen myself perform and seeing myself in this situation was chilling, thrilling and totally confusing. I was always my own worst critic when I sang, but now I listened to myself in a different way. The audio wasn't great, but I still picked up on a few things, both good and bad. But the real surprise was seeing me there dressed as I was. It was like seeing a whole new person. I was evaluating her,



judging her. How she was dressed, her hair, her makeup, how she moved, how her eyes came alive as she sang, and how she fell into the emotion of the music. And when she finished singing and the applause rose, I wanted to join in... I wanted more. I wanted to be there again.

Mother pulled me out of my daze, "So, do you want to explain this. As you might imagine, I am more than a little shocked. What exactly are you up too?"

Daddy stepped in before I could say a word and I held my breath. "Lynn, I think it's obvious what's going on. Our daughter has found herself. She's beautiful, has an incredible voice, amazing stage presence, and is probably destined to be a super star."

I didn't know what to say, so I jumped off the sofa, ran to where daddy sat and gave him a huge hug. He kissed my cheek and when I stood, mother was there to hug me as well. Then Trisha joined us, and we had one big family hug.

For the next hour, I explained everything. The band, singing for Tiffany, Sunday's dress up session, meeting the band and the breakup, and how we ended up at the Orion on Tuesday. When I was done, there was shock on all their faces. This time daddy took the lead. "You mean to tell us this is the first time you've performed like this? You play dress up once, then two days later looking like a country angel, perform on stage and knock the audience on their collective asses?"

Daddy ordered pizza for dinner, but before it arrived, he and mother insisted I sing something. Retrieving a guitar from my bedroom, I sat there tuning it while deciding what to sing. I considered several of the current popular country songs but decided against them all. Mother and daddy didn't have a clue about what was popular, but I knew what they liked, and that's where I went.

I played eight bars of intro and then sang Jolene. Just like all of Dolly's songs, it invited you in and teased your emotions, which always worked well for me.

When I finished singing, Trisha applauded, but mother and daddy cheered. Mother hugged me so tightly I thought she'd break my ribs. Daddy wrapped his arms around the two of us. I was sure we'd all collapse in a giant pile, but I was saved by the doorbell and Trisha yelling. "Pizza's here."

## *KC Music*

A week later, on Wednesday afternoon, I had just walked in the house getting home from work and planning for my online class when Tiffany called. “Hey girl, are you ready for this. Reggie, the manager at the Orion Club called. He’d asked me for my number while you were busy listening to your applause last Tuesday. Anyway, he offered us a gig. A paying gig. Two nights, Friday for date night and Sunday for their Country Classic Show. One 90-minute set each night, and are you ready for this? He’ll pay \$400 per night plus tips. Can you believe it?”

Tiffany and I played at the Orion Club every Friday and Sunday for six weeks. I ended up with three more outfits and spent hours with Tiffany and Trisha doing ‘girl school’. Trisha was insistent. “When you’re on stage, you’re perfect. The girl in you just comes out. But once you get off the stage you need to polish your mannerism and movement a bit.

Mother and daddy came to two of the Classic nights and cheered the loudest. After six weeks, Reggie offered to bring us back occasionally saying he wasn’t set up for steady long-term acts. It was good work while it lasted, and my self-confidence grew every day. Tiffany and I would occasionally get a tip only opportunity in one of the Nashville clubs, but these were generally last-minute deals when another act called in sick. It was fun but didn’t offer a lot of future potential.

I took a step back and focused on school. With all the performances, my grades had suffered a bit and I needed to get them back on track. We agreed to take gigs as offered but didn’t push things. Maybe in the spring.

## II

Her name was Katherine Christine Brooks, and she was from Austin, Texas. She was 5 foot 7 inches tall with strawberry blonde hair and bright green eyes. She was the product of the Austin country music scene and had grown up in a musical family. Both her mother, Alice, and father, Zach, had performed locally over the years. Her brothers, Nate and Willie and sister Tammy had had their own little bands with a few friends but had moved on to other careers.

Being much younger than her siblings, Katherine had never performed with them. She kicked around with several local bands before stepping out on her own. She could play piano but preferred guitar on stage. She worked as a receptionist at a local law office while earning a nursing degree and took every singing gig she could get. She dreamed of stardom but wasn't sure it would ever happen. It changed one Saturday evening at a club called Rosedale's.

Having covered every country pop hit, she had dabbled with writing her own songs. She had picked Saturday evening to sing her newest song on stage for the first time, and it was an instant success. The song was called 'I'm Not Done Leaving You Yet', and when she sang it, the crowd went crazy.

