

## Supreme Dream

By Frank Moher and Rhonda Trodd

Featuring the music of The Supremes

### Act One

(A karaoke bar. Microphone on a stool, some kind of slightly shabby backdrop, maybe some modest neon script-style sign saying "Roxy's" to add a bit of glitz. That's about it.)

We hear ROXY in voice-over only, on the p.a. system)

ROXY(V.O.)

Okayyy...

(Taps her finger on her mike a few times to make sure it's working, blows into it.)

Okayyy . . .

(ROXY has a sort of perky, hostessy voice.)

Welcome to Roxy's . . . the last remaining karaoke bar in town . . . we may not start trends, but we sure know to drive 'em into the ground . . . Okayyy . . . so, who's going to be first up tonight? We don't want a repeat of last Friday, when Roxy had to sing all night all by herself, do we? . . . So, who's it going to be? . . . All right, looks like Roxy's going to have to do all the singing again this -

(RHONDA stumbles onto the stage, as if someone's given her a shove. She doesn't look too happy to be there.)

RHONDA

Okay, okay . . .

(To the audience. Butter wouldn't melt:)

Hi . . . My name is Rhonda, and I guess I'm going to sing you a song.

(Looks off.)

Do you have anything by the Supremes?

ROXY (V.O.)

How 'bout "Love Child"?

RHONDA

(Hates "Love Child")

Mmmmm . . . no. How about "You Can't Hurry Love"?

ROXY

Yooooou got it.

RHONDA

I didn't really want to do this, some friends made me come --

(The music starts.)

Oops! Here we go. Just make yourself comfortable, it'll all be over in a minute.

(She sings "You Can't Hurry Love". At first she's hesitant, tentative -- maybe she even blows a lyric. During a music bridge, she apologizes:)

I'm sorry, I haven't sung this in awhile. Actually, I don't think I've ever sung the lead . . .

(She continues. She gets better and better, remembers the spirit, the look, the moves. By the end she's cooking. She puts a big finish on it. As the tumultuous applause subsides:)

RHONDA

That felt -- good, actually!

(To a man in the audience:)

How was it for you?

Actually, as you may have guessed, I -- *have* sung this before. Just not for awhile. Not for . . . four years, about two months and um . . . thirteen days, to be exact.

(Surprised.)

That *is* a long time . . .

All right, all right, I'll just tell you this little bit, and then I'll be outta here. I promise. I can tell this gentleman is just dying to get up here and sing "Mandy".

*I* . . . was a Supreme

No really, I was a Supreme.

(Hopefully, some people laugh.)

Why do people *react* like that?

(Or, if no laugh, to an audience member:)

Whaddaya mean, "A supreme what?"

All right, all right. You all know the Supremes, right? Flo and Diana and Mary? Right, well I was one of them. You see, there have been other Supremes. I mean after Flo there was Cindy Birdsong. And after Diana there was Jean Terrell. And then there was Linda Laurence and Scherrie Payne and Susaye Green, and Debbie Sharpe and Karen Jackson and Kaaren Ragland, and Gloria Scott and Debbie Crofton and Robin Alexander and Linda Levine and Damia Saterfield, and somewhere in the middle of all that -- me!

Well, it is true that most of those women were Black . . .

All right, all right, I'll go back just a few steps, and then really, I mean it, I'm gone, I'm finished, you won't hear from me again.

Back when I was about two years old -- *What?* You wanna know how I got to be a Supreme, don't you? Well all right.

Back when I was about, oh, okay, *six* -- I heard the Supremes for the first time. I don't really remember where. Maybe it was on a beach somewhere, we used to go to Sylvan Lake a lot. Or maybe it was with my Mom -- she used to take a radio out into the backyard when she hung up the washing, she'd crank it up real loud just to annoy our neighbour Mr. Beatty and I'd dance in and out of the sheets. I know it wasn't on the TV, because I remember that, I remember the first time I saw them. That was on the Ed Sullivan show on December 27, 1964, just after Ed Ames and just before Topo Gigio the Little Italian Mouse. But everything's sort of a *blur* before that.

But I remember the song. It was "When the Lovelight Starts Shining Through His Eyes", written by Holland, Dozier and Holland, natch, released 10/31/63, not one of their biggest hits, but big enough to get onto the radio in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. It was magic. Really. I mean the Beatles were already around, and I *kind* of liked them, and yes, in years to come I would lust after Paul's dimples, not to mention his capital acquisitions. But I didn't like the Beatles half as much as the other girls at school, especially Murphy Crowder, who supposedly had a glove that

Ringo had breathed on. But this -- this was something different.

Oh there were other girl groups around. "The Ronettes", who sang "Be My Baby" and "Walking in the Rain". "The Shirelles", who sang "Baby It's You" and "Walking in the Sand". Or was it the other way around? "The Shangri-Las", who sang "Give Him a Great Big Kiss", which included the immortal line "He's good bad, but he's not evil." But they were nothing compared with -- *them*. First of all, the Supremes weren't girls -- they were Women. Capital "W" O-My! "Women". And then there was that sound -- that *sound* -- angelic, almost eerie, but something you could dance to, and exciting in a way my little six-year-old body didn't quite understand.

Actually, what I *really* thought was: if me and my Mom and my best friend Suzanne Terpstra were to form a singing group, this is what we would sound like. So we did. Well, I did. I told Suzanne we were too old now to play Easy Bake Oven, and that from then on we would be Supremes. Now unbelievably, my Mom did not want to be a Supreme, so we went down the block to Eva Huchalak's house and asked her. Actually, neither Suzanne or I *really liked* Eva Huchalak, but it was clear that you needed three people to be the Supremes and that the boy who lived across the street, Kevin Rorby, who I *did* like, would not do.

Now here's the interesting thing. Well, I don't know if you'll think it's interesting. I don't know if you find any of this interesting --

(She asks an audience member:)

Do you find this interesting?

(Hopefully, they say they do.)

Are you sure? 'Cause we could have this gentleman come up here and sing "Mandy". No? I thought not. Here's the thing I want you to remember: I never wanted to be the lead singer. I never wanted to be Diana Ross. I just wanted to be in the background -- not to *blend in* necessarily -- but just to be there, doing my moves, doing the harmonies, doing my bits: "Baby baby." "Oooooo - oooooo."

So Suzanne Terpstra was Diana Ross. And Eva was Mary Wilson -- by now I'd looked up their names in "Tiger Beat" -- and I, I was Florence Ballard. Flo -- the taller one. Flo, the one who had started it all. Flo, the one who actually sang on all the records, which Mary did not, we'll get into that

later. And there we were -- the closest thing to Soul that southeast Calgary would ever see.

(Looks to ROXY, wherever Roxy is, gestures.)

Um um um um um -- "Where Did Our Love Go?"!

(To audience.)

And we rehearsed the routines in my basement.

(Music.)

And every Saturday afternoon for the entire month of September, we performed in my backyard.

