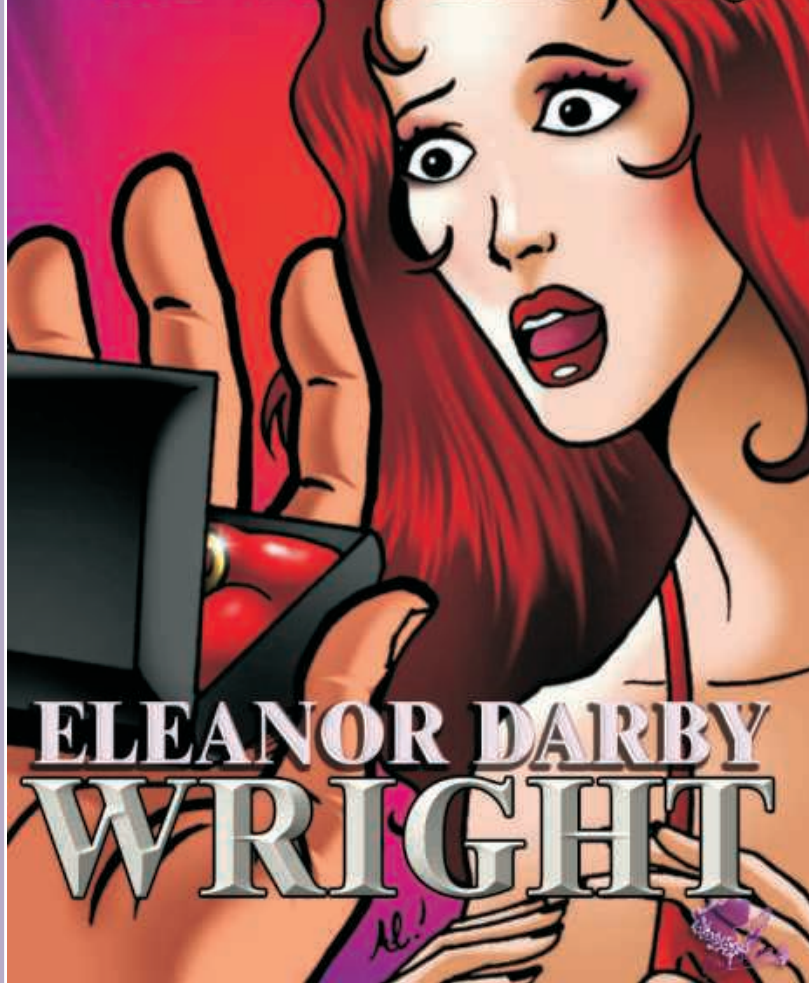


Inside & Out A Woman 2



ELEANOR DARBY
WRIGHT

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INSIDE AND OUT – A WOMAN 2

by Eleanor Darby Wright

*******The third time is the cure*******

When my sister Lisa learned, two years after she'd scorned me, that she was barren and would never have children of her own, I, her transvestite brother, was summoned back to Seymour Hall. All was forgiven, the letter assured me. The Andersons were also willing to forget that they'd ever had a brother and a son in the family at all.

They'd welcome me as their new daughter and new sister, Julia. I was, since Aline was dead, and Lisa barren, the only one with a child in the family. There was even money for a train ticket home in the letter I received. I thought about all the financial

strain I was under and how I was depriving Michael of the childhood he should have had. I made the awful decision to try again to go home.

I went to Wellingsley by train with Michael. He was walking by then. Of course, there was no car to meet me at the station. That should have warned me of the reception I'd receive but there were buses which I'd always used before.

I made no attempt to be masculine any more. I was Julia Anderson. I dressed like a woman. I wore a pretty blouse and a straight, black skirt that I wore in my job as a waitress. I wore the feminine underwear I always wore, stockings, garter belt, a little slip, a padded bra and, of course, a tight gaff. I wore lipstick and a little eye makeup with the feminine cologne I always used.

At the Hall, I had to introduce myself to an astounded Mrs Gregory, still the housekeeper. I was brought right away to see my grandmother. "I've told the others to treat you as a woman," were the first words out of her mouth, making me squirm, "and not as a 'drag queen' that you are!"

Despite the fact that I'd been invited home by Gran herself, I was astounded at her casual insult. She launched into a tirade about Lisa's problems. It seemed, weirdly, that it was all my fault in Gran's twisted mind!

"If you hadn't gone up to London and slept around until you got some girl pregnant," Gran told me as I shivered at the story that they'd made up about me, "such a terrible thing to do, but what could we expect from, from a person like you?" Gran went on. "Look what you brought on the family! We're all being punished for what you've done!"

“I, I didn’t come back,” to hear nonsense like that, I wanted to say, but Gran wasn’t listening to me at all.

“But at least, now, you can put it right,” Gran confided in me. “Lisa will never conceive and we must have an heir to the Hall.” I was aghast at the way she said it, not trying to sugarcoat the surrender of Michael, whom she thought of as my child, to my sister.

“You’ll both be much better off,” she went on, Gran’s imperious command meant to be obeyed. “You’re no mother, we all know that. Hand your son over to Lisa. Nicky and Lisa will raise him as theirs!” The way that my grandmother spoke to me, it was all a confirmed fact that my sister and her husband wanted to raise Michael. Two years before, I would have agreed with her that I was an unfit mother for Michael. And the last two years had been so hard on me ...

Gran went on that I shouldn’t say anything to Michael, either, as he would be called Nicholas from now on and inherit everything in due course. I could have part of my inheritance back, if I didn’t make any problems for Lisa. Gran would make sure my father did that for me. I could train then for any occupation I really wanted.

“We heard that you do make a good female impersonator,” said Gran with a smirk, her audacity in saying that taking my breath away. I staggered out of Gran’s room with the old woman bellowing after me, calling for Richard, me, to come back. I hadn’t been called Richard in two years! Since I was in my prettiest, summer-white, puffed sleeve blouse and my short, mid-thigh skirt and dark stockings, my

hair now so long, my makeup so carefully and femininely done, calling me Richard was really hurtful.

I was astounded to discover that Lisa, Nicky and our father all thought that it was a fait accompli that I was going to hand Michael over to the family. The men were stunned to see me as the woman I'd become. They didn't know how to greet me. They couldn't ignore my womanliness as Gran had. I'm sure none would have called me Richard any more. Lisa, however, ignored me and was already instructing Michael in the living room, to my horror, that his name was really Nicholas. He was to call her 'Mama' from now on.

I did the only thing that I could. I ran to my son, hugging him as I cried. While my family looked on, stupefied by the unknown woman whom they saw, but must have known was me, their Richard, I gathered my son in my arms. We had run out of Seymour Hall for what, I had vowed most vehemently, was the last time. I'd kept to that vow.

*******Here and now*******

The accusatory letters from my grandmother and Lisa, they must have been getting my address from someone in Welfare, called me ungrateful and worse. Their opinions of me, so baldly stated, what they said about me as a pervert in women's clothes, made me move to hide from them. I couldn't believe that they'd think I'd ever give Michael up to people who were so spiteful to me.

I knew that my grandmother was ill and trying to arrange the future before she died. The first letter I received, after I'd stormed off that second time with Michael, had offered me money to give up my son to

become the second Nicholas. I'd torn it up in a rage right away. I hadn't read anything from my family since.

I'd tried to keep Welfare from knowing where I was living but the cheapest of housing I was able to qualify for as a single mother was too tempting. I could put up with the letters over the years for that. I'd scrawl, 'Not known at this address', and dump the letters in different mailboxes, away from the cheap bed-sit. Lately, I tore up anything from an Anderson.

Now, here was Paul, Paul of all people, obviously enlisted by my family to persuade me to give up Michael. Did they know, I wondered in agony, how I'd once surrendered, as a girl, to him, to Paul? Surely, he'd never told, as I hadn't, ever. I never would.

Sitting in the park with Paul so close beside me, the tension rose between us. Tears blinded my eyes with all the frustration I felt as I sat in my brownish shirt-dress that I'd just worn to work in the shop. I was going to tell him in no uncertain terms to clear off but then heard Michael's cry of fright. He'd emptied his bag of crumbs to feed the birds but a big gander was still stalking him, pecking at his coat as Michael ran around the far side of the boating pond we'd stopped at in the park.

Paul was quicker than me. He ran forward, ignoring the mud and the puddles and the bird slime. His yell drove the gander off. He scooped up my son and brought him back to me, not even looking at his spattered suit and ruined shoes.

"Mummy," Michael cried, putting his arms out to me. I took him right away, feeling his heart beating wildly and sensing his shock as I held him to me.

“It’s all right, Michael,” I whispered to him, kissing his ear. “It’s all right. That goose was very scary. He scared me.”

I felt him relax. I knelt so that his feet came back onto the path. He held onto me for a moment before raising his head. He looked at Paul, standing there, looking down at him, frowning. “He wasn’t scared,” Michael said in surprise.

“No,” I agreed. “We were lucky Mr Leisham was with us, weren’t we?”

“For goodness’ sake, Julia,” Paul growled. “Mr Leisham is my father!”

I nodded nervously, stroking Michael’s hair. “Yes, you’re right,” I said. “Thank you so much, P-Paul, for, for helping us, and, and ruining your good shoes.”

That took Michael’s attention. “Oh, yuck,” he said, pulling a face as he looked at Paul’s oxfords.

Paul looked down and suddenly laughed, his eyes so bright and so blue that I felt a wrench of my heartstrings just looking at him.

“Yucky indeed,” Paul said. He put out a hand. “And I think we are going to get rained on, too!”

We were. The umbrellas kept most of the rain off but our shoes were soaked by the time we got back to the little flat. Michael and I were laughing as we ran up the stairs, two at a time. I let Michael win the race to the front door as usual. I looked back at Paul, coming up the steps behind us onto the landing, and was frightened by the grim look on his face as he studied the graffiti, even on the roof above our heads.

Well, he should try being a single mother with no skills and living on Welfare, handouts and menial jobs, I thought. I had an image of him then in a dress and wig like the one I used to wear, trying to be nice to the clowns in the bars where I'd been a waitress. No, he didn't have the legs for it, I thought cynically. He'd never have survived. That was all I could claim for my son, I never called him my nephew, and me. We'd survived.

Paul followed us in and took off his wet shoes by the door. He even hung up his coat over Michael's. Why don't you just go? I thought at him. I think that he got the message for he shook his head at me. It seemed that he must have more to say to me in private and not have Michael overhear. Michael had already disappeared into the bathroom to check the hot water tank to see if there was enough hot water for a bath.