"I'm not done leaving you yet, and country boy you'll soon regret, that you ever cheated on this sweet little country gal. I gave your boat to your new girlfriend, the hole in the bottom she'll have to mend. I emptied our accounts and took your truck, my name is on the title, more bad luck, took your old piano and your hound dog Buck, he likes me better and likes riding in the truck."

"You kept saying my complaints were lame, all those girls were the spoils of fame, but when I'm finished with you it won't look the same. Your credit cards are all charged up, I've got a whole new wardrobe and a brand-new diamond ring. If you want the old one back, you'll have to pay, cause I sold it down at Pawn Today. They said they'd sell it in a week or two, so you got some time if it's sentimental for you."

"I left some things for you behind, the mortgage contract where you signed, your old clothes and six pack of Red, White, and Blue. You can get half drunk and think it through wondering what I'll next do, cause I'm not done leaving you yet."

## *KC Music*

As luck would have it, a local music producer was in the audience, and he knew a good thing when he saw it. She had two other songs, 'Heartbreaks and Heartaches', and 'Love Always Finds a Way, Or Not'. When the producer heard them, he was convinced she was on her way, she just needed his guidance.

Dalton Geary had cut his teeth in the music business and rode the highs and lows for years, but now had a thriving production company. He was known around the area as an enthusiastic supporter of young musicians and had worked with many of the hopefuls. There were some minor successes and many failures, but it never slowed him down. He never tired of working with young musicians. This young lady had the talent, and he had the facilities and contacts she needed to break loose.

It took three weeks of negotiating, planning, and putting together a studio band before the first cut was recorded. It took two more days of practice and seven takes before everyone was satisfied. The sound tech and recording engineer smiled wide and gave it two thumbs up.

When the band listened to the replay, they couldn't have been more pleased. They were all experienced studio musicians and knew a hit when they heard it, and this was it. They were all nodding their heads. This was going to be great.

Katherine was more than a little bit in shock. This is what she wanted, what she hoped, prayed, and practiced for. It was a dream come true. Now, the question was, 'Will it sell?' Dalton told her it was a sure thing. "I've got a three-part plan. 1) I'm going to send the recording to Parity Records. They've had a lot of success with new talent recently and I can almost guarantee they'll want to sign you, 2) I'm going to release demo copies to all the country stations in Texas and you'll be getting airtime immediately, although it'll be for a limited time and number of plays, 3) I'm going to get you booked into a couple more clubs. Rosedale's is great, but we need to get you in front of a wider audience. We could also do an online release, but we'll hold off until Parity steps up. If for some reason they don't, we'll hit every online music service. Either way, hang on girl because it's going to be a wild ride from here."

Katherine's head was spinning, but there was one more thing. "I think we need to 'country up' your name. What do you think of using KC Brooks? I think it's got the right feel for a young country girl. Your first song has an edge to it, and I believe KC Brooks has that same edge."

Thinking it over for a few minutes, Katherine smiled. “When I was younger, I was a bit of a tomboy, and my brothers and sister would call me KC. Even daddy would do it. Mother would get upset because she always saw me as her little princess, but I think she’ll be OK. I’ll still let her call me Katherine.”

Over the next several weeks, life was every bit of a wild ride. Performing three nights a week was work, but the weekends spent in the studio were grueling. KC recorded both of her other songs plus one more she brought out called ‘Six Miles Out of Blue Ridge, I’m Coming Home to You’. With those four songs ready, she chose a few of her favorites from the past to cover with an updated feel. Two Willie Nelson songs were selected, ‘Blue Eyes Cryin in the Rain’, and ‘Angels Flying Too Close to the Ground’. Then she chose Crystal Gayle’s ‘Don’t It Make My Brown Eyes Blue’ and to fill thing out ‘Desperado’ from the Eagles.

After securing performance rights, Dalton structured the songs into an EP ready to be released on a trial basis either with or without Parity. He could hardly contain his enthusiasm. “KC, my little darling, you’ve got a young heart and an old soul. You’ve written some beautiful songs and brought life into a few amazing classics.”

All the members of the band were as excited as Dalton. They worked with young musicians with a song and a dream week in and week out, but this girl was special. When the recordings were done, they produced a bottle of champagne and toasted to KC’s success, in which they all played a part.

When KC went back to Rosedale’s, it was complete with a backup band. Dalton had arranged it and was covering the cost as an investment. Three guitar players, a keyboardist, and a drummer, were the same studio musicians she’d worked with and there was one additional guitarist. Dalton was thinking far ahead, “When you head out on tour, you’ll need a band, and you need to be connecting with musicians with whom you are comfortable.”

