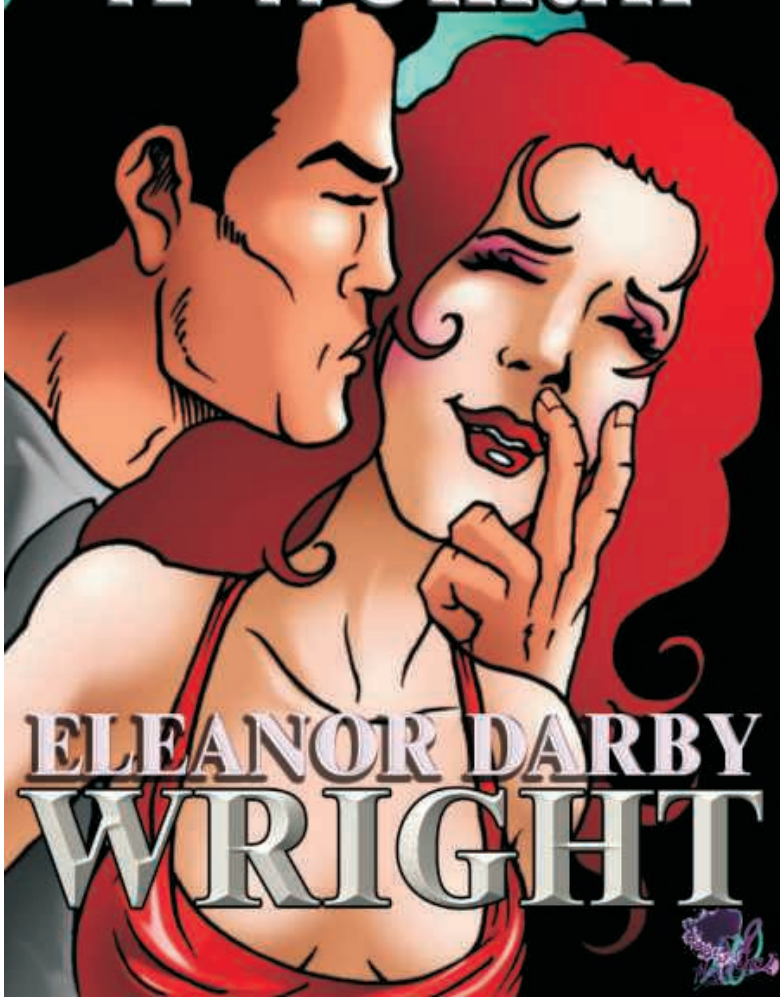


Inside & Out A Woman



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INSIDE AND OUT – A WOMAN

by Eleanor Darby Wright

*****After I'd become a mother*****

I froze, halfway through the simple action of closing the bolt on the shop door. I stared at the car in the parking area as a familiar figure got out. Anyone looking at me would have thought that I was staring at a ghost through the clear glass. One look at my white, stricken face was enough to bring Mr. Nazir rushing as best he could to my side.

The powerful, black car, with the familiar Rolls-Royce symbol on the radiator, hadn't drawn up in front of the shop but was parked arrogantly across several empty spaces, parallel to the door.

Mr. Nazir stared at me, his young, apparently female shop assistant, so neat and so aloof in my light blue smock. My skin had always been pale. Mr Nazir was always telling me I didn't get out enough into the air. So I was pale, a peaches and cream complexion, I joked at him, but now I was beyond jokes. I was ashen.

A few wisps of my long, dark, femininely-styled, red hair surrounded my face like a nimbus, making the contrast of hair and skin even more vivid. Mr. Nazir said in quiet times to me that he was drawn to 'austere' females, like me. That always made me feel so nervous and, frankly, disconcerted, to be complimented. I must appear, in my pain and distress, even more beautifully austere to his eyes.

I always kept my hair back, tightly bound. It was thick, auburn and shiny, naturally curly and wavy. Mr Nazir sometimes teased me about my crinkly hair, as he called it. I was always kind enough to smile at his teasing for which his own daughters berated him. But, when I stepped back from the window after seeing the car in the parking place, the look on my face must have told him that this was no time for teasing. Mr Nazir touched my hand and we were both startled, I think, to find that I was as cold as ice.

I turned swiftly at my boss's touch, my lips moving but no sound coming from me.

"Is it someone you know?" Mr. Nazir asked, looking into my bright, green eyes. "Is it bad news?"

As he said it, Mr Nazir must have realized what he was seeing in my expression. It was not grief or simple surprise. It was fear.

“He’s found me,” I croaked, my eyes wide as I stared up into the dark brown face and black eyes of my employer. I began to tug at the cords of my wrap-around smock, my fingers working but unable, it seemed, simply to set me free of its confinement.



“Julia!” exclaimed Mr Nazir. He actually raised his voice to me as I didn’t answer his question.

I looked up at him in a daze, startled. Mr Nazir never raised his voice. He said that it was bad for him at his time of life. I looked up at the lines and creases of his face. He was so concerned for me, that I was so upset. I suddenly realized that Mr Nazir must be thinking it was an angry boy friend coming after me, the way I had reacted to seeing Paul Leisham’s famed automobile, outside the place I worked. Well, that wasn’t true. There was no way that Paul Leisham could be my boy friend, not after what he’d found out about me, what the little extra I had in my panties was. I shuddered in distress. I’d thought myself so safe here! Fool! Idiot! I screamed to myself.

“I-I have to go!” I said hurriedly, looking to the back storeroom, thinking of the other way out of the grocery store.

Over my head, Mr Nazir should be able to see the chauffeur of the car holding open the door for another man to get out. A tall man. A strong, athletic young man to judge by his dark hair. Paul would definitely be frowning as he walked up to the front door of the shop.

The firm rap on the glass of the door made me spring into action. I pushed Mr Nazir’s hand to one side and almost ran to the back of the store. I saw Mr Nazir’s jaw drop. Never in over two years knowing me, had he ever seen one moment’s rudeness from me. I hoped that he could not even remember one inconsiderate action on my part. Not until now, that is.

The rapping was louder, more insistent, on the window. Mr Nazir turned to look at the man standing in the doorway, wanting in. Piercing, blue eyes looked at us through the clear space between window advertisements. Mr Nazir turned back with a frown to look at me. The till was still open and there was the money that had to be deposited in the bank still on the counter. I hadn't finished with it but it was all there, totalled and ready to go.

I couldn't wait and face Paul Leisham in the old, buttoned up shirt-dress I was wearing to work in the often dusty store. I ran away to the store room. The slight swing of the door separating the shop from the storage area might show where I'd gone. I could imagine what Mr Nazir would say as this was terrible and most upsetting, to have the day-end routine of the shop so disturbed.

I heard another rap on the window, peremptory, demanding. I stole a look into the shop. Dark, frowning eyebrows showed above the now glittering eyes in the door window. Mr. Nazir went to the door, seeming to be compelled to deal with their owner first. Paul Leisham was like that, totally compelling. It was one thing that my sisters and I had always agreed about.

The dark, handsome man straightened as the door opened. He towered over the white-haired, slightly stooped shop owner. His dark suit pronounced that it was from Savile Row. It was clearly expensive to both Mr. Nazir's eyes and to mine. Paul's cultured accent when he spoke confirmed to Mr Nazir as it did to me, that this was a man of power and distinction.

"I believe that a Miss Julia Anderson is employed here at this time," Paul Leisham said in his deep,

pleasant voice, belieing the hawklike, predatory look the frown gave to his face.

Mr Nazir swallowed. “She, she went home early today,” I heard him say. I don’t know why he was lying to such a man as Paul for me. I knew that Paul would see right through Mr Nazir once he looked at him. But I was so grateful for the small attempt at keeping Paul from me. I knew, however, that it wouldn’t stop a determined Paul Leisham if he was determined to see me.

The gemstone-bright, blue eyes stopped their brief cataloging of the neat and orderly organization of Mr Nazir’s Grocery Emporium. “Did I not see a young lady at the door as we drove up?” asked Paul in his most cultured voice. I could detect right away that his amusement by the shopkeeper’s obvious lie.

Before Mr Nazir could think to stop him, Paul strode past the shop owner who employed me and through the storage door to where I was cowering.

“Here,” Mr Nazir protested, running after him. “You can’t go in there!”

I’d already put on my dark coat. I’d drawn the bolts of the back door as Paul swept into the store. But my curiosity had overtaken me. I hadn’t seen Paul Leisham in three years and here he was. He was definitely after me. There was no doubt about that. Paul stopped just inside the storage room and looked at me. I waited in the middle of the room, my long, feminine, auburn hair over my collar in a dark mass, held back by the French braid that I had made of it. My long, brown shirt-dress protruded beneath my short, dark, mismatched coat.

“Julia?” questioned the dark-haired man, amusement still in his voice and manner, as he looked at

the woman that I'd become, that I presented myself as. I gave up thoughts of a hasty retreat through the unbarred, back door. I stood stock-still at the sound of Paul's voice. Slowly, I turned and replaced the bar. I pirouetted around, as a girl would have, on my low-heeled women's shoes to face the tall man and my anxious employer.

"Hello, Paul," I said, hoping that my face was controlled even if it was strained.

"Not leaving when I've come so far out of my way to see you and bring you a message from your grandmother," Paul said to me, an ironic smile curving his lips.

I turned and locked the back door properly, my hands shaking. My shoulders, however, seemed to sag as I felt Paul watching me. I had to put a hand on the stone wall to steady myself before I finally turned back to speak to the invader of Mr Nazir's shop.

"Send me a letter," I said in a low murmur, not looking up at the powerful, handsome man that Paul had become.

Paul Leisham reached into a pocket. "Funny you should say that," he said. He laid the letter on top of a crate stack and backed away to the door. "You didn't answer any of the ones the post delivered, I do believe," he said mockingly then to me.

For a while, Paul just stared at me, noting every detail about my dress and my female figure, I was certain. I made no move towards the letter he'd placed so carefully. The pause went on for a long moment. Paul started to say something else but I raised my chin, blinking away tears that came to my eyes. I prepared to be castigated and insulted about

my hair, the fact that I was wearing makeup like a woman, a dress for goodness sake, as well as the fact that my stockings and bust must show that I was entirely clothed as a woman, on the inside, as I was, again.

Paul smiled at my defiant gesture and the way that I flushed. "Well, it was good to see you again," he said quietly. "Your grandmother has a message." He frowned. "She says your sister will help you out of your troubles."

"There are no troubles," I said, knowing my voice was thick with emotion and that I was close to tears. I could imagine the conversations they'd all had about me at home with Paul. I knew what their solution would be to my being a 'mother' now. I hated Paul for being a party to it. If he only knew what I was, I thought bitterly, but, of course, he did.

The inner door that divided the store room and store swung easily as Paul shrugged at me and withdrew. Mr Nazir looked at me as Paul left. I couldn't help it. I was standing so still by the back door of the shop. I was still torn between running away and running after the man who'd left so precipitously. I didn't move, however, as the front door opened and closed. Mr Nazir hurried back into the shop. I finally moved, in time to see the Rolls-Royce pull through the little parking area in front of the store and disappear into the early evening traffic.

I woodenly went through all the things that I normally went through at the end of the day for Mr Nazir. He didn't say anything as he locked the front door again and brought away the bag with the day's receipts in it from the counter. He gave them to me even as he looked at me in concern.

“I need my purse,” I said, turning back into the storage room. Mr Nazir darted spryly past me to get it for me. As he passed the crate with the letter, he picked it up and gave it to me as well, pressing it into my hand.

“Do you want to talk about it?” my old, gentlemanly employer asked me softly.

I seemed to be in a daze as I looked at Mr Nazir. I saw the bank deposit slip in his hand and jolted back to reality. I took it from him, tucking the bag inside my dark coat as I always did. I saw the anxious look on the old man’s face and shook my head.

“I’m so sorry,” I began, and then the tears began to come, tears of rage and tears of despair. I had hidden so assiduously from Paul Leisham, sure he at least would never find me. I was so afraid of what he might do when he found me, what he might do to my son. Now, my worst nightmare had been shattered, proven empty.

Paul Leisham hadn’t considered me at all, had barely noticed me, or the woman inside me. He might have looked to assuage some curiosity he must have about me. My grandmother would have noticed that and used it for her own and Lisa’s purposes.

But Paul now was certainly unconcerned about me, who Julia really was, and my life. That was what was so terrible though I’d prayed it would be that way. He’d found me, how he had I couldn’t think after the intervening years, as I’d moved so. And Paul had been so, so unconcerned about me! Meanwhile, I’d churned inside at the sight of him, wanting to go to him and knowing that I absolutely couldn’t. He had just, so, so, nonchalantly, dropped

off a letter from my grandmother, the last person in the world I ever wanted to hear from. He must know that and that he'd left me humiliated and embarrassed, no, mortified, by my reactions to his presence.

What a laugh Paul must be having to himself, I thought despairingly, as he realized he still had such absolute power over me. He must be so amused that I'd run from him, so amused that I'd thought that I was in any way of interest to him.

At least, seeing me dressed as I was, Paul wouldn't be gloating over his great triumph in having me still adore him. He'd seen how I was dressed. He'd seen the little makeup I used on my feminized face. He'd seen me as the ordinary person, the ordinary woman, I was. He'd quickly categorize Julia as no longer interesting as any kind of plaything and go on his merry way. In many ways, his visit was good, I thought miserably, because now I could put him out of my thoughts entirely and get on with my life with Michael.

"There's nothing to talk about," I said, as girlishly as I could, trying to smile at Mr Nazir's so worried face. "Nothing at all." I looked down at the letter in my hand. I'd tear it up and dump it in the trash next to the bank deposit box. I didn't need to read anything from my grandmother any more. I'd put up with enough grief from that quarter and I didn't need to put up with more.

I'd have to leave Mr Nazir's, though, and soon, I thought with regret. I might look up some day and find that spiteful, old woman, my grandmother, there in the shop, there to gloat over how far I'd fallen, ready to expose all my sins and peccadilloes to my employer. Mr Nazir knew none of them. He

didn't have to hear my grandmother say hurtful things about Michael, the only joy in my life. My grandmother would want to know, loudly and publicly, I was sure, if her grandson knew that his 'mother' could never be a mother, of any kind, though 'she' probably was his father.

I wouldn't let my son go through that with my grandmother, I thought angrily, as the ghosts of past angers passed over me. I wouldn't let any member of my family anywhere near to Michael, not after the last time. I was disowned and disowned I'd stay, I thought, iron returning to my system as it always did when I thought about how my family had treated me.

But Paul had found me! I'd envisioned so many times the two of us meeting again. In friendly ways. In rage-filled ways. In sentimental, romantic ways. Never had I imagined that he'd be so casual, so indifferent to me. How could a man be like that who'd done what he had to me? How could a man who'd scorned me to my family and its friends now be so indifferent? I'd never thought of Paul as being cruel.

I felt the tears begin again and heard Mr Nazir begin to chatter on about me, "sweet girl", having to confide in him. I tore away from the old man and rushed to the front of the store to let myself out. I made sure the lock was turned. All Mr Nazir would have to do was put on the bolt and go on back to the stairway that led up to his rooms above the grocery store.

I almost ran around the corner and onto the main street to the bank that Mr Nazir used. My low-heeled shoes enabled me to do that. My dress and shoes were so different from the clothes I'd worn before I came to the city, before even Michael

was born. Then, I'd tried so hard to be a pretty, outgoing girl to the boys who'd been interested in me. I was sure, by the way I was treated, by all the kisses I received, that I was succeeding in being a 'pretty girl'.

I dumped Mr Nazir's money into the deposit slot, tore up the letter from my grandmother and dumped it. It was too late for family, I thought darkly, too late for anything like that.

And the agony began again. The agony I'd thought I'd conquered as Michael and I had begun a regular, routinized life, as mother and son, the affairs of the family in Wellingsley receding into the background. Not reading the local newspaper helped because I never saw any of my family's or Paul's family's pictures any more by accident. I'd have hated to see Paul's picture constantly with the way I felt about him. I had, however, thought that that particular agony had lessened.

But just seeing Paul once brought it all back in full measure. Even though he didn't care! He didn't care, I cried, wanting to beat my hands helplessly on the bus window as I rode west to where I'd left Michael with a babysitter. Instead, I sat in stoic silence, as I always did, despairing and breaking down inside, in the sure knowledge that Paul Leisham would never care for me as I'd cared for him.

*******The beginning of it all *******

Richard Anderson, me, yes, that's my proper name, never let his family know the real extent of his cross-dressing all through his awful, tense, teen-aged years. I'd known they'd laugh at me. Only my

mother, who'd found out about me when I was small, me having forgotten to lock the bathroom door while I tried on Lisa's bodice and garter belt, had been at all sympathetic to what I was. She'd smiled at my predicament and just told me not to do it again.

Then, Mom had found strange marks on some of the panties that she'd washed for the girls. It had been made by a lipstick that had turned up in the wrong place among the girls' white clothes. It was one that I'd lost after buying it as a 'present for my sister'. I was mortified by my loss as I loved red lipstick on me.