(She does the moves to the song, ultra-cool, waiting until it gets to the back-up part, then lip-synching "baby, baby", etc. Speaks overtop the record at some point:)

Now naturally we didn't try to sing ourselves -- we were naive, but we weren't stupid. We lip-synced. And we made up our own moves, because we'd never actually seen the Supremes in performance, just a very grainy picture of them about this high in "Tiger Beat". But it didn't matter. It didn't matter to our mothers and fathers. It didn't matter to our occasional visiting relatives -- except Eva's grandmother, who thought all dancing was dirty. It didn't even matter to the friends and neighbours we'd charged five cents to let in, or to the boys we'd lured into coming by offering them free Eski-Pops after, because we really believed we were the Supremes, and besides, when you're six years old and cute you can do anything you want.

And then, sometime just before Christmas, it was announced that the Supremes would make their television debut on the Ed Sullivan show, and for awhile time stopped.

(Music stops.)

I didn't even notice Christmas. Well, that's not true, but I didn't get that sinking, it's-all-over feeling on Boxing Day like I usually did, because Boxing Day was one day closer to Sunday. Ed Day. Really-Big-Shoo Day. I didn't even leave the house that afternoon, I just sat on the couch beside my Mother while she wrote thankyou notes, and kept one eye on the TV, because my sister kept threatening to hide the rabbit ears. Dad had said I could stay up to watch the whole thing as long as I had my teeth brushed, so after dinner I brushed my teeth three times, and left the wet toothbrush on the bathroom counter as evidence.

(Song, almost subliminal, heard on a TV: "Come See About Me".)

Actually, they were nearly the first ones on. By this point they'd had a coupla hits, but a coupla hits did not earn you the featured performer slot, not like Topo Gigio the Little Italian Mouse. But they were everything I wanted them to be. Elegant, in their sequined dresses that glittered like moonlight on the Glenmore Reservoir. Languid -- moving almost in unison, but with just enough variety that you knew each was her own woman. (I made a mental note that we would have to take the splits out of our choreography next time we performed in the backyard.) And with that hair -- that *hair* -- disciplined, glistening-black, looking like it had been carefully sculpted elsewhere and then placed, crown-like, upon their heads. And then my Mother pointed out something I hadn't noticed as yet. "My goodness," she said, looking up from her thankyou notes. "They're coloured."

(Sound stops.)

"Coloured?" I wondered. "Coloured?" Whatever could she mean? Of course they weren't "coloured", they were black-and-white, just like everything else on the TV. Only the Americans had coloured TV, we'd seen it when we went down to visit our relatives in California. Coloured. But then my mother turned to my father and said, "Look, William. They're Negroes." And I looked again -- and I saw that it was so ...

I'm not sure exactly how I had missed this. It is true that up to that point I had seen only the grainy, two-inch high picture in "Tiger Beat", in which they looked more speckled than anything. And it is true that in our neighbourhood in southeast Calgary in 1964 there lived not one, single, solitary black person, and that the only black person I ever saw on a semi-regular basis was the Jamaican woman who worked behind the desk at the local library. This is not to say that Clearview -- for so my neighbourhood was ironically called -- the only thing you could see clearly in Clearview was your neighbour's garage -- this is not to say Clearview was a pool of racial calm. There were a number of Indian and Metis families who lived on the other side of Macleod Trail, and whose children our mothers tolerated when we played beside them at the park, until one of them happened to pick up one of our toys or shovels, at which point it would be snatched away from them by some beet-faced woman, muttering words like "savage" and "half-breeds" and "thief". And the fact is the reason neither Suzanne nor I really liked Eva Huchalak was that her house

smelled of cooked cabbage and borscht and sometimes, or so we were convinced, so did she.

So, I was no little Coretta Scott King. Still, I had managed to sit through two verses and one-and-a-half choruses of "Come See About Me" without noticing that one very salient thing about The Supremes: they were Black. "Well," said my Father, "that's all right. So's that Nat King Cole."

I suppose the real reason I hadn't noticed was that to me the Supremes had come to represent something else, something more, something more even than what it might be to be a woman. They were -- America. They were America, the States, that mystical land somewhere south of the Mountie Museum in Fort Macleod, where they'd had coloured TVs for two years already and where all the good shows came from, the ones you never got to see on channel two or channel four but you knew were out there, bouncing around, entertaining luckier children than you. America! We'd passed through orchards of oranges *this big* on our trips to California. Navel oranges! *American* oranges, the kind that peeled easily and squirted juice the second you sunk your teeth into them. In The States people all had nice hair and big smiles, at least they did at Disneyland, and every little boy could grow up to be President and every little girl could grow up to be his wife, and on the maps my Dad unfolded in his lap on our trips down there, usually cursing because we'd missed another turn-off, the cities were all marked with stars, because after all *that's where the stars were*, in Hollywood and New York and Detroit, yes, Detroit, because I knew now that that was where Flo and Mary and Diana lived.

In Detroit. In America. *Land That I Loved.*

So it didn't matter to me that the Supremes were Black, that wasn't the *point*, and I forgot it almost as quickly as I had noticed it. I say "almost" because unfortunately it *did* matter to Suzanne Terpstra's mother. "I can't play Supremes anymore," Suzanne told me the next day, as she pinned a poster of Herman's Hermits to her bedroom wall. "My Mom says it's not natural." So Suzanne was out, and I was not prepared to carry on alone with Eva Huchulak, and besides, I already knew that lip-syncing in the backyard for my relatives and the boys in the neighbourhood was not going to be enough for me.

So I started practising. Just by myself. Out loud, out in the garage, or later, in grade school, in the classroom at St. Winnifred's after the last bell had rung. So that when all that practising paid off and I got to be the featured performer at the St. Winnifred's commencement -- eat your heart out Topo Gigio -- this is what I sang:

(A plunky piano intro to "Stop! In the Name of Love" begins. RHONDA prepares to sing, stops, considers the music.)

This is a very versatile karaoke bar!

(She sings "Stop! In the Name of Love" as if at the commencement. Halfway through something goes wrong -- she stops, but the accompaniment keeps going. She has to cover. It's your worst commencement nightmare come true.

When it's done:)

Now I want to say that it was still my intention to be a back-up singer to somebody, possibly not to Diana Ross, but somebody. Singing lead at the St. Winnifred's commencement was strictly a matter of not wishing to sing back-up to anybody *there*. Actually, the whole concept of girl-groups and back-up singers and sequins and eyelashes that curled back to your forehead had become slightly retro at that point, well, more than slightly, Joni Mitchell was very big then, and Janis Joplin. And Janis Joplin -- who by the way had lived briefly in Calgary, as had Joni Mitchell, this gave me hope -- Janis Joplin didn't *need* back-up.

So then it's 1974 and -- I'm sorry -- am I leaving anyone behind? -- I did promise to get through this as quickly as possible --

(To the "Mandy" man.)