The first time she heard her song on the radio, KC almost did back flips. The DJ did an intro, “I had the pleasure of hearing this young lady perform last Saturday night at Rosedale’s and couldn’t be happier to have received a promo copy of her song ‘I’m Not Done Leaving You Yet”, Austin’s own KC Brooks.” And there she was singing on the radio.

## *KC Music*

KC was at her receptionist desk when the song played, and when it was done, she heard the DJ say, “This girl is going to be a star, and just remember you heard her first here on KTXS 103.5.”

KC was still floating when the roof almost came off the office. There was cheering and applause, and someone had picked her out her chair and was hugging her. When he put her down and she caught her breath, KC looked around and most of the staff including the attorneys and a couple of partners were there still applauding.

Daniel Pierce, one of the senior partners, who was always the most stoic, came forward to congratulate her. “I guess this means we need to start looking for a new receptionist.” He even gave her a hug. “Young lady, you are amazing. That song is exceptional. I’m sure this is the start of an incredible career and when I see you on TV receiving some award, I’ll be able to tell my grandkids, ‘I knew her when’.”

Much to Dalton’s prediction, three weeks later Gerald Gardner, an executive from Parity Records sat in his office ready to make a recording offer and sign a contract. Dalton was there to help decipher the language and talk about industry standards, and alongside KC sat her mother and father and her attorney, Daniel Pierce who was more than happy to be there for her.

Mr. Gardner distributed copies of the offer to everyone and gave them a few minutes to read it through. “As you can see it’s a straightforward offer and contract. We think you’ve got a lot of potential, but you’re still an unproven commodity.” The contract covered the four songs KC had already written and required her to produce three new songs in the next two years. It also required her to record songs written by other song writers, at the discretion of Parity Records. The money they were offering seemed to be substantial and he tried to focus the discussion only on the money, but both Dalton and Daniel knew better.

KC wasn’t sure what to do. She had never imagined making this much money. She thought her mother was going to faint, and her father’s eyes had rolled back in his head. It was up to her, Dalton, her producer/agent, and Daniel, her attorney to dissect the contract and protect her interest, and she let them take the lead. Between the two of them, they were ready to go to war to get her the best deal, not just money, but everything else going along with the package.

Among what was hiding in the contract was the issue of intellectual property. The contract required KC to give ownership of her songs to the recording company giving

them the right to license them to other singers, distribute them for commercial purposes including but not limited to TV commercials or movies. Daniel and Dalton were both all over this and the battle was on.

Gardner insisted this was industry standard practice. “We’re taking a big risk, and there needs to be ample rewards for us. This simply covers our costs and provides an income stream for the company. As much as we’d like to help every would-be star make records, we still need to make money.”

Daniel came totally unglued and escorted KC and her parents out of the office. “I want you to go have lunch.” And he handed KC a credit card. “This is my treat. I’m going to give that pompous ass a dressing down like he hasn’t seen, and the three of you don’t need to see it. Give me a couple of hours. I’ll call your cell when the dust has settled.”

It was three o’clock when KC’s phone rang, and she was invited with her parents to head back to Dalton’s office. When they arrived, Mr. Gardner wasn’t there, and she was sure something had gone wrong. Daniel assured her everything was fine. “He did leave, with his tail between his legs, but he also knows we’re interested in putting a contract together, but it sure isn’t going to be as one sided as what he brought. He’s used to dealing with singers who do not have proper representation, and it is definitely, not going to happen here. It may take another couple of meetings, but we’ll get it hammered out. All you need to do is let me or Dalton know of any specific issues you’re concerned about and let us handle it until we get to something reasonable, then we’ll set up a meeting and it will be a lot less pressure and stress on you. Dalton’s been around this business long enough to know how it goes, and between us we’re going to make sure you get everything you deserve.”

It took another three meetings before a contract was signed. During the interim, KC kept performing at Rosedale’s and at Hal’s enjoying great receptions from the audiences, and her name was floating all over town. She’d even been invited to be interviewed on the Royce Bennington show. This provided Dalton and Daniel even more leverage in the negotiations.

The first song officially released was ‘I’m Not Done Leaving You Yet’ and since it had been a pre-release sent to stations across Texas, it had a ready audience. When it went national it was just as big a success and hit the County Top 40 Chart at number 17. Over the next few weeks, she and Dalton solidified her back up band, and started

## *KC Music*

preparing for her first tour. 'Leaving You' continued to climb the charts topping out at number 4, something almost unheard of for a new artist.