"I know it was you, Richard," my mother had told me as I'd quivered and denied it. "I want it to stop right now before the others find out." She'd ruffled my hair then. "You don't want to grow up to be like one of those funny men we see on telly occasionally," she'd said to me. "I don't want you to grow up and be one of those men you read about in the Sunday newspapers."

Mom got the News of the World on Sunday. I was probably the only one beside her to read it, the stories of cross-dressers being hauled into court and the ads for women's clothing for men. "If you try hard enough and stop doing this," Mom lectured me, "this trying out your sister's clothes, you'll have a much happier life. I know you'll grow out of it if you just give yourself a chance."

I'd cried and my mother had consoled me. I'd promised I'd never do it again. And while my mother lived, I'd kept that promise. It had been hard but I hadn't touched my sister's clothing again, even though my fingers had itched and itched on occasion.

It had been hell at home after my mother died. Dad still kept her room the same as it was with all of her so attractive dresses still hanging there in the closets. The older girls went off with their boy friends at every opportunity while Dad either slept in front of the television or was off to his watering hole. They all left me to be the unpaid, on-call servant to my nagging grandmother. Left me with all of those beautiful dresses, too.

So, when Gran was finally asleep, and I had the house to myself, the restless urge kept coming on me again and again. I was older, on the verge of leaving school at first, and then, after the last vacation, in my first year at the local, community college. Oh, I might have better grades than my sisters in school, and they went to university, but, "Think of the money you'll save if he stays close to home," my grandmother had told my father. "Besides, he should earn his way, shouldn't he, through school. The pocket money you give him can be for the little time he spends helping out his grandma."

So I'd to stay home with Mom's dresses hanging in the closet in the main bedroom, her high-heeled shoes in the rack, while one wonderful drawer contained all of her undies. I loved that drawer more than any other.

*******Learning how to be a girl*******

I did more than just moon about the house. I had to or I'd have been in hot water much sooner than I actually was. I got a job in the local store, stocking shelves. I saved every penny I earned. I bought a money order one Monday, in excitement that must have been obvious to the clerk in the post office.

Then, my fingers trembling, I posted my order for a 'foundation garment for a man', a corset, from one of the advertisers in the Sunday paper.

When that came and it was so perfect, I felt so shapely and thought I was, as I looked at myself in the mirror. From then on, I ordered wigs, stockings, dresses. My elation and arousal grew with every purchase I made from the catalogues I was sent. I pored over them, unable to believe that there were so many other men, or so it seemed, who were just like me, wanting to dress like women!

I even paid for a mailbox at the store where I worked. The day my first wig arrived, I almost had an orgasm on the spot. Well, it was the most exciting day of my life!

I bought 'gifts' for my sisters that they never saw and had a special suitcase in my room where I kept my booty. Oh, I was so awful at first. I looked nothing like my sisters. I looked nothing like a girl. I gave it all up on several occasions and promised that I'd never, ever do it again, especially after near misses of which there were a few.

It was so confining in the Hall when I was finally dressed in a black dress of Mom's that I had spirited to my room. But, when Dad took Gran off to meet some of her old cronies at the old place she still kept up, and the girls were gone, I dressed to thrill myself, practising up and down the hallways in my high heels.

I put on my 'undies', as Mom had called panties and a bra, pulling and making everything fit, made up my face, trembled with the wig and earrings I put on and thought that I looked 'good enough'. The mirrors at the ends and top of the stairs to help

walkers avoid collisions were so spectacular when this thin, dark-haired girl would come sashaying down the hallway like a model. I loved seeing the dress I was wearing swirl about me and feel my legs in nylons. Oh, it was so wonderful! I practised my female walk and tried all sorts of makeup 'looks' until I was thrilled at the girl, who looked nothing like me, I thought, who smiled so prettily, her lips bright red.

And all the time, I shivered with the desire to go out and be a girl on the street, in cafes and shops! I was so thrilled just thinking about it. Slowly, I began to think I could do it. I could just walk down to town and back as a girl would. I dared myself and, one fateful night, I did it. I went out of the house as a girl and walked into town, dressed completely as a girl. My face was made up and my wig pinned and glued to my head. I felt my dress swish against my tantalizing stockings in the breeze. I was gasping for air as I swayed femininely on my high heels for the enervating stroll.

Silly, silly me. I almost killed my legs walking in high heels that far. The hooting of a car as I was swaying down High Street frightened the living daylight out of me, making me flee and hide behind a tree in the park, frightened to move.

Afterwards, I learned to walk in my runners to town and then to switch to my high heels. Then, I could stroll so easily around. Of course, I didn't dare for the longest time to talk to anyone or even go into a store to buy anything. I had to dare myself several times before I finally screwed up enough courage to go into a cafeteria, buy a coffee and sit down with it. I deliberately chose one that none of any crowd I knew went to.

“Hey, miss,” said a younger kid to me as I squirmed in my dress and panties in my seat. “Pass us the brown sugar, would you?”

‘Miss’! It was the first time I was ever referred to, in the feminine, by anyone. I was so aroused that I’d have kissed the grammar school kid if he’d but known it. As it was, I did give him a big, lipstick-y smile anyway that made him blush.

Then, I began to notice how other girls dressed and realized that I was way, way over-dressed. My dresses, too, were lovely but far too old for the girl I was pretending to be. The girls were so loud and bratty, as well, while I wanted to be so demure. I loved leaving lipstick stains on my cup, however; even though I tried to tone down my eye makeup and wear a shorter, straight skirt and a more normal top of Mom’s, I still had to keep on my red lipstick. I loved it on my lips so much.

“Haven’t we seen you here before?” asked an older girl, Jean Smith she said she was, intruding with other girls with her as well. I had to give her a name to call me. “Come and join us.”

“Julia,” I said to her and moved my coffee over to her table. I’d been going to say ‘Smith’ as a last name but, when she said it, I was flummoxed a little. So, when one of the other girls at the table asked me my last name, I began with And- before I could stop myself and so I had to finish with ‘Anderson’ in the soft whisper I was using.

“Are you related to Lisa and that Aline?” asked Jean Smith then. I was trembling and about to deny it when Jean went on. “Oh, of course you are. You look just like them. They always dress so cool as well, don’t they? You must be a cousin.”

The other girls didn't hold back on their opinions of my sisters and how they thought that they were snobs. "I hope you're not standoffish like them," sniffed one of the girls.

"No," was all I got to say as they all talked about anything that popped into their minds but I found it exhilarating. I got to nod and smile at my girl friends when I made that foray into town. It was through Jane, later on, that I met Barry Buckingham.

Barry took a fancy to me, the new girl, from the start. I went with him, shaking the whole time, oh, that made my stockings feel so, so, femmy (!), to the Bear's Head pub! I let him buy me my first drink, a Babycham, in the outside garden. Barry wasn't from the town at all and, thus, was so, so eligible to the demure girl I acted as. He came in with his mates from Rotherton, across the hills that bordered our county.

I didn't get out much, naturally. But Barry told me about this dance in his town, whispering in my ear that he'd been looking for me for a week and more to invite me to go to it with him. I was sick with pleasure that he'd picked me out of the little group of girls around Jean Smith to ask to a dance. I felt so nervous as I said 'Yes!' I swore to myself for a week that I wasn't going to actually go. But I did, finally. I caught the bus across the Penines and was met by Barry outside the dance hall in Rotherton.

When I think of it now, I don't know how I ever got the nerve to do it. I know I was on edge the whole time but it was a lovely, thrilling, emotional edge. I loved wearing a really frilly dress and heavy makeup and having the men on the bus tease me. I loved dancing with Barry in my flirty dresses and letting him hold me. I loved walking to the bus and

being kissed as a girl should be by the boy she's just dated. I loved it on the few occasions when Barry got a car. I loved it when he and his friends would pick me up. We'd go dancing and drinking on our side of the hills.

Mostly, though, I went over the hills, where I could be girlish and fancy-free in a town where, definitely, no-one knew me. I dated some of the other boys in Barry's set as well. I found that Barry wasn't as good a kisser as were many of his friends, like Alec, who actually had a girl friend he was engaged to, but danced with me and kissed me afterwards anyway. He wanted to walk me home and was most disappointed that I had to go for the last night bus.

"If you lived in Rotherton," Alec whispered to me, "I'd make you my permanent girl friend! Mary could take a hike!"

*****Julia, me, emerges from the shadows*****

That was what my life was like for the longest while. I'd sneak out of the house and, sometimes, get into so much trouble with the old folks because I wasn't there to look after Gran. No-one knew where I was!

"You're just hiding out in the pub, I bet," Lisa teased me. She was in a serious relationship with her future husband then. "But you have to take your turn looking after her at night."

I shrugged. I did enough turns, I could have said. How about Lisa or the saintly Aline, whom Gran always praised to the skies, while she told me how worthless I was, staying in on a Saturday? Lisa or Aline on party night staying home and looking after Gran? Hah, even I knew that that was never going to happen. So my party night was usually Friday.

It took me some time between dances before I got to go back on the bus in a pretty, party dress, just the sweetest girl around, I thought as I smiled at my reflection, admiring my pretty legs as the boys did to. I'd meet Barry Buckingham, often just by chance, in Rotherton. On the most fateful evening of my life, I actually went to a planned 'do' with Barry and his friends. I dressed up more girlishly than I ever had in my life, even on the inside, of course, and went over on the bus to Rotherton, letting Barry take me to the wedding reception dance, where I sparkled, everyone said so, as I wiggled so girlishly, my dress so wonderful swishy on my legs, as I danced with all of the men who asked me!

I left the dance later that night, but early for me, as Barry and his friends had begun to drink shooters with their beer. I wasn't angry with him or anything. I was just tired of beer breath, of being thrown up on later, and the inevitable apologies. With those boys, it always seemed to end up the same way at these affairs where the booze was free.

So, smiling to my Rotherton girl friends, I'd slipped out of The Hounds and had gone for the late bus to take me across the Penines, back to Wellingsley. It had been a very pleasant surprise when the little MG pulled into the alcove for the bus to stop along the high hedges right beside me.

It had been an incredible thrill when Paul Leisham had stood up in his car, waved to me and motioned to me to get into the car with him.

"Are you going to Wellingsley?" I'd asked him in delight, being coy as I'd seen other girls behave, flushing a little at the smiling, frank admiration on his face. I was in my flirty, white, silk dress, my arms bare, my red petticoats peeping out above my

knees, a white-ribboned straw hat on my lovely wig of dark-red hair and white purse in my hand.

Paul had frowned just a little as he looked over my trim figure, my legs exposed as I slid into the front seat, a fresh, red-lipsticked smile on my face. He had glanced up at my face and smiled back. I'd been forced to look away from those penetrating blue eyes of his, even though they'd been so warm and admiring. Perhaps he thought I should know him. Well, I did, but I had to pretend that I didn't, didn't I?

"Wherever you want to go, I'll take you," Paul said lightly. "But I don't think we know each other, do we? I thought that it was Lisa Anderson, a girl I know, waiting for the bus. But since you're in my car, Wellingsley it is. Wasn't the dance any good tonight?"

I laughed nervously as we took off. Paul was startled and yet amused by my laughter. Ooo, I'd practiced so hard that it was really girly in sound. "The wedding dance at The Hounds was fine," I said, knowing how much my laughter and my smile animated my face and made me seem much girlier! No, I wasn't going to tell him I was leaving early. Paul must have seen me at the bus stop kissing my date good night.

Paul must have seen my last kiss with an argumentative Barry who'd finally just left me when I wouldn't go over to his place and 'fool around' with him. Was that why Paul had stopped, thinking he could get from me what I wasn't going to give Barry. Ooo, that was such a lovely, girlish thought. I wiggled in my dress and felt my panties beneath me. I felt my hair on my neck and smiled demurely at Paul, looking at me so speculatively.

I'd seen Paul a weekend ago, well, I'd seen his car before, passing the stop as I was swishing away from Barry, onto a late night bus, waving goodnight to my 'date' for an evening. How I envied Paul's passengers, whoever they'd be, their quick ride home. Oh, how I wished I could be going home with him. But he wouldn't have known me from a hole in the ground.

What a shock it was, then, when Paul had pulled in after the wedding reception, when I was all alone, and waved to me to join him. I wouldn't normally have gone with anyone in a car who did that. But this was Paul Leisham, the one who, whenever he'd called at any time at the Hall for one of my sisters, had made me green with envy and, yes, frankly, with desire for him to be my boy friend.

"So, if you're not Lisa Anderson, you must be Julia Anderson," said Paul clicking his fingers suddenly, stopping the slight frown on his face. It shocked me that he knew about me, no, not me, but the 'me' who was Julia, at all.

"Ron Hayman," Paul said, naming a really nice friend of Barry's who'd danced and hugged me a lot, even at the dance earlier that night, "says that you're a cousin of the Andersons of Seymour Hall. He says that you're the nicest of the girls there. You're living at Seymour Hall in Wellingsley, aren't you? I know a quick way there when we get over the Pass."

I flushed and felt a tremble in my panties and petticoat. I crossed my legs which I'd forgotten to do as we hurtled on the clear roads into the Wellingsdale Pass. "For, for the moment," I whispered, wondering how I was going to get out of that when all the family came home. Paul was bound to

let slip that they had a female cousin living there. I wonder who would put two and two together first.

“My date,” I went on quickly and nervously, looking away from those so wonderfully dark blue eyes, hoping he wouldn’t notice this time how high my color was, beneath the female makeup on my face, just being near him, “was more interested in getting drunk with his mates than he was in dancing with me.”

“And you just left my brother Lowell there?” Paul asked, a chuckle definitely in his voice as he turned the sports car onto the back country lane that led directly to the Hall. His lean frame was stretched out in the small seat. He seemed taller, more athletic than ever in a white, open-necked, tennis shirt.

When Paul had gone out with Aline or Lisa, my older sisters, Julia, that is, me, Richard, had privately embarrassed myself on more than one occasion by mooning over him, if he only knew. Luckily, I was now so much more grown up, my eighteenth behind me. Paul smiled at me, Julia, again, the breeze stirring his hair. Ooo, I felt somehow more womanly than I’d ever felt before! I, Julia, was being noticed as a woman by Paul Leisham!

Wow, I thought incredulously. This is Paul, the dream date. I licked my lipstick to try to steady my emotions. I’d better be careful. He’s just trying to be nice, I told myself, as I sat more femininely on the car seat, my skirts rising, exposing more of my stockings and red petticoat. You’re not a little teenager talking about soccer and rugby, trying to impress him. But it wouldn’t do any harm, since I was dressed as Julia, to flirt a little, now would it, asked a mischievous voice inside me. I felt a silly, nervous

smile flutter across my lips and risked a glance at his handsome, familiar profile.

Paul looked back at me, raising an eyebrow, clearly waiting for an answer. With a start, I suddenly realized that I was just looking at him, the admiration, I was sure, just pouring out of my heavily madeup eyes. He'd asked me a question about his brother, Lowell. But Lowell wasn't my date for the evening. He wasn't even going out with Lisa now. He was out with Aline somewhere. I saw the funny gleam in Paul's eye and knew he was teasing me.

"Oh, yes," I tried to laugh, biting my lip to try to stop myself blushing. "I left Lowell to Barry Buckingham. They were drunk as skunks and totally useless as men. I hate men who get drunk and try to kiss you. Wouldn't you have left them if you were me?"

"Oh, I'd never have gone out with Lowell, or Barry, for that matter, in the first place," Paul said, his mouth smiling but his eyes were hooded. "Barry Buckingham has been a drunk, crashing up three cars in two years, since he turned eighteen."

"I know," I said lightly, in the really little-girl voice I used on all the boys. "But if I hadn't gone with him to The Hounds tonight, I'd have been all alone at the Hall, wouldn't I?"

I winced inwardly as I thought how empty-headed, how girlie, that would have sounded to Paul. He did momentarily frown before the amused smile returned to his lips.

I thought of my grandmother, my father, my sister, Lisa, and Lisa's new husband, all returning from France in the morning. Aline, my elder sister, had said she might not be back at all when she and

Lowell left. I was alone, I'd thought in joy. I'd skipped up the stairs to my special suitcase and into Mom's room, trying to find a suitable dress to go to a wedding reception in, a wedding where I knew no-one in the bridal party; and no-one, save for Barry and a few others from Rotherton, knew me.

Mrs Gregory, our old housekeeper, was also taking her holidays while my grandmother was away. It was such a big house and very empty. I hadn't really given it more than a second thought when Barry invited me to the reception at the last moment on my cellphone.

"All alone on a weekend?" Barry had sounded aghast before I realized he was teasing me. I kept my cellphone hidden as best I could. That was because I gave my number out on that phone as Julia. I had to answer as Julia no matter how I was dressed.

Paul said the same thing. "All alone at the start of the weekend?"

