

AMERICAN IDYL

DAVID JALNER

We knew it was his job to be mean, but did he have to be that mean? The Judge had led her on, saying: “The thing about a voice like yours is that no matter what you sing”—and pausing just long enough for her to hope—“It sounds like crap.” Her guitar sagged from her arm, and we knew even a Judge has no right to be that mean. We started to boo—we booed the Judges, the network, and the ads. We booed until her shoulders straightened and her hand slid down the throat of her guitar, and she opened with the chords of the only song we *had* to hear, and then she sang into the very darkness of our lives, *Love Me Tender*—and *tender* was more than a word, it was a way things ought to be.... The last note died away, she bowed toward us, leveled her gaze at the Judge, whose eyes tried to say I’m sorry. She looked at him and grinned, she just grinned.

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