For her second release, the record company chose her version of Desperado. Gerald Gardner picked it. "When I heard you sing it, I knew we had to do this. It's a classic and perfect for you. We'll save your next original to release with the tour and it'll make a hell of a splash!"

The tour was set for spring. Twelve cities across the Midwest, Dalton called it Country Music's Hot bed. "We'll get you out there and let you settle in. Touring isn't easy, so you need to work your way into it gradually. All the venues seat between 2000 and 4000 people and I think you'll sell out everywhere. We're going to keep you off the East and West coasts for now. That'll come later. Here's the list, Austin, Dallas, San Antonio will get you off to a great start. Then Oklahoma City, Kansas City, St. Louis as you spread your wings. You'll get a break for a week, then Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Columbus, Cincinnati, Louisville before ending up in Indianapolis. We're working on a tour finale in Nashville, but it's a hard sell for a new artist. I figure by the time you finish your first six shows they'll be begging to get you there."

Coordinated with the first show, the record company released 'Six Miles Out of Blue Ridge' and it immediately hit the charts at number 6. The next week, they released her version of 'Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain', written by Fred Rose, made most popular by Willie Nelson.

KC was having the time of her life, but the pressures of touring were exhausting. She did six shows in the first three weeks. "I don't know how groups handle the big tours?" During the break after St. Louis, she was still busy. Dalton had lined up interviews on radio stations all through the tour and now he had scheduled three interviews on nationwide networks. Plus, he was sure the tour was heading to Nashville. "They can't ignore you." And before they hit the road again, the Nashville date was booked. There was going to be a two-week break, so she'd get some time at home. It was something she needed.



### III

Tiffany and I continued to play gigs at the Nashville bar scene, but little by little the opportunities were drying up. On a good night, we'd make \$200 in tips, so it was more of a hobby than a career. I kept my day job and was still doing classes in the evening but longed to find my way in music. I just needed the right break. Tiffany was Ok with her job as an accountant. She made good money and was getting ready to get her CPA. For her, the music was a happy diversion.

Spring arrived, and the Nashville season was beginning to heat up, but between work and school I'd been out of touch, so it was a surprise when Trisha sat me down to listen to a new song being played on the radio. I listened to the song and thought it was very good. "Who is it? I don't recognize her voice."

Trisha laughed at me and gave me a shove. "You've been hiding in a hole all winter. This is the best part. She's a new rising star out of Austin and her songs are all over the radio, and are you ready for this???"

I had no idea where this was going, and she laughed again. "Her name you dummy. We've got to get you back in the groove. Her name is KC Brooks! Can you imagine? She's stolen your name and she the hottest country singer going."

My head dropped and my heart sank. Another KC Brooks on the country scene. It was just too much. Time to give it up. Damn, damn, damn!

Now Trisha was showing me a picture. It was me on stage, but I didn't recognize the club, or the dress I was wearing. "Look at this picture! This is the other KC Brooks. She's not only got your name, but the two of you could be twins! And it gets better."

I had no idea how this could get better. It was only getting worse, but Trisha went on. "She, the other KC Brooks, is playing a concert in Nashville next month. But listen to this, WNCM radio is holding a KC Brooks lookalike contest. You need to dress like her, sing one of her songs, and upload a video to their website. The winner gets four tickets to her concert and a meet and greet session with her prior to the concert."

I had no idea where she was going and just let her talk. "Don't you get it? There's no way you lose this contest. You've already got her name, and you could be her twin. We'd need to do a little work on your hair and get you a new dress, but damn it, you

## *KC Music*

can win this contest. In some sort of crazy way, this is your big break sitting in front of you. You just need to take it.”

I thought it was a crazy idea, but Trisha kept pushing. She solicited help from Tiffany, then from Jacob and Courtney, and finally from mother and daddy. I finally gave in to the pressure. “OK, if you all insist, I’ll do it, but I’ll bet I don’t win. This is some sort of publicity stunt and they’re not looking for a real singer.”

I listened to a couple of the other KC Brooks’ songs trying to decide which one to sing. It had to be one of her originals not a cover, so the list was limited. In the end I chose ‘Love Always Finds A Way, Or Not’. It was her most current release and I felt comfortable with her style of singing it. It took me a few days of practice, but I eventually mastered it.