"Well, for most of the night anyway," I began with a giggle to Paul, trying to think how to explain it to him that I'd been a little lonely in the Hall. The tension was starting to build in me. It only got easier if I dressed as a girl but I could never tell Paul that.

I wanted to be demure but not so much that I was clearly trying to lead him on, throwing myself at him as I'd seen so many girls do at various men. I shivered. I wasn't like that. But I was lonely. I missed my mother terribly. Mom wasn't there any more. When I was totally on my own, I kept forgetting. I talked to her all the time and expected to meet her in every room when I opened a door.

Yes, she'd have understood me, wouldn't she? In Mom's clothes, in her panties, as I was wearing then, I was never lonely as I was when I was Richard. I'd only to sashay down the hallway in my underwear or a dress and talk to her as Julia. 'She' cheered me up. How could I explain that to Paul, I wondered, when he looked at me now in such an amused fashion.

Paul gave me another lazy glance in the lingering twilight of one of summer's longest days. "Got to get out," he teased. "Got to see the bright lights while you're young?"

"Why not?" I countered lightly, still the demure little girl, stung a little. I decided though that it was just not the time to be serious, to let him know what I truly thought. "Isn't going out and having a good time on the weekend what everybody really wants?"

The peppy, little car surged onto the long drive up to Seymour Hall, bought by my grandfather just after the First World War. I didn't have Paul drop me off in town as I did with my other dates on one of the rare occasions I was driven home. He knew where Julia lived, after all. With Barry, I'd let him pull in near the entrance to the Hall. Then we could engage in a little necking, kissing and petting, in which Barry always wanted so much more than I, his loving girl friend, was prepared to give him.

Paul grimaced as he looked up at Seymour Hall, my home. We Andersons were still very much newcomers to the country set despite our money and the house my family owned. We were not part of the farming aristocracy that could trace their ancestors back hundreds of years, like the Leishams.

“Thank you for the drive,” I said, as prettily and girlishly as I could, opening my door, as the car came to a sudden stop before the covered entranceway. I was astonished when Paul turned off the engine and leaned back in his seat, holding me back, just looking at me.

“I’ll come in,” Paul said with a smile, indicating the house. I was too astounded to object. All I could do was to smile foolishly as Paul got out of the car. “This is Lowell’s,” he said, stroking the dark green shine of the hood of the car. “Too small for me to drive for long but it leaves him in Rotherton without wheels, doesn’t it? And you’re here in Wellingsley.” He seemed very pleased with himself.

“Oh, really,” I said, looking up into his dark face and trying to remain straight-faced as Paul led me to my own house, my heart beginning to beat a mile a minute as I tried to mince and sway like a girl in my dress, my long hair swirling down my back. “I’m sure Lowell will manage. He has lots of friends, doesn’t he?”

Paul wasn’t as handsome as Lowell, I’d long ago decided. His jawline was too firm. He was too tanned from outdoor work, a little too weather-beaten; but, I thought, as Julia and as Richard, he was undoubtedly far more attractive as a man than Lowell Leisham. Paul was much more mature than Lowell, his younger brother. He was like a coiled-up spring ready to explode, I’d said to Aline, but, as Paul Leisham walked me up to the door, he unexpectedly relaxed and made an effort, or so I thought for a moment, to smile at me, a girl, though my answer hadn’t pleased him.

Paul reached out and took my arm, the first time he’d touched me since I’d got into what I thought

was his car. The touch of his strong, man's hands on my bare arm, stroking me as if I was a girl, made an instant warmth go through me. The shock was so tangible I almost fell from my high heels as I jerked my head back to look up at him.

"Watch your step," Paul said, his eyes suddenly hooded again as he held me around my corseted waist, to save me from falling. He looked stunned too as if he'd also felt the electric shock that was threatening to overwhelm me as it had seemed to burn through my whole body.

"Oh," I said, flustered, not understanding why I felt so strange, my knees seeming to be so weak. I'd heard that women went this way when an attractive man touched them, but it couldn't be that, surely, I told myself, my dress skirts shaking against my stockings. I'd kissed boys before. I shook as I thought of Paul kissing me, thinking I was a girl. Ooo, I'd let him, I knew!

I'd known Paul for so long as Richard, a young boy. I'd joked with him about his 'affair' with Aline, over a year ago, and taking her out, commiserating with him when I'd met him, just after, when Aline dumped him. But Paul hadn't been devastated to be dumped by my sister as I thought he should be. He'd seemed so unconcerned himself and was surprised, even amused, by my brotherly concern for him. I'd been so embarrassed by my gaucherie that I'd fled to the bathroom at the Murrays' house. I'd taken care not to speak to him again until the race meeting at Newbury just a month ago.

At the enclosure in Newbury, Aline had drawn Lisa in, even though she was married, flirting with both Leisham brothers, suggesting that they must double date. Lisa had agreed, laughingly, saying

that she would, so long as she wasn't lumbered with Paul who'd be too old for her, having dated her 'elderly' sister already. Paul had looked at her very strangely, I remembered, almost as if he was disgusted with her. He hadn't laughed at my teasing as he usually did. In fact, he'd seemed irritated by my, Richard's, remarks.

So, Lisa had taken a grinning Lowell off to have him show her the MG in the parking lot between races. It had been Aline, however, who'd left with Lowell when the race meeting was over. Lisa had gone off with her hubby, the charmless Nick Fleetling. I'd had to come back as usual with my grandmother, being the designated one to listen to the old woman's stream of complaints about our neighbors and friends.

Paul seemed annoyed as he took the key from my nervous fingers. I don't think he noticed how nicely and femininely I'd painted my fingernails. He opened the double front doors. He lectured me, Julia, about leaving the lights on, telling me how I, Julia, and Aline, and Mrs. Gregory, must be more attentive to security when Mr Anderson was away. But I, Julia, barely heard him at all. Paul had just proceeded to enter the Hall with a shivering, nervous me, a girl, clicking in high heels and swishing in a pretty dress, as if he had a perfect right to accompany me into the dark, empty house.

"Where's Aline?" Paul asked, having locked the front door behind him, taking my trembling hand, leading me to the family room and the bar that my father had set up there. I realized that he didn't know the Hall was empty and that Richard, me, was supposed to be there by myself.

“She’s out at a friend’s,” I said automatically, using the excuse that had been pounded into me by my older sisters. Then, I bit my lip, tasting my lipstick, thinking what Aline might really be up to with Lowell. Would Paul know about the two of them? He should. They’d made no secret about going out with each other. Paul knew where his brother was, anyway. Hadn’t he taken Lowell’s car from Rotherton and stranded his brother there?

Paul went straight to the big television in the family room, turning it on. He knew exactly how everything worked in my home. He went to the bar and poured himself a Scotch, me shaking and wondering what to say as I watched him. I felt like Richard in his mother’s dress as Paul gave me a glass of red wine, far too strong, before indicating to me, a glint in his eye, to sit on the sofa beside him in my stockings and my femmy dress, never mind my makeup and wig.

“What time will Aline be in?” Paul asked, again smiling what seemed to my anxious eyes to be a deliberate smile.

“Oh, anytime,” I said nervously, trembling anew as I stepped daintily, trying so hard to be a girl, out of the semidarkness of the doorway to the big sofa. “You know Aline.”

Paul grunted and didn’t seem to notice that my hand was shaking as I took the proffered glass of wine. Shouldn’t I tell him to leave, I thought uneasily, that this was too much, invading the Andersons’ house like this while everyone was out but me, Julia, a girl he didn’t know, a stranger really?

“This won’t wake up Mrs. Gregory, will it?” Paul asked, indicating the television where soccer high-

lights were causing a commentator to almost strangle himself with excitement at the results.

“No,” I said, knowing I was lying to him. But if he knew he was all alone with me, I suddenly realized, he wouldn’t very likely leave. But I was all alone with him, on the sofa. I’d teased Aline about the sofa and her boy friends, so often, asking so impertinently what Aline had done and how long she’d done it with her ‘special’ friends in the family room at night. I’d just been out to embarrass my sister but one day Aline had neatly turned the tables on me.

“You ought to know,” Aline had said to me in front of the family and Paul in response to my teasing. “You sneak down often enough to watch.” I couldn’t have gone redder with embarrassment if I’d just got up and painted my whole face with lipstick. Everyone had laughed uproariously at me. My only consolation was that I hadn’t fled from the room. I’d faced down the amusement and admitted that I’d deserved the putdown.

The sports program ended and a film began. Paul stretched out on the sofa. I stole a look at him as I nervously eased back myself, my legs crossed as a girl would do it. Was he going to stay here with me forever? What a giddy thought that was. I exulted finally in how easily I was fooling Paul Leisham. Paul really did seem to think I was a girl! That was so wonderful! He really did think I looked like Lisa and was her cousin.

I did have to ask him to leave, I thought with a shiver. I had to get upstairs and get changed back to being me. I almost jumped out of my skin, in shock, when he suddenly put his arm about my shoulder. I wriggled in fright at his touch. Paul was looking

right back at me, at my lipsticked mouth, but not in the soft, indulgent way he did when I was Richard.

“How come I haven’t met you before, Julia?” Paul asked me softly. I felt my nerves tighten and my breathing quicken again. What a time for my chest to tighten and communicate with me that I was wearing a bra beneath my lovely dress!

“I don’t know,” I said in a raspy voice. It sounded nothing like my normal one, as Richard, or as normal as the whispery, breathy voice I used as Julia. Alec, Barry Buckingham’s friend, said how he loved my little-girl voice. So I’d practised it hard. It was easier for me now to sound the way I wanted, like a silly, little girl.

Paul leaned over me, taking the full wineglass deliberately from my quivering hand. I didn’t see what he did with it, being only conscious of the slightly musky aroma of his aftershave, the set of his jaw and the astounding realization that Paul Leisham was going to kiss me. I was on the sofa for the first time with a man and he was going to kiss me. I’d kissed and hugged guys but it had always been standing up. Well, the sessions with Barry in his car didn’t really count, did they?

It was too much, my giddy brain told me. I couldn’t let Paul kiss me! Apart from the obvious reason, he was my sister’s boy friend, well, ex-boy friend. His arm hugged me closer to him and, silly girl that I was, I didn’t resist at all. I think I sighed as I prepared myself for a man’s lips on mine, vindicating all that I thought about myself. I was a girl! I could pass as a girl!

Paul paused for a moment as I looked at his lips, so full and yet so firm. I looked up swiftly, unsure as

he just held me. He seemed to be waiting for me. I was suddenly afraid of the desire in his eyes.



Maybe it was me who kissed him first. It was hard to tell. I think we moved together. From that wonderful moment that our lips met, I could have done nothing else but pour out all the longing I had always felt for him, ending all the envy I'd felt for Lisa, Aline and the 'other' girls I'd heard he'd gone out with. I forgave him all that as Paul leaned over me. Ooo, I raised my lipsticked, girlish mouth eagerly to his.

At first, it was just so gentle, a mere brushing of the lips, but then, it was as if each of us had received a sudden, terrific jolt of static electricity. That was how I felt. I went rigid with shock as I felt him stiffen. His hands tightened at my shoulder and my waist. My lips were quivering as Paul returned my pressing, eager kiss, gently testing, exploring, enjoying me with his mouth, finding pleasure and giving pleasure. I was in female heaven as I clung awkwardly to his hands, really knowing what it was like to be a girl and kissing a man I really wanted to kiss, for a change!

His mouth didn't stop, inviting me to kiss him again and again, even though I was so girlishly nervous. His mouth was so sweet as I clung to him helplessly. When I timidly parted just a little for him, at last, as I did with Barry, the wonderful kiss deepened into a rapture that devoured my whole body, threatening every overheated nerve on my skin with burning overload.

Paul moved my arms about his neck and pulled my body against him, the gel pack falsies that I wore pressing against his chest. I was almost ashamed of the hunger for him that I revealed in my kisses as he eased himself free after a little while. Almost. I was shaking and clinging to him, my senses totally

engulfed by the deep feeling of intense, incredible desire that was welling up inside me as if a dam had suddenly been burst and every obstacle before it had been brushed aside. I wriggled against him and put his arms about me to caress me and make me feel girlie, as other guys had done with me.

One look at the stunned expression on Paul's face, inches from mine, removed all thought that I'd presumed too much, as a girl, or overreached myself. He was as stunned as I was. Yet the desire for me, for me (!), was clear on his face, just as I had imagined that it would be some day. Our next kiss was even more rapturous than the first and drew him across the sofa right on top of me. Every nerve was on fire as my body became engaged in the chaotic tumult of my longing for him.

My ears roared. My mouth twisted to take more and more pleasure from him. I frantically pushed my body against his so that every wonderful sensation of being a woman with a man could be mine. I was greedy and couldn't let him go, my arms clinging about his neck, surrendering to every delicate and exquisite caress, his hands lifting my dress and caressing my stockings and shaved legs so marvellously.

I wiggled beneath Paul as I'd never done with Barry. I didn't want to be in control. His hand found the soft skin of my thighs above the tops of my stockings. He caressed me softly while I went into shivers of passion and desire, his masculinity aroused. I could feel it and glory in what I could now do to a man. I kissed Paul passionately, not caring about little things like my wig staying in place, even though it did. I could experience the same womanly

feelings that Lisa and Aline must have been so crazy to forego with Paul, I exulted.

Oh, what wonderful dreams I would have tonight after I finally let Paul get up and leave.

*******I learn the lesson that I am not really a woman*******

I approached ecstasy as Paul gently caressed me, exulting in the explosion of femaleness I could feel rising inside me. But Paul eased and would not let me explode. He slowed and his hands became gentler as I became more frantic and passionate. His hands slid away from my panties which he could have caressed with ease. I wasn't stopping him. I wanted him to tell me how pretty I was, as all the boys did, how lovely my hair was, and my makeup, copied for hours from girls' magazines. He should tell me he loved my perfume. It was so expensive, a week's pay from the store at least.

But Paul eased his mouth free of me. I was shivering as I could sense his rigidity even as he gently kissed my neck and my face. I wriggled against him. Paul sighed, looking down at me. It was his mouth now that was trembling. I shook all over at the intensity of his expression, how he seemed to be holding himself in.

"Julia, Julia," he muttered. "We shouldn't do this."

I agreed, though I didn't know if 'this' included kissing and hugging. I lifted my mouth. Paul kissed me yet again and everything was right with the world as he let go his restraint and his fierceness grew. I let him take ownership of my opened lips. He began to touch me again, gently at first but, when

he slipped his hand across my taut, false breasts, I had to wrestle and hold onto him and encourage him to enjoy my girlish wriggling against him as much as I was enjoying it.

“I didn’t come in to do this,” Paul said, stroking my legs again. My dress rode up, firing my feminine passion even more. I whimpered, it was the only way to describe it. He tried to gently kiss me but we were both past the point where that would suffice. I felt so womanly. I wanted him! I was a girl! I was Julia and my man was as aroused as I was.

“I first saw you at the bus stop in Rotherton after the Midsummer Dance a month ago,” said Paul, smiling and fondling me as I clung to him, his girl, and feverishly kissed his neck and his chest. He tried to talk between all the kisses we exchanged, telling me how he knew about me, Julia. “I asked around and heard about you from Barry Buckingham. He said you lived over here, Julia, but I’d never seen you. But since I saw you there once at the bus stop, in that green dress and high heels, laughing with one of Barry’s friends, I’ve wanted you, my beautiful Julia.”

From last week, I thought, remembering that dress, one I’d actually bought myself as a ‘present’ for my sister. Smugly, I kissed him again, pressing my lips on his, and thought how I’d wanted him longer than that. If I’d been a girl before, I could have admitted to myself that I’d known I was in love with him. It wasn’t just a silly, schoolboy, um, schoolgirl, crush.

At long last, Paul had noticed Julia, me, I thought excitedly. He wanted me! It was enough. It was too much. He made a half-hearted pass at undoing my dress and, Oh Lord, what was I doing? I

was helping him! I was quivering with the overpowering, ecstatic feeling of being loved by Paul Leisham, of being wanted by him.

“No,” I whispered weakly as my dress was slipped easily over my skinny shoulders, down my arms and was gathered at my waist. His tongue enervated my body with its touch, each pass by my phoney breasts leaving me aching and shivering with longing. Paul caressed my bra and smiled as he knew that I was fooling him with my shape.

“It’s all right,” murmured Paul. “Nothing to be ashamed of. I’ve gone out with a lot of flat-chested girls. I’m a leg man myself.”

I’d kissed several boys amorously, wondering if I should go further than kissing as so many of my new, girl friends had told me they had. But I’d never taken my dress off with a boy before, letting him see my padded, black bra, my black panties and slip, my garter belt and my silky-smooth stockings.

“You, you should go,” I whispered to him as I thought about the ugly things that we girls sometimes talked about in the Ladies’ Room, things like hand jobs and blow jobs and doggie-style, and things that I knew I could never do. I couldn’t even though girls assured me that boy friends liked them as the girls showed me new ways to wear my hair and do my makeup.