-- Hang in there, sir, "Mandy" wasn't even written yet . . . it's 1974 and I'm in high school, Pope Innocent the Seventh High School in Calgary, your usual mix of jocks and nerds and acts of random violence, and here's the plan: I'm going to go into Beauty Culture so I can become a hairdresser and move to Vancouver and support myself giving people perms while I break into the music industry. Why I thought there was a music industry in Vancouver I *don't* know, I just knew there wasn't one in Calgary, and Toronto seemed too damn far away. I had formed a rock band by this point, yes, I had formed it, just like Flo Ballard formed the Supremes, but unlike Flo I had formed it mostly as a

way to hang out with guys, and have them hang out with me, I was not the scorchingest babe ever to walk the halls of Pope Innocent the Seventh, I thought they might need some *incentive* (kind of like the Eski-Pops we used to serve at our concerts in the backyard). We didn't play Supremes songs of course, because by that time any mention of the Supremes to anyone under twenty would get you a blank stare, or from the guys in the band an eloquent "huh?" We played Zeppelin and The Stones and Hendrix but in my heart it was still opening night at the Copa.

But in my heart I had also decided I wanted to be an actress, because, after all, wasn't that what Diana Ross was doing? So I gave up my plans to lead the life of a hairdressing back-up singer and instead auditioned for the drama department at the University of Calgary. Now here I may appear to digress for a moment, but in fact auditioning for the drama department at the University of Calgary was my first step in becoming a Supreme. Which proves that I really was fated all that time to be one, or that God really doesn't know what He's doing and is just sort of making it up as He goes along.

We had to do one monologue and one song for our audition, so the song I chose was -- yes, you guessed it --

(Beat.)

-- "Leaving on a Jet Plane" by Peter, Paul and Mary! Well, at least it was a trio . . .

(She sings a listless, hippieish version of "Leaving on a Jet Plane", to acoustic guitar accompaniment.)

"All my bags are packed, I'm ready to go" -- I have no idea why I chose this -- "I'm standing here, outside your door" -- I have no idea how I got into the program -- "I hate to wake you up to say goodbye" -- it was the first year of the program, maybe they were desperate -- or maybe it was my big finish, Peter, Paul and Mary as interpreted by Liza Minelli:

(She belts out the chorus, Broadway style:)

"I'M LEAVIN' ON A JET PLANE!/ DON'T KNOW WHEN I'LL BE BACK AGAIN/ OH BABE, I HATE TO GOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!"

(Strikes a pose. Pause.)

Okay, don't applaud, neither did they.

(Or, if the audience does applaud:)

Thankyou, thankyou, apparently you're as desperate as they were.

Anyway, there I was in the drama department, which is how I met -- Sam. Sam was not a student in the program, Sam was already out in the "profession", which is what we euphemistically called the handful of mostly broke theatre companies that we longed to work for so that we, I guess, could be mostly broke too. Sam looked more like a football player than your average actor: six-five, 220 pounds, blonde, built like the Pyramid of Cheops turned upside down. Look, all I really have to tell you is that Sam's first big-time film role some years later was as Thor, yes, Thor, the one with the big biceps and big pecs and big . . . lance.

And I loved Sam. Not just for his big . . . lance, but because he was genuinely a nice guy - then. He used to invite me to come and hang out backstage at the dinner theatre where they used to hire him because made the blue-haired ladies swoon, so I did. And one night a few months later, sitting on the ratty leather couch in the green room, Sam and I got engaged.

(Intro to "I Hear A Symphony".)

What's that? Time for another song? Why Roxy -- I couldn't agree more!

(She sings. During bridge.)

You know, that Roxy is one canny little lady. Not only has she played this song to give you the chance to run out to the bar -- don't you dare -- but she's also picked it for its appropriateness to the moment. Its sweetness, its elan. Its tender evocation of an ignorant woman about to walk headlong into romantic disaster.

(She sings. Later, as the song continues under:)

All right, look, I have small confession to make. I . . . didn't really just stumble up here. Roxy helps me out sometimes, y'see, gives me the use of the bar, the lights. You. And I do this little -- "presentation". You see, it's not easy carrying around a long history of personal betrayal and profound bitterness at my age. It's not a healthy thing to keep inside you. It's the sort of thing you want to spread around!

(Sings. After awhile she gets bored with the song, and indicates for Roxy to cut it. It ends abruptly.)

Holland, Dozier and Holland were *wonderful* composers. But they never did learn how to end a song . . .

So. Now Sam and I are living together, everything's going pretty well, we're getting the occasional Brick Warehouse ad, when all of a sudden Sam gets the call from L.A. Gary Sandy. Remember Gary Sandy? "WKRP in Cincinnati", the nice guy, always used to wear jeans? Him. Sam had met Gary Sandy at Stage West when they'd worked together in a production of "The Foreigner", and now Gary Sandy was remounting the production in Los Angeles and wanted Sam to come down and play his part. And since Sam's father was American, which was where he'd gotten all that football-playing DNA, this was easily arranged. Sam went down to L.A., I stayed behind to play a handicapped lesbian skydiver in some intense new play or another, and Gary Sandy's agent saw Sam in this show and, well, you know, there he was -- Thor! -- and just like that, Sam had an agent.

Yes, I *know* it's not supposed to work that way, you're supposed to struggle and struggle for years and years and then Gary Sandy's agent turns you down flat. But none of this worked out the way it was supposed to. That's the whole point.

So Sam says "come down", and I think "why not?", the show about the handicapped lesbian skydiver is over and the only other role anybody's offered me is as a depressed pregnant nun, so down I go, to L.A., bag in hand, like Mary Tyler Moore arriving in Minneapolis, except without the hat.

And there I am. In L.A.! It hits me, like an estrogen rush, about ten minutes after I get there. I'm in L. fucking A! In the US of A! Where I always knew I should be! And my fiancée knows Gary Sandy! And he's a client of Gary Sandy's agent! And no, I don't have a green card, but cripes, somebody can get me one can't they, I mean pull some strings or something can't they, I mean -- that's how America works! And I run into a store and I buy one of those big American navel oranges and I bite into it and the juice squirts up my nose.

Now naturally, I had assumed Sam would introduce me to his agent. But a funny thing happens. Sam starts to get all squirrely. All sort of "I'm-going-to-an- audition, no-I-don't-know-what-time-I'll-be-back." All sort of "Yes-I-know-I-invited you-down-here, but-did- you-have-to-think-I-

meant-it?" To be fair, things are getting kind of weird for Sam. Good weird, but weird all the same. He's already done the role of Thor -- that was a movie-of-the-week. He's worried he's going to get typecast as, well, a big Scandinavian lout, but he's also got an audition for a new sit-com produced by Ted Danson called "Let's Do Lunch" and, unbelievably, I mean the man has been in Hollywood less than a year -- he gets it! And he comes home and tells me the news and that they'll be paying him \$12,000 a week -- a week -- and I'm hyperventilating on the living-room rug but Sam's saying "I don't know, I don't know if I can do it, I don't know if I'm ready for this." Sam, I say -- you're ready. Because I'm ready. We'll be ready together.

