

The Karaoke Girls

by Joe Tripician

The Karaoke Girls take to the stage, a flock of sister gazelles all huddled, nesting and preening with giddiness and light.

They could pass for real sisters. The warmth that radiates from them as they grab the microphones feels like a summer wave on a dry shore.

They appear far more natural than any of the men before or after them. They don't force the vocals, growl in aggression, or shred the lyrics into ugly unrecognizable gutturals.

Nor do they fellate the mic, as much as the men in the audience would secretly encourage, if their spouses weren't seated beside them, counting choruses and calories.

No. The Karaoke Girls are not appreciated. Not nearly enough and not often enough.

Just look at them. They sway with the souls of saints. Smile with the colors of joy. Dance to the rhythms of heartbeats.

They should not, must not know that he loves them.

At his age he doesn't ask for any assurances. Not in love. Not in life.

If their eyes meet his, he will speak to them. If not, he moves on. Forgets it. Lets it go. Thinks nothing more of it. Starts repeating his mantra: "o r g a s m."

He is grateful for any attention. And puts in a good effort at a man's job.

Louise is a Scientologist. She likes puppies and purrs when her feet are rubbed.

Mary is studying to become a lawyer and squeaks when her ear is nibbled.

Carol is adrift, but she loves cinema and her eyes widen when she is licked.

There's no point in pursuing them in any serious sense. Not as a boyfriend, or girlfriend, and certainly not as a husband or partner.

They are as independent as they are conjoined: spiritually, of course, not physically.

And should that time come when they allow him into their sphere of hot breaths and warm touches, he will dedicate the next song to them. Croon as if it were his last. And when the bar is closed, when the tabs are all paid, the ringing in his ears will continue: a small pleasant painful souvenir of something that was almost real.

The Karaoke Girls say, "He couldn't, certainly must not love us."