Mother, Trisha, and I went shopping for a dress and it took two days and ten stores to find it. It was cream color with a pattern of pink and red roses. The neckline was a bit too low cut for me, but Trisha insisted it was the current style. The neckline was edged with eyelet in a slightly darker shade and the hem, which was several inches above my knees, and was edged with the same eyelet made into a ruffle.

Once we had the dress, mother was ready for more shopping. You’ve got to have the proper underclothes. You need a bra and panties and a petticoat, the proper shade of pantyhose and of course, shoes. And we can’t forget the jewelry.

The next day, it was off to see one of Courtney’s friends who owned Le Chic hair salon and spa. Her name was Tina, and she gushed when I met her. I was wearing a jean skirt and plain red blouse, but she seemed impressed. “Oh my! Look what I’ve got to work with? This is going to be fun. You’ve got it going already and we’re going to make you gorgeous.”

Tina handed me a couple of pictures as she waved her fingers through my hair. “You already could be her twin. Your hair is the perfect shade, we just need to add a few highlights and shape it a bit. And look at her eyes. Big bright green eyes just like yours. Are you sure your daddy never visited Texas?” And she laughed at her own joke.

I thought it was more than a little over the top just to record a four-minute video, but two days later I stood on the stage at the Orion Club before opening. Tina had volunteered to stop by and make sure my hair and makeup were perfect. I stood there introducing myself, then singing ‘Love Always Finds A Way, Or Not’ while both Trisha

and Courtney recorded me. “Hi, my name is KC Brooks, I’m 23 years old and I’m from Nashville.” Then I sang.

The next day, Trisha uploaded the video and all we had to do was wait. I felt like I sang the song to perfection and looked like the other KC’s twin, but I still didn’t expect to win, especially when they found out I was a guy. There was nothing in the rules against guys entering the contest, but I’m not sure they were expecting me. They weren’t!

It only took an hour for Trisha to get a response. “Thank you for sending your video submission for our contest, but we are concerned about the validity of this video. If this submission is legitimate and is neither a joke nor fraud, we request you to present yourself at our offices with proof of your identity. Please present yourself at our offices between the hours of 10AM and 3PM at 2137 South ...”

I was ready to give up, but my support group was up in arms. So, Thursday morning, I was again dressed as a girl. I still had the outfit I wore when I first performed at the Orion Club and chose to wear it. Trisha and mother worked on my hair and makeup. I took my guitar with me, just in case I needed to sing, and off we went. Daddy was heading to his office but offered his support. “If there’s any problem, just give me a call. I’m only ten minutes away.”

Mother and I arrived at the radio station offices just before noon and were escorted to a conference room to meet with someone from the marketing department, and an attorney. The look on their faces when they walked in was priceless. I’m not sure what or who they were expecting, but their faces showed shock.

“Good morning, I’m Debra Marks director of marketing and this is Wendall Cobb from our legal department. And you are?”

I was ready to answer, but mother took the lead. “Good morning, I’m Lynn Anne Brooks, and this is my son, Kyle Clifford Brooks, but everyone calls him KC. This is KC Brooks who entered your contest. We have both his birth certificate and passport as proof of ID.” And she laid the documents on the table. “Now then, do you have any further questions?”

They looked at the documents then asked if they could make copies to which my mother answered, “No! You may not.” They looked at each other for a minute obviously lost for words, then excused themselves. “Give us a minute, we’ll be right back.”

Mother was on her cell phone when they returned, and they seemed to have a plan. Mrs. Marks spoke. "Mrs. Brooks, Kyle,"

And mother interrupted them, "He prefers KC, please."

"OK, Mrs. Brooks, and KC, we seem to have several issues here. First, we're not sure how your 'son' just happens to look so much like the real KC Brooks, and we certainly never anticipated a boy entering this contest. Our best legal opinion is..."

And mother stopped them there. "I suppose I should have brought it up sooner, when you first brought legal counsel into the room, so while you were out, I've contacted my husband who is an attorney, to have him come and listen to your legal opinion. Here should be here any minute."

And as she finished, the receptionist poked her head in the door. "There's a Mr. Carl Brooks in the lobby asking to join this meeting. Would you like me to show him in?"

Daddy joined us and mother explained where we were. "Mrs. Marks was going to explain their legal position. They have already questioned how our son happens to look like the "real KC Brooks" and expressed their opinion they never anticipated a boy entering the contest. Does that about sum things up to this point?"

Daddy didn't give them a chance. "My understanding is my son needed to be here today with proof of ID. I believe he has presented his birth certificate and passport. Have you reviewed these documents? Is there any question of their authenticity?"