"You shouldn't be in a place like this," said Paul Leisham angrily as I put on the kettle for tea.

"The water's hot, Mum," said Michael cheerfully from the bathroom door, saving me from any bitter rejoinder I might want to make.

I busied myself with the nightly rituals, leaving Paul to make his own tea. I bathed Michael, who didn't mind me still being with him in the room, though I was waiting for that to change. He played with his boats for a while. I washed his hair and, on taking him out, bundled him up and tickled him, forgetting Paul was there as I carried my giggling son into the sleeping area we shared.

After Michael changed into his pyjamas, we went to the kitchen table so that he could have his snack of ginger snaps and milk. Then it was cleaning teeth

and to bed and the reading of a story. I left on the side light as usual, before pulling the curtain across to give Michael his privacy, and went back into the kitchen area, a feeling of doom awaiting me as I saw Paul's face, glaring at me.

"You're very good with him," said Paul quietly, making an effort to be sociable. "What do you do with him when you're working?"

"We have a good minder," I said shortly, finding an unchipped mug and pouring myself a warm cup of tea.

"Lisa's offer of raising him was a non-starter, wasn't it?" Paul stated as he stared at me, at my wind-blown hair and mussed up face. I didn't wear much makeup these days. It was expensive and one item I didn't really need. I didn't want to be noticed as a female.

I took a sip of the tea and looked at Paul, afraid to answer that back. I didn't want to start a fight with Michael trying to sleep across the room.

"Say what you've come for and then go," I finally said through clenched teeth. Paul was looking at me so funnily. Almost as if he was admiring me. But I'd seen that look before, opened up to it, and look where I'd ended up. Besides, he'd had girls with him, hadn't he, just days after his brother's funeral, when he laughed about me, 'Queen Julia'. I doubted that he lacked for female company in the five years since I'd really known him. But it was amazing how we talked, and didn't talk, just as if the last conversation we'd had, hadn't ended. We were picking it up from where we'd left off.

Paul thought about it for a long moment, staring at me as I sat at the table, feeling more and more

uncomfortable, not joining him on the sofa. "I was your first, wasn't I?" he said, his face becoming a mask. "I drove you to this, living as a woman."

I could feel my hands starting to tremble. I took a firm grasp on my mug. I looked down at the table, not daring to look at him. "Everything I've done," I murmured to him. "I've done because I wanted to do it." He might read too much in my eyes if I looked at him and so I didn't look up. Naturally, my hair fell across my face. I had to push it away, my hands shaking, finally having to lift my head.

"Where's Michael's mother?" Paul asked me bluntly. "Or is there someone else? Someone who'd like to be his father, perhaps?"

"No-one else," I said, ignoring the blatant enquiry, finally finding my voice, still refusing to look at him. "Michael's mother, well, that's old news, isn't it? Don't feel sorry or blame yourself for what's happened to me, Paul. I didn't run off to the first girl I met after you had me to prove I was a man like you. I didn't." Yes, that snapped his head back.

"I made my own mistakes," I went on huskily, "because it seemed like the best thing to do at the time. Now I have to live with them. This place may not seem like much to you but it's better than the last place we lived in. And I can take Michael with me to the Emporium on days when we're not so busy. He'll be in school soon. So what do you want from me?"

"You can't go on living here," said Paul suddenly, forcefully. "I won't have it. It's not right. Your family ..." His voice was filled with derision and so I cut him off before that began again.

“I have no family,” I said, looking up at him, surprised again by the anger in his face. “They once said I was never to come back. I should have believed them when they said it the first time, five years ago.”

“Is it really that long?” said Paul, staring at me. “Oh, I suppose it is. The boy’s grown, hasn’t he? He’s yours as well, isn’t he? Your family thinks that blood is thicker than water, Julia,” Paul added harshly but he must have seen by my expression that I wasn’t convinced at all. “They’ve changed their minds.”

“Lisa wants my son,” I replied, my own temper rising. “My grandmother needs someone to harangue. Aline’s dead and the others want no part of listening to Gran going on about her femmy grandson.”

“No,” Paul agreed, after a definite wince. That barb got home, I thought mockingly. He sighed suddenly and looked so distraught, I thought, as I glanced at him. “Aline and Lowell,” he said then. “But I can’t talk about them or I’ll choke up. Such a waste, such a waste. And you couldn’t even come to their funerals?”

“For the scene that there’d have been if I arrived like this?” I asked him, letting my long brown dress swirl about my crossed, stockinged legs. At least, Paul nodded at that. He seemed not to remember how he’d sneered about the ‘nancy’ brother who couldn’t even put on a black dress and come to his sister’s funeral.

“You had such a happy home when your mother was alive. I used to enjoy the company of you and your sisters so much,” said Paul unexpectedly. “You

were always lively and bratty, teasing your sisters, just as you were in there bathing Michael. It's torture to go over to Seymour Hall these days."

"Then don't," I said, turning to the little sink with my empty mug so that he wouldn't see the tears in my eyes that had come unbidden at the mention of my mother.

Paul stood and came over to me. "You're crying!" he said in astonishment, reaching out and putting his hand on my head so that he could turn me and see my face.

"I miss my m-mother," I said, keeping my voice low. I moved out of Paul's grasp and towards the front door. He stood in the little kitchen, hands on his hips. He'd loosened his tie. In his soft, white shirt, he looked like an ad out of a magazine for men's shirts.

"Call your driver," I said curtly. "You have plenty to tell them at the Hall now. You can also tell them I've moved, too, and left no forwarding address."

Paul came forward and took me by the shoulders, spinning me to face him. "No, you don't," he said, steely-eyed. "I had a hard enough time as it was finding you here. Aline and Lowell, we're linked. You're my, my, in-law." He couldn't decide on brother or sister, I noted with a shiver of understanding. "You're not getting away from me again so easily."

I felt the door behind me. I was about to protest and tell him he'd never find me again, after I changed my name, when he suddenly lowered his head and kissed me. It was as if I'd never stopped kissing him the first time. His lips were warm. I felt my body catch fire and respond with a longing that

I'd thought long since dead. No other man who'd kissed me had ever made me feel so alive, so electrically charged, so wanting to be kissed more and more.

I quivered, my hands trapped, as his mouth moved on mine. I felt Paul's hands slide down my arms, taking me about the waist, pulling me to him. Quite unresisting, I let him. I was stuck to him, my arms raised about him as his were about me, lost in the frightening enchantment of the kiss, knowing full well that, just like the first time, I wouldn't be able to stop with a kiss. I felt so wonderfully fulfilled that I'd have let him have his way with me again without another thought. The woman inside me soared at his touch. Julia wanted her man so badly, her mouth taking every ounce of satisfaction that she, me, could, from kissing him.

Paul broke it off, hugging my trembling body to his soft shirt. It probably cost as much as half my entire wardrobe, I thought inconsequentially. I struggled to gain control of my reeling senses. That was impossibly hard with Paul pressed up against me, my skin on fire to his every touch.

"I had to do that," Paul said thickly, smoothing my thick hair back from my ear, touching my little earrings with a hard, manly finger. "From the moment I saw you in that grotty store, I wanted to do that just like I did that first time after Rotherton. You should know, shouldn't you, as all evening, you've been taunting me."

Taunting him? I wasn't, I thought in hot denial, trying to push him away even though I really wanted him to take me again, crush me to him, and say what he'd never said to me, the first time he'd had me, that I was the woman he loved. I shook in ag-

ony. I couldn't put up with this again, I thought, as reason returned. I was furious then with him at the idea that it was all my fault once again for tempting him. It couldn't be my fault, as this time, when he'd kissed me, he'd known this time I wasn't a woman. Yet, I felt so delirious with other emotions, wanting him so fiercely, my face on fire where his lips had touched me.

"Your hair is so lovely," Paul murmured, stroking my long, wind-blown hair. "And everything you wear, the way you stand. You know the effect you have on me. I can't look at an auburn-haired girl without thinking of you."

I found the strength and pushed him away. "I'll have it all c-cut off tomorrow," I stammered in distress at the way he was softly seducing me, just like the last time, five years before. "I don't want to kn-know that I'm your type! You're not m-mine any more!"

I pushed his hands off me and scampered away from him in my panic, putting the sofa between us.

"I didn't mean any insult," Paul began, frowning at me.

"I don't care," I hissed at him, looking towards the curtain, hoping that Michael hadn't awakened, to lie there, listening to us. "I really don't care. Go somewhere else for an easy lay tonight, Paul! The phone book is full of escort agencies!"

His face darkened at that vicious shot, but I was so frightened of what I'd do if he just touched me, kissed me again, pulled me down to the sofa with him. Just as I thought that, Paul vaulted the sofa easily and grabbed me. "Why you little minx!" he

snarled at me. "You think I came here just for, for sex with you?"

I freed one hand. "Shush," I whispered, glancing again desperately to where Michael slept. Wasn't it obvious? Now that he'd kissed me and felt my reaction? Paul must know I'd let him make love to me. He could feel me trembling. He must be able to sense it as I did. Once our mouths met again ... I'd felt it in him, too. He was as aroused, as aware, as I was, I was certain. He was aroused with me just as he'd been when he thought I was a woman, just as he had been when he kissed me in the garden just before I left. Oh no, Paul, I thought savagely, horribly. You haven't got this tranny out of your system yet, have you?

Then, the thought came to me that that was why Paul was really here, to bury all his demons in having me as he had once before.

"We can't do it here! Michael!" I gasped as Paul held me so tightly, his eyes boring into mine.

With an oath, Paul finally let me go. As I reeled across the room, he turned on his heel, seized his coat and charged out of the door. I was shaking as I went and locked it.

I leaned against the locked door for quite a while as my body tried to regain control of itself. My mind tried to fight the aroused, unruly emotions running through me. He'd gone. Paul had been so angry because I'd recognized what he was after from me. If I hadn't had Michael across the room, if I'd been living alone, I'd have said nothing and given in to him so easily. I surrendered for a moment to the ecstatic feeling that ran through me, betraying me, as I thought of making love to him all night, of his being

there with me in the morning. Of me, being Paul's woman once and for all.

I took a long time in the bathroom, washing my face and body. I could really only afford one bath a day. I'd often follow Michael into the warm water while he watched television or read in bed. But I couldn't have done that with Paul there. A kettle of hot water was enough to wash my unruly hair.

I pushed the auburn locks back and readied for bed by braiding the longer strands. I was slimmer than I'd ever been in my life, my breasts of course non-existent. I wasn't the curvaceous girl I was when I padded myself, I thought gloomily, wondering what Paul could possibly see in me. To my own eyes, I was gaunt in comparison to what I remembered, thinner even than Aline in the photos I had of her from the newspapers.