Well, Sam was ready. Sam was more ready than he knew. I mean that in a good way, of course. Well, maybe I don't -- but it's true. As for me, I still didn't have a green card, all I had was a library card and a Tower Video card, so I decided to use them. I started taking out biographies of great actresses from the library, Katherine Hepburn, Merle Oberon -- did you know Merle Oberon's father was a half-Mexican? -- it's true -- and I'd sit by the pool in our apartment complex and drink margaritas and read and whenever I came to a reference to one of their movies I'd stop to watch it. And after a few -- *months* of this exciting Hollywood lifestyle, I decided it was time to start home-manufacturing Prozac or move onto biographies of singers. Which is when I picked up a copy of --

(She holds up the book "Dreamgirl"  
by Mary Wilson.)

-- Dreamgirl. By Mary Wilson. Of the -- say it with me -- Supremes. See, I told you this would all add up, didn't I? We're getting to the good stuff now.

-- So, there I was, sitting by the pool reading Mary Wilson's autobiography Dreamgirl when the call came from Calgary. Now, admittedly, this is not the stuff that dreams are made on, most people do not sit around L.A. waiting for the big call from Calgary, but hey, you work with what you're given. It was the artistic director of Stage West, he was mounting a production of a show called "Beehive", and would I be available? Would I be available? WOULD I BE AVAILABLE? "I'll have to get back to you," I said, and hung up the phone for five minutes, long enough to give the impression, I hoped, that I'd called my agent and told him to get me out of that Jodi Foster thing because I was going back to thank the little people in the city that gave me my

start, not to mention my first role as a handicapped lesbian skydiver, and I called the director back and said "Yes, I think that would be possible" and, by the way, who was the star?

(She holds up the book.)

I couldn't believe it. I could not believe it. I -- was going to Edmonton -- to work with Mary Wilson -- OF THE SUPREEEEEEEEEEMES!!!!!!!!!!!!

(Music: intro to "My World is Empty Without You". She boogies to it. Suddenly she indicates for Roxy to stop the music.)

Wait a minute. Something just occurred to me. I can't believe I never thought of this before! You probably don't believe me. You probably think I'm making all this up. The stuff about Sam, the stuff about being a Supreme, the stuff about performing at the St. Winnifred commencement . . . all right, maybe you believe that part, but the rest -- I mean honestly -- I just *happen* to be reading an autobiography of Mary Wilson when I get an offer to do a show with her? Yeahright. So, I'm going to prove it to you. I'm going to prove to you that I performed with Mary Wilson, right now, before we even get to that part of the story, and hope that you take the rest on faith. Don't be so cynical. The nuns at St. Winnifred's told us faith was as important as chastity.

(She takes out a copy of Supreme Faith.)

Here we have it, "Supreme Faith" by Mary Wilson -- you see? Even Mary Wilson thinks faith is important. This is the second part of her autobiography --

(Sotto voce:)

-- stick with "Dreamgirl" -- and here we have . . .

(She turns to the back, leafs around:)

. . . somewhere here . . . just a minute . . . why look! -- someone's stuck a bookmark in the very spot! . . . yes here we have it . . .

(She finds it on the page with her finger:)

. . . "Rhonda Trodd".

(She holds it up for all to see.)

Yes there it is, under "Back-ups for Mary Wilson", bold as anything -- well, actually, the type is kind of small -- but there it is, in real letters, in a real book: "RHONDA TRODD". Here, pass it around among yourselves . . .

(She hands the book out to the audience:)

. . . And meantime I'll just get my driver's license . . .

(She does.)

. . . Just so you'll know it's me . . . sir. You sir, your name is?

(He tells her.)

And have we ever met before? . . . No. And you are not receiving any fee for this appearance? . . . Good. Now, would you please read the name on this driver's license?

(The audience member reads the name:

"Rhonda Trodd". She is triumphant:)

Thankyou! Yes, thankyou, "Rhonda Trodd", that's me. And there I am in that book. So the only remaining possibility is that there's another Rhonda Trodd out there who's also a performer, and really, what are the chances of that? So you see it's true, it's all true, everything I've told you and everything I will, well, almost, and besides, it has to be true, because who would bother to make this up?

Could I have my book back now please? Thankyou. I like to keep it in my vault.

So, where was I? Oh that's right: Mary Wilson, Calgary, "Beehive" . . . oh screw it, why don't I just sing?

(Again, intro to "My World Is Empty Without You".)

I brushed up on this song before I flew back to Canada, because I knew it was in the show. Besides, it's how I figured Sam would feel once I was gone, and boy, would it serve him right.

(She sings part of the song. When it's over:)

Thankyou. No, it's not how Sam felt while I was gone. I suspect Sam's life while I was gone was more like "Love Child" . . . or "I'm Livin' in Shame". But more about Sam later.

So I arrive in Calgary and as I'm waiting for my bags at the airport I see this rather large woman -- no make that enormous woman -- struggling to pull this huge suitcase off the carousel. And she's Black, though that's not the clincher, there are a few more Black people in Calgary by this point, but she looks an awful lot like Mary Wilson. Except she looks even more like two Mary Wilsons. So I sidle up and I check the name tags on her luggage and, yep, it's her.

"Ms. Wilson?" I say.

"Yes?" She thinks I'm a fan -- which I guess I am.

"I'm Rhonda Trodd. I'm going to be doing 'Beehive' with you."

"Girlfriend! Am I glad to see you!" she says to me. "Help me get this trunk off the carousel, would you? By the way, what's the weather like here this time of year, do you know? I hope I've brought enough clothes."

And then I realize: I can see a shirt peeking out beneath the shirt beneath the sweater beneath the coat beneath the coat she's wearing, because she's wearing at least two extra layers of clothing! She's filled twelve suitcases with wardrobe but she still doesn't have everything she needs and besides somebody's told her how cold it's going to be in Calgary in October and so she's wearing the rest of her closet on her back. Thank god! She's not obese, she's not stumbling around drunk, she's not turned into some over-rouged parody of herself, in fact when I look at her close-up, she looks really great. So we get her suitcase off the carousel and I get my bags and I load them onto the cart she's already piled sky-high with other bags and I push and she takes my arm and we head out to clear customs. And you know what? When we get outside it turns out she does need all those clothes.

So there we are, doing "Beehive" in Calgary, my triumphant return to my hometown. "Beehive" is a musical revue of the 60s, and they don't let me do the Supremes song, but that's okay, I get to do a Janis Joplin number that stops the show, and Mary does an imitation of Diana Ross that's funny as hell. And when we go out to some bar after, if nobody notices that Mary Wilson's just walked in the door, which nobody in Calgary ever does, we make sure they know. Little whispers: "Hey, do you know who that is over there? It's Mary Wilson, you know, Mary Wilson from the Supremes." And pretty soon there's a circle of admirers around her, women in dresses a size too tight, guys with soup stains on their ties, and eventually somebody always buys her drinks for her, and, if we're lucky, ours too.