I’d never done those things, even with Barry, though I felt him so aroused against me in the car. One or two kisses usually made my head spin a little but all my past experience paled as it was nothing like this, like kissing Paul. Instinctively, I’d known that this would be different. Paul was a man, with a man’s desires, not a boy like Barry whom I

could control. I must break it off, I knew, if I didn't want to go further with him.

But I couldn't. I wouldn't as I dreamed of Paul exposing me and not being cruel at all! It was too fantastic, to be on the sofa with Paul, kissing him. I didn't want to hold back. He certainly didn't seem to want to, either! Ooo, the way his hands caressed my tush and my garters, trying to part my shivering, pleased legs as I held them tightly together.

Paul caressed my body through my thin, silky slip and bra. I dared myself and put my fingers on the buttons of his pants. He seemed to pause. I guessed he was waiting for me. The kisses slowed as my hand rested on the front of his pants. I fought a battle within myself. Did I really want to pleasure Paul so much? Oh, I did. I wanted him to enjoy me, to tell me he loved me, a girl named Julia. I could I release him, be his woman, relieve his sexual distress. Did I want him to be the first man I ever made love to? Ooo, yes, I did. But I wouldn't let him take my panties from me, I wouldn't.

I felt my breathing rate increase as I thought such wild thoughts. Almost involuntarily I felt myself opening Paul's pants. He grunted as I did that as if he couldn't believe that I was helping him from his clothing. I tried to speak, letting him know where our passion could end, would end, should end. He opened his shirt. I helped him to take it off. I kissed his chest, another man's chest, his nipples so aroused. He was so unlike me. Paul was so muscular and so tense to the light touch of my lips.

"Mrs Gregory," Paul whispered, hugging my equally tense body to his. I freed his shirt from his arms, my mouth buried in his neck drawing in the wonderful smell of him. I let my hands move onto

his wonderful, huge erection, caressing it. Paul groaned, writhing even as he fell on me and kissed my mouth so fiercely.

“Not here till tomorrow,” I muttered stupidly, besotted with the taste of him on my lips.

Paul stiffened and rose a little as I began to pump his moist, sticky erection. “What about Lowell?” he asked, his voice thick with taut, ragged emotion.

I was mystified, unable stop from touching him, caressing him. “Who cares about him?” I asked, moaning as his hands slipped so enticingly over the hairless skin of my arms and legs.

Paul went rigid again, but, when I thought he was going to pull away and leave, in a mass of jumbled and unrequited emotions, just like me, he stopped, reached down and pulled his shorts off completely. I was confronted by a naked man on the sofa that my sisters had called the ‘make-out couch’.

With Paul’s body free from mine, I was able to free myself from my dress. Then, I saw myself and Paul in the mirror over the mantelpiece. It was angled slightly down. There was Paul in all his masculinity and there was a dark-haired girl with such darkly outlined eyes against and under him. I couldn’t believe how womanly I looked with my thin garters still holding up my skin-toned stockings.

My black, silk slip swayed about me. I could see and feel my black panties at my legs. My hair was a terrible mess. My lips were outlined but free of lipstick and seemed to be pouting as I looked at myself. Paul’s hands went about my waist. I jumped, shivering like a girl, as his male member began to

explore between my legs the place where a male member should explore.

I'd gone too far. I knew it as we kissed. I rolled from the sofa, standing. Paul, all rampant male stood with me. Tentatively, I touched his manhood, looking up at him in fear, as we stood in front of the sofa in the flickering light from the television set.

Paul drew me close. His kiss was harsher than any I'd received before. I wanted to tell him I loved him, I always had. I'd loved him for his humor, his consideration for a precocious teenager, his definite masculinity. But one part of my mind said that I shouldn't, I couldn't, not if I was going to try to make a sort of love with him. I could tell him after I'd released him, when his desire and passion were lessened. He wouldn't think I was out to simply entice him to love me as a woman.

Paul's hand touched my legs and I spasmed against him, shuddering as he caressed my inner thigh, his mouth hard and demanding on my lips. He lowered me onto the cushions across the sofa inserting his legs between mine as I held onto his manhood. It was jerking with desire for me. I so wished that my soft body could accommodate him. I would have if I could have.

"Stop! Stop!" I moaned as Paul slipped his hands into my panties. He did stop. I writhed as he teased me again with his mouth and his hands. He wasn't as gentle as he'd been but I didn't care.

"What a tease you are, Julia," murmured Paul, still so huge and not coming, as I would have been, in just seconds of the caressing of his penis as I was doing.

“I can’t take you from the front,” I said in inspiration. “I-I have an infection there.”

“Gods!” sneered Paul. “And you let me get this far with you? What kind of girl are you?”

I should have told him then that I wasn’t a girl. I should have. But he was reaching into the pocket of his pants and, while I quivered against him, Paul took a condom out of his pocket and smiled at me.

“You want to put it on?” Paul asked me. I thought for a terrible moment that he knew what was in my panties but he didn’t. Not right then. He sat up, took my hand away and put the condom on himself.

“Paul,” I began as he lay down with me, lifting my slip and fighting with my hands for control of my panties. I just wasn’t strong enough.

“It isn’t a big deal,” Paul was saying lovingly as he kissed my scented navel as he took down my panties and then my gaff.

I was exposed and shamed. I saw the look on his face. It was horrible. He wasn’t laughing any more. Paul was looking at me as if I was something that had been caught in a rat trap and died horribly. I began to cry as Paul reared up. “What the f...?” he bellowed at me.

“I’m so sorry,” I cried in panic.

“Who the hell are you?” asked Paul, pushing off me; then suddenly understanding came all at once. “Richard,” he spat the word at me. “You’re Richard. Oh, gods, kid, do you know how you’ve screwed things up for my family tonight!”

“Let me up,” I pleaded with him. Paul Leisham then did the funniest thing. He laughed at me. He

lifted my silky, little slip and laughed at the pretty garter belt that was still about me holding up my lovely stockings.

“What are we going to do with this, my she-male friend,” Paul jeered at me, indicating his erection and his condom. “You’ve really done a number on me tonight, haven’t you, my phoney, little girl. Gods, to think that I nearly let you have me! And you’re Lisa’s and Aline’s bratty brother. Oh gods, I could have been f... bonked by the whole family, male and female. Look at the mess, Julia my boy, that you’ve left me in.”

I cried again, terrible emotions gripping me. I wasn’t a girl at all, was the worst. “I’m so sorry,” I moaned but his legs still held me down. Wriggling, I tried desperately to free myself but Paul toppled down on me. His hands caressed my garter belt. He looked so angry that I was terrified and tried to cover myself as he sneered at me in disgust.

“Well, you want to be a girl. Is that it?” Paul asked me, inches from my face.

“No,” I said with a shudder, thinking of how wonderful it would have been but couldn’t be. I was so ashamed, so stupid to have done what I had. Suddenly Paul kissed me once more. The electricity that had run through me before shot through me again. A strange joy rose in me. It would be all right, after all. I think that Paul felt it as well as he kissed me so gently, so cruelly, the pressure on my lips increasing, his manhood seeming to jump against me.

“You want to be a girl,” said Paul, taking off his condom. I felt him all wet against me. “So you shall be, Julia.”

I squealed. That's the only way to describe the crying I did as Paul used his strong legs, he was past showing me any consideration, and thrust his manhood into my tush. I squealed and rolled, my whole body wriggling in distress, but that only seemed to please him. He held me down at the shoulders, as I begged him to let me go, but he was intent on penetrating me. He impaled me on his manhood as I quivered and writhed, my legs high up in the air as he pushed into me. Then, he didn't come. No, he began to go in and out like a piston. He pushed a cushion behind my back. That was so he could kiss me as he bonked me, as he had just called it.

Paul kissed me as he made love to me as if I was his woman. He said that I was as I screeched in distress at being a woman for a man like Paul. At first, I tried to push him off me but then, a surge of the strangest excitement passed through me. I shuddered and kissed him back.

"Better," Paul murmured, squeezing my nipples. I crossed my legs over his back and he rode me as he would have ridden a woman. I was being treated as if I was a woman by Paul Leisham! Paul was fucking me, his woman! Ooo, I loved it so-o-o-o much.

I wanted Paul as a woman wants her man. I wanted him desperately. Even when it hurt as he entered me, when he muttered an oath and tried to withdraw, I didn't care. I hugged him tighter as he began to reach for his climax. I found myself soaring, bouncing my tush against him, drawing him into me, his woman. I clutched him as I felt him crescendo. I suddenly found a startling tremor within me that kept on vibrating faster and faster until I

exploded and was simply hanging on to him, like the little girl I was.

I was calling his name and urging him to caress me with hands that simply held me at the end as I felt such a joy and an arousal such as I had never imagined before. I know Paul was kissing me and caressing my tush and my legs as he came, flooding me. I bounced up and down some more and urged him on when he flagged. It was the most wonderful experience of my life. I was a woman. I was a woman. I was Paul Leisham's woman, I said in agitation to myself.

I was shuddering so much that it took me many minutes to come down and for my senses to become less scattered and more cohesive. I clung to a silent and unmoving Paul and kissed him lightly all over his face and neck and chest. It took me a little time to realize that he was not kissing me back, not responding at all to my loving caresses as he had just done so wonderfully.

"W-What's wrong?" I asked, my voice quivering. His face was stone-like, the amusement that had once been there leeched away.

"You're an effing drag queen," Paul said as if they were a swear words. "I just, just effing well bonked another guy. That's what's effing wrong."

Stung, I eased away from him, aware with a start, of my own partial nudity, of the traces of love-making that must be on my body as they were on his.

"What did you think ...?" I began, then realizing what he must be thinking of me, Richard Anderson, and what I'd enticed him into doing to me. A flush rose in my body. I felt goose bumps rise all over my

exposed skin. For the first time since Paul had aroused me with his kisses, I didn't think I was a girl any more. No, I was the lowest of the low. I was a man in a dress, a cross-dresser, a queen. I felt Paul's outrage at me and I shared it. I was the worst person in the world with what I'd done to one of the best.

"Lowell said you were the prettiest of all the Anderson girls," Paul said, a controlled anger as well as disgust and loathing in his manner.

"W-What?" I asked, hugging my dress to cover myself, unable to understand what he now wanted from me, a queer, a fag. There I'd said what he seemed to be too gentlemanly to say to me.

"The man you were going to go off with tonight," Paul said, his face pained, as he said the words. "The man that you've been fooling, just as you did me tonight, over the last month or so. He thinks you're going to be marrying him in Scotland in the morning. But even he should be able to think twice now, shouldn't he, after I tell him what a fool I've been with the most beautiful of the Anderson girls?" I was dumbfounded as he said that, both by how he kept linking me to his brother, and by his calling me a beautiful girl. "I have so much to add to all the reasons why marrying an Anderson slut of a woman is stupid."

I found my wet panties and got them on, scrambling and crying as I frantically did so, Paul not trying to stop me. What had I done? What had I done? I'd let a man take off all my woman's underwear and make love to me as if I was a woman. No, not just any man. Paul, the one man of all those I'd seen at Seymour Hall whom I'd fantasized about. I'd let him have his way with me, Julia, as a woman and, oh, it

had been, for some of the time, so wonderful. The look of horror on his face, though, as he slowly put on his shorts and shirt seemed to indicate that he hadn't enjoyed the last part where he'd filled me with his maleness as I had.

This was all ending so horribly! It couldn't be happening, not after that, the way he'd made love to me, and the way I'd felt so much a girl and responded to him! What had happened to the kind, wonderful, demanding, masculine, Julia-loving Paul? Oh, gods, he'd made love to me! He'd stroked away my panties and my bra, my garter belt and stockings, kissed away my lipstick and knew that I wasn't Julia as I was thinking I was. He knew that I wasn't a woman he'd bonked.

No, Paul had made love to Richard Anderson to punish him for how he'd acted like a girl. While, I, Julia had acted like Julia, loving every move he made on me, so feminine did I feel to be made love to by Paul. I knew why he was so enraged about that. I'd fooled him into thinking I was a woman. I'd aroused him so. And even when he'd tried to punish me, I'd just finally accepted him banging me as if I was a woman, letting him know how I'd enjoyed having sex with him.

Well, Julia had but she wasn't real. I should have told him much, much earlier. Why was he so angry, however, about Lowell? I deserved all the disgust he was piling on me, though, all the things he was saying to me that disgusted him so; but this stuff about Lowell. I didn't understand that.

What had he said? I, Julia, was going to be marrying Lowell? My ears couldn't comprehend the accusation. "What are you talking about?" I blurted out as Paul pulled on his pants, still looking at me

with that ugly, distasteful expression on his face as if he couldn't believe what he was looking at, couldn't believe what we had done together.

"You and Lowell," Paul said, his voice strained.

"Lowell's out with Aline," I said, teetering as I pulled my dress up over my shoulders. "There isn't any me and Lowell." That's why he might be angry, I thought suddenly. Did he think that I was a woman, even with proof to the contrary? Paul was a man but surely he couldn't think that he was poaching on another man's territory, his brother's territory? Oh, not with a 'girl' like me, who'd clearly loved making love with Paul! Oh, but if it could only be that, I thought desperately, looking at his face. But no, Paul would never compete with anyone, I thought by the awful expression I saw as he looked at me.

Understanding flickered across the strong lines of Paul's face, followed suddenly by an expression of such stupefaction that I felt compelled to reach out a hand and take his arm.

"What is it?" I asked. Paul turned and looked at me, tossing my hand from his arm in distaste. His eyes went up and down my femininely dressed body as if he couldn't believe that I was still standing there, in my own house.

"What have I done?" Paul asked. Suddenly, his eyes looked terrible. His face was ravaged and worn as if he had committed some terrible wrong. "Lowell said that he was going to marry the most beautiful of the Anderson girls. I thought it was Aline but Lowell just laughed at me. I knew he was speaking cryptically. Hayman and Barry told me weeks ago that you were the most beautiful of the Anderson girls.

“Lowell said he’d be taking you off to Scotland today. He admitted you’d been sleeping together. You were going to meet him again there in Rotherton to elope. When I couldn’t find him, I found his car at least and then found you.”

“So you decided to seduce his girl,” I gasped as my little fantasy world came crashing down about me. I stared in terror at the man I’d loved for so long. It didn’t matter that it was Aline who’d been going out with Lowell. It didn’t even matter that I was dimly aware of the compliment of being considered by Paul, Ron Hayman and Barry Buckingham as the most beautiful of the Anderson girls.

Understanding flared in my brain but I was suffused with feelings of abject shame as I thought of my conduct and how I’d led Paul on, had wanted him to make love to me, thinking even at the end, that he, the man having sex with me, had actually loved me. It was so absurd! I was a man like Paul Leisham!

Well, that wasn’t true. Paul wasn’t really a pervert like me. He’d never have seen me really as a woman when he bounced in and out of me for I wasn’t one. He could now boast to anyone, his own brother not least of all, that he’d made love to me before any of them. He could be telling them how easy it was to make love to a drag queen like me. All you had to do was kiss me; and I’d be yours. My name would be absolute mud in town. I’d have to leave. I looked at Paul, wanting to tell him that I was so sorry. I couldn’t see him through the tears in my eyes.

“No, I didn’t intend to make love to you in place of Lowell,” Paul said savagely. His eyes traveled over the phoney, padded curves of my body and down to

my stockinged legs. "I took his car to stop him making a fool of himself. Now it turns out I'm the bigger fool."

"To stop him marrying my sister? You did all this to stop him marrying my sister?" I asked Paul fearfully. "Why? Lowell is an adult now. He can do as he pleases." And so can you, I thought edgily as he looked so furiously at me. "And so is Aline."

"Not to just stop him marrying," said Paul angrily, tossing my high heeled shoes away from him, from where I'd kicked them off in the throes of our passion on the sofa. "Anyway, Aline's been around enough times," he added bitterly.

"With you?" I asked, nettled. "Jealous of him? Aline's always talked of marrying and having a family."

Paul's face darkened. "Just talk," he sneered. "She says that to trap a guy but it doesn't work on guys like me. I'm never going to get married and have a family just to be like everyone else. If I ever marry, it's going to be to someone very special."

"Aline is special to Lowell," I said, humiliated and shaken at daring to speak to him, while he still looked at me with such loathing. "They're in love and they both want to get married. She's tired of boy friends like you!"

"I was probably the only boy friend Aline ever had that she didn't lie down with," Paul snapped as he looked at me again, almost studying me. His voice didn't soften at all. "Look, Julia. That's what you call yourself, Richard? I'm sorry about tonight, I really am. I shouldn't have taken my anger out on you, no matter that you were tempting me and asking for it!"

Sorry! Paul was so sorry after the most earth shattering experience I could ever possibly hope to encounter and he was sorry for it! Words failed me and humiliating tears came instead. "I can take it that love and attraction to me had nothing to do with you picking me up tonight," I cried, pulling my dress tightly about me.