I looked even younger than I had when I'd left school, I thought gloomily, as I tied off my braids and blew my bangs away from forehead. Yes, my lips were still full, girlish really. I sort of held them that way to make them appear fuller. Yes, my skin was pale and girlishly soft, but I did cream and moisturize all the time. My eyebrows and eyelashes were femininely shaped. Yes, I suppose I was feminine enough, I thought with a shiver. That woman inside me was still there, encouraging me to do all the things that 'she' wanted to do. And being compelled to lie and pretend to all the authorities that I was Michael's mother was conditioning me into becoming a woman like everyone else who looked at me saw in me.

My hair needed more care, proper styling, I thought, as I looked at the two pigtails I had braided for sleeping. The damp weather always made the

long hair I loved, curl more and tangle so much about my face. I grimaced at what I'd have called my small features, my thin nose and my little chin. Oh, nothing was wrong with my looks, I thought, seeing light freckles on my nose that a little foundation would take care of.

Smiling and with makeup, I could be quite striking, I'd once thought. But I didn't want that any more. Look where that had got me. I was an unmarried mother now, I thought starkly. I couldn't afford costly morals. Paul hadn't seemed to think so. I wondered angrily if he'd have given me something, money, if he'd slept with me.

When I got into bed, my mood was dark but Michael sighed and jabbered on, talking to himself in his sleep. A lump came to my throat. Paul may not know it but I was going to have to move soon anyway and not because of him. My son needed a room of his own. I smiled and left the light on and just looked at him, my wonderful son, a gift from Aline and Lowell, Paul's brother, if he had but known. Worth any abuse I had to take from his uncle, I thought, as I finally dozed off, dreaming fitfully all night of making love time and again to a smiling, amused Paul Leisham.

*******Back to the present*******

Somehow, I got through the next day. Michael had wanted to talk about Paul and his ruined shoes at breakfast. I said that Paul had had to go and, No, I was not thinking of visiting my family ever again. I got him dressed and on the bus and so to Jean Leonard's.

“I hope he comes back,” said Michael as he went up the walk to a smiling, welcoming Jean. “I liked him.”

That tore at me more than anything else Michael could have said. I’d agonized over telling Paul so often that he was an uncle. I ought to, my conscience told me. It wasn’t right that he, Lowell’s brother, shouldn’t know. The authorities had pushed me to tell them who Michael’s father was. They’d wanted to go after him to make him pay support for my son.

I could just imagine Paul’s fury when there was a knock on his door and he was told that he had a son, which he would have known was impossible. He’d have been told that I was the mother as well. I couldn’t bear to have him told like that.

Yes, once, I’d said that Paul was the father of my child but he wouldn’t acknowledge it. I’d decided by then to keep Michael as mine. The deception had worked, too well. Everyone assumed that the baby I cradled and fed was mine. They were so helpful in registering his birth for me with Julia Anderson as Michael Anderson’s mother and Paul Leisham, address unknown, as the father. Well, I had to do that much for my son, didn’t I? What would have become of him if I’d been in an accident like my sister and Paul’s brother?

It would have been unbearable, however, to face Paul and his anger. To hear once more what he thought of me. Better to be mute than give away who he really was and where he lived. I’d used up my savings and applied for financial help but that had backfired. My family had been notified of my request for Welfare and been asked to list Julia Anderson’s assets.

My case worker tried to make me feel guilty about what I was depriving Michael of, financial aid from his unknown father. I mumbled that it was just a one night stand, a student, Paul, I barely knew. I'd encouraged the many case workers I had to think that I'd known a number of guys and so I really couldn't be sure. I thought it was Paul, the student, but it might have been a lot of other guys. I mixed up his birth date on several forms deliberately. Paul, of course, if he'd been contacted, would have known that Michael couldn't be his. Not with me as his mother.

I was on tenterhooks when Paul had showed up because I was thinking that some enterprising social worker had tracked me back to Wellingsley and found Paul Leisham.

That next day, Mr Nazir was kind when I got to work. He wanted to know about the rich man who'd come to the store but didn't press it. He was a private man himself and respected my privacy. I found work to do when we were slack, restocking the shelves, until they bulged. I'd emptied one rack completely from the storeroom.

The work was mind-numbing. I didn't have to think about what I'd done in the past or the present, what I might have done, what I should have done. But at lunch, a quick sandwich at the counter, as I served the school kids who crowded in for junk food, I realized that I'd ducked, again, the unpleasant decision of confronting Paul about his nephew, my son.

I'd heard Paul speaking of me to those women in the garden. I should have confronted him then about what he'd said about me and told him about Aline and Lowell.

I drove the image and the words from my mind. A little grey-haired lady wanted to know where the canned peaches were. I was glad to help her with that and to find other items, advising which were to be on sale at the weekend.

I was happy to close up at last, the receipts in my purse, heading off to the bank as usual. It was good to have a routine, I thought miserably, dropping the money off in the night safe. It helped to get through bleak days like today.

I wouldn't think of how Paul had felt in my arms as he kissed me. Had he felt what I had?

I'd worn no makeup to work, knowing I looked like a teenager again in a short, straight skirt, my legs on show. But, really, I didn't want the attention of any man now. I did want to feel the woman inside me just a little more, however, to reassure myself I was still doing the right thing by Aline's son.

"You look washed out, love," said Jean Leonard, concerned for me. "Tough day?"

I nodded and took Michael in hand. My hair was held back in a low pony tail, by several elastic bands. That only emphasized my facial features and the dark shadows about my eyes.

"Be better tomorrow," I said. "See you at eleven!"

On weekends, I worked less hours. The family was all available, cousins and their grown up children needing part-time jobs, getting the till wrong and not knowing where everything was. Mr. Nazir opened early and was always glad to see me arrive at noon to let three of his nieces and nephews have their break for lunch.

One of his sisters had once rudely asked, in my hearing, intending the putdown I knew, why Nazir would employ such a girl as me instead of family. All hired help ever did was pilfer from the till. I'd looked at him then, and never seen Mr Nazir so angry.

"Julia does the work of three of my lazy relatives," Mr Nazir had snapped, "and the only time the till is wrong is when I let your sons do the check-out."

It was just after that, that Mr Nazir asked me take the money to the bank, his outraged sister resorting to complaints in her own language. I'd no doubt that I was not being described in flattering terms by the older, striking woman, always so elegantly dressed, never in an apron and drab dress as I usually wore.

I had a bag of groceries, bacon and eggs for the late breakfast we'd have on Saturday, after Michael's early morning swimming lesson at the local baths, when I went to pick him up. Michael looked for the chocolate bars on the almost empty bus. He knew that it was treat day and wasn't disappointed in his search.

It was dry on the streets despite the rain of the day before. We tried the Don't-Step-on-a-Crack Game. Michael got past several places by going on tippy-toes.

"Look, I'm a ballet dancer," Michael said, spinning and keeping his balance as he went around the corner. The girl at the bottom of our covered stairwell looked at us strangely as we approached, beginning to sing in a high, unmelodic voice.

A sense of premonition came over me. "Keep back," I said to Michael in fright, pushing him be-

hind me on the steps. I ran up the last stairs just in time to see a leather-jacketed youth coming out of our apartment, my little TV in his hands.

“Hey!” I yelled as the youth took off along the landing. I started to run after him, my heart sick at the thought of my little home being ransacked. I hiked up my skirt to run faster. I ran full tilt into a young woman coming out of my door. The hit catapulted me against the railing, overlooking the courtyard. I seized at the girl’s jacket. Then, my head seemed to explode. I saw red and an incredible hurt spread down my neck and face. I’d been hit by something heavy and metallic.

I slipped down, hearing Michael screaming, “Mummy! Mummy!” Whoever I was holding onto broke free and took off. I was aware that there was someone else also coming out of the apartment, man or woman I couldn’t say.

I couldn’t control my legs. I crumpled. Michael was there, flinging his arms about me and crying. I heard the sound of other voices, doors slamming, and running feet.

“Are you all right, love?” asked one voice, male and concerned. “God strewth, you’ve been burgled, you ‘ave. You gotta phone. Hey, Alfie! You gotta phone? Call the police and an ambulance! This lady’s going to need it!”

I swam in and out of consciousness, holding onto Michael’s hand. I was aware of a siren coming closer, other people and someone in a black uniform.

“She got clobbered all right,” I heard someone say.

“Who’s gonna take the kid?” I heard from someone else as new sirens came.

“Michael,” I managed to gasp, looking up suddenly at a ring of concerned, stranger faces. Then, Michael came to me, his face lined with tears. “All right,” I muttered, meaning to say it would be all right.

“Can he go with her in the ambulance?” someone asked.

“Don’t see why not,” said a woman’s voice, taking charge. “We’ll find out about relatives at the hospital.”

I felt arms lifting me. I was on a bed somehow and was being strapped down. I wanted desperately to sleep, to stop the pounding in my head.

“Should we let her sleep?” asked a worried voice, a man again.

“I think she’s gonna pass out whether we like it or not,” said a woman’s voice and, grateful for the permission, I did.

*******The collapse of all deception*******

I awoke finally after tortured dreams of people pounding and pounding on my head. I still felt as if I had a great weight on the left side of me. I wasn’t in my own bed, I realized. I rolled over and looked up. The ceiling was white, the walls were white. I was in hospital and memory flooded back. Michael, I thought in sudden distress. Michael! What would have been done with him?

I pressed the call button on my bed. A young, sunny nurse came bustling in. Her scrubbed face, starched uniform and youthful enthusiasm made

me feel suddenly old and dirty. I needed a bath. But first things first. So, she'll know all about me, I thought with a shiver, even if she says nothing. Just ignore that until they want to confront me with being a man in a dress.

"My son," I croaked. "My son, where is he?"

"Oh, your boy friend came for him," said the nurse brightly, letting down the slightly raised sides of my bed. "He was here and brought in that nightie for you and changed you for us. He said they'd be in as soon as Michael, that's your son's name, isn't it, was awake."

It hurt to shake my head in agreement. My boy friend? I could only think of Mr. Nazir. But he'd never have changed me into the white, frilly nightie and high-cut panties I was wearing. Besides, if he came in to see me, his relatives would have the run of the shop. A spasm went through me as I thought who it must be. I knew I had to get up.

"You need to sleep more," the nurse said, straightening the bed clothes, fluffing my pillow but laying it flat and pressing me gently back against it. "It's only seven thirty, you know."

The door opened and a young, male doctor came in. "Thanks for calling me," he said to the nurse. I'd no time to sleep as he immediately began to question me on who I was and what had happened to me. He made occasional notes on a notepad.