And then something funny happens. In retrospect I should have seen it as a warning, I should have known it was the

beginning of the end, though really, I didn't even realize this was the beginning of the beginning yet. Mary and I are getting along pretty well -- in fact, we're getting to be pretty good buds. If she'd had a few drinks, she'd get to telling you about all the people she'd met and what they're really like. Paul McCartney -- how he was the first person to call when the Supremes broke up to wish her good luck. How her friend had had an affair with Elvis Presley and then had to sneak into Graceland to get her stuff out when Elvis died. How *she'd* had an affair with Tom Jones who used to give her rings that were almost as big as his own. And I was coaching her in the show, too, because she had all these monologues and she'd never done much acting before, so I'm working with her on the side, *I'm coaching Mary Wilson of the Supremes*, and she's so grateful to me you'd think I'm the star.

So things are clicking along pretty well when -- *Dick* arrives. Dick -- appropriately named -- is Mary's manager. "Manager," I think, "hah! Is this the guy who's responsible for her playing dinner theatres, is this the guy who didn't bother to make sure there was someone to meet her at the airport?" That's not management, that's sedition. But still, I'm willing to give Dick the benefit of the doubt. I mean, to be honest, Mary isn't quite the performer Diana Ross is. She's been taking singing lessons ever since the Supremes broke up -- a little late in the day you might say, but Diana had always carried the vocals and Mary had basically hung out in the background being the sexy one. So now she had a voice coach, but still, there were notes that shall we say eluded her. And Dick had taken her on despite this, so maybe Dick wasn't that bad after all.

Well, Dick was that bad after all. He shows up and suddenly everything changes. Mary can't be seen with us, Mary isn't allowed to sit at a table with us, or rather, we're not allowed to sit at a table with her, because she's a *star*, doncha know, and we're just hired hands. And our attitude, and I do mean attitude, is "Hey, bud, we've been sittin' at Mary's table for six weeks now, in fact before you arrived it was just a table, *the* table, not Mary's table, it was nobody's table, so why don't you just frig right off?" And amazingly enough, Dick takes offense at this, and decides that I am the ringleader, which I was, and decided he'd have to watch out for me. Which he would.

Y'know, here's the thing . . . if you could see in advance what was gonna happen to you -- like Scrooge could -- you wouldn't change yourself. I don't think you would. You'd try to change the people around you -- you'd try to convince the girl who was going to steal your grade eight boyfriend to become a nun. Scrooge would've given Cratchit stock in the company. I'd have driven Dick out to Canmore so he'd want to buy some land there and give up showbiz to raise bison. But. Who knew?

After the run in Calgary we took the show to Toronto and Dick went home to Dickland and things kind of got back to normal. And one night Mary announced she was going to be performing after the show one Friday at "East 85th", this little, very in jazz club on Front Street in Toronto, and she said she'd be performing all her old songs. And my little antennae started twitching, and I said "Mary. Mary. You have got to let me sing with you, you have got to let me be a Supreme." And I show her, I know all the moves, I know all the songs, and not like we did them in my backyard in Calgary, for *real*, and I do the song I've been waiting 25 years to do in the presence of Diana Ross or Flo Ballard or Mary Wilson and it goes something like this:

(She sings "Baby Love". Halfway through:)

And at some point Mary joins in and starts singing back-up to *me*, and I am in heaven, I mean I have died and come back a Supreme!

(She continues. Later in the song:)

And then Mary looks over and says "Okay, Rhonda, you're on." And the whole dressing room starts spinning, and the little lights around the mirrors start twinkling, and Mary's giving me this big grin -- and suddenly I realize that for all those years, every time the Supremes sang "Someday We'll Be Together", they'd been singing -- to *me*!

(She sings. Big finish. Applause, applause. As the houselights come up:)

ROXY (V.O.)

Time to take a break, folks. Roxy needs a re-fill.

End of Act One

## Act Two

(RHONDA comes on wearing a slinky, glittery dress.)

RHONDA

I just thought I'd change into something a little -- cooler.

(She sings "Back In My Arms Again". Then:)

So! Where were we? Oh that's right. You're all enjoying a little drink, and I'm enjoying a little cheap psychotherapy.

So there I was -- a Supreme. How can I describe to you how this felt? You, ma'am, what do you do for a living?

(Ad lib with audience. If a woman replies that she's a teller, Rhonda says something like:)

"Okay, imagine that they call you in one day and tell you that they're gonna make you bank president and, what's more, you get to keep a cut of all the deposits. Sound good? That's how I felt."

(Or if a man says he's a bus driver, Rhonda says.)

"Okay. Imagine there's a trap door under all the seats on your bus and whenever anybody obnoxious gets on you just wait to see where they sit down and then, whammo, that's it, they're sittin' on concrete. Would that make you happy? That's how happy I felt."

(And so on.)

So anyway. I was one happy little Rhonda Trodd. When the poster came out, it just said Mary Wilson of the Supremes, it didn't even say our names, mine or Dana, the other girl from "Beehive" who was singing backup with me, but I didn't care, when I stepped out there in my dress like someone had poured latex over me and then rolled me in sequins, and started doing those little shoulder swoops, and this --

(She does the "Stop! In the Name of Love" traffic policeman gesture.)

Remember this?

(Does it again.)

-- which I'd been perfecting since St. Winnifred's . . . I knew I was a Supreme, just like I knew it all those years ago singing with Suzanne and Eva.

Now I know what you're thinking. You're thinking "Rhonda. Rhonda, Rhonda, Rhonda. Maybe it took you awhile to figure out that the Supremes were Black, but surely by this time you'd figured out that you were white." Good point. Of course I thought of that. Obviously Mary thought it was okay, but then as far as she was concerned we were just singing back-up to her, but to me and a goodly part of the audience Dana and I were Flo and Mary, only we weren't, and I have to admit when I looked out at that audience there were a few people looking like a concussion wave had hit them, I mean this was a few years ago, nobody was sitting there going "hmm, is this correct? Is this really appropriate?", but there were a few people going "Think I'll have me another one of them B-52s". But by the end of the show it didn't seem to matter anymore, they loved us, the black people in the audience, the white, and when we sang "Someday We'll be Together" for our encore they were standing on the tables, and remember, most of these were people who liked jazz.

So. Was I naive? Certainly. Stupid? You betcha. Did I love being up there? It was the best night of my life.

It still is.

After Toronto, I went back to L.A., all abuzz with my triumph, not in "Beehive", at East 85th, and I get off the plane, and something's up with Sam.

