

# Along Came Doreen

by J. Mykell Collinz

Twenty two, reading Camus, feeling blue, life is absurd. Why even try? Live for today, stay blown away. Inherent meaning does not exist in this universe. Attempts to find it will ultimately end in failure. It's humanly impossible. Then along came Doreen. She changed all that. She demanded excellence. She attracted genius. I needed a miracle. It happened late one night during open mic at Hobbs Corner bar.

Earlier that evening, I stood outside the bar listening to the emcee's words echoing through the open door. "Poetry, performance art, folk music, jazz, whatever you have, bring it. But know your song well before singing. You are being judged here by an elite audience." There were so many performers ahead of me, I didn't expect to make the stage. To be honest, I was hoping I wouldn't make the stage.

I had never performed in public but I could sing and play the guitar well enough, I felt, and it was time to try. While practicing at home, I would visualize myself standing on stage in the large, square, dimly lit barroom filled to capacity for open mic night. With ceiling fans circulating smoke filled air, the atmosphere would be torrid. All the top performers would be in the audience watching from the tables or from the bar or standing at the side of the stage, responding to every musical nuance in my expressive delivery. Doreen would always be right up front in my visualizations. I didn't really know her. Yet, to me, she and her friends epitomized the local hip scene.

When it became clear I would make the stage, I thought of backing out the door. Instead, I unpacked my Martin acoustical six-string guitar, strapped it over my shoulder, and stood in the shadows waiting for my cue. The performer on stage ahead of me, a poet with a great sense of humor, had the tightly packed audience laughing and shouting loudly. Not the best act to follow for a somber folksinger. I needed to start off with something strong.

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The emcee took the stage to announce a short break when the poet finished. That's the way things always happen to me so I wasn't really surprised, just irritated; and I started strumming the guitar to release tension. People around me in the shadows by the stage started clapping to the rhythm. That's when I noticed Doreen, with friends and admirers, moving through the crowd towards the stage. She saw me looking. She looked back and smiled. She looked back again. And this time her smile broadened.

She knew what she was doing to me, for me, as I walked to the open mic.