"Well, apart from the bruise, you seem to have come through the attack very well," he said, leaning over and looking at my pupils again. He shone a light in my eyes and made more notations. "The X-Ray and brain scan were negative but we'll do

them again before you leave. Never know. Might pick up something different, now you're awake."

Then he was gone. As I lay back, the nurse was right there to arrange my bed sheets. "Sleep while you can," she advised. "It'll be a hectic morning what with the police wanting to talk to you. Then, there's rounds, and you might have to go for another EEG."

I'd only close my eyes for a minute, I thought, but when I opened them, Michael was there, his concerned face just an inch from mine.

"You awake, Mummy?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, darling," I said, reaching out to touch him. It hurt when I moved my head again to look at him. Michael smiled as I pushed myself up on an elbow. "I look a sight, don't I?" I said, wincing, my voice a croak as I looked for the drink the nurse had said she'd leave on the side table.

A man in a dark suit reached for it for me. When he moved, I felt the top of my bed rising. My head throbbed as I looked at Paul Leisham, his face grim as he stared at me in bed. I remembered what the nurse had said about my boy friend changing me. I went red as I thought how he'd have seen everything about me, Richard Anderson, and would know exactly what he thought about me was true.

My hair was still a mess, I thought weakly, as Paul came around, not taking his eyes off me, putting the glass of orange juice in my hand. "I should have taken you out of that place," he said grimly. "I was going to but then we argued." He paused. "Seeing my car and me must have given those punks the idea you had something worth stealing."

“They took our television,” I said, remembering what I’d seen. It was nothing to most people but it had taken me so long to save for it. I felt tears coming.

Michael sat up on my bed and squeezed my hand. “Where’s Mr Nazir?” I asked, my mind still not functioning. I just hoped, by some remote chance, that it was him I’d been exposed to and not Paul Leisham. What was Paul doing here, anyway? How did he ever get in to see me?

“Mr Nazir?” asked Michael, puzzled.

“Where did you stay last night?” I asked foolishly, looking back at Paul, staring at me with my wavy hair splayed out all about me on my pillow, the nightie he’d supplied me with showing off far too much of my neck and upper chest.

Paul ignored the anxiety in my eyes. “I came as soon as I could,” he said. “Michael gave them my name and I’m glad he did.”

I turned back to my son, my eyes brimming again with tears. “Oh, Michael,” I whispered to him. “You shouldn’t have involved Mr Leisham.”

“Yes, he should,” Paul interrupted me. “Michael can stay with me while you’re in here - and then you’re coming to Lansdowne Court as well.”

“You should see it, Mum,” said Michael excitedly. “It’s enormous! It goes up and up like a skyscraper!”

I looked at my son in distress. I sensed how impressed he was with Paul. Well, I knew about the Leishams’ fabled ‘town’ house. I just didn’t want Michael to get used to living in such a place. It would be such a come-down when he had to come back with me to where we could afford to live.

“There’s a park at the back, too, with no geese,” Michael went on. “Paul and I played football there last night!”

I couldn’t help it. I had to hug Michael’s little body to me in my frilly nightdress. He should be anywhere but with Paul. I must get up and get out of hospital.

The nurse then came in with massive bunches of flowers which she had began to put about the room, breaking up the monotony of white. “Aren’t these gorgeous?” she enthused. “Mr. Leisham said that Michael helped to pick them out in the florists.”

The nurse shooed Paul and Michael out while the doctors visited me again. I winced as the consultant, or so he declared himself, examined the side of my head, checked my eyes, talked to me and read my charts.

“Schedule another EEG as a precaution,” the consultant said to the resident I’d seen before. Then he smiled at me. “You took a heavy blow, Julia, but there’s no skull fracture and you seem to be a very alert young woman. Rest should do the trick but we’ll monitor you for a day or so yet.”

As he left, the police came in, wanting to speak to me, the woman who’d been robbed. That made me shake a lot as they called me ‘miss’ and ‘missus’ all the time even though they could see how flat I was in my nightie. From them, I learned that my apartment had been trashed, probably, the policeman said, because of the hoodlums’ disappointment in not finding anything of real value. No-one could live in it for a long time until it was fixed up.

“What will we do? Where will we go?” I gasped, distressed at the constable’s litany of the things de-

stroyed in my home. He kept staring at my nightie as well until I pulled one of the blankets around me as if I was cold.

“Move in with relatives or friends,” said the detective with a smile. “The council will eventually fix up your flat. They might even find you another one,” but his expressionless eyes said, But don’t count on it. “Just let us know where you are. When we catch these crooks, and your descriptions are going to help, we’ll need you for the court case.”

Paul and Michael came back, Michael’s hand trustingly in his uncle’s hand as they came in, pushing my lunch in front of them, the laughing nurse following them. I wasn’t hungry but Michael was starving and tucked in accordingly.

“They destroyed our home,” I said, on the edge of tears, as Paul asked me what the police had said to me. “I’ve nowhere to go and I’m stuck here.”

“That wasn’t your home,” said Paul fiercely. “You shouldn’t be living there.”

“I should be at Seymour Hall?” I asked bitterly.

“This is good, Mummy,” said Michael enthusiastically, from the table where he sat, finishing whatever the soup was. “But Paul’s cook makes it better.”

“I thought you should have done that before, for Michael’s sake,” Paul said seriously, going over to open the container with a pear and syrup in it for Michael and then coming back to speak quietly to me. “But you were right,” his tone became grimmer. “You’ve done a fine job in raising him.” He didn’t say for a man, playing at being a woman, a mother. “I can’t believe how, well, how intelligent he is, how well he speaks. He’s a fine boy, in fact.”

“Thank you,” was all I could think of to say. What would he say if I told him now that Michael was Lowell’s son? I looked at the strong, determined set of Paul’s face and quailed at the thought. He’d be so angry with me, I knew instinctively. He’d think that my need for money had made me spring it on him. I couldn’t bear to think of his rejection of my son, as Paul would have to think that I was lying to him at first. I couldn’t bear the hurt that it would give to Michael to have Paul reject him. Better that they were friends at least.

“You are to get well,” Paul instructed me after Michael had bounced outside with the nurse for a candy for dessert. “The house on Lansdowne Court is yours while we work out what we are going to do about our son.”

I sat up as if I’d been stabbed. His eyes were like dark pools as he looked at me furiously. “Michael told me when his birthday really is as well,” he said, his voice barely above a whisper. “So, who is he really, Julia?” I stared at him, the guilt showing on my face, for sure.

“Look,” he went on acidly. “I don’t know what game you’re playing, Julia, but his birth certificate that the police found and gave to me clearly says I’m his father. I shouldn’t be saying this to you now, I know. But how could you do this to me, Julia? Is this some kind of extortion scheme you’ve made up to get even with me?”

Tears came to my eyes as I leaned back against the pillow. This was much worse than being hit by the burglar. That was just physical pain. I heard Paul’s words and they burned into me.

“You should have let them find out who I really am,” I told him through gritted teeth. “Then all your problems would be solved.”

“I don’t think so,” said Paul. “I’ve never solved you, Julia, have I? No matter that I’ve tried everything to forget you, obliterate the memories of making love to a woman named Julia. You know what I thought when I saw Michael’s birth certificate?” He looked down at me and was sneering but at himself. “I actually wished it was true.”

“We made an agreement,” I whispered, my mind in turmoil, unable to look at him as Michael came back and put on the headphones at the end of the bed and played with the knobs for tuning. “You told me never to mention what occurred between us. I shouldn’t have used your name as Michael’s father. I’m sorry.”

“You aren’t stupid,” Paul hissed, glancing at Michael who was frowning as he adjusted the station controls. “I know that you had a very good reason for doing what you did. I want to know what it was.”

“I was just angry with you!” I whispered, unable to keep the bitterness from my voice and from my face. “You wanted me not to say anything and I haven’t, ever? Then, I heard you on the patio, remember? How you referred to, to Michael, and to Queen Julia!”

Paul’s eyes narrowed and he seemed to be in great pain. “I didn’t know at that time ...”

He was cut off by a thin wail of music as Michael took off the headphones. “You ought to try these, Mum,” he said, smiling. “Spice Girls at one o’clock!”

“We will talk again,” said Paul thickly. I looked up at him fearfully, at his eyes so full of, of pain,

disgust? No, it was something else. Grief? But why should he be grieving. No-one he loved had died. Then it came to me. Paul had worked it out. He knew when Michael had been born. He had known I was at Aline's when she was killed. He must have worked it out.

Paul turned and spoke to Michael. "Say good-bye to your mother, Michael," he said in a gentle voice, the word he used sending chills through me. "She needs to rest and get well. I'll bring you back to see her at the next visiting hour."

I clung to Michael as he hugged me. If Paul went away with him now, and never came back, what could I do? I looked up at him as fear intruded every pore of my body.

Paul looked down at me impassively. "I will bring him back," he said, correctly reading my expression. "I give you my word on that."

*******The life that they should have had*******

I was discharged on a Tuesday morning. I only had the women's clothes I'd been wearing when I was attacked. The nurses insisted I go out in a wheelchair. There was Paul bringing it in, his face as stiff as I last remembered.

Michael had come to see me alone although Paul had brought him to the hospital twice a day. "Did you two have a big fight?" Michael had asked anxiously the second night. "Paul says you want to see me, not him."

"Well, of course I want to see you," I'd said, trying to be light and cheerful. "Paul's just being nice," I

added brightly. “He has you in the day, doesn’t he? So I should have you now.”

Michael nodded sagely. “He’s really nice,” he said a trifle wistfully. “He’s really good at football, too. We played in this game, in the park, with these other boys.” Diverted, with just a few prompts, he outlined all the things he and Paul were doing together.

It brought a lump to my throat as Michael innocently described his football, his walks by the Thames, and the absolutely fab toy room Paul had at his house. Paul had had his train set since he was a little boy. Michael could play with it any time he wanted to. He didn’t have that many racing cars but he had lots of other good stuff. He didn’t mind at all if Michael played with it.

I eyed Paul with trepidation when he came in with my wheelchair but he smiled at the nurses and was charming as I sat there, like a wooden puppet, as they pushed me out. My hair, washed that morning was as unruly as ever. The nurses insisted on me wearing makeup, far too much in my opinion. They’d sprayed me with my cologne everywhere, too, giggling about what they’d do with a boy friend like Paul. I could smell the fragrance of my womanly self, the light aroma of lilac filling me up.

Michael wrinkled up his nose at me. “Ooh, Mummy,” he said, holding his nose. “I don’t have to sit next to you, do I?”