In the terminal he doesn't even hug me, he just touches my arm, like this, like I just kicked a field goal or something. At least he could have patted me on the bum. I tell him all about the gig at East 85th and he just looks at me, like "What are you *talking* about?", like "Mary *who*?" "Let's Do Lunch" had just finished shooting its first thirteen episodes -- they were also to be the *last* thirteen episodes, but Sam didn't know that yet, or maybe he did, even subliminally, which may be why he had the inner serenity of a chihauhua. They had the wrap party for the show and Sam said just dress casual, but, believe me, your idea of casual and Hollywood's idea of casual are two very different things. So there I am, in my jeans and authentic Calgary, Alberta cowboy boots and everybody else is dressed in gowns and white jackets and -- actually, Diana Ross, dressed as she was for her opening night at the Copa, could have slipped into this room unnoticed. And Ted Danson is there and I find myself sitting next to him, alone, because

Sam's off some place working the room, and for the first time in my life I'm star-struck, I have nothing to say, well I do, it's just not in any language spoken on this planet, and Ted Danson says to me, "So, you're here with Sam, are you?", and I say "Fla-fla-fla-fla-flaaaaaaa," and he says, "Are you an actress?", and I say "Fla-fla-fla-fla-flaaaaaaa," and, oddly enough, not long after that Ted Danson gets up and walks away.

And then it turns out that nobody in the room has ever heard of me, I don't mean they haven't seen my billboard on Sunset Boulevard, I mean Sam has been working with these people for six months and apparently the subject of the woman he lives with, his *fiancéé*, do you remember the *fiancéé* part? -- good, because Sam didn't -- the fact that we're *engaged* has never come up. And not long after that -- oh, it's so banal you could make a sit-com about it -- Sam says to me, "We need to spend some time apart." And I, in my simple prairie-girl way, think, "wait a minute, wait a minute, I just got back from three months in Canada, maybe what we need is to spend some time together." But Sam wants to spend some time apart. Like maybe -- I can see it in his eyes -- his beautiful, blue, quasi-Scandinavian eyes -- like maybe the rest of our lives. And so I move out, and I have no money, and I have no place to stay, so I end up staying in Gary Sandy's guest-house. And that's when I stop drinking margaritas. Because I know if I don't . . . I'm going to be living in Gary Sandy's guest-house for a very long time . . .

(She sings "Love is Here and Now You're Gone." It starts out pretty straight, a little melancholy. We hear the first interpolated bit from the recording: "You closed the door to your heart and turned the key, locked your love away from me." Song continues. Rhonda takes out a little wallet-size photo of Sam, and seems to get peed-off looking at it. The song acquires a certain "edge". We hear the second interpolation: "You should have taken one look at those big pecs, and left that guy sittin' on the couch at Stage West". Song continues. Rhonda's really pissed by now. We hear the third interpolation: "Pull yourself together, girl, I haven't seen such a pathetic display since Burt dumped Loni". Rhonda finishes the song while pinning the

photo to the wall and throwing darts at it, then ripping it into tiny pieces. This seems to have some cathartic effect on her. She looks to the audience.)

This has been a Kodak moment . . .

But then! -- you get to be good at that in showbiz -- moving from utter spitefulness to butter-wouldn't-melt in ten seconds flat -- but then! . . . Mary's people, namely Dick phones up and they need a backup singer for a tour of the Eastern seaboard, but they don't need just any singer, they need meeeeeee, oh yes, Mary Wilson has seen the light, she neeeeeeds me, and I am back in business as a Supreme.

Well not really as a Supreme. Well, sort of. Some nights we're Mary Wilson and the Supremes. Some nights we're Mary Wilson of the Supremes. Some nights we're just Mary Wilson and her back-up singers, Mary has a lawsuit going with Motown over who owns the name and any time we get within a hundred miles of anybody who matters hearing Dana and I become wallpaper. Our tour starts in Syracuse, but first we have to rehearse in New York, which is a bit of a fantasy come true, right? I mean I'm not going into rehearsal for my Broadway debut, but still, going into rehearsal formally, officially as a Supreme -- sort of -- is better than doing furniture ads. So I get to the rehearsal hall, which is above the Sure Bet Electronics Store on 43rd Street, and I ask Horace the musical director for the charts and Horace says "Charts? What charts?", and he hands me a cassette tape, off which I am supposed to figure out, somehow, which parts are mine. And Dana, who has been touring with Mary in England for the last three months, is exhausted and doesn't really want to show me the steps, but she does anyway. And Mary gives me fifty bucks and tells me to go buy a gown. But while I might have been able to buy a camcorder at the Sure Bet Electronics Store for fifty bucks, I was not about to find a gown for fifty dollars, not in the 72 hours available before we left for Syracuse, so I ended up wearing one of Mary's old numbers cinched up under my boobs. And all this time I'm wondering why New York doesn't look the way it does in Woody Allen movies.

So we head up to Syracuse in Barry Manilow's old touring bus -- I am not making this up -- Barry's bus had coffins for beds . . . obviously Mr. Manilow is a much more complicated man than we knew. And we get there and what we're playing is like -- well it's not even a Holiday Inn,

it's like a cheap Holiday Inn, with a dinner theatre in it, I'm having flashbacks, I'm thinking the last three months have all been a dream and I'm back in Toronto doing "Beehive". This? This is where Mary Wilson performs when she's on tour? This is not what I was led to believe! And I go outside at one point during rehearsals to get a cup of coffee and when I try to get back in the security guard won't let me! I tell him, "Look, I have to get in there, I'm a Supreme!" and he's like, yeah, right. Horace has to come and rescue me. And when we do the show, the lights go up and there's this gasp -- really, this gasp -- and I look to see if Mary's forgotten to get dressed or something and then I realize: it's us. It's Dana and me, we're the ones they're gasping at, because this is not a hip little jazz club on Front Street in Toronto, this is a sub-Holiday Inn in Syracuse, New York and Dana and I are still not Black. But Mary just brazens it out, I think she thinks they're gasping because yes, it's really her, and all the time that I'm watching Dana, still trying to pick up the dance steps, always half a beat behind, I'm thinking, "This is my last night as a Supreme. I'll be fired before the encore. It's back to chugging margaritas in Gary Sandy's guest-house."

But after the show Mary makes a point of coming up to me and telling me how well she thinks I did. And at the reception afterwards her fans come up to me and Dana and say the same thing, and I remember thinking how gracious these people were, how kind, and I chose not to notice that most of the white people were clustered around Mary and the musicians, or around the fountain that dispensed the punch, anywhere but near Dana and me.

(Pause.)

So we continue the tour, down the east coast, the next place we play is actually this big theatre in Ocean City, New Jersey, very new, very acceptable, and all this time we're sleeping in the coffins in Barry Manilow's old touring bus and to tell you the truth I'm feeling pretty good.

(She sings "The Happening". Produces a little toy bus, "tours" it around the audience, running it overtop bald men's heads, generally acting out. Halfway through:)

Isn't this just the worst old song you've ever heard? Good travelling music, though . . .

(She continues singing, and running around. During the long bridge in the

song she disappears behind the backdrop. Music builds. Spotlights play over the backdrop. When she reappears she's wearing a large cardboard cut-out of a bus suspended from her shoulders with "Barry Manilow" crossed out on its side and replaced with "Mary Wilson". She finishes the song.)

Thankyou. We promise not to reprise that song at the end.

(As she removes the bus:)

"Miss Saigon" has a helicopter -- we got a bus.