Cobb now spoke. "We've seen the documents and have requested copies of them, which your wife refused to provide. You must understand we've got a problem here. It should have been obvious to anyone entering the contest it was open to girls and women only. Now, we're willing to compromise and provide your son with two free concert tickets, but we certainly cannot allow his submission to go forward. We don't believe it's in the best interest of him or the radio station to allow this. This is our position."

Daddy was mad but controlled his temper. "May I see a copy of the contest rules?"

Now it was Mrs. Marks who stepped in. "We're trying to be reasonable here. The rules are posted on our website, you're more than welcome to view them there."

Daddy turned red, “Mrs. Marks, I believe it is in your best interest to provide me with a set of the rules while we’re discussing this matter. If I need to get a subpoena, I’ll make the call right now. I believe Judge Cawley is in his office today.”

It took only a minute for a copy of the rules to be passed over to daddy. Mr. Cobb had them in his file. Daddy looked them over and then spoke. “Let’s address the salient points. ‘This contest is open to all listeners of WNCM. All contestants must be between the age of 18 and 30 years of age. Each contestant must submit a video presentation where they identify themselves by name and where they live. They must then sing all, or a portion of, a KC Brooks song demonstrating their singing ability. Videos must be between 3 and 4 minutes long. All submissions become the property of WNCM.’”

OK, I think that about covers it. The rest is all legal mumbo jumbo. So, which part of these rules does my son not comply?”

Mrs. Marks was clearly irritated. “Can’t you understand? We never anticipated a boy entering this contest. Isn’t it perfectly clear? Furthermore, can you explain how it is your son looks so much like the real KC Brooks?”

As she spoke, Mr. Cobb cringed, and daddy boiled over. “Mrs. Marks, if I hear you one more time use the phrase ‘the real KC Brooks’ as if you are challenging my son’s name and person, I will be filing charges against both the station and you. Is that clear? Next, if my son were really my daughter and a girl would you be questioning her appearance? Do you understand what I’m asking?”

Before Mr. Cobb could stop her, Mrs. Marks plowed on. “If ‘he’ and she pointed at me, ‘was a girl, it would be acceptable for her to enter the contest and it’s perfectly understandable that two girls might have similar appearance, but not a boy. You want to explain how his appearance just happened to be so similar?”

That really pushed daddy over the edge. He slapped his hand down on the table. “That’s it. I’m going to call the judge right now and get a restraining order to halt this contest. Then, I’m going to do a press release to all stations in town, including yours explaining the false premises of this contest. Is that enough, or do you want me to go further?”

Mr. Cobb stood and took Mrs. Marks by the hand and led her out of the room. “Excuse us for a minute.”

## *KC Music*

It was almost 15 minutes later when Mr. Cobb returned with another gentleman he introduced as Milton Meyers, the station manager.

Daddy gave a 5-minute summary and Mr. Cobb seemed to agree with everything he said, only adding, in his opinion, the situation was ‘unprecedented’. Mr. Meyers listened intently and took copious notes, asked if he could see my birth certificate, and looked pensive for a minute.

“Mrs. Marks seems to think this is some sort of scam, but I don’t see it. Mrs. Brooks, Mr. Brooks, KC, what is it you want to see happen. How can we make this right?”

This time, daddy looked at me, and I gave our answer. “We want, I want, this contest to be as it was promoted, open to all listeners, including me. I don’t want or expect any special consideration, but it needs to be judged fairly. Can you tell me how you plan to make certain that happens?”

Mr. Meyers smiled at my response. “I think you’ve made a wonderful request, and I can assure you it will happen. Here’s how judging works. We’ve received over a hundred submissions, and our studio staff will judge them and select the top ten. From what I’ve seen, I’m pretty sure yours will make the top ten, but no promises. Then, the top ten will be viewed by an independent judging committee. We use Nashville Audit for this step. The judges will only see the performances of each contestant and be given no other information. These judges will select the top three entries, and these will be forwarded to Dalton Geary Inc, the production company for the other KC Brooks, and she will view the final three and choose the winner. I don’t think we can make things any fairer.”

We all shook our heads, but daddy added one thing. “I believe you should consider some counselling for Mrs. Marks. I find her attitude and beliefs more than a bit outdated and it makes her a poor representative of the station.”

Leaving the station was sort of bitter-sweet. I was back in the competition, but somehow felt like I cheated my way in. “Do you think it’s fair? I almost feel like I’m cheating. What do you think?”