Paul actually smiled then while I flushed in embarrassment. “The nurses,” I began.

“I love your scent,” said Paul from behind me as he wheeled me out. “Your mummy can sit next to me, Michael. You can sit up front with Ramsey, if you like.”

Michael, who had been in front, looked back, his face lighting up. "Super!" he said excitedly and raced ahead, opening the automatic doors for us. We looked for all the world like a little family, I thought in agony, father, Paul, son, Michael, and mother, me.

I felt myself growing hot at the thought of sitting next to Paul, being able to reach out and touch him. I became flustered as I tried to keep my thoughts to myself. From the doorway, I'd been allowed to walk to the car. I'd put on my raincoat for warmth over my white blouse and grey skirt which I'd worn to work. It was mid-thigh in length and went with my black, kitten-heel shoes. Nothing, though, went with my new, heavier eye makeup and flyaway hair.

The grey-haired chauffeur smiled at Michael who bounced into the front seat of the Rolls drawn up under the canopied entrance to the hospital. It was attracting many gawkers, clearly wondering at who might be getting such treatment. My face burned as Paul in his camel hair coat and Savile Row suit, his shoes gleaming, handed me into the car as if I were some sort of fragile princess.

Paul got in beside me even as I sank into the luxurious cushioned seats, his suit trousers brushing my stockinged leg. Even that much touching caused me to be inflamed with emotion. I shrank back and edged toward the far door, crossing my legs femininely as I did so.

"For heaven's sake!" Paul snapped. "I'm not going to attack you in the car!"

"In your house?" I asked tartly. Paul gave me such a withering look that I could have bitten my tongue off.

“Not there, either,” Paul responded coldly.

I had so many questions to put to him. I had issues to settle with him, now that he knew about Michael. I had lines to draw in the inevitable battle we would have. I'd decided to attack as soon as we could talk together but now, sitting beside him as the car purred through busy streets, I knew I couldn't stand up to the rightness of any of many arguments he'd bring against me.

Michael is my son, I wanted to scream. My son! All I have and you have so much. Even if you have him just a little of the time, he's going to despise me for being so poor when his uncle could give him everything, all of the time.

We drove all the way to Lansdowne Court without saying a word further although we were both acutely aware of each other. Michael, I could see, was chattering away to the chauffeur, pointing and asking question after question about the instruments on the dashboard. He'd ridden so rarely before in an automobile.

Paul was out and handing me again out of the car as if I was a porcelain doll that might break. He had a key and went up the flight of stone steps to the massive, white-painted double doors. Black railings on a low wall separated the house from pavement and sidewalk. The house was fronted with white stone, the windows framed with ornate carvings. Lace curtains prevented anyone from seeing in. As Michael had said, the house went up and up, four storeys at least, like the other houses on this shallow crescent.

Little balconies, outlined by black grillwork on white stone, stood out from several of the rooms

above, long, double patio doors behind them. I'd often heard of the Leishams' fabled London home – I remembered Paul once saying laughingly that the estate was his family's country cottage - and now I was about to see it.

A red carpet ran down the shining hardwood foyer, the staircase ahead zigzagging up to a balcony or landing that ran about above our heads. Large paintings and wooden carvings, part of the paneling, decorated the foyer. There was a statue and a suit of armor on a pedestal beside different rooms that led off from the foyer. From beyond the stairwell came the smell of food being prepared, bread being baked and coffee being brewed.

I was conscious that I had nothing with me but the clothes I stood up in. I was suddenly aware, too, as Michael took off his windbreaker that he was wearing a shirt I'd never seen before.

"I took the liberty," said Paul suddenly with his uncanny ability to read my thoughts, "of shopping for both of you. Your vandals, the girls, I think, took great pleasure in ripping apart all the clothes you owned. So, I replaced them with a few things in your rooms. You'll want to shop for yourself later on, I know."

"Paul," I said, choking, knowing that my eyes must be bright with tears.

Paul looked at me and something like pain crossed his face. His hands twitched and he suddenly balled them into fists as if he was fighting for self control. His jawline moved with some strong emotion I was grateful that he didn't let loose on me.

"Since a mother is always a pretty woman to her son," Paul said to me, each of his words a rebuke to

me and what I'd done to myself since I was a teen-aged boy, "Michael will not see how, how awful the clothes are that you're wearing. Since you are my guest now, I request, Julia, that you choose suitable clothing for appearing with me in front of the people I employ to run this house."

I wanted to say, "Well, show me your room and I'll find one of your suitable suits and shirts to fit me," but I didn't. I couldn't start a fight with the way that Michael was looking, in hero worship, at Paul.

Michael wanted to show me his room and mine, too, with so many pretty dresses, mummy, for me to choose from. Mine, I thought with a shiver, my room. It sounded so permanent. "Paul says we can stay here as long as we want to, Mummy," Michael said, awed, as in new socks, he led me, up the carpeted stairs to the second landing.

We could hear Paul's voice floating up to us as he spoke to someone at the back of the house about lunch in thirty minutes in the little dining room. So how many dining rooms does he have, I thought irritably, as Michael took me along a short hallway to another stairwell on the left that led up to the third floor.

"Can we stay here for a long time, Mum?" Michael asked anxiously as we could hear Paul running up the stairs behind us.

"Maybe," I said guardedly, keeping the heels of my women's shoes on the carpet so that I couldn't hurt the shine I saw all along the halls. "Probably until the Council or Welfare finds us another flat."

"Look at my room!" Michael exclaimed as he opened a white door straight ahead of us. It was a wonderful room, neat as a new pin, as Michael's

spaces in our houses always were. I had stressed so often that everything had to be put away after being used. It was no surprise that the Lego was in a box, though several completed figures were beside it on a shelf. Michael's collection of Matchbox racing cars was on another shelf, each model parked in the same direction.

Despite the whiteness of everything, the bed-spread was a crazy quilt of colors and several posters of footballers in colorful uniforms decorated the walls. It was a little boy's room, with a wide window and a padded seat to sit on and look out at the garden below and beyond. It was a wealthy child's room, I thought miserably, the room Michael could have had if only his mother and father had lived.

My family could have provided something like this. My father would have provided something like this for Lisa's and Nicky's son, I was sure. But I, Julia now, could not have borne the contempt in my father's eyes and the sneers that would be directed at me, dressed as a woman, even if I visited Aline's son, the newly proclaimed Nicky, junior.

I heard Paul come into the room behind me. I swayed femininely across the floor, I couldn't seem to help it when I knew Paul's eyes were on me, to the window away from him. Michael wanted to point out to me the tree that Mike the gardener had attached a swing to, especially for him.

I was surprised by the size of the garden. Hedged and treed on the sides, separating it from the neighbours, the garden had a lawn near the house and then dipped down to what appeared to be a tennis court beyond, flanked with trees, a path separating it from a vegetable garden by the look of it.

“The tennis court is grass,” explained Michael. “Mike and Paul took down the net and we played football in there! Mike and I beat Paul and Mr Ramsey six goals to five. I got a hat trick!”

I smiled and sat down on the window seat as gracefully as I could as Michael’s mother. I wished my nylons didn’t rasp so provocatively and my skirt wouldn’t move up so much. I couldn’t look at Paul as I acted my part as Michael’s mummy. I looked wistfully at the garden and how every inch of it was planned. I could see trellises of roses and ivy close to the house and something else, wisteria, I believed.

“Let’s show Mummy her room,” said Paul. “She can see the dress you chose for her.”

Michael got up, ready to show me, his mother, the dress he’d picked for me. I could see I must give in. I hoped the green dress wouldn’t be too little-girlly. I’d wear it anyway, for Michael. I shivered at the thought of what sort of clothes Paul would have bought for me. Surely, there’d be a pant suit among the female clothing. I shuddered as I thought that all the clothes would have pants and shorts and not skirts with them, showing me what Paul thought of me. Well, that was obvious since we’d been in the car. Of course, I was wrong about the clothes. There weren’t any pants or women’s shorts, when I finally looked in the closet, only rows and rows of dresses, pretty, silky dresses.

I’d missed Wellingsley, I realized, as I looked out of the window. Michael would have so loved the countryside where I’d grown up as a little boy, a little boy with a secret he could share with no one. So much outside Seymour Hall was now housing es-

tates but the grounds were there with the river and the woods.

I sighed and looked back as Michael ran across the room to show me a new book Paul had bought for him. Paul's eyes were fixed on me, sitting there in the window in my short skirt. I nervously brushed my long, loose hair off my face and again he looked pained. I made no move to pull up my skirt even though my legs and stockings were very visible to him.

"What's the matter?" I asked, waiting for him to criticize me, but Paul didn't.

"You sat in the MG when I picked you up in Rotherton just like that," Paul said, staring at me, again clenching and unclenching his hands at his sides. "You look ... exactly the same."

"That was six years ago," I protested, standing up. "I was barely a girl then."

"I always thought it was cute," Paul said, his jaw stiffening, but his eyes showed a gleam of humor.

"See, Mummy," said Michael while I, open-mouthed, looked at Paul and tried to make sense of what he was saying. "It's a book of football stories. Paul read me the first three the last three nights!"

Taking my place, I thought miserably.

"Your mother is here to tuck you up tonight," Paul said, his manner gentle to his 'son', but the humor was gone from his eye as he looked at me. "Now, let's show your mummy," he had a hard time saying that, "to her own room, as well."

I gasped when I entered the large room, said to be mine, next to Michael's. The doors were open to a

balcony beyond so that the room was airy, even chilly. A huge, canopied bed dominated the room. It was a room decorated in pink and white, a feminine room, the other furniture clearly expensive and ornate and suited to a woman.

“Your bathroom is through there,” Paul indicated a door that led back towards Michael’s room. “You probably didn’t see the door on Michael’s side. It was painted like the wall and is flush to it. It used to be the nursery.”

“Then this room was your parents’ room,” I said, indicating the gorgeous room, a pair of Gainsboroughs or very good reproductions on the inner wall. My heart was in turmoil. I couldn’t say more without revealing my consternation at being placed in a room that must be the heart of the house known as Lansdowne Court.

“Yes, it was my mother’s room,” said Paul levelly, his emotional state seeming to calm as mine frothed. I was in a mother’s room. It was suddenly very clear what role I was going to serve in this huge house.

Michael had headed out immediately onto the balcony. To cover my confusion, I stepped over to check him. It was a good thing I did for he was leaning over a long way, trying to see back into his room.

My heart beating even more rapidly, I pulled Michael back and hugged him, explaining how dangerous the balconies could be. I closed the doors as soon as we were in.