"No," Paul agreed, reaching out to me as if to help me dress. I pulled back hardly able to see him through my tear-blinded eyes. "I thought you and Lowell were running off and, well, Lowell's too young for marriage and responsibility. He's too young to start a family even though he knows I'm never going to have one.

"What happened between us, me picking you up wasn't just chance. But what just happened, well, I didn't plan to do that, did I? I mean, I was kissing this pretty girl, who wasn't objecting to anything I was doing; and I wanted her. She seemed to want me. You wanted me to make love to you, didn't you? And I was so attracted to Julia. I really did think that you were a girl. Gods! Why am I talking about this, and apologizing for this, with a little pervert like you?"

Paul was working himself into a rage. I was actually frightened by the look on his face

I could bear no more of it. "Why don't you go?" I asked, trembling all over, clutching my folded arms about me in what I knew was a female gesture. Paul started another, hateful protest. "No!" I cried in fright. "Just go! Please!"

Paul had pulled on his shirt. Now he found his socks and shoes as he gave me a strange look. I'm sure he was trying to see what he'd ever seen in me

that had enticed him to do what he had. "We have to talk about what went on here before your family comes back," he said. His voice was as choked as mine, too.

"Aline took our car to meet Lowell," I said, shaking inside, no woman there trying to get out any more. I attempted to be offhand, not to match my voice to my seething emotions, but it came out as just a squeak, I was sure. "I guess he left his car wherever you found it. They've got at least a six-seven hour head start on you."

As I expected, Paul seemed to turn pale and headed straight for the door where he paused. "I can't leave you like this," he said huskily. I couldn't see his face at all in the dark. "That's not what I intended to do to you when I picked you up. We have to talk."

"Forget it," I said lightly, though I'd never felt so overpowered and dismayed in my life before. As high as I'd been making love to Paul, so now I was in the depths of degradation and self-loathing at what I'd allowed myself to do.

And with Paul of all people! To be such a deluded, sex-crazed, little fool! There was nothing I could think of to excuse my self-indulgent, perverted conduct. And to engage Paul in it with me! I wanted to die as I tried to answer him straight-faced as if it was nothing what we'd done, he making love to a crossdresser like me. "There's nothing to talk about."

I felt him come back from the door towards me in the passageway. "What do you mean by that? Nothing?" he asked. I could hear the suppressed anger in his voice.

“You weren’t my first man,” I said, my voice cracking but not as badly as my emotions did as I spoke. “You won’t be my last. We’ll both just have to live with that and go on.”



Paul cursed, ranted at me, and called me horrible names that I'd never wanted to hear from a man like him. He came back into the house and took me by the shoulders. I couldn't see him but he must have been able to see me by the little light that was leaking out into the hallway from the family room.

"I had this stray thought a few eons ago that said to me you were better than your sisters," Paul snarled. He shook me so hard I thought I might break. "If I thought for an instant when I was, was inside you, that you were going to turn out to be the same as them, I couldn't have touched you, ever. My passion would have dissipated on the spot. So, Richard, I'll see you when I get back. Believe me, Julia, Richard, whoever, we will talk."

Then, Paul let me go. He turned on his heel and was gone. Numb from the bitter words he'd used for me, I heard the car start and hurtle violently away from the house. I was left alone with the memories of a night that once had seemed so wonderful and had ended up so disastrously wrong.

*******How it looked to the family*******

"When are you going to make her get out from underfoot?" Lisa moaned at my father for the third time that day.

I, Richard Anderson, scrunched down in the big armchair and pretended to be more engrossed in the paper than I really was. Maybe it was my eyebrows or my mannerisms but Lisa loved to taunt me by using female pronouns for me. She and Aline had had many laughs at 'her' and what 'she' had just said or done that was so wrong-headed.

“I need Richard round here right now,” our father said distractedly, his half glasses perched on the end of his nose. He leaned back and tried to make the words come into focus as he read through the sports page. He didn’t correct Lisa on the word she’d used for me, her brother. It was as if he understood completely and agreed with her assessment of me, his fairly useless son.

Lisa snorted. “What for?” she asked, rolling her eyes dramatically. “Every other person in her class is working now before they go up to university or college next term. She’s just laying around here, taking up space.”

Her father looked at her over the top of his glasses. “You want to be the one running and fetching for your Gran, then?” he asked Lisa with a crooked smile. I had to smile at that. Good for you, Dad, I thought in silent approval

“That’s another thing,” said Lisa petulantly. “Ever since Mom died, Gran is getting worse.”

The reading of the Sunday papers in the living room was interrupted by a crash from the room above. I leaped to my feet while my father, his part of the paper spread over the massive, oaken dining table, only looked up and snarled angrily at the ceiling.

“I’ll go,” I said hastily, ashamed that my own initial reaction was the same as my father’s. I had to step over Nicky’s outstretched legs as Lisa’s husband made no move to shift from lying down across most of the sofa, half asleep from the sherries he’d consumed in the pub on the way home from church.

“She may be my sister but I say she has to get out and get a job full-time over the summer,” I

heard Lisa resuming her diatribe about me with my father. I'd heard it all before. I was glad to be away from Lisa's harping on, that the Hall was 'the family home' for her and the Honourable Nicholas Fleeting, her husband.

Lisa was the only married sister and it was time for the others, Aline and Richard, me, to be making our own way in the world, Lisa would be going on. The Hall should come to her by right as she was married. Look at the expenses Aline had added to the family estate by wrecking not one, but two cars, I heard, as I paused at the top of the stairs and listened. If I was half as irresponsible as Aline, and I was, Lisa was going on, we'd be bankrupt in a year. I, Richard, could have recited the lecture about me in my sleep.

Well, Lisa didn't know everything, I thought, as I skipped daintily up the hallway to attend the old woman in the front bedroom Gran had insisted on taking over. Poor Lisa, I thought with a wicked grin to myself. She didn't know she wasn't the only married woman in the family now. Lisa didn't know yet about Aline and Lowell Leisham.

Lisa, too, didn't know that she had another sister as well, I thought with a little, feminine thrill, as I sashayed like a model along the length of the hallway, slowing right down to look at how I could walk like a girl. Yes, and no-one was a virgin in this family any more, either, eliminating Lisa's pet word for her brother.

Ugh, I thought with a shiver, tension building inside me as I thought of Paul. I shuddered as I wondered how Paul would reveal his special news to the family. I would hear Lisa's cackle when told about 'Julia'. And she, Julia, I thought indignantly at

Paul's description, didn't look like that witch of a sister of mine. Julia didn't! Paul had been lying when he said that.

Well, not lying exactly, just trying to compliment me, Julia, when he was sure I was a girl. Ooo, how delightful was that thought!

"Couldn't be bothered to attend your own grandmother until I got your attention," croaked Gran. I picked up the medieval knight's helmet and restored it to its position on Gran's chest of drawers. I propped her 'walking' stick back up at the side of the bed's headboard.

Gran watched her only grandson's every move, criticizing the way I walked, the way I poured the water from the jug, the amount of water I put in the glass and my tardiness in coming to see to an old woman. Aline, she said, would have been with her all day on if she'd been home. She wasn't an ungrateful girl like some Gran could mention.

I knew that it was all a lie. On a Sunday, Aline never stayed in. The only time she ever visited her grandmother was when she was short of money. Aline said it herself. She'd take Gran her evening meal, tell her all about her current love life, which Gran would take most exception to, and then ask for money to spruce herself up for her latest conquest.

"You should try it," laughed Aline, pocketing a fistful of banknotes, the like of which I'd never seen. "It turns the old girl on when I tell her what I did with Sebastian and Ronny. If she didn't pay me, she knows I wouldn't tell her anything!"

"That's mean, Aline," I'd said but Aline had only danced off down the curved main staircase, grinning

broadly and riffling the money with both hands at me.

“Try inventing a girl friend or two,” Aline had shouted to me with a laugh. “I’ll tell you what you did with them if you can’t think of anything, my little, virgin brother.”

“Now you stay,” ordered Gran as I prepared the drink Gran liked, made from a thick, blackcurrant cordial. “I’ve had no-one to talk to since we got back from France. What an awful journey that was! I didn’t tell you what happened in London when we stopped for refreshments, did I?”

“I think you did, Gran,” I said lightly but that didn’t stop the old woman. She repeated everything I’d already heard three times before, embellishing the tale, lying back on the frilled pink pillows that I’d fluffed up so badly for the old woman, in her opinion, earlier.

Gran considered herself bedridden but, whenever a family outing was planned, she was inevitably there, whether at the races or in France. She walked, always on someone’s arm. If she didn’t think about it, she leaned no weight on her support. When she came down to the back patio in the summer, she was always swathed in sweaters, blankets and scarves. She outlined all the corrections to be made to rectify the errors made to the gardens by her ‘forced’ withdrawal to her bedchambers by the lazy members of the family. She always looked at me as she made her pointed remarks.

“It’s because you look like Mom,” Aline had said when I’d once sighed at being razed by the old woman because nothing was done right for her. She’d even thrown her sandwich onto the patio

floor. I'd been the one asked by my father to clean up the mess.

"I don't remember," I said, thinking back, a lump in his throat.

"That's why Mom made her leave the Hall when we were kids," said Aline. "And Richard, you look most like Mom of all of us. Lisa and I look like Andersons but you're a Trentham, my boy. That's where you get those lips from that I'd love to have, that dark hair and those big, green eyes. If you were a girl, you know, you'd be a real dish, just like Mom was. You look just like her which is why Gran treats you as if you were her."

I always blushed as I thought about what Aline had said about me and Mom, wishing it was true.

"You're just like your mother," jeered Gran at me suddenly, confirming everything that Aline had said. "She was always woolgathering. That's why she was such a rotten housekeeper. Now, since Lisa's taken over, the house is clean at least."

But it had been a home when Mom was alive, I thought angrily, careful not to show it. Seymour Hall had been warm, noisy with radio music, and cluttered with stuffed animals, even the odd real one. Mom ignored her mother-in-law's constant criticizing. She put it all down to the old woman being lonely and wanting to be of use since Grandpa had died. Mom even relented enough to let the old woman stay for extended times with the family Gran claimed to cherish.

I tried to be equally charitable to the old woman as my mother had been, but I really couldn't find it in myself. I really couldn't recall a kind word ever from the old woman. Gran's displeasure with most

of her family seemed to be total. Only when someone was away, as Aline was, did that person suddenly become a paragon of virtue to the old lady.

I jerked my mind back to the troubles the family had had trying to cash a cheque to buy a cup of tea in a roadside cafe on the motorway. Gran had a way of peppering her stories with questions and expecting right answers from her listeners every time. If I didn't get the right answer, she'd ruthlessly start over, doubling the excruciating pain of having to listen to her long litany of complaints.

My head throbbed after the intense pressure of two hours of listening to my grandmother. I was only released while the old lady had her pre-supper nap. She intended to rise for that, it seemed.

The last person I expected to see seated on the infamous, flowered sofa was Paul Leisham. He rose, grim-faced, as I arrived at the entrance to the living room, Paul's eyes murderous as he looked at someone he'd known previously, had made love to, as a girl, as Julia.

Julia's heart, my heart, did a double, no, a triple flip in fright and shock at seeing Paul. The smile that briefly lit up my face I tried to damp down immediately, particularly as Lisa looked up at me angrily from the sofa where she was ensconced beside Paul. I shook my long, greased down, masculine-styled hair and quivered, remembering that I wasn't Julia at all. I wasn't in a pretty dress. There was no way Paul Leisham could be glad to see me. I could see that right away by just one look at Paul's baleful expression.

"Well, someone's glad to see you," Lisa said, her head moving in a petulant gesture. "How could you

have deceived poor Paul like you did, Richard? That was most unfair.”

I was stunned. “Most unfair?” I asked in fright, wondering what the glowering Paul Leisham had been saying about, about Julia, terror whipping through me. I was sure I was about to be exposed and debased in front of my family for what I was, an effing drag queen. Yes, Paul had called me that. “About what?”

I remembered how horridly I’d spoken to Paul, to drive him away from me, from Julia. I hated to think of it. All I wanted was to dream about him, as I did, the way he’d held me in my pretty dress and kissed me. I should have recalled that he hated me for what I’d let him do to me, a girl. I flushed. Was he here to tell on me?

All I had was hope that Paul didn’t detest me as much as he’d said he did when he saw me putting on my panties and my dress. He couldn’t have told Lisa and my father about our night together, as boy and girl, could he? No, my father would already be physically confronting me. Lisa would be sneering at me. My face flamed anyway as I thought about what had transpired so wonderfully between Paul and his girl friend, Julia, on that sofa he rose from.

“Lowell and Aline were married in Gretna Green,” said Paul directly, his strong chin never so firmly held. He didn’t look at me. “While you were diverting me, getting me to drive you back here to the Hall, Richard, my brother and your sister were making us in-laws.”

“It isn’t my fault they’re married!” I cried out in disbelief. It was Paul’s own fault that he’d jumped to the wrong conclusions. Julia hadn’t intended to

mislead him. Well, she hadn't, I thought in fright, waiting for the revelations to start. I'd already confessed to myself that it was all my fault what had happened between Paul and Julia. I, Julia, had wanted too much to be Paul's girl. I'd 'let my knickers down' for him, as the song says, being a naughty girl.

"That Aline!" said our father, coming out of the dining nook, folding the paper as if this was just a small, everyday crisis in the Anderson family. "She always did say she'd elope, you know. Said she wouldn't have a big wedding. Always said that, if you all remember."

My eyes were glued on Paul's. So, I saw the exasperation that flitted over his face at such an ill-conceived remark. For just a moment, I thought of my family as Paul must see them. My grandmother was mean-spirited, my father often downright silly. Lisa was rapacious, her husband one of the most hen-pecked men I'd ever seen. Aline was promiscuous and flighty. As for myself, my cheeks colored again as I recalled how I'd wanted Paul Leisham to think of Julia as a pretty girl after he'd left 'her'.

"Well," said Paul, his expression very guarded. "I thought you should know since Aline, when I saw her, made it very clear she wasn't about to contact any of you."

"Oh, she will in time," said Mr. Anderson with a bluff heartiness that belied the seriousness of the situation. "When she runs out of money, we'll hear from her."

Even Lisa found the gumption to react to that sour remark. "Oh, Father," she said crossly.

“What did I say?” asked Mr. Anderson looking about him in what I knew was fake innocence. “It’s the truth, isn’t it?”

“Lowell’s not short of money,” said Paul in a mild tone that didn’t match the gleam in his dark blue eyes.

Paul is furious with us all, rightfully so, I thought helplessly, not quite knowing what to say. Oh, how could Aline have behaved so recklessly and engaged Lowell so capriciously in an elopement? Had she felt Paul’s disapproval, I wondered, trying to think why my sister would do such a thing. Had Aline taken matters into her own hands when she realized that Paul would have stopped Lowell from having any relationship with her?

And then, there was what I’d done to him, in my lovely, flirty dress. Poor Paul and poor Aline, I thought with a shudder, watching the way Paul held himself as he retreated from the living room. Lisa was going on about the difficulties of receiving her sister socially. Oh, please, this is not a nineteenth century Jane Austen novel, I thought grimly to myself. And what about me, I thought helplessly, as it seemed that Paul would leave without once speaking to me about the matter he’d said we had to talk about when he’d rushed away on Friday, no, on Saturday morning.

“Oh,” Paul said at the door. “I do have to talk to Richard, a message from Aline I promised to deliver.”

“You can tell us,” Lisa said brightly, leaning on the open oaken door. “We’ll hear it all from her later anyway.”

“You may,” agreed Paul, shaken as he looked at me. His temper seemed to be on the verge of boiling over. “But I did promise to speak to, to your brother,” he emphasized that word, “privately and I will.”

*******Repercussions from a night of bliss*******

Paul beckoned to me. I found myself moving after him out of the red-stoned hallway and down the steps under the vine-covered trellises, into the garden walks on the eastern side of the Hall.

“Your family!” Paul exploded at me when we were well away from the house. He marched me past the stone benches, underneath shady chestnut trees, heading us down towards the little stream and the line of weeping willows.

Paul seemed to be completely oblivious, however, to the famed features of Seymour Hall’s so-called riverine walk.

“It’s not so terrible, is it?” I asked anxiously, unable to meet his eyes. “Lowell and Aline marrying?”

“I could say,” said Paul grimly, stopping beside an impressively thick hanging of willow branches and yellow leaves, “that they deserved each other. But you might have guessed that I didn’t really come over today to talk about Lowell’s troubles.”

That stung. “Aline,” I began huskily.

“I know what Aline is,” said Paul angrily, reaching out and turning me so that I had to look at his blazing eyes and furious face. “And so do half the men of this county!”

“Only half?” I asked before I could stop myself. I felt my own anger beginning to rise at the constant

disparagement of my family. It was one thing for me to hold them, and myself, in contempt; quite another for someone else to voice what I was thinking myself.

“You flirt with me like your sister,” Paul’s eyes narrowed as he looked at me. “You want to be a girl like her, don’t you?”

