



Proudly Presents

# **PARTON ME**

**WRITTEN BY TAMARA COSTON**

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It all started at the beginning of this semester. My teacher, Mrs. Williams, challenged every student in class to do something outside his or her comfort zone. She said we all should take the challenge seriously, and her suggestions included volunteering in the community, applying for a job that was way beyond our experience level, signing up for a new club here at school, or trying out for a sport or activity—like trying out for the spring play or next year’s band—even if we couldn’t act or play an instrument. Mrs. Williams said if we had any other ideas we could write them down on a piece of paper for consideration.

My biggest fear is speaking in public. I’ve never liked drawing attention to myself. I’m a little shy, but I’m also super competitive. I’m always entering contests that offer cool prizes. I’ve entered writing contests. I’ve competed in spelling bees. When our class has a fundraiser, I’m almost always the winner for selling the most wrapping paper, candy bars, lollipops, candles or whatever crazy thing they ask us to sell. So, I knew exactly what my challenge was going to be. I had seen the poster for it over in Jackson last week. The poster said:

**Come one, come all!**  
**Strut your stuff, and have a ball!**  
**Step out of the box! Step out of the carton!**  
**We’re searching for a look-alike for Dolly Parton!**

Mrs. Williams said my idea of entering a Dolly Parton look-alike contest was the perfect challenge for me. I don’t know if she thought the idea of a little skeleton of a girl like me trying to impersonate a bigger-than-life country super-star was the real challenge, or if she just thought it would be good for my self-esteem. Regardless, she did say that she’s noticed how—even when she knows I know the answer to her discussion questions—I never raise my hand in class. Mrs. Williams said that I might be surprised at how a contest like this could change my life. I don’t know anything about a contest changing my life, but the prize itself was enough to make me enter—a three day/two night, all-

expense paid trip to Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, a weekend pass for four to Dollywood, and the honor of meeting Ms. Dolly Parton in person! I started packing immediately. Like I said, I am a super competitive person. I may be shy, but there is no way I was going to pass up an opportunity to meet the legendary singer-songwriter-actress-business woman-philanthropist simply because I was afraid of standing in front of large groups of people...and lip synching a record...and having everyone compare me to The Queen of Country Music herself. It was then that I began to second guess my decision to enter this contest. What was I thinking? I'm a tiny high school girl who is constantly trying to fly under the radar and not be noticed! And now I'm considering entering a look-alike contest for perhaps the biggest personality in the world? This will definitely be a challenge!

Contests are like sports. The trick to winning is to basically just figure out a strategy to beat your opponents. So that's what I started to do—plan my strategy! The rules stated the contest would be judged on overall resemblance and similarity to Dolly Parton, lip synching skills, and a brief question and answer period. Now for the first part of the contest: resemblance and similarity to Dolly Parton. I looked at myself in the mirror. The only similarity between Dolly Parton and myself is that neither one of us is a male. Dolly Parton is curvaceous. She is the poster girl for the full-figured woman. I turned to look at myself profile in the mirror. I could already see two BIG strikes against me. There is a reason I was nicknamed “Mosquito Bite” in junior high. Well, the rules did state that any and all artificial enhancements may be used to create the desired effect. So, I thought to myself, what will be the boost I need in the bustier department? Toilet paper? No, the contest was being held on an outdoor stage, and it could rain. Besides, I think I need a little movement for believability's sake. Then it hit me. Water balloons! Of course, water balloons! With water balloons, I could adjust the size, and they would give me that certain natural quality I was going for. A big wig from the costume store downtown—quaffed, of course, by the cosmetology teacher at school—and I would be as good as half-way *on* my way