“Oh, Mummy,” said Michael in a disgusted tone. “I wasn’t going to fall.”

“We don’t take chances,” I said sharply, more sharply than I’d intended. “I don’t want to lose you. You’re all I’ve got.”

Paul’s face seemed to turn to stone as he looked at me.

“Oh, Mummy,” said Michael again as I knelt beside him while he hugged me back.

“Lunch,” said Paul tersely. “Would you like to change, Julia?”

“Change?” I asked, frowning, putting off the inevitable. “But I have nothing at the moment.”

“I did tell you,” Paul snapped, “that we shopped for you.” He slid back the wooden door of the closet to reveal a rack of clothes, the like of which I’d not seen before except at home in Aline’s room.

“I chose the green one, Mummy,” said Michael while I attempted to speak, my breath quite taken away with the magnitude of what Paul had done. But one thought only ran through my mind. What would he want from me in payment for all this cossetting?

I turned to him, unable to voice it, but he read my mind again.

“There’s no charge, Julia,” Paul said grimly. “A gift from one, one friend to another.”

He took Michael after opening several drawers for me that had underclothes and lingerie. “Take your time,” Paul said. “It will be nice to see you in makeup as well. My staff is used to elegant women visiting us.”

“Wear the green dress, Mummy,” begged Michael.

Because Michael asked me, I told myself, I went into the feminine closet and shivered at the touch of silk and nylon on me. I would do as I was asked. I lifted out the green dress. There on a bag inside the dress was a dark-green silk teddy, green, frilled panties and a green bra. I blushed at the sight of falsies as well in the pockets of the bra, and the garter belt and stockings left for me to wear.

I would have spent hours as a youth, enjoying myself in putting such pretty things onto my boy's body. I still had a feminine rush as I stripped off all my own clothing and encased myself in silks and soft nylon, oh the stockings so sheer. I felt so emasculated as I lifted my dress skirts to anchor my stockings to my garter belt. Yes, Paul was going to get his money's worth in treating me as his doll and dressing me up, I thought. Oh, there were green shoes with impossible high heels, as well, to put on.

I swished and wobbled just a little to my dressing table. Yes, it would be my dressing table, with a jewellery box of earrings and necklaces and pendants. I slipped my old earrings out and put in new danglers as I pinned back my long hair. It gleamed from the quick brushing I'd given it, but, then, in hospital, what else had I to do but look after my womanly needs. I started on my eyes.

I intended just a few quick lines but I got carried away. It was so easy with everything to hand that I needed. I put a little rouge on my cheeks and eye shadow about my eyes. An eyebrow pencil, like the lipstick pencil outliner, worked wonders. I looked as I had when I was trolling around the clubs as a dolly girl with my friends, not a thought in my head save for fashion and boys, or was it boys and fashion?

I put on more cologne and so Michael's reaction was predictable when I swished into his room to collect him. "Wow, Mummy!" said Michael enthusiastically. "You look so beautiful!" Then, of course, when I hugged him and thanked him demurely for his compliment, he had to go all boyish on me and pretend that my perfume was gagging him.

"Thanks," said Paul, standing up from the fort they were starting to build. He smiled at me but it seemed like he was forcing himself to do it. He silently indicated the door. I meekly swished out girlishly ahead of him, taking such short steps, my tush moving very femininely from side to side. No, I wasn't a male cross-dresser any more, I wanted to say to Paul. I'd been in women's dresses for too long. Call me any name you like to hurt me, I thought, only make it a feminine insult like telling me I was a bitch. I didn't mind that at all. Well, not much.

I was most uncomfortable walking down the staircase beside Paul, Michael skipping ahead of us. My new dress flared out about my legs so beautifully, emasculating me completely. I loved what Michael had chosen for me to wear, Oh, and I had all those lovely female dresses, calling to me from the closet, to try later.

On the walls of the staircase, portraits of Georgian, Victorian, and Edwardian figures looked down disapprovingly on me, I was sure, as I silently minced down to the foyer where a grey-haired woman, wiping her hands absently on her apron, watched us all descend.

"Julia, this is the house's angel, Mrs Annie Salter," Paul said heartily as if trying to be good-tempered to someone who wasn't. "She won't let anyone else cook for us and runs the house like

a machine. She really is a godsend to a bachelor like me. Annie, this is Julia Anderson, Michael's mother."

The house's angel gave me a satanic look. "Lunch is ready in the little dining room," Mrs Salter said, merely nodding to me, turning on her heel and disappearing back into the house.

"She doesn't approve of unwed mothers," Paul said calmly as Michael went bounding after her. Paul's hand lightly touched my arm to direct me. I felt a shock go through me as if he'd caressed me. I stumbled slightly in my new, pretty shoes. He was instantly solicitous.

"No, I'm quite all right," I said, trembling as Paul tightened his grip and steered me, femininely swishing as I moved, into the little room that opened into the kitchen itself. The round table was laid for six. I was quite surprised when the chauffeur, Ramsey, and another man came walking in.

"Mike!" said Michael in delight as a dark-haired, young man, well tanned, his mouth curved in a smile, lifted him off the floor.

"So, Mikey me boy," the young man said, his Irish accent pronounced. "Won't you be after introducing me to your beautiful mam?"

Mike the Gardener turned bright blue eyes on me. I could only blush when I saw the frank admiration there. His eyes roved all over me as men's eyes had when I was dressed as glamorously as I was in the shimmering green dress and matching heels.

"We don't stand on ceremony here, Julia, at lunchtime," Paul said, holding a chair for me. For some reason, his heartiness to Mrs Salter was gone.

He seemed to be angry at something, perhaps the way I looked or the way I smiled to Mike.

Mike the Gardener took a seat opposite me and, when I glanced up, he winked and raised an eyebrow. “Michael O’Donoghue, mam,” he said with a smile that showed brilliant white teeth against his tan. “Mike the Gardener, don’t you know, and you’ll be Mrs Anderson, I take it.”

I shook my head, feeling my long hair moving again. A stray lock drifted again across my face. A lump came to my throat. “Miss Anderson, actually,” I said, looking down, adjusting my dress as I crossed my legs in my so pretty nylons, not wanting to see the knowing look I’d see in his eyes. There was a little silence at the table

“If you don’t mind my saying,” said Mike with a lilt in his brogue accent, ignoring my revelation, as Paul sat beside me, glowering at what I’d said, “you’ve a very fine boy here in my namesake. And you’re so young yourself.”

“She’s older than she looks,” cut in Paul irritably. Michael sat between Paul and Mike and immediately engaged the gardener in a quiet conversation about football. Michael seemed to know instinctively that that was a safe subject when adults were tense, or more particularly, when his mother was. She was me, of course, and a poor excuse for a woman at that, I thought miserably.

Mrs Salter brought in plates of meat, potatoes, Yorkshire pudding, vegetables and newly made bread rolls. It had been a long time since I’d had a traditional English dinner at traditional English dinnertime, noon.

I was hungry though. I couldn't remember the last time I'd had roasted potatoes. I was astonished at the pile of food Michael put on his plate. He grinned at me. "It's okay, Mummy," he said, seeing my face. "I will eat it all."

"And then waddle upstairs for a nap," I said without thinking, in my higher-pitched, girlish voice that cut in when I was nervous. Mike laughed and Ramsey smiled, as he put several pieces of meat on his plate.

"He's too thin," barked Mrs Salter suddenly. "He takes after you, doesn't he?"

I winced. I heard the implied criticisms that I didn't feed Michael properly and the reminder that there was a father somewhere whom I wasn't married to. But I was used to that criticism. It had amused me for a long time as the real situation of my son and I was too complex for the truth ever to be told, or so I'd thought. I forced femininity on myself.

"Yes, he does," I said quietly to the woman next to me.

"So that's why he's so handsome a lad, mam," said Mike, joining in with a chuckle. "He takes after his mother."

I felt my color rising again. I wasn't used to such outright admiration any more. It had been so long since I'd last flirted with someone as open and irrepressible, it seemed, as Mike the Gardener that I scarcely knew what to do.

"We have to tell you about Mike," said Annie Salter acidly. "He chases everything in a skirt, no matter their station in life. The girls who come in to clean love to listen to Mike's blarney."

Ramsey, beside her, laughed. Paul, however, seemed to be made of stone.

“Oh, Annie,” said Mike with a wide smile. “What a way to put me in my place! Is it a rival you’re after seeing for a place in my so tender heart?”

“Hah,” Annie grunted. “If you had a heart, they kept it when you left the traitorous island.”

“Oho!” said Mike in delight. “The perfidious Englishwoman speaks of treachery!”

I sensed that Annie and Mike were about to enjoy a rancorous debate but Paul intervened. “If you don’t mind, Mike,” he said firmly and the debate stopped right away. By the surprised looks on the others’ faces, I had the impression that what he’d done was fairly unusual.

“By the way,” Paul went on, again with forced jollity, I thought, “if you need help in the vegetable garden this afternoon, Michael can come and assist you, Mike. As Julia indicated, he’ll need to work off all those potatoes and Yorkshire pudding.”

“But the food here is so tasty,” Michael protested. That produced smiles and good humor, even relief, from everyone.

“Michael is right,” I said quietly a little later to Annie Salter, my female voice stronger as I regained control of it. I nibbled on a bread roll. “This was a lovely meal.”

Annie grunted and squinted. She wore no makeup and had thick grey eyebrows which gave her face an owlish but predatory look. “It’s hard to cook properly for just two people,” she said, her mouth a firm line. “You worked, I hear, too?”

I nodded, sensing the older woman's disapproval. I felt like explaining about my need to work, to have a job, to explain why I couldn't stay home as I'd have liked with Michael. I shuddered as I realized that I was thinking like a woman. Well, my pretty dress and fragrance was making me behave more and more like a young girl. I should be pleased with myself but I wasn't.

Annie wouldn't let me rise to help with the dishes but she didn't excuse Mike or Mr Ramsey. I had to wonder if he had another name. Even Paul, who was Mr Leisham to them all, was required to help with the cleanup. "You haven't been in hospital," Annie said to Mike, when he protested having to get out dishes for dessert from the cupboard behind me.

That put me in the forefront of the discussion. I felt I had to explain, trying not to sound abrupt and manly, what had happened, my hospital stay and what the police had told me about their search for the culprits.

"Young thugs," growled Annie. "That's why it's nice to have a man about the house."

I flushed, unable to answer that or the implied criticism again. If she only knew, I thought darkly.