“I want to be exactly like Aline,” I said furiously, thinking how strange it was, my senses all a-flutter that Paul of all people should talk to me openly about being a girl. “She does exactly as she wants!”

“Sleeps with whoever she wants,” said Paul thickly. “But it wasn’t her I have to talk to you about. I have to talk to you about Julia and what we did on the sofa.”

“Just forget it,” I said with a quiver in my voice. “I won’t talk about it, ever, to anyone else.”

Paul frowned at me. “How can I trust what you say?” he asked me. “You, you didn’t just put a dress on Friday night and decide to go out on a date, did you? You must have been dressing up for quite a while, Julia, mustn’t you, to look as real and as good as you did. You had me completely fooled.”

“I’m never going to do it again,” I told him, my face burning. I did mean it at the time.

“I suppose your sisters help you,” said Paul, studying my face intently, looking for signs of Julia, I supposed. “I heard what Lisa called you in there. Do they both help you find the right, sexy lingerie to wear?” He started sneering at me. “I guess you do want to be like Aline and sleep with half of the men in the county.”

“She left the other half for me,” I said, knowing I was speaking in Julia’s voice, lifting up my chin bravely, staring into his angry, dark blue eyes. “But, for my first lover, I did get the one that got away from her.”

Paul Leisham cursed and cursed again. He took my hands in his and savagely pulled me against him. His kiss was hard and passionate. Whoa! I felt myself immediately swept up in the so familiar, feminine feelings I’d felt only once in my life before - when I was first kissed by Paul. But I wasn’t dressed as Julia! It was wrong to react to Paul as if I was a girl when I wasn’t dressed and made up!

His kiss made me do it. I raised my arms about Paul’s neck, girlish feelings rising inside me. Somehow, despite the way that my mouth and lips were yielding to him, imploring him to take me, I knew that this was so totally wrong. I mean, I was dressed as a boy!

“I’m not gay,” I hissed at Paul as I broke free of him but he grabbed me again. He kissed me gently as I felt a huge lump rising in my throat. I couldn’t help meeting his demanding kiss with one of my own, leaning against him and feeling an imaginary bra and dress pressing into Paul. I almost begged him to take me off with him in his car. I’d get my special suitcase and join him! He could raise me, Julia, again to the heights he’d brought her, me, before.

“I’m not gay, either,” said Paul, pulling apart from me. I felt so weird with the imprint of his mouth on mine again. I forced myself, however, to put my arms beside me, my fists closing tightly as I tried to be the boy I was, somewhere. My senses, however, were transported into a girlish ecstasy,

which I'd so longed to repeat, as Paul Leisham held me again and kissed me again, his tongue sliding over my lips and entering my mouth.

With an oath, Paul finally pulled back from me, looking deep into my eyes, his hands sliding down my arms to my rigidly held hands at my sides. "You're much too young to know what you are and what you want," he said thickly to me, to Richard Anderson. "But when I look at you," he paused, "when I look and listen to you, you are her, Julia. You've slicked back your hair but I never realized before how girlish you are, how waved your hair is. I'm always attracted to demure, sweet girls and you play that role really well. Who taught you how to do that? It couldn't be your sisters. If they knew all about you, you'd be Cinderella, wouldn't you?"

"Of course," I said, barely able to speak with the feel of his lips still on my mouth. I closed my eyes in dismay. If I looked at him, I'd betray myself and my family. I'd dissolve into his arms. Jane Austen's novels helped. "You have insulted my family and particularly the sister I love most in the world. You took advantage of me ..."

Paul snorted and his laugh was bitter. "Took advantage of you!" he roared. "Who led me on? Who deceived me and let me think she was a girl when she knew bloody well she wasn't? Who gave me her body, just to keep me from going after her sister and lied to me about Lowell being in Rotherton?"

"I did no such thing!" Julia, no it was me, Richard, said hotly.

"Aline told me what she said to you," Paul sneered. "She knows all about Julia. She asked me if you'd lured me into bed to give them the head

start they needed. She asked me if I thought you were pretty and if I thought you were real. So you don't have to start making up lies. Why else would you let me make love to you, Julia? Why else?"

Because I love you, the Julia inside me said to herself in her mind, in my mind. But I was reeling at the charge he'd levelled at me. Words stuck in my throat. Oh, Aline! I screamed to myself. How could you say such cruel things? To Paul, of all people! Didn't you know how I loved him? But, of course, I knew the answer to that one. No, Aline would never think of her faggy brother and Paul Leisham together, me as a girl. It would just have been words, whatever she'd said to Paul about me. No, she didn't know about me at all! Did she?

"Can't answer, can you?" said Paul bitterly, letting my hands go. "Your family is a good example of why I never want one of my own. Well, we've had our talk. I'd take it as a personal favor if you do not tell anyone what a fool I made of myself with, with Julia. If you can keep it to yourself, I'll try to help out that spendthrift brother of mine and his, his wife."

"Aline knows?" I asked huskily.

"I didn't really say anything to her about last night and she didn't mention Julia," sighed Paul. "You can go on putting on your pretty dresses and going out with your faggy friends, Julia. I won't say or do anything to stop you. Just keep clear of me. I don't want anything to do with a man in a dress whether you want to be a woman or not. I kissed you now to see how it really felt. And it was truly awful, wasn't it? Kissing another man is sick. I've got it out of my system with you. It was only so good before because you were so girlie and so femmy."

And because I thought you were really a sweet girl. Now, it's just yuck."

Paul made a sound then as if he was throwing up. I could bear it no longer. Tears blinded my eyes as I howled inside at the sheer injustice of the bargain he'd wanted to make with me. I brushed past him, nerves jangling even at that accidental touch against his body.

"Well, do you agree?" Paul roared after me.

"Agree!" I screamed back at him, tears pouring down my face, which luckily he couldn't see.

"Good!" Paul yelled. "I don't want anything to do with you ever again, as a brother- or a sister-in-law. Got that?"

I ran to the shelter of the house, lifting my arm in a salute I hoped he'd understand as agreement. It took me five minutes to wipe my eyes dry in front of the main doors before I crept back into the house and encountered Lisa coming down the stairs.

"Well," asked Lisa. "What did our prodigal sister want?"

"Clothes," I lied unsteadily. "She gave Paul a list."

"You'd think she'd ask me," said Lisa as I went past her.

"I think she wants them right away and not at the end of the month," I said acidly to my first-married sister who sneered unintelligibly after me as I ran up the stairs and away from her. I went immediately to Aline's room, hoping for some time to myself, to try to control my distress at Paul's words and expression when he looked at me. Why, oh why, had he really kissed me again? To let me know what it was I'd lost? But I had no time to brood.

Someone was needed to sit with Gran and listen to the whole story of the French trip once more. I was the youngest and the best listener, said my father huffily. I was to get with my grandmother right away and stop mooning about over my sister's clothing. It wouldn't happen to me, eloping, my father said to me, laughing at his own joke. He'd put his foot down on leaving his children alone and to their own devices. I was going to have to stay at home much more and look after my grandmother, too.

*******How it is in the present *******

Michael didn't really want to leave the Leonards when I arrived for him. He and Robert, Jean's little boy, had built a huge fort with wooden blocks and were just getting the action figures arranged in it.

"You could stay for a cup of tea," Jean Leonard said with a wide smile.

She was a chatty, happy-go-lucky Londoner, a gem really, so loving to all the children she minded with her own.

"We impose on you so much," I said, declining, getting a reluctant Michael into his raincoat and wellingtons. I could see Mr Leonard in the kitchen putting heated plates from the oven on the table in anticipation of me taking Michael, the last child to leave that day.

"I wanted to stay," Michael pouted as we stood in the rain, my pink, femininely styled umbrella shielding us both, as we waited for the bus.

"Their supper was ready," I said, feeling the rain percolating down my back as I sheltered Michael more from the downpour.

“How long will supper be for us?” asked Michael. He sighed as he looked up at me. He knew it would take a while.

I calculated. I had worked overtime twice for Mr Nazir. I had paid Jean for the next week. I could afford Michael’s favorite treat. “Are you very hungry?” I asked, squeezing Michael’s soft, little hand.

“Oh, yes, very hungry,” said Michael, a little smile on his lips, hinting at amusement. He could hold it in just like his real mother, I thought, with a violent tug at my heart.

“Absolutely starving?” I asked, playing the game, wondering how long he would go before he’d break into his wonderful smile that uplifted my heart whenever he did it.

“Oh, yes, absolutely starving,” Michael repeated, his voice eager, as he sensed what I would suggest for supper.

“Famished?” I asked.

“Very, very family-ished,” Michael said, looking up at me and flashing his smile. Yes, my insides did get all in a knot. Yes, I felt so motherly and protective to the child I’d promised to raise as if he was my own, as if I was really his mother.

“Well, we could stop at Kosta’s,” I said doubtfully, mentioning the fish-and-chip shop at the end of the street.

Michael nodded. “Can we afford it?” he asked, as the double-decker bus suddenly came around the corner and pulled up in front of us.

“I think so,” I smiled back at him as we clambered up the stairs while the bus moved on. We had

to sit in the back with the smokers but it was only four stops and it was raining.

We had to sit beside each other on aisle seats. I thought of Michael's concern about money and my heart ached for my five year old son. So young to have to think over what treats to ask for so that he wasn't constantly disappointed, so young to be so considerate of me, his mother. He would have said, "It's all right, really," as he had so many times before when I couldn't afford to meet his requests.

We didn't have to wait long at Kosta's for the fish to be ready. I let Michael carry the bag with our food. I always had a plastic one in my purse. You just never knew when you might see a bargain. I'd missed out on a few sell-off deals at the greengrocer's for not having anything to put potatoes and carrots in when I'd been struggling as a young, single mother with a baby in my arms.

"Let's run," said Michael, taking off into the light rain.

"That's cheating!" I called after him, hearing him laughing as he scurried up the street, around the corner to the block of flats where we lived.

A large, black car dominated the little street as it sat in front of the entranceway. The teenaged boys from downstairs crowded the stairwell, eyeing the Rolls-Royce hungrily.

"Look at that, Mummy," said Michael, pointing as we crossed the street and headed to the stairs to our flat. Even the huge, shiny car couldn't prevent him, however, from jumping the puddles in the middle of the street.

When the sidewalk door to the Rolls opened and Paul Leisham got out, I knew I should've turned and

run away, run anywhere. I reached out to grab and protect Michael but he was already skipping up to the frowning owner of the car.

“What kind of car is that?” Michael asked, pointing to the front of the car and at its famous hood ornament.

Paul came forward, oblivious to the rain. He looked at me while I, dry-mouthed, could only stare, wild-eyed, back at him.

“Don’t look so scared, Julia,” he said, his eyes glinting. “I’m not about to kidnap your son.” Paul half knelt in front of the boy. “This is a Rolls-Royce car. Haven’t you seen one like it before?”

Michael screwed up his freckled little face, his hair so dark with the rain, no red highlights showing like mine, with the moisture. “No,” he said thoughtfully. “I don’t believe I have.”

Paul raised an eyebrow and looked at me. “He speaks well for himself,” he said, with a frown. I could almost hear the sound of his voice, recalling how, on an occasion before, how I’d tried to explain my son to my furious, derisive family, on the first time I’d gone back since I’d left. Oh no, panic set in as I watched Paul. It’s not going to be all about Michael, is it, I thought in dismay, seeing the way Paul was looking at my little boy.

“He’s my son,” I said anxiously, putting my arm about Michael’s shoulder.

“He looks a little like you,” Paul said, frowning.

Thank goodness he did, I thought, my heart racing, thank goodness for that at least. Yes, my son did resemble me. But for his blue eyes. And so many people had blue eyes.

“Fish and chips for supper?” Paul asked into the pause while I tried desperately to think of something to send him away.

“Yes,” I said shortly. “A treat and we need to go eat before it gets cold.”

Paul nodded. He spoke to Michael. “Do you mind if I come up with you and your mother and have a cup of tea while you eat?”

“No,” said Michael automatically. “Are you from Welfare?”

Paul’s look spoke volumes as he raised his eyes to me. Just for a moment, I thought I saw pain there. But then the expression was gone. He was glaring at me angrily, again.

“No, I am not from Welfare, whatever that is,” Paul muttered.

Paul let us lead, through the teenagers. They were undeterred by rain and cheeky with their comments until Paul gave them one of his looks. I heard them simmer down to whispers under their breath.

Along the second landing, we came to the bedsitter I rented from the city. Going in through the green painted door with its frosted glass panels, I steeled myself against Paul’s comments at the obvious poverty in which my son and I were living.

Paul couldn’t know how long it had taken me to scrape together the money just for the shabby sofa and chair, my one and only floor lamp, and the small television set. I took Michael’s coat and hung it up on the wall on the hook next to mine. Michael had already put his wellies on the paper inside the door. I kicked off my own low-heeled shoes to make them sit beside Michael’s.

I hurried to put on the kettle while Paul looked at Michael's artwork pinned to the wall, along with the posters I had picked up here and there. At least they covered the worst of the marks on the wallpaper from the previous tenants. Paul was in socked feet, his shiny oxfords at the door, neatly stacked beside mine, men's shoes while mine were women's. If Paul only knew what a step up this was from our previous living quarters ... Well, we could never have walked there on the greasy floor in our stockinged feet.

Michael was playing host with a confidence I found truly amazing. "That's my seascape picture," Michael said with all the self-importance of a five year old. "It took me ever so long 'cause Mum made me paint each layer of green and blue on a different day. It took six whole days to do it all."

Paul looked up at me as I turned from the kettle and opened the packages of fish and chips that Michael had dumped on the table beside the plates. "Michael," I said quietly while Paul continued to look at me. I just couldn't read his expression. I couldn't think why he was here in my apartment and why he wanted still to talk to me. I'd thought that he didn't care at all about me. Oh, it was indeed going to be all about Michael. He must know about him, I thought, and hysteria was near. "Come and eat while it's hot. I thought you were hungry?"

"Famished," Michael said, darting to the table and reaching for the ketchup bottle. I'd joke with him sometimes about whether he'd like chips with his ketchup or just the ketchup by itself. It was now a number one priority on my shopping list.

"Tea will be just a few minutes," I said to Paul, wanting to fidget under his intense gaze. He hadn't

changed in looks at all, I thought. He was still just a touch weather-beaten; his blue eyes were as penetrating as ever, his jawline just as firm. His hair was as dark as ever, maybe a little longer than when he was younger, but combed neatly, fitting perfectly with his expensive raincoat and dark suit.

“Eat your supper,” Paul said bluntly, his expression still unreadable. He was cruelly going to make me wait and beg me to ask him why he was here, I thought, my emotions still ready to set myself to fighting him and fleeing with my son.

I sat down but my appetite was gone. Luckily, Michael wasn't affected by the strange man's presence. He ate ravenously and soon began on the extra half fish and chips I shovelled on to his plate while I made tea, wishing I had a decent tea service with which to serve Paul. Well, I thought, my nerves ravaged by Paul's presence, he'd just have to have it as we did, in a thick white mug, purchased at a rummage sale, the survivor of a set of four.

Paul didn't seem to notice the cup. He was looking at me as I put the cup, with a little milk and no sugar, on the arm of the faded, light green armchair. “Where's the letter from your grandmother?” he asked.

Michael's head swivelled around from stuffing his food into his mouth to look and listen to me.

“I tore it up,” I said, thanking Paul silently as I felt the bitterness rise in me again. It was so much easier to talk to him when I knew that I didn't like him at all.

Paul looked at my son. “Does Michael not know?” he began.

“Michael knows that I want nothing more to do with a lot of people. Yes,” I said vehemently, lowering my voice nevertheless.

Michael took his plate over to the sink and began to run the tap, whistling some pop song. I looked at his boyish little figure and wanted to run over and hug him. He was trying to give me space to talk to this invader of our small room.

“What are you here for, Paul?” I finally asked, my abject fear, that Paul knew all about Michael, receding as Paul sat there, not really paying that much attention to my boy.

“Your grandmother is dieing,” Paul said, hooding his eyes. I knew that wasn’t the real answer.

“We all are,” I said abruptly. “You think as little of her as you do the rest of us. Some of us were born bastards, and some of us were self-made, I think you said.”

Paul’s eyes squinted and showed something other than neutrality. “You heard me,” he said thickly, his face sort of sagging. He looked as if he’d suddenly made an important discovery. Perhaps he’d figured out why I disliked him now so much. Or so I told myself. “You must have been in the hallway. That was why you left that time without a word.”

“Melanie and Lynn thought you were very funny,” I said, bitterness at him rising within me. I remembered his cruel, cutting words. I’d just come down from my confrontation with my grandmother, her words to take my stinking little bastard son out of the Anderson house still ringing in my ears.

“I meant to include all of us, you and me, everyone,” Paul explained lamely. What he’d said, he

must know would really have hurt me, even if both of us knew that the idea that I was a mother was absurd. "I am sorry if I hurt you. I didn't think."