Mother always knew how to deal with me, and she quickly made me feel better. “Listen, the only thing happening here today was to give you a chance. I’m sure there’s a bunch of girls out there with a lot of talent, so don’t go feeling like you’ve already won.”

## IV

Life settled down for a few weeks and it was a nice break. Tiffany and I played Friday nights at the Orion, and I spent most of my free time bouncing from instrument to instrument. I happened to go to a garage sale one afternoon, and they had a cello for sale. The appearance was rough, but it was still a solid instrument. They had it priced for \$75, and I was considering it. It had to be like playing a big violin, didn't it? As I was looking at it, a lady approached and said I could have it for \$25. "If I don't sell it today it's headed to the dumpster." I couldn't resist and became the proud owner of a somewhat distressed cello. The body looked bad but was solid and the neck was straight, so I stopped on the way home and bought new stings and a bow. When I walked in the house, mother just cringed.

Like it always happened, I couldn't pull myself away from my new toy. I cleaned the cello, brought the wood back to life with Swedish oil, and used a hand rubbed wax to polished it. Once I had the new strings in place, I sorted out the tuning and ran the bow across the strings the first time, and I shivered. The tone was deep and rich and filled the room. I played with finger positions to find the notes and fell in love with it, just as I'd done with all my other instruments. As I sat there, I worked through finger positions learning as I went. The most fun for me was learning on my own. I could always find a teacher, but I enjoyed it more this way.

Just as I felt I was accomplishing something; my cell phone came to life. The caller ID only showed the number and the origination in Austin Texas. It didn't register right away so I just answered as I would another call. "Hi, this is KC."

The voice on the other end was a man who identified himself as Dalton Geary. "You can call me Dalton, I'm the agent and producer for KC Brooks here in Austin. We've been reviewing the submissions sent to us from the WNCM radio contest being held in conjunction with KC's upcoming show in Nashville. I think KC has something to say, so I'll put her on the phone."

The next sound over the phone was a squeal and scream, and then her voice. "Hey KC, girl you've blown me away. You sound more like me than I do, and we could be twins. You're our winner!" And she cheered again.

The next voice I heard was Dalton again. "KC, we've been in conversation with Milton Meyers, the station manager at WNCM and made him aware of your selection but

asked if we could make the call. As you know, they plan to introduce you at the show in two weeks, but we've asked their permission to discuss just how that announcement is made."

I wasn't sure where this was going, but I was willing to listen. I was supposed to get 4 free concert tickets and a meet and greet before the concert, but now, they were apparently thinking about changing it around somehow. So, I listened.

"KC has just wrapped up her tour after 12 shows and only arrived home yesterday. She received the contest submissions about a week ago, and her decision was immediate. When I listened to your submission I agreed. She's watched and listened to your submission at least twice a day and can't wait to meet you. She's come up with a crazy plan for the introduction. The radio station was just going to introduce you, and have you walk up on stage, but she's come up with a better idea."

I had no idea where this was going but they had my attention. I didn't want to get talked into some crazy stunt, but I figured it wouldn't hurt to listen.

"The show is on Saturday the 17<sup>th</sup>, and KC wasn't due to arrive in town until the 15<sup>th</sup>. Then at the show you would get to meet her backstage. Here's what she's proposing. She'd like to come into town a week early to meet you and spend some time getting to know you. If it works out, she'd like to do the introduction on stage and invite you to play a song with her."

I think my heart stopped. Did I hear him right? KC Brooks, the 'famous' KC Brooks wants me to play on stage with her. Wow!

"Why don't we give you some time to think about this. I know it's a lot to absorb. I'd like to set up a conference with you and your parents, your agent or attorney if you have one. On our side, it will be myself, and KC and her attorney. I don't want to scare you with all this attorney talk, but we need to make sure everything is done above board. Does that work for you?"

It took me a minute to absorb everything I heard, and I finally found my voice. "I guess my mother is my agent, and my father is my attorney. I'll have to run it by them. Can I call you back in a couple of hours? They'll both be home from work, and I can tell them all about this. I'm amazed, I guess I didn't expect to win, and this is way over the top."



Thirty minutes later, I was still sitting playing with the cello trying to make sense out of the call. I believed I had the talent to be successful, but never expected it to happen, especially like this.

Mother walked in and saw me sitting there and stopped short. “What’s wrong? Are you sick? You look pale.”

I shook my head and had just started to babble and explanation when we heard daddy walk in, and she called for him. “Carl, can you join us here, please? KC is trying to explain something about a phone call and I’m having trouble making sense of it.”

