

DREAMGIRLS

CHAPTER 1

A chance to be famous

'Hurry up, Effie!' Deena shouted as she ran towards the theatre.

'I'm going as fast as I can. It isn't easy to run in these shoes,' Effie cried. 'Anyway, it's not *my* fault we're late. We were waiting for *your* mother to go to sleep before we could leave!'

Effie was a long way behind Deena and their other friend, Lorrell. Effie's brother, C.C., was following, too. He wrote all their songs and planned their dances.

The three best friends were going to the Motor City Show at the Detroit Theatre. It was every Monday night, and it was the only night black people were allowed into the theatre. Everybody wanted to go. Even R&B* stars like Jimmy Early played there.

Early was from Detroit, but now he was a big star. Once a year, the theatre had a talent show.

Lorrell reached the theatre first and smiled as she read the sign: TONIGHT JIMMY EARLY AND TALENT SHOW.

Tonight was the three girls' big chance. They had started singing together when they were children. Now they sang as a group called the Dreamettes. They hoped to win the talent show tonight. They wanted to become stars. But they were nearly an hour late.



* R&B is a style of black music.

Deena ran past Lorrell towards the back door of the theatre. The door opened and two women came out. They were angry. Jimmy Early's manager, Marty, was following them.

'Come back, ladies! Please! Jimmy needs you tonight!'

'No way – we're finished! Find someone else!' said one of the women. They got into a taxi and left.

'What am I going to do?' said Marty. He walked past Deena, back into the theatre. He looked very worried.

A handsome man in a suit was standing by the door. He'd also seen what had happened with the two women. An idea came to him.

Deena went inside the theatre. 'Come on!' she shouted to Effie and Lorrell. 'We'll be too late!'

'Hi. I'm Curtis Taylor,' the man said. But Deena didn't really hear him. She was looking at Oak, the talent show organiser.

'Look, I know we're late,' she began.

'Who are you?' Oak asked impatiently.

'Deena Jones,' she said. 'I'm one of the Dreamettes.'

Oak looked at his list. 'You're late.'

'I know,' Deena said, 'but—'

'Bad luck. The show's over,' Oak said. He turned away, but Curtis stopped him.

'Brother,' Curtis said quietly, 'I can see you're a good man. So why not give these girls a chance?'

Oak looked at Curtis. 'OK,' he said finally. 'They can sing last. After Tiny Joe Dixon.'

'Oh, thank you!' Deena smiled, and the girls ran to get ready.



Wearing their best dresses, the girls waited at the side of the stage for Tiny Joe Dixon to finish his act.



‘And now, please welcome our final act, the lovely ... Creamettes,’ the presenter said.

‘It’s the *Dreamettes!* The *Dreamettes!*’ Deena shouted as they ran onto the stage.

The band started playing and the heavy curtains opened. When she saw all the people in the crowd, Lorrell couldn’t move. Deena took her hand and together they moved to the music. Then Effie began to sing; her voice was amazing.

When Effie finished the song, the crowd went wild. They were still shouting for the girls when all the other musicians came back on stage. Everyone thought the girls would win.

‘Now remember, the winner of the talent show will perform here at the Detroit Theatre for seven nights,’ the presenter was saying. ‘And that very talented Star of Tomorrow is ... Tiny Joe Dixon!’

Everybody was surprised, and the girls were very disappointed. They felt it was the end of all their dreams.

‘Come on,’ Effie said sadly. ‘Let’s go home. We aren’t going to be famous now.’

Just then, Curtis walked over. 'You girls need a break, and I'm here to give it to you,' he said. 'You can have thirty dollars each to sing with Jimmy Early tonight.'

'Jimmy Early!' Lorrell cried. 'But he's really famous! Do you mean it?'

'Yes,' said Curtis. 'And,' he continued, 'Jimmy would also like you to go on a ten-week tour with him, starting tomorrow.'

'Oh!' Deena cried. 'Effie, can you believe it? We're going to sing back-up for Jimmy Early!'

'I don't do back-up,' Effie said angrily.

'Effie,' Lorrell said, 'this could be our big break.'

Curtis moved over to Effie.

'You're talented, and you're beautiful,' he said. 'But that isn't enough. You need a break. Take this chance, and I'll look after you, I promise. I'll be your manager. And believe me, I won't disappoint you.'

'Please, Effie,' Deena said.

Everybody waited. Effie was thinking about it. Then suddenly she shouted, 'OK! Our manager says we're singing behind Jimmy Early tonight!'

Deena and Lorrell were so happy. Curtis smiled. Now he had a back-up group for Jimmy Early. He went to find Marty and tell him the good news.



'Are you ready for Jimmy Early?' the presenter cried. The crowd started to shout.

In his dressing room, Jimmy stood up and put on his jacket.

'Look, I've found a fantastic group of three girls who can sing back-up tonight,' Marty told him.

'Three? I only need two,' Jimmy said.

'OK then, two,' Marty agreed. 'Let's go.'

Curtis was waiting outside. He knew that if this worked, his dream might finally come true. He'd wanted to be a music manager since he was twelve years old. He'd tried writing his own songs and he'd even married a singer. Now, he was managing her father's Cadillac sales business. But he'd never given up his music dreams – and now he had a chance.

'Jimmy wants two girls,' Marty said to Curtis.

'Two? Wait a minute. This is a group,' Curtis said. He tried to stay calm.

'Sorry, brother. It's two or nothing,' Marty said. And he led Jimmy towards the stage.

'Then it's nothing,' Curtis said.

Just then Jimmy saw the three girls on stage. He smiled when he saw Lorrell. She smiled back at him. She couldn't believe she was meeting a real star!

'It's OK. Three's fine,' Jimmy called to Marty. 'Ladies, you are saving my life! I'll do anything for you,' he said and took Lorrell's hand. He looked into her eyes. 'What do you want?'

'Well, Mr Early ... you could teach us the song,' Lorrell said shyly.

Jimmy laughed. 'OK,' he said. 'That's easy.'

He started to sing, and the girls soon learned the words. They loved singing with Jimmy, and Jimmy thought they were great.



The curtains opened and the concert started. Jimmy flew across the stage on his knees, screaming all the way. And when he started to sing the crowd went wild. He jumped up and turned as the musicians danced and played behind him.

The Dreamettes were nervous, but they were excited,

too. Here they were, on stage, with Jimmy Early! They couldn't believe it. Was this their big break?