Now all this time I'm writing letters back home to Sam . . . "home". I call it "home", but L.A. isn't really "home" to anyone, is it, except maybe Charlton Heston . . . because a) we haven't broken off our engagement, b) "we're just spending some time apart" and c) I can understand it, I'm a sympathetic gal, Sam was under stress, he was under pressure, it's not easy, earning twelve thousand a week, it's *hard*, and he needs to know I know that.

(She sticks a finger in her mouth and mimes retching.)

So anyway, I'm writing to Sam and I'm not getting any letters back, but, of course, for all I know the U.S. Postal Service doesn't work west to east. About this time I find out that Dick doesn't even really want me on the tour, that the only reason I'm there is that another singer walked out on them about a week before the start date and I'm the last resort. And then I discover that Dick is trying to convince Mary to pose for Playboy Magazine. This, he is convinced, is the way for Mary to jumpstart her career. Well I take exception to this, and tell him so. "Look what it did for LaToya Jackson," Dick says. "LaToya Jackson?" I say. "LaToya Jackson? Dick, Mary may not be Aretha Franklin, she may not be Whitney Houston, but she is *not* LaToya Jackson either!" And I can see the little tumblers clicking behind Dick's eyes, he's storing this, see, not that I spoke up for Mary, but that I compared her unfavourably with Whitney and Aretha, which, y'know, if you compared me unfavourably with Vanessa Redgrave I would not take grave offense at this. But Dick's already calculating how this might be used against me. And then about a ten days after that our gig in New York is cancelled.

We were supposed to play New York for a week. It was going to be great, a decent club, we could stay in one place for seven whole days, get in a little shopping at the Sure Bet,

and maybe some top-line producers would come and see Mary. And it gets cancelled. And the word comes down that the reason it got cancelled was that the promoters found out that Dana and I weren't Black, and when Dick threatened to sue them for breach of contract they threatened to sue him for fraud. Dick makes sure Dana and I know about this, of course, and for about about a week after that I can't even look at Mary, I feel so guilty about it. I mean she acts just fine about it, says it's no big deal, says she needed the break anyway, only when I do look at her I can see how hurt she is. I tell Horace this, and he just laughs, laughs and says "Mary's been storing up hurt since the day she was born," and he stashes his guitar with a friend and goes home to visit his son in Detroit.

Sometimes I think . . . if you'd just listen to those little voices inside you . . . the ones that warn you: don't go in there, don't go to that movie with that guy, *stop and get out of this situation now* . . . if you'd just listen to those little whispers that are sort of like a "Hints from Heloise" column written by God . . . you could actually make it through life without getting trashed. Happy. Reasonably happy. The only problem is: you don't. I didn't anyway. And even if I had, what could I do? I was stuck in New York, about one hundred dollars to my name . . . and Andrew Lloyd Webber wasn't casting that week . . .

After New York -- or what was supposed to be New York -- we're booked on a cruise ship out of Miami. We play a club in town before we leave, and Mary's a mess, it's not that she's drunk or anything, it's just like she's -- fuzzy. One night during the chorus to "Love Child" she forgets the words -- she forgets where she is, really -- and I have to dance up to the front and take over the lead till she pulls herself together. I find out later that this almost always happens in February, because February is the anniversary of Flo Ballard's death, Flo basically died of booze and poverty and disappointment. And Mary always goes to pieces in February and then spends March picking the pieces up. And when we get out on the cruise, things aren't much better: Mary sits out on the deck most of the day, staring out at the ocean and pretending like she's working on her next book.

And I don't know how I feel about Mary Wilson at this point. I hate her for not being the Mary Wilson I met

eighteen months ago, when she could be anything I wanted her to be because I really didn't know her at all. I love her for hanging in with me after New York City, thus sparing me the humiliation of going back to L.A. and facing what I know to be the truth. And sometimes, like in February, between Miami and who knows where . . . I even feel a little bit sorry for her.

And meanwhile Horace has given me some CDs of the music he really likes to listen to - Muddy Waters, Billie Holiday - and boy, if I didn't know before what he means about Mary storing up hurt . . . I sure do now.

(She sings "Good Morning Heartache."  
When it's done:)

About two days into the cruise . . . Dana gets fired. I don't know why exactly, except I have my ideas. It's because Dana has started to speak up, to tell Dick that No, he can't ask us to pay for our own dry cleaning and then forget to reimburse us, and No, he can't treat us like Motown used to treat Flo and Mary; we may not be real Supremes but he ain't Berry Gordy either. So they helicopter Dana out and helicopter in a new singer, Lori, Lori is actually a country-western singer with the hair up to here -- kind of like the way the Supremes used to wear their hair, come to think of it -- and I try to teach her the steps and the arrangements but *there's just no time!* And the only thing that saves the situation is that after work we can sit out on the deck and suntan and make up dirty lyrics to Johnny Cash songs.

But one thing I notice is the guys in the band head right back to their cabins after rehearsal, and just stay there until it's time for the show. And these cabins are more like cells than rooms. I talk to Jerome the drummer about it, and he just says "I'm a night owl" and tells me he's fine. I talk to Horace about it, but Horace just says to me: "Rhonda. Look around." We're sitting in a corner booth after the show -- they'll only sit in a corner booth -- and Horace says to me, "What don't you see here? Other than at this table, what don't you see?" And I get it. Finally, I get it. And Horace says to me, "If we went into the pool, the pool would clear. If we went onto the shuffleboard deck, the shuffleboard deck would clear. If we went into the dining-room at lunch, after about half-an-hour there'd be a circle of empty tables all around us. Mary is protected, because Mary is a star.

But we're not stars. And it may be fun to have the swimming-pool to yourself the first couple of times, but after that . . . it isn't fun anymore."

And I tell him that's ridiculous. Yes, I, in my simple wisdom, tell them they're all wrong, it's not that bad, and somehow I convince them to come with me when we dock the next day, we're going to dock for the day at this private resort on the Gulf Coast, we can go into town, go shopping, have lunch, *c'mon* you guys, I tell them, I need company. So they come. And Horace's little boy, who has arrived from Detroit to spend a week with his Dad, comes too.

Around about three in the afternoon, Horace and his son and I end up playing frisbee on the private beach. Now I can see the looks we're getting from the guests on the beach, and I realize, they think we're married, they think Horace and I are married and Horace's son is our kid, and oh oh isn't it shocking. And Horace is right -- this little circle does open up around us, for about fifteen yards all around us, this little circle of very white sand, and there we are, Horace and me and Horace's son, playing frisbee in the centre of it. Until the security guard arrives. He won't even look at Horace, just comes up to me and asks if we're staying at the hotel and I say no, no, we're staying on that fifty million dollar cruise ship over there, and maybe he'd like to check that out with my boss, Mary Wilson, of the *Supremes*. And he just says "Maybe it would be better if you went back there, now." And I look at Horace, and I look at Horace's son, who's looking up at his Dad to see what his Dad's going to say. And Horace just says, "Let's go," and he starts back towards the ship.