You didn't think I'd hear you, I thought in pain at the memory. I shook my head, remembering how I'd had to struggle with a sleeping infant son down the long driveway of Seymour Hall for the second time. Then, I'd had to change him while I waited for the bus, Michael crying throughout the last part of the journey into Wellingsley, the bus so hot, and me without any sort of drink for Michael.

"You didn't come here to apologize," I said. I repeated my request. "Why are you here, Paul?"

"This," Paul said grimly, indicating the room all around us.

Michael was humming as he came from the sink to the table. "Shall I clean your plate, Mummy?" he asked.

I was trembling as I turned away from Paul's rigid face at my son's name for me. "Let me help you, darling," I said. I let Michael finish the last chips on my plate before I went over to the sink and wiped the plates he'd already washed. We had no fridge and so the leftover bits had to be removed right away as well. I closed off a small garbage bag, ready to take out in the morning.

It was calming to do my regular chores as a mother with Michael, setting the table for breakfast while still leaving the main part clear for a game or for reading later on.

"The rain has stopped, Mummy," whispered Michael as we both seemed nervous about the male visitor in the living room, our only room. "Can we still go down to the park?"

“Why not?” I asked, smiling at his upturned, eager face.

We saved our crusts and now had quite a bag of them. Michael loved to feed the ducks and geese on the river at the bottom of the park. Why should I deprive him of that little pleasure we’d promised ourselves just because Paul was here, determined to speak to me of things I’d put behind me?

“We’re going down to the park,” I announced to Paul, reaching femininely for my navy blue raincoat, a navy umbrella and my purse. My work dress would have to do. It wasn’t as if, like at home, I’d change for dinner, or for after-dinner. Well, I couldn’t change, either, could I, in front of Paul. “What are you going to do?”

Paul stood up, his mouth tightening at my rudeness. He looked at Michael, sitting on the floor to tie up his shoes. “Can I come to the park, too?” he asked my son.

Michael looked up at me eagerly. “We could bring my football,” Michael said. Sometimes he was disgusted with my attempts to kick and pass the ball in a proper way. “The pros,” he’d say while, bemused, I wondered where he ever got such a vocabulary, “do it like this.” He’d attempt to demonstrate but got very defensive and angry if I so much as smiled at his very stylized efforts.

“I don’t think Paul plays football,” I began, thinking that rugger was more likely his sport. “And it is going to be wet.”

“Which only proves that your mother knows very little about me,” said Paul smiling easily at the little boy in front of him. “I was a schoolboy select from my school and I’ve had season tickets at White Hart

Lane since I was old enough to drive into town. Soccer games are never stopped for a little rain. That was one of the first lessons I learned.”

Michael looked at me to see whether he ought to be impressed. “The Spurs play at White Hart Lane,” I said, mentioning one of the teams Michael was beginning to talk about with the boys, many of them older, at Jean Leonard’s. “If Mr Leisham wants to ruin his shoes, that’s his lookout.”

Paul’s face tightened at my formal use of his name. He looked about to respond snappishly but then he stopped himself. “I want to,” he said lightly, smiling at Michael.

Michael went scrambling beneath the table in the kitchen area to find his ball. The smile on his face when he came out from underneath told its own story.

I refused the offer of riding in the car with Paul and his chauffeur even though I could see that Michael would have loved to go to the park in the car. “We always walk,” I said to Paul and so he told his driver to take some time off.

“I’ll call you on the cell phone,” Paul said, taking the instrument from his pocket which only made Michael’s eyes get bigger. Eyeing the sky speculatively, Paul also got an umbrella from the car.

Paul must have seen, I thought bitterly, that we didn’t have a phone. Michael and I didn’t have much of anything, period. But we did love each other. And my heart suddenly went cold as I thought about what Paul could do to that love if he once suspected that the little boy between us was not my son at all.

Michael chattered on, asking Paul football questions as we wended our way through the back

streets to the park. It had never looked so unkempt and shabby before to me as I looked at everything anew as it might be seen by Paul. Even the grassy area where Michael usually kicked his ball was thick with geese droppings. Nevertheless, we went down to feed the birds first.

I was surprised by the number of geese and how they pushed the ducks and swans out of the way to get at the crusts we had brought with us. We tried to feed only the ducks but it was impossible.

“Canada geese,” said Paul as Michael’s attempt to feed two ducklings was intercepted by several of the squabbling geese. “They horn in where they aren’t wanted.”

He turned and looked at me lazily. I stared back at him, not caring how my loosened, girlishly styled hair surrounded my face, a strand now and then crossing my eyes, touching a cheek. Paul seemed to be fascinated by it. Well, now it was all mine. I hadn’t worn a wig in years. In fact, I didn’t own one any more. I must get my hair cut into a more fashionable style, I thought, the idea of going to a women’s hairdressers making me feel all chilly and yes, aroused. It was silly to still look as I had when I was back in Wellingsley, like a girl out of school.

I pushed my hair back angrily behind my ears. I glared at Paul, staring at me, looking at my legs in the ‘nude’ stockings I wore, and watching me for every feminine gesture I made, smiling as if I shouldn’t do that.

“You wanted to say, the geese are like me, didn’t you?” asked Paul, giving me his sly smile.

I refused to be charmed. Oh, I wanted to be. I wanted to step back to that wonderful night when

the family was in France. It was never far from my thoughts how I'd pressed in so close to Paul; and he'd taken me, making me his woman.

"You think too much of yourself," I snapped anxiously. "Why don't you go home, Paul, or wherever else you have to go? I'm not interested in anything my grandmother has to suggest."

Michael ran around on the path to the far side, laughing as the geese followed him. "Feed the ducklings, mummy!" he called. "While they follow me!"

I did as Michael asked and the ducklings at last got bread to eat. "Lisa and Nicky could give Michael a great start in life," Paul began slowly, almost apologetically.

"I don't want to hear it," I snapped, putting my hands to my ears, touching the rose shaped earring studs I always wore.

It was on my first time to go back to Wellingsley, trying desperately to get Paul first, and then my family, to take Aline's son from me that I'd tried to tell them about Michael. I never, of course, got to say that to either of them.

My grandmother had berated me for my morals on having Michael. A deviate like me shouldn't be allowed to have a child in their care. They should call the authorities, Welfare, whoever, on me. Gran had called me names I'd never thought to hear from a member of my own family when she learned that I'd actually brought 'my son' into the house. Her words for Michael weren't pleasant.

As I strolled with Paul, feeling my dress lightly touch me, my bra pulling tightly, I remembered it all, that attempt to go home. I hadn't even been dressed as a woman. My father, however, had joined

in, his words even more vitriolic than Gran's, until I'd staggered from the room, speechless in anger, only to have Lisa turn her back on me most pointedly and slam her bedroom door in my face. Then, shaken and weeping inside, I'd stumbled down the stairs and into the morning room. The patio doors were open. I'd heard Paul's voice and the laughter of people who'd been at school with me.

*******Discovered by the family*******

Alone, looking after Gran as Richard, I hadn't been as careful as I should have been. Gran was asleep early and everyone was out. Who would have thought that Dad would get into a fight with the bartender and get thrown out of his favorite watering hole? Who'd have thought, for the first time in years, he came to his son's bedroom to complain to him and met in there one very scared, raven-haired beauty wearing one of his wife's dresses.

"Who the bloody hell are you?" Neville Anderson had demanded of me, his son, whom he didn't recognize at first. He did something then that no other man had ever done to me. My father grabbed at my hair as I retreated in fear, heading for the bathroom with a lock on its door. It had only been a dressing up session to prepare for the weekend and Barry in Rotherton again. Barry had persuaded me to go out with him again by offering to pick me up in his car. That was the proper way, I agreed in my girlish voice, for a girl like Julia to travel.

The wig came off in my father's hands as I tried to flee but my father wasn't drunk for once. He sprang after me and flung the door open into the bathroom. I tried to hold it against him, my dress

and my high heels swishing and wobbling. My father was so strong, pushing me out of the way; and there were all my cosmetics revealed as I cowered away from him, the evidence of their use all over my face.

“Richard!” bellowed Mr Anderson, waking up my grandmother who began calling and banging to know what was going on. “What the hell are you doing? Ye gods, my son is an effing pansy!” He swung a haymaker that glanced off my padded shoulder, splitting my flimsy, black dress and then my bra strap was revealed, falling from my, his son’s, shoulder.

“You rotten, little pervert!” Mr Anderson yelled at me. There was the sound in the distance of the front door crashing open. Lisa was calling up the stairs in concern for Dad and what had gone on at the pub.

“You want to see something that will make your stomach turn?” yelled Neville Anderson at the top of his voice to my sister as he dragged me across my bedroom, my feet wobbling in my high heels. My tight, black dress prevented me from striding as my father did to the wide open door.

I was thrown out, across the landing, as my sister came rushing up the stairs. “What is it?” Lisa was screaming. Then she saw me, her brother, in all my face makeup, and in the little black dress, the neckline torn to reveal the black bra I was wearing.

Lisa laughed. She laughed and laughed while I trembled and started to weep. “Oh, Nicky!” she called. “You really do have to come up here and see this. It’s priceless! My precious brother really is a poof. I was so right in what I’ve called him all these years!”

The Honorable Nicholas Fleeting staggered up the stairs. He was so drunk. He looked at me and despite the fact that my wig was gone, he didn't see that it was me who'd fallen in my mother's dress. He immediately and drunkenly offered to help the 'young lady' to her feet.

"This is no young lady!" chortled Lisa, punching her husband in the shoulder. "This is my brother, you idiot!"

"My son, a nancy boy!" sneered my father at me. "Oh, your mother would turn over in her grave, Richard, if she could see you like you are, wearing her dress!"

"Now, you'll let me get rid of them," said Lisa triumphantly to her father. "I told you that all those dresses and that clothing had to go, father. It's that or you'll have to get used to the fashion parade she's been doing for herself every night we're out."

Lisa was laughing as she pointed at me, her brother.

"Why's she want to be a girl?" asked Nicky then, swaying worse than I ever did when I wore a woman's high heels.

"My brother is a tranny!" sang Lisa while our father's face turned purple. "Look at all that eyeliner and mascara running down her face. Oh, I have to get my camera and get a picture of this!"

I did the only thing I could think of. I used the table in the doorway to pull myself back to my feet, kicking off my mother's high heels as my father sneered at me and told me what a thrashing I was going to get. But Nicky suddenly threw up and some of it went onto my father's suit. Lisa wasn't there to see that. She was off getting her camera.

It all enabled me to squirm out of my father's hold on my arm, my bra being pulled right off my chest, and to run into my bedroom. I pushed a chair under the door handle and retreated to the bathroom again. I locked both doors as the empty guest room shared a bathroom with mine.

Gran was screaming for attention. My father was roaring in the hallway at everyone as I tore off my ruined dress, pulled my bra around and unfastened it. I got out of my panties and my garter belt, thankful I hadn't gaffed that night. As my stockings floated down my legs, I was already putting cream on my face to begin the urgent task of removing my makeup.

Lisa, I could hear, was at the other bathroom door, banging on it, as I frantically shovelled the cosmetics and clothing into the suitcase open on the floor by the bath. Naked, my face not properly clean at all, I went back into my room, pushed the suitcase under my bed and put on my own, boy's clothes with frenzied haste.

I was wiping makeup from my face, Richard again, in a brown shirt and pants, even runners on my feet when my father burst the lock to the bathroom and came pounding through the door, into my bedroom, after me.

"Dressing like a man isn't going to save you!" roared my irate father as Lisa came after him, gloating, a camera in her hand.

I kicked the chair away from my door and ran out, right into my grandmother who was coming down the hallway.

"Hold her!" yelled my father. Gran was confused, letting me go and swinging her cane at Lisa. "No, not

her! Her!” my father screamed, pointing to me, darting then down the stairs. “Stop her. Stop Richard!”

“Richard’s a ‘her’ now?” asked Gran Anderson of her son, my father.

“He’s wearing my mother’s dresses and makeup!” answered Lisa, smiling. “I’d say he’s become a she! I have to get a picture of her in drag! This is so rich! My brother is a female impersonator!”

“Well, at least it’s a job he’ll be good at,” said my grandmother as Lisa began to cackle uproariously again.

*****Consequences*****

I snuck back into the house at about three in the morning. My father was snoring on the sofa. Yes, that very sofa where I’d made love with Paul Leisham. Even thinking that made me have a fit of the golly wobbles inside. Well, I called it making love, I thought in a tremble. Paul would call it something else, something horrible. He’d thought he’d degraded himself by what he’d done to me.

Paul didn’t think about me at all, I knew that, and how I felt. Well, I wouldn’t be doing ‘that’ again with him, Paul had made very clear. He said he wasn’t gay. He thought I was, I guessed, and that being gay as I was, dressing as a woman, was completely contemptible.

Dad’s coat was on an armchair, wide open, his wallet showing. Well, he thinks I’m a pervert, I thought bitterly to myself. He’d yelled that he wouldn’t pay for my college that year, not for me to be wandering around town in my dresses, making him and the family look foolish. I took his wallet. I’d re-

turn it later after I'd replaced whatever I'd lost in my flight from the bathroom. I expected my room to be ransacked.

My bedroom, however, was just as I'd left it. I took my suitcase out and tiptoed around the room, picking up a few personal things I'd need. I went into the bathroom. Big mistake. Lisa opened the other door and started screaming at me. How could I be a faggot and a homo and still be a 'she', I wondered in fright at the noise, as I grabbed my suitcase and headed for the stairs.

Dad was waiting for me, awakened by Lisa. He tore my suitcase from me, opened the front door and threw it out onto the driveway. "No son of mine," he began, slapping my face.

"He isn't a son of yours!" called Lisa viciously from the top of the stairs. "She's your faggy daughter, Daddy! Look at her! She's crying like a little girl and have you seen the way she's walking? She wants some big man to take her and stick himself up her ...!"

"Nicky already does that to me enough!" I yelled back at my sister. That shut up both of them for a moment. I dodged away to the kitchen and the other way out of the house.

"Mr Anderson!" came a voice from the top of the other flight of stairs and our housekeeper, Mrs Gregory, looked over the high balcony. "Is everything all right?"

"Yes, Mrs Gregory," said my father, pausing for a moment. So, I was able to get a start on running away. "Sorry. Just a family argument! You know how it is."

The interruption gave me enough time to open the kitchen door and run around the house. I think my father came after me but he couldn't run like me, not even after I'd picked up my precious suitcase and run with it down the lane to the road heading into town.

I raided my bank account and Lisa's and my Dad's. Well, Dad had copies of the credit cards in his wallet to the accounts he gave to all of us. I caught the first bus I could across the Pass and the first train from Rotherton to London. No, I was never going to go home again.

Dad's money didn't last very long. Then, the credit cards didn't work any more. But, by then, I was having a fantastic, girlie time in London. No, I wasn't having sex with anybody. I was living totally, completely, though, as a girl. Dad's money bought me the skirts, blouses and the little, black dresses and stockings that I needed to be the one and only Julia.

I even got a job in a bar as a waitress! I learned how to speak sassily in my little-girl, squeaky voice to every man who approached me. I didn't get mad when drunks kissed me. I learned how to move my glossy lips away so that they only got my soft, rouged cheek.

I was Julia full-time, my voice improving as I practiced all the time. I even got up the nerve to go into women's stores and buy more, fancier skirts, dresses and cosmetics that I had to have as Julia Anderson. No, I didn't change my name. It wasn't that unusual and who would be after me, anyway, in the dives I was hanging out in. I tried to meet other drag queens like me but the men in dresses

who sounded like men and were so much taller than me and really scared me.

“What are you looking at?” growled this big, busty, blonde. “Clear off from here!” If she’d kept her mouth closed, I’d never have thought ‘she’ was a man. I’d have said she was a tall girl.

“I hate the way girls like her look at us,” said her thin, brunette partner in a drawl that could only be a man’s and made my skin crawl.

I had to run away in my high heeled stilettos then, my color high. A smiling guy came after me at the Underground turnstile. “They really do put you off, don’t they, queens like them,” said Danny. “Didn’t you know you were walking through the queer section of London?”

I didn’t dare answer. I just shook my head and ran, as fast as my high heels would carry me. The train would take me back to the little bed-sit I was paying for with Dad’s money.

Danny followed me and got off where I did. He offered to take me to a better pub than the Pink Pagoda. The Pagoda’s advertising had said it was the leading drag club in town. I only saw later on that every drag club did the same. I hesitated as Danny was clearly following what he thought was a girl on her own. I thought of what I had to go ‘home’ to. So, I let Danny take me to his pub. I let him walk me home. I kissed his beery lips on my doorstep and promised to meet him for a date the following weekend.

Danny was only the first of my boy friends. Oh, I found it so much easier to be a girl than a boy. I could be so natural and wear makeup all day long! I brushed my hair into the semblance of a short,

woman's bob. I was taken for a woman everywhere I went and the next six months became the most wonderful of my life.