"That's why Julia is here," Paul cut in. "She's to rest, Annie, not be dragged into any domestic chores for a while." He shook his head at my protests. "Nor is she to work in the garden until the doctors give her a clean bill of health, Mike, which won't be until next week at least. And here, for certain, we have enough men about the house to make sure nothing like that attack ever occurs again."

"Am I a man of the house, too?" asked Michael, frowning, restoring the good humor and laughter to

the end of the traditional meal. He didn't want to nap, either, but gave in easily, as he always did, to his mummy's insistence.

"I'll take our tea to my study," said Paul as I escorted Michael out of the dining room, my high heels working much better, to the passage that connected to the hallway and the stairs. "Come down and we can talk."

I glanced nervously at his face. Paul was looking at me again with that strange expression as I took Michael's hand in motherly fashion. I nodded as a lump rose once more in my throat. I knew what we had to talk about. He'd want me out soon, out of his way. He seemed to like Michael, perhaps too much. What if he wanted me now out of Michael's life, as I'd kept him out of Aline's and Lowell's son's life for the last five years? I couldn't blame him.

Paul was waiting for me, his face grim, as I swayed slowly and femininely down the stairs, my dress so silky and airy about me, feeling all the way from Michael's room as if I was a woman, but going to her own execution.

"Oh for heaven's sake!" Paul said irritably as I slowed down, approaching him. He turned and strode across the hallway to open a doorway in the panelling. He was so tall, I thought, as he stood, waiting for me.

"I'm not the headmaster," he said furiously. "You've not been told to come to my study for a beating."

I couldn't think of anything to say. That was how I felt. I went in past him into a room that could only have been a man's room, filled with leather chairs, high book cases, trophies, cups and plaques every-

where. A huge desk stood before the curtained windows, the computer terminal almost lost on the large surface.

I sat primly, femininely again, in a chair across from the desk, crossing my legs, smoothing my dress back against my stockings, my hands in my lap as the light from the windows fell on my face. Paul surprised me as he sat on one of the sofas, sprawling out, long, lean and so darkly attractive, I thought. I remembered another sofa so long ago. My cheeks flamed at the memory of it.

“When I said to Michael that I’d get him a new football for his birthday in October, he told me when his birthday really was,” Paul said decidedly, staring at me. “I just thought I’d misheard at first, and then I worked it out. I knew you were a virgin when we made love that one time. Even if you ran immediately into the arms of a willing girl friend, you couldn’t have been his father. I wasn’t absolutely sure though until I spoke to you in hospital and you gave it away. How could you, Julia? How could you not have told me about Aline and Lowell?”

What could I say? That Aline and I were really sisters and that Lowell had begun to tease me about boys who looked at me, and how he, Paul’s brother, had told me that he agreed with Aline. I should be Michael’s guardian if anything happened to him.

Paul spluttered, his eyes blazing at me. “Didn’t you think of Michael at all? Didn’t you think of my family and how we’d want to raise Lowell’s son? You not only cut me out of your life but out of the life of my nephew, as well!”

There was nothing I could say to assuage the pain I heard in his voice. I’d gone over the argu-

ments too often in my mind, anyway. I was nothing to him, he'd shouted after me in the gardens at Seymour Hall. It was only Michael now that he cared about, as I knew he would. He'd want to control him, Paul would, I thought in distress. He'd say he cared for Michael but it would be the way he'd cared for Lowell, the brother who'd do nothing that Paul wanted. That told me how Paul thought of 'family', his family. He hadn't even mentioned Aline. Her family was nothing to him, though he was bound to it, or so he'd said.

"Nothing to say?" Paul asked bitterly. "Not going to throw back in my teeth what I said about your bastard child?"

"I, I knew you were angry with me," I said quietly. "You must have been sure I was going to blurt out something about, well, you know what. And, I'd led you on, deceived you about me and what, what I am. Seeing me with a baby, well, you must have thought it was a joke."

I really meant his talk of me seducing him. That was a joke. One look at Paul, his tanned face so strong and determined, showed that he wasn't a man to do anything against his will. But I couldn't say really that he'd seduced me. I'd wanted him so badly at the time. It had been so right that he should be the one, my first lover, for I'd loved him so long. I still did.

I shook my head in dismay as Paul stared at me. I'd taken much of the makeup off my eyes in my gorgeous bathroom before I came down. Perhaps that was what was annoying him. I was trying too hard to look like anything but an attractive woman to him. I'd loved Paul so spontaneously, I remembered. He'd made love to me in the end quite delib-

erately, when he already knew that I wasn't a real woman.

"Well, water under the bridge now, right?" Paul said. He stood up and went behind his desk. He opened a drawer and took out some papers. "Here's Michael's other birth certificate," he said, his eyes narrowing as he stared at me. "The real one, not what you told Welfare about yourself, making me his supposed father. Michael Leisham, it says, registered by Lowell and Aline Leisham as his mother and father."

I gasped. "You're going to take him away from me?"

Paul's eyes glittered. "I should," he said bitterly. "He'd love me for that, wouldn't he? No, you don't have to answer that. He needs his mother and he needs a father. I thought at first I could just set you up in a house in the suburbs, drop by and see you and Michael on occasion but I can't do that. He is my brother's son, after all.

"But you've made it impossible for me to acknowledge that, haven't you, Julia? Why should I be his uncle anyway when I can be his father and your little white lies," I flushed at his charitable way of describing the fraud I'd done, "make that possible. I won't live here and have Michael somewhere else. I won't be an absentee father. No, you must live here with me. And if I'm to be Michael's father, and he thinks that you're his mother already, we must also be married."

Married! I felt the blood drain from my face. "Paul, no," I began. While one part of me thought with such a thrill of being Paul's wife, of sharing his

bed, another part of me wept, as I thought, but he doesn't care for you. It's just for Michael.



“If you’d told me four-five years ago,” Paul said angrily, “we could have been married in Rotherton or Wellingsley before all the rumors about you started flying around. I’d have made your family acknowledge you as a woman. Now it will have to be a private ceremony. I’m arranging that. Until then, you can wear this.”

Paul took out a little box that instinctively I knew was an engagement ring.

“No, Paul!” I gasped again, trying to gain control of my wavering emotions. “I’m not marrying you! You know I’m not a woman. You must have seen that in the hospital!”

Paul got up, his face a mask, his angular chin jutting forward. He came towards the desk. I tried to shrink back into my chair, my hands gripping the silk of my dress tightly, though what defence that would have been, I’ve no idea.

“I should never have let you come to London and get lost!” Paul said thickly.

How could you have prevented that? I thought wildly. It was my father who threw me out, sort of. It was my decision to run away and become a she-male. What was Paul talking about?

Paul put out his hand and pulled me to my feet, my senses reeling, my whole body shaking with the dress that caressed my thighs so wonderfully. Just the touch of his hand, I thought, fighting to remain calm, and I’m a basket case. I have to control myself but my heart was beating too wildly. He was going to kiss me; and I was going to let him, wanting him to do it.

Paul grunted as his lips met mine, his arms tightening about me, pulling me to him. All of the

hunger I'd ever felt for him returned in full. I felt the desire leaping through me, felt his response as I parted my painted lips in the kiss as he took possession of my mouth with his tongue. My body heated up. I felt myself wanting to push tightly against him as he caressed my bra strap through my dress.

"Julia," Paul murmured shakily in my ear. I must push him away but I couldn't do it. The insistent ring of the phone startled us both. With an oath, he let me go and went around his desk to answer it. "About Michael, we must tell him, when it's appropriate, who his real parents were."

With his hands not on me, I was still trembling. "Yes," I mumbled as I headed for the door.

"Wait a minute," Paul said into the phone. "Julia!" He called after me as I opened his door. "We aren't finished yet!"

"Y-Yes, we are!" I snapped back at him. "I'm not going to marry you just to give Michael a good home, not now, not ever!"

I almost knocked over an aghast Mrs Salter as I hurried down the passage and went running up to Michael's room. Michael was fast asleep, of course, oblivious to the tempest raging through me over what I should do that was best now for Michael and his future.

*******The gilded cage *******

Michael was surprised to find me there in his room when he awoke but pleased nonetheless. He didn't notice my ravaged face, luckily, nor did he seem to notice how my voice was still so shaky with

all the emotions that had battered me while he had slept so peacefully.

Michael wanted to show me Paul's house and gardens. I went with him, steeling myself for the inevitable re-meeting with Paul. But there was no sign of him as Michael led me out into the garden that was much larger than I'd imagined from the window of Michael's room. I looked back at the house. It was much bigger than I'd thought it, from so low down. The garden, too, seemed to stretch a little wider.

Mike the Gardener was putting tools away in a little shed. The sound of my high heels on the path alerted him to the fact that I was there. He smiled as Michael called to his namesake. "Well, now, me boyo," he smiled at Michael's attempt to get him into a football game. "It's like this. I've to be going now to get my transport, don't you know. But next time I'm here, at the end of next week, I'll be glad to show you some of the tricks Mr Beckham taught me."

Mike winked at me as he took his coat and headed to a back gate. "I hope you'll still be here then, Miss Anderson," he said with an impish smile. "It certainly brightened my day to meet you. And don't mind Annie. Her bark is definitely worse than her bite."

After what I'd endured with Paul, I didn't mind Mike O'Donoghue's easy banter. I could see that he didn't mean anything by it. I was just a young woman, a pretty one in his eyes, I hoped. He'd have been the same with any woman in the house.

Mrs Salter still had to warn me stiffly about Mike when I got back into the house.

Michael immediately came to his namesake's defence. "I like him," he said to me anxiously. "Do I have to watch myself around him?"

"No, darling," I said, kneeling down to help him take off his outside, wet shoes. "It's me who has to watch it. I'm not used to men who say things they don't mean in order to impress women. I'm used to living with sober, serious men who mean everything they say. Oh, that's you, isn't it?" I tickled him and he ran to Mrs Salter to 'save' him.

"I'll get you later!" I promised him as we resumed our tour of Paul's marvellous house. I learned where Paul's room was on the main floor, his parents' rooms now on the third, next to the elevator that Paul had just had installed. Mrs Salter had what must be an apartment on the lowest floor. Think Upstairs, Downstairs I said to myself. The maids had been on the upper floors, but those were guest rooms now, mostly unused. I loved strolling with Michael, dancing and being all girlish in my lovely, flowing dress. It didn't hurt to receive all the compliments to my femininity, either, even if they came from a little boy who thought that I was 'super' pretty.

It hadn't looked like it but the house was indeed massive, I thought, as Michael and I came down hand in hand to the lowest floor. Several families could have lived in it comfortably, I knew, remembering some of the places Michael and I had lived in.