That night, I went to apologize to Horace. He said, "Forget it. I knew what was going to happen. I just wanted you to see.

"I guess it's different up where you live, huh," he said to me. And I just stood there. What could I say? That the Metis kids in my neighbourhood might not think so? That up in Canada no one would ever throw him off a beach -- not in February, at least. So I didn't say anything. But what I thought was -- the world is really screwed.

But I wasn't ready to quit. Oh no, that's the worst thing, if I'd walked off the ship right then -- well, maybe I'd have waited till it docked again -- if I'd said, "No, I

will no longer be a cog in this awful society, I, Rhonda Trodd, will set an example by going to work among the poor in -- some place so foreign I don't even know its name!" -- I might at least have got out with some shred of dignity. As it is, what I said was, "Cog? So I'm a cog. Cogs have their place too."

Our next gig is supposed to be in Palm Springs. But sometime about a week before we're supposed to leave -- I find out I'm not going.

Nobody tells me. I mean, nobody tells me right away. By this time, I'm back in L.A., I try to get hold of Sam but now he's shooting a film, a respectable one, he's moved up to jobs where he doesn't have to wear a loincloth. So he's never in. And I'm phoning up Dick to ask when my plane ticket's going to arrive, but he's never in either. And just when I'm starting to think, well, Palm Springs isn't that far away, maybe he expects me to walk -- Lori fesses up: Dick's been paying her for the last three weeks to train a new singer, and that's who's going to Palm Springs.

Now the most amazing thing about this to me is that they've been working together for three weeks. I learned to be a Supreme in about two hours in the rehearsal hall above the Sure Bet Electronics Store -- what have they been doing for *three weeks*? And then, of course, I'm a little bit mad at Lori, until I realize that that's just shooting the messenger. Who I'm really mad at is Dick. I mean first of all I have *no idea why this is happening* -- though I . . . kind of . . . do. And I spend days and days and *days* getting mad enough to call him up one more time -- and this time it's going to be at two in the morning -- when all of a sudden he calls me.

"Hey Babe," he says to me -- Dick went to the Don Cherry School of Sweet-talk -- "you all set to go?" And I tell him, Dick, I know what's happened. What's this, a new concept -- you're going to have four Supremes? And he says well, hey, the other girl twisted her ankle -- you're on! I'm on. "I'm on," he says to me. "Dick," I say, "you're right -- I'm so fucking on I could light up the city of Philadelphia!"

"WHY?" I say to him, "WHY are you firing me?" and he says "I'm not firing you, I'm hiring you," and I say "are you going to hire me again after Palm Springs?" and he says

"that remains to be seen" and I say right, right, so does your head after I stick it up your ass.

"I was *good*," I say to him, and he says, "well, that's a matter of opinion, isn't it?" and I say "Is it true this new girl is Black, because that's what Lori told me, is it true that she's Black?" and he says "that has nothing to do with it" and I say "Do you have to be Black to be a Supreme?" and he says "Apparently you do." AND I SAY BUT THEY LIKED ME ON THAT CRUISE, and he says "No, no they didn't like you on that cruise, Rhonda, they didn't like you in Miami either, or in Syracuse or in Ocean City. They *hated* you, Rhonda, they may not have said it to your face, but they hated you, they paid to see the Supremes, and what they got was you," and I say, "The Black people didn't hate me," and he says, "The Black people thought you were cute," and I say, "And how do you know the white people hated me?" and he says, "Because, I stood backstage and I looked out at their faces, and I could see, I could see how they were feeling, these are Americans, darling, they're not like you, they're not Canadian, you can *tell* what's going on from their faces. And you broke the rules, babe, these people'll basically accept Blacks in two categories, sports heros and performers, and anything else is a threat. And you crossed that line, Rhonda, because you know what? -- If you can be a Supreme, why then Black people can be doctors and lawyers and CEOs and god-knows-what-else! You *threatened* them, Rhonda, and people don't pay a fifty-buck cover to be threatened," and I said, "but I'm still a Supreme!" and he said: "No. You're not."

And I thought back to that six-year-old girl ... lip-syncing to "Where Did Our Love Go?" in the backyard . . . or sitting in the backseat on the way to Disneyland, wondering which was the turn-off to Detroit . . . and I thought, "Tell that to her." And I thought of Sam, out there somewhere, grabbing at the brass ring and having it lift him whole into showbiz heaven, like the Virgin Mary on steroids . . . and I thought, "Bye bye, Sam. Watch out for falling stars."

(Pause.)

And then I said to Dick: when do you want me there? Day after tomorrow, he tells me. So I tell him: you have to fly me there first class. And after, you have to fly me back to Toronto. Because I'm getting out. I'm getting out of Gary Sandy's guest house. I'm getting out of L.A. I'm getting

out out of the US of A. And there's now way I'm gonna slink back to Alberta.

I did see Sam one last time. It wasn't face-to-face. I suppose I could have tracked him down, but by then Gary Sandy's wife had told me he was seeing someone else -- actually, someone elses, plural -- so I figured, why bother? It's too soon for him to have a stalker. Where I saw him was on the last episode of "Let's Do Lunch". He looked great. He really did. I pressed my hand up to the television screen and just left it there . . . until all the little hairs started to stand up on my arm.

There was one last meeting with Mary Wilson, too. It was up in her room, after the gig in Palm Springs, she threw a big party for the usual hangers-on. I went up to her -- I had to go up to her, she hadn't exactly been consorting with me all evening. I said, "You know I'm leaving, don't you?" and she said she did. I said, "I want you to know, whatever else happened . . . I always loved doing the show." And then we hugged, and she told me to take care of myself, and the very last thing Mary Wilson ever said to me, the very last thing Mary Wilson ever said to me, while we were embracing and crying in each other's arms, was: "Don't forget to return the dress."

(Pause. RHONDA indicates the dress she's wearing. Smiles sweetly.)

I forgot.

(Very softly, music starts under.)

So! What's the moral of the story? There isn't one. "Racism is Bad". We knew that. "Fame Does Funny Things To People". Ditto. "Always Wear Clean Underwear". Sam was in the last Martin Scorsese movie, maybe there's a moral in that. "If you love somebody, set them free -- and they will become a very big star without you."

No, there isn't a moral. Who wants a moral in a karaoke bar? But sometimes . . . when I'm standing in an elevator . . . or in the supermarket, picking out fruit for a platter -- I have my own catering business now, fruit platters, cheese plates, special discounts for groups of fifty or more -- and an old Supremes song starts playing on the Muzak . . . Baby Love, or Love Is Like an Itching in My Heart . . . I feel it again . . . I feel that old tingle, moving up one arm and down the other . . . and it makes me want to move, and sing, and do a shoulder swoop like it's

never been swooped before! . . . and you know something? .  
. . Sometimes I do.

(Sings:)

Medley

LOVE CHILD  
REFLECTIONS  
YOU CAN'T HURRY LOVE  
KEEP ME HANGIN' ON  
SOMEDAY WE'LL BE TOGETHER  
Big finish.)

The End

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