I spent every penny I could earn on dresses, lingerie, cosmetics, shoes, all with high heels. I let my hair grow and grow, backcombing it outrageously. I read every trashy magazine aimed at teenaged girls. I experimented with every girlish look I read about and every hair style that was proclaimed as femininely beautiful.

I bought and tried different gaffs from the ads in the News of the World, as well as false breasts that looked so good in the new bras I was wearing every day. I even bought beautiful, shapely corsets that gave me an hourglass figure. Wow, my tips skyrocketed in the bar! I even got a cellphone so that my boy friends could call me to take me out on dates.

I loved going to the movies and sitting in the back row and letting my boy friends kiss me. Yes, and fondle my legs and my stockings. I loved that. I felt so much like a girl! I loved them caressing my crossed legs, moving up my thighs as far as they could reach. It wasn't far enough for them, of course, but I had to reward them a little. After all, they paid for me on the dates I went with them. They were pleased with me. Ooo, and I was thrilled with them.

I went out with girls as well. Not as boy friend-girl friend, of course. No, I went out with other girls I worked with to dances and clubs. We joined with crowds of guys and let them buy us drinks and such. It was so nice to meet a guy with a car and let him take me home. I certainly rewarded him well at the end of the evening as the car windows sometimes even fogged up.

I was alive and enjoying myself, broke always,
when my phone rang on a Sunday morning as I was
half-asleep.



“Julia Anderson?” asked a familiar voice. I gasped and gave away that it was me. I recognized the voice on the other end of the line.

“This is your sister, Aline Leisham,” said a laughing voice in my ear. “Since Lowell and I are the grey sheep of the family, and you’re the blackest of black, we thought we should look you up since we’re in town. I’d love to see my new sister in her infamous, little, black dress. Lisa can’t get over your nerve in taking it away with you.”

“Aline,” I said anxiously. “I don’t want to go through this again.”

“You don’t sound like Richard,” said Aline with another giggle. I wished I could do that as she did. “You sound so upper-class. You sound like Lowell’s mother. I guess you’re Julia full-time now, aren’t you?”

“N-No,” I denied it but Aline was having none of my qualms.

“I’ve been given the boot as well from the Anderson family,” said Aline cheerfully. “So I thought we should compare notes and think of ways to torment Lisa and Little Nicky whenever we get them in our clutches.”

I had to laugh at that. I agreed to meet Aline at a local coffee shop. I knew that she wouldn’t recognize me. If I changed my mind in a fit of nerves when I saw her, I could always slope off. But Aline knew me right away.

“But you are so gorgeous, little brother,” Aline said to me, putting out her arms to hug me, my dress swishing about her, my long earrings swinging wildly about my neck. “Your hair is so beautiful and you’ve a figure!”

I was wearing my Merry Widow corset and my red dress. I loved the way it moved about me, how girly it made me feel in my stockings, showing off my black slip with the gauzy frill. I looked so shapely as a girl but Aline was a complete surprise to me. Not just because she accepted me as a woman, her sister, right from the start. Well, there was that but it was the other thing that startled me more. Aline must have been nearly nine months pregnant.

“This is why Lowell and I had to get married,” laughed Aline as I hugged her gingerly. “Oh, what a lovely fragrance you’re wearing, Rich-. Oops, I guess I’ll never be saying that again, will I? Oh, Julia, you are such a marvellous looking girl! I bet you have a permanent boy friend by now!”

“Oh, no,” I lied to her, blushing and shivering as I said that to my sister. I sat daintily at a table with her as Aline admired all that she saw of me in my female clothing. Well, she wasn’t seeing all of it. She wasn’t seeing my panties or my gaff. She wasn’t seeing all my paddings and tapings, my pushes and pullings, as I called them, that made me look a little bit, I’m trying to be modest, like a girl.

Even when Lowell joined us, making me shiver as I saw him as a younger version of Paul, Aline and I got along famously. Lowell had parked the car a long way away. So, my sister and I had a little time to talk while he went to Timbuktu, as Lowell called the place so far away, to bring it back for his wife. He was really nice to me. I could see that he was determined to treat me as a girl and not as Aline’s brother whom he’d known a little.

I shivered and flushed a lot when I felt Lowell looking at me with such interest. I could guess he

was wondering whatever made me do what I was doing. I'd have answered him honestly if he'd asked. I just felt so much better in girl's clothes and being treated as a girl. He treated me differently, more nicely, than he ever had. No, I knew I wasn't a girl but I loved being treated as one. I intended to dress like one for the rest of my life. I had a job as a girl. I was eventually going to find someone who liked men dressed like me and live with him for the rest of my life.

"Come and see me in Maternity," said Aline, hugging me as a familiar MG sports car came tooting up to the front of the café, holding up all of the traffic as a laughing Aline had to squeeze into the car. "No-one knows I'm here or that I'm pregnant!"

"I can't believe that!" I said to her, a car going by honking at me as my dress and my hair blew about me so femininely. Ooo, I loved it.

"Even Paul hasn't been to visit us," Aline had said, Lowell nodding in agreement. "Anyway, this gives us time to have Matilda here and live on, just for each other. We won't have all the snarky people back home saying we had to get married, which we did, when we go back with a kid. But I'd like to have some feminine company for a while."

When Aline put it like that, I had to go. I had to visit her on the maternity ward where all the women were like her. I was humbled and reminded that it wasn't a dress, pretty hair and makeup that made a real woman. It was a very thrilling and educational experience. It wasn't a Matilda that Aline had to show me when I made my visit to her, though. It was Michael Leisham. She and Lowell had a son.

I actually stayed with them in their little flat for a few weeks, helping out Aline and learning much more than I ever wanted to know about how a woman's body works and how a woman has to recover from childbirth. I learned how to take care of a little baby.

It really made Aline laugh when Michael would snuggle into me when I got him ready for feeding. Poor Michael would try to suckle from me.

"Poor kid," I said with the giggle I'd learned from my sister, as I passed him to Aline. She opened her maternity bra and breastfed an angry little man, angry that I hadn't done that for him.

"Your boy friends must say the same thing about themselves after they've rolled around on you, Julia," said my sister who would broach any subject with me. "That's one easy thing to get fixed, you know. Almost every woman in Wellingsley above a certain income has had breast augmentation. You should do it, as well."

"I couldn't." I told her, flushing and thinking how wonderful it would be to have breasts like Aline's and have a baby suckling from me as Michael was from her.

"I'll give you the name of a surgeon who does breast implants," said Aline, sitting back comfortably in her rocking chair as Michael noisily smacked his lips as he enjoyed his meal.

"I wouldn't have the money anyway," I told her lightly, taking off her white, frilly apron and smoothing down my dark green, straight skirt. With that and my white, puff-sleeved blouse, I was ready to go on to work when I left Aline and her baby boy.

“You will make sure that you can have the weekend after next off, won’t you?” asked Aline anxiously. “Lowell has a ride for an important trainer and he expects to win. If you like, I’ll put every penny you have on Street Fighter III. He’s a dead cert! Lowell will get lots of rides afterwards, the trainer told him, if he brings this ride home! Then you can afford girlie titties and a real, femmy tush!”

“Aline, I have no money to risk,” I began but Aline thought I was just being silly. It was a dead cert, she said gaily. She was going to be there to see Lowell win. My proper, girlish figure was a sure thing for this year, I had it promised to me, as I trembled and joined in with her on all the things I’d do when I had breasts. Wearing and not wearing a bikini top had us both giggling like schoolgirls as we talked about how men would love me without a bra anyway.

“And I’m going to be wearing Mom’s tatty, black dress,” Aline laughed at me. She’d brought Michael round to my bed-sit, hated it, but loved all the dresses and lingerie I’d acquired.

“But where do you keep your male clothes?” Aline had asked me as she took out Mom’s black dress and held it against her receding stomach.

“What male clothes?” I asked her. Aline had hooted at me, hugged me and kissed me as we danced around my little bed-sit.

“Now, I really have a sister,” Aline beamed at me. “Not a ragbag like Lisa and St Nick. Oh, when this kid sleeps through the night, and I can afford a babysitter instead of imposing on you, we are going to troll our way through the handsomest, sexiest men in London! You, Julia, my lovely sister, are go-

ing to be a sensation with all the men's hearts you'll break. Oh, we have to win this race for you. If you can't afford them, I'm going to give you real breasts for Christmas!"

I didn't doubt that Aline meant what she said. It had been a fabulous three months as a sister. I loved my nephew. I wasn't put out at all by being asked to give up a weekend to help my sister and her husband get ahead.

Aline looked so good, her figure almost back to what it had been, as she opened the door to her apartment and let me in. I brought a suitcase with me with the clothing I was going to wear overnight, my nightie and so on, even the new dress I'd splurged on, unable to resist its frills and ruffles.

"Not a male thing in sight, not even a razor," said Aline with a laugh as she looked through my case before taking me into her bedroom where Michael was asleep in his crib.

"I'm so glad you're here, Julia," said Aline as she got her coat. Lowell helped her to put it on. "We'll see Paul at the races and we've decided to tell him about Michael. Michael should be no trouble as he knows you so well. I was saying to Lowell that we must, in our will, when we make one, specify that if anything happens to us, ever, it is you who'll be Michael's guardian and not anyone on my side of the family."

"There's Paul ..." I began but Lowell snorted at that as Aline looked lovingly at her husband.

"He hasn't been nice to Lowell," Aline said. "He ordered Lowell to divorce me the last time they spoke on the phone. He said to do it before Lowell got me pregnant. Little did he know!"

I waved the pair of them off in the MG; and that was the last time that I saw them alive.

I didn't understand why they didn't even call me from the racetrack as Aline had said she would. I put on the television very late at night and listened and watched the race results. Street Fighter III had won at very good odds by three lengths. I was so pleased but then my world was shattered as the race announcer talked about the tragic accident that had killed the rider of Street Fighter, and his lovely wife.

"Lowell Leisham was an upcoming rider with a bright future ..." the eulogy went on and I sat there, too stunned to even cry for my sister as I recalled her prophetic words that I knew I couldn't live by.

*******You can go home again*******

I found a pair of jeans in Aline's cupboard that fitted me. They were women's jeans. I'd no money to be able to afford anything else. I found a t-shirt top. I scrubbed my hands and face and cleaned my nails so that I looked as masculine as I could. I'd lost so much weight. I'd been shaping myself with corsets, too, for so long that I didn't look like any kind of man.

I thought about what I had to do, return Michael to the people who could afford to raise him. I cut my hair. Well, I cut it a little. I plastered it with gel and thought that I looked a little like me, Richard Anderson.

I carried Michael and my pack for him onto the train for Wellingsley. I was never so embarrassed in all my life when a young man called me 'Miss' and stood up in a railway carriage. He smiled as he gave

room for Michael and me. An older woman started cooing over Michael as well. Michael always was such a cute, alert baby. He was soon gurgling and giggling at every one.

“How old is your little boy?” asked an older woman, not batting a hair when I answered unwittingly in my Julia voice.

“I hope your husband or boy friend,” said the woman, she’d noticed my ring finger, I think, “is waiting to help you with this little cutie. I doubt he’s sleeping through the night yet, is he?”

I had to listen to all the women in the carriage then telling me all about their pregnancies and asking me about mine. They totally ignored how I was dressed and how I’d combed my hair. They treated me exactly as if I was a young mother on a trip with her baby to visit her mother and father. I shouldn’t have agreed with that so quickly.

I was flustered, though, when I got off the train in Wellingsley and took a cab out to Longview, the estate where Paul and his parents lived.

“None of them are here,” said the haughty butler when I persisted in asking to speak to one of them. “There’s been a death in the family, miss. It would be best if you did not pester the family at this moment in time.” He’d almost sneered at Michael who was awake by then and who wanted to be fed. I’d thought that I’d heat his milk bottle at the Leishams before I handed him over but the door slammed on me.

I’d no more money for a taxi. I needed to feed Michael, change him and find someone to take him from me. I turned and saw Paul’s familiar, shiny Rolls in the driveway. I saw this girl stepping away

from a doorway. It took me a while to recognize that 'she', in the reflection, was me, in Aline's jeans.

Somehow, my hair hadn't stayed in place. It was thick and dark and fluffed out around my head. I had no makeup on my face but that didn't matter. My face had a female cast to it, my lips seeming fuller than I recalled, and so feminine. My eyelashes were dark and curled and my eyebrows were thin and arched like a woman's. My dark jacket complemented the slender legs of my jeans, the buttons tenting over my chest as the strap of my pack pushed on it.

I went across the fields of Longview, Michael agitating, until I came out at the stile which gave me access to the paths up to Seymour Hall.

Mrs Gregory was shocked to see me as I was. She was stunned to see the baby I had with me but she did help me to heat his milk while I changed Michael. I learned that everyone, even my grandmother, was in the house and wouldn't they be surprised to see me, and my baby.

"So the queen returns," sneered Lisa as I went into the living room to face the music.

"What the hell are you doing here?" asked my father.

"I think she's really cute," said Nicky Fleeting.

"Neville, you're not going to allow that degenerate in your house, are you?" snapped my grandmother, slamming on the floor with her walking stick.

"You don't understand," I said, spreading out my hands to show that I didn't want to argue. "Aline and Lowell ..."

“How dare you!” screamed Lisa. My father moved threateningly towards me as well. “Don’t you dare come in here and say anything about your sister. She was twice the woman you are, Pansy Potter!”

“I was looking after Aline’s flat when she was killed,” I began. The three of them, Nicky just leaning back in his armchair and grinning at me, all began to berate me at the same time. They’d had the funeral just a week before and I, the deviate son, they proclaimed, hadn’t dared to show up.

Well, I didn’t want the scene I knew would take place just as it did, right then and there in my home. I was a traitor and a pervert, I heard. I couldn’t even come to my own sister’s funeral. What a disgrace I was to the family. Not that they wanted me there or even here. I should be in jail for what I’d done with the Dad’s credit cards!

“Call the police on her!” Lisa urged my father. “She’s not even sorry.”

My father actually stepped over to the phone before stopping and shaking his head. “Let’s keep this, this shame in the family,” he sneered at me. “What have you come back for, Richard?” Lisa huffed when Dad used by proper name to me. “I’ve changed my will,” he went on smugly. “You get nothing now after what you did here, wearing your mother’s dress like that.”

“There was nothing for Aline, either,” I retorted. “We laughed about how petty you all are!”

My father slammed the phone against the wall and stalked across the room to me just as Mrs Gregory entered with a squawking baby and a heated bottle. “What the hell is that?” my father thundered.

“It’s a baby,” I said to him, taking Michael from a very formal Mrs Gregory. “I’ve been looking after him because his mother ...” I was going to say, is dead and your grandson, Dad, needs to have a home but I couldn’t get it out.

“So you’ve got yourself a little bastard,” sneered my grandmother. Lisa laughed and clapped her hands in delight at Gran’s description of Michael.

“No,” I began.

“Just get out of here and take your little bastard with you,” fumed my father. “Don’t think for one second that you’re going to return here and bring that thing into my house.”

What a time it was for Paul Leisham to make his entry with a girl on either arm. He came through the gardens and so didn’t see me, right away, through the open French windows.

“You’ll never guess what my nancy brother has done now,” said Lisa dancing out to talk to him. I saw Paul in profile through the curtained windows. He did look rather haggard but so he should after just burying his brother. “He’s brought his little bastard here to the house. Who’d have thought a queen like him could have fathered a child! What kind of woman would let him into her bed?”

That was when Paul cracked jokes about me, Queen Julia, and about bastards in general. “I should tell you all about Lisa’s nancy brother, shouldn’t I?” Paul said as well to the girls he was with. “He even tried it on with me once. I’m not surprised at all that a bastard like him, she couldn’t even come to the funeral in a little, black dress, could she, has a little bastard of her own! I’d expect it of a queen like her!”

That was when I could stand it all no longer. I turned and hustled Michael to the kitchen. I picked up my bag as Mrs Gregory stared at me, not saying a word, just looking so superior. I went the same route that I had once before, past the sparkling Rolls and the driver, down the long driveway and lane to the bus stop.

“Can I help you, miss?” asked the chauffeur, the only kind words I’d heard all day.

It was hot as I tried to feed Michael. He was annoyed as I had to stop holding the bottle to him as a bus came. He was crying as I tried to settle him for the ride into town.

“You should put him on your teet,” said an old woman. Her friends about her nodded at me. “Nothing soothes a baby quicker than his mother’s teet.”

I colored at that as I tried to manage my pack, Michael, and ignore the remarks directed at me. I looked up at the mirror in the bus. This fresh-faced, flushed girl looked down at me. Oh, no wonder they all thought I was a girl, a mother, I thought, as I stared at my reflection.

I had to wait at the railway station for an hour. Michael finally eased off to sleep as I made my second escape from Wellingsley, vowing this time never to return. Well, I broke that promise later but I did promise myself to carry out Aline’s wishes. I’d be the one to look out for her son. It seemed that I was after all the only one who loved him in any way at all.

*****end of first of two parts*****