Mother jumped up and hugged me. “I knew you could win this. But what’s all this about playing on stage? I know you can do it, but are you ready for something like this?”

Daddy took over the conversation with his level head. “First, congratulations on winning. You’re incredibly talented and we’re very proud. Next, about this offer, I think it could be a great opportunity for you, and I’m glad they asked for this meeting. It lets me know they’re serious and not trying to hide anything. So, when do we call?”

We called Dalton Geary’s office at seven in the evening. It was mother, daddy and me. On their side, it was KC, Dalton Geary, and her attorney, Daniel Pierce. Dalton talked through what they had in mind for the show, and it sounded exciting. KC the star, would introduce KC the contest winner, and then invite me to stay on stage and play a song with her. It was her idea, and she was still sorting out the details in her mind, but she sounded as excited as I was.

The meeting soon became dominated by daddy and Daniel Pierce and Dalton Geary. Mother sat and listened, taking notes about everything said. At one point, KC stepped into the discussion. “Hey KC, is there a different number I can call you on? Let the lawyers sort out the details. I’d like to call you and talk so we can get to know each other better.”

Daddy nodded, we’d called from his phone, so I gave her my cell number and headed to the bedroom. I had just flopped down on my bed when the phone rang. When I answered, she was all giggles. “I can hardly believe this. When I first watched your video, I got goose bumps. It was like watching myself on stage. Where did you record this? You were on stage somewhere. Do you play clubs in Nashville? I can’t wait to meet you.”

I told her about my fascination with music and all the instruments I play. “I can’t get enough. I just bought a cello last week and I’m playing with it every free minute I get. I always knew I could sing but have only been singing seriously for the past few years.”

Her story was a bit the opposite. “I started singing when I was three. My parents couldn’t shut me up. I sang in choir at school and at church. I didn’t start piano lessons until I was twelve, and I picked up the guitar for the first time when I was sixteen. I play OK, but I’m not an expert player. It’s good enough for me to play small parts on stage and I count on my band to be the real musicians.”

I teased her about it, but I knew she could play. “I’ve heard you play and heard you sing and you’re amazing. Don’t ever underestimate yourself. Being humble is fine but have confidence in your skills and talent.”

She laughed, “Listen to you, the amateur psychologist. I have learned to appreciate how lucky I am. I know my talent has gotten me where I’m at, but I still need to pinch myself every day.”

We seemed to connect easily, and spent over an hour on the phone, and near the end of our discussion she stopped me short. “How does it feel being my twin sister? I always thought it would be so cool, and now I’ll get to know for sure.”

I fell silent for a minute quickly trying to figure out how to approach this issue, then took my best shot. “What would you think about having a twin brother?”

She was quiet for a minute then asked, “You aren’t saying you have a twin brother, are you? Oh my God... you mean? Holy crap. Nobody told me anything about this. Holy crap. You’re a guy, aren’t you?”

I gave her another minute before I said anything, then took a deep breath. “I’m sorry. I thought by now someone probably told you. I mean there was a big hassle when I first entered the contest but I kind of figured they would have told you. If it’s a big deal, let me know. I guess I expected something might come of this.”

She was quiet for a minute again. “Wow! I don’t know what to say, but let me start with this, now I have a twin brother who just happens to be my identical twin. How cool is that? It makes me even more amazed and impressed with you, but I’ve got a ton of questions. As far as I’m concerned, it doesn’t change a thing, it just makes you all that much more interesting. I’ve got to let you go for now, I’ve got this press thing

for the record company tonight but let me call you tomorrow so we can talk more. Can I call you at the same time?"

Thursday night, KC and I spent almost two hours on the phone. She did have a hundred questions, but I gave her the short story of how it all started with Tiffany and the first time singing at the Orion Club. Then, I explained how Trisha and Tiffany talked me into entering the contest, and now here we were.

"I think it's uncanny we look so much alike. All it took was trimming your hair and doing your make up and there you are, my twin 'sister'. I find it to be totally amazing and am in no way insulted or put off. It just makes you even more interesting."

From there, we talked about music. I asked about the inspiration for her songs, and she explained, "the concepts always come from life". It wasn't necessarily her life, but what other people she knew had experienced. She asked about all the instruments I played and was fascinated. "When I get there next week, I want to hear you play them all."



*Kyle Clifford Brooks and Katherine Christine Brooks are making their way in the country music scene. Finding their way, and overcoming defined gender norms, they find love and success as KC Brooks. It's Serendipity.*

## **KC Music**

By Emily Ashcroft

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