Paul had called Mrs Salter, she told me, to ask her to tell me that he wasn't going to be around for tea as he had to attend to business. "He said that he'll see you tomorrow," said Mrs Salter stiffly after she saw me playing with Michael. "Are you going to change for supper tonight?"

“How, how dressed up?” I asked with a gesture at my lovely, green dress.

“Mr Leisham is informal,” said Annie Salter with a frown. “But when his parents are here, they like to dress properly for supper. You’ve enough cocktail dresses in there, haven’t you?” She sounded very clipped and snarky to me. I guess she must have had to unload all of Paul’s purchases for me and hang them all up. It must have been a day’s work for her, or more. “Mr Leisham says that you’ll still have shopping to do but I don’t know what for. I think he bought out several boutiques for you.”

Oh, dear, I thought with a tremble. And Mrs Salter did not approve of that.

“Yes,” I agreed with her. “He did go rather overboard, didn’t he? I really only needed a couple of skirts and blouses to replace the clothes I lost. Paul must have thought I had a wardrobe like my sisters at Seymour Hall. They’d be the ones out shopping tomorrow. If, if, if I stay here, I won’t need to buy anything for years!”

Mrs Salter gave me a funny look. I didn’t blame her. What must it look like to her, Paul installing me and my son in the house? And not really Paul’s house. There were his parents who lived here when they weren’t on vacations like the Mediterranean cruise they were currently on. I thought of Lowell and Aline. I didn’t know how to talk to Mrs Salter about them. Could I say that I was Aline’s sister? No, not until I talked again to Paul.

It was a quiet evening being a woman in a strange house. Michael showed me Paul’s train set in a different room to the playroom but I suggested he wait until Paul was there before he played with it.

“Paul said ...” began Michael and stopped. We’d had that discussion before about ‘he told me I could do it’.

“There’re a lot of other things we can do in the playroom,” I said. Michael smiled and agreed, so long as I played with him. Paul’s, and Lowell’s I guess, old toys were remarkably masculine, I saw with an inner smile. They wouldn’t have suited me. No old dolls and princesses or ponies that Aline and Lisa had given up playing with. No plushie toys that I could lie on in my tents or ‘forts’ as I called them for Dad when he occasionally looked in on me.

I don’t think anyone ever found the stash of Barbie clothes I’d put together in packs. I used them on the gorgeous plastic dolls, out of sight of everyone in our nursery. “Richard likes to play alone,” I heard my father saying to a friend. “He’s got a really vivid imagination.”

Such an imagination had helped raising Michael on my own. We made up imaginary games and imaginary companions. We took them on adventures on our walks. We picked up souvenirs to remind us of the ‘voyages’ we took. A coin found on the street was a part of a treasure hoard, a weird piece of wood was a death ray gun, a battered flower had the power to transform with its aroma. How I wish that that last one had really worked.

I was always transformed into a lovely princess when Michael played that game, the damsel he had to rescue. Perhaps that’s why I loved our imaginative games so much. I tried to do the same to him but he was disgusted. He had to be a knight or an astronaut on a quest. Sometimes he’d be a monster but a girl, never.

“Why not?” I teased Michael. “Half the world is female, you know.” Even if that half didn’t include me.

“Mummy,” said Michael firmly. “Girls are icky.” I could hear the Leonards’ little boy saying that to Jean when he came in, crying over being excluded from a game being run by the older girls at the Leonards’ baby-minding business. “All except you,” my little diplomat added.

It was going to be difficult to play the way we had, Michael and me, with all the new toys available to him. He stared in fascination at the electronic games. I had to show him how several worked. He was absorbed in some sort of Dungeons and Dragons fantasy that seemed eerily similar to what we’d just created out of the air or the books we’d read. I wondered how long it was going to be before he didn’t need my imagination.

I went to bed as soon as Michael was asleep. Drawer after drawer in my room contained female treasures. Sealed packages contained stockings and garter belts of every length and color. A whole drawer and a rack contained nothing but bras. But no more paddings, I noted with a shiver. Oh, well, I could use tissues and panties to stuff my bras. I’d done it before as a young boy. I could do it again.

I could wear extra panties until I could find some tape to maintain my secrecy ‘down below’. Oh, but how I shivered as I ran my hands over the soft fabrics of the dresses and lingerie that Paul intended for me to wear. My skirt and blouse, across the laundry basket, looked so plain beside what he’d ordered for me.

The jewellery box in my room fitted into a drawer, all to itself. Earrings were still attached to cards

they were displayed upon, as were necklaces and bracelets. There was a ladies' watch, thin and gold and several dark satin pouches that seemed to contain real pearls. It all made the flowery studs I'd worn in my ears when I'd arrived seem like tacky pieces of tin.

I finally found the drawer that contained nighties. Oh gods, did Paul think that I'd wear babydolls to bed? It wasn't just those. It was all the other passion-rousers that there were, so frilly. Some were so long, almost sultry, like evening dresses. But there were so many, I thought uneasily, like the whole wardrobe in a room, the closet was that big, devoted to dresses for me. They didn't fill up the whole space just as the shoes on the rack, all high-heeled, I noticed, didn't fill up all the space ready for women's shoes. All-in-all, though, it definitely looked as if Paul did plan on me living in his house with him for a long time.

I slept in a long, white, silk nightie, one of the few that wasn't frilled around the neck. It just had thin straps over my shoulders. I wore panties as well with it though I supposed a real woman wouldn't. I really didn't sleep well as I kept thinking that Paul was in bed beside me. I woke and sat up a few times but there was no-one there.

The last time I awoke, it was already light. So, I headed into the bathroom and ran a bath for myself. Of course, the bath cupboard was stocked with everything a girl could need, including a lady's razor as if I needed that for my legs.

The cologne and perfumes were exquisite. I did use some of the dreadfully expensive Desert Nights behind my earlobes and on my wrists, feeling really decadent until someone rattled the doorknob on Mi-

chael's side of the bathroom. I put on my robe and night dress and let my son in.

"Wowee, Mummy," said Michael, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed in his new, Space Wars pyjamas. "You look really nice, like a film star!"

I had to laugh at that. I'd been experimenting a little with the makeup set out for me and maybe I'd overdone it a little. My eyes were vivid. I rarely used much eye shadow or blush normally at all. I loved the rose colour on my lips, however. When I kissed Michael 'Good morning', I left a lovely imprint on his forehead.

"Mum-mee!" he squealed at me. I was past the stage when that word made me tremble with such intense pleasure when Michael said it.

"Mi-Key!" I parroted back to him, going into his room to find clothes for him for the day. Like me, he was spoiled for choice. I gulped as I looked at all the shirts and pants my little boy had to choose from. This was, of course, how it was intended to be, when Lowell came to his senses and returned to his home. Or was it, I thought.

Would Aline really have been welcomed, with her baby, by the Leishams? I had my doubts. But if Aline had only lived, either here, at Longview or Seymour Hall, Michael would certainly have had a richer life, in regard to material things, than he'd had with me.

We breakfasted alone, Michael and me. I wanted to take Michael out for a walk. Annie Salter bustled and got a coat for herself. I'd chosen a dark, straight skirt for myself and a shirt-like top, with the mastectomy pads I always wore now.

“You don’t have to come with us,” I told Mrs Salter as I prepped Michael for a walk around the neighborhood.

“I do,” Mrs Salter said grimly. “The master’s orders.”

I must have given her a shocked look. Annie Salter was angry with me. All I could think of as she followed me out the front door was that I’d stepped back into a Dickens story where the servants were like slaves to their ‘masters’. Or maybe it was the way she said it; her words made me think of Igor in a Frankenstein movie.

I had to suppress a giggle but the sound of my new, womanly high heels, a skirt touching my stockings, helped with the girlie feelings that came over me. It was so wonderfully green on all the streets we walked on until we finally came to a schoolyard.

“That’s where Paul and Lowell went to school,” said Annie, “until the old master took them out to the country.” She shook her head. “Mr Paul took to it well, we heard, but Mr Lowell, well, it was all fast cars and fast women right up to the end. Broke his mother’s heart, he did, dieing like that.”

It wasn’t funny and giggly any more to sit with Annie, two women together, my legs crossed in womanly stockings, as Michael played. She asked me about when I was a little girl. I tried not to lie to Annie but I said a lot of things that must have made her wonder just what kind of girl I was. I prefaced what I said with ‘tomboy’ excuses but Annie, my minder, as I thought of her, or my bodyguard, didn’t give that much weight. I think the way that I sat, the way I played on occasion with Michael, how he

chided me for being so useless 'like a woman' in kicking his ball or throwing it to him, destroyed my credibility as a tomboy.

I think all the staff had their orders to watch me. Paul probably thought I'd bolt with my 'son', whom he knew was his nephew. I'd have to get used to Annie Salter's sour company, I thought, even though she was nice to Michael. But then, Michael, like Paul, could charm anyone when he put his mind to it.

Paul arrived with another man in the afternoon. I was summoned, like a schoolgirl again, to the principal's office. I went in and stood meekly behind the door, my arms behind my back, letting Paul see that I was wearing 'his' clothes, as I'd begun to think of them in my mind.

"For goodness sake," snapped Paul at me as the other man stood and smiled. "She's not as demure as she appears, Godfrey, not by a long shot."

"Thank you," I murmured to him coyly, like a proper schoolgirl. The man with him grinned immediately.

"Godfrey Walters," he announced himself as he shot to his feet, his hand out to shake mine. "Paul's lawyer, solicitor, and general dogsbody. You've presented me with a pretty legal problem, Miss Anderson. I don't know how anybody can pass through society these days without being documented somewhere. We'll sort it all out, however, and, yes, I think that you and Paul here will be able to be married by the end of the month! Sometime next month, for sure."

I was shocked. I wobbled as Godfrey helped me to sit down on the sofa beside him. I remembered to

smooth my skirts beneath me and to cross my legs, showing off the silky nylons that Paul had bought for me as he would know.

I had to listen to Godfrey expound upon Paul's plans to have Paul adopt Michael legally as 'our' child after we were married. Godfrey kept talking about a special licence he was sure we could get just as soon as my identity was established. All I had to do was sign the relevant forms.

There were rafts of them. There was even one that said that Paul was re-imbursing Welfare for all the monies they'd paid to me, Julia Anderson, the mother of Michael Leisham. Paul was acknowledging that he was the father of Michael, I saw with a leap of my heart. I knew that was happening because he'd wished it could really be true. Now, it would be! Paul promised to make payments to me immediately for Michael's and my upkeep and promised to register all agreements in family court if the need should arise.

That was at least how Godfrey cheerfully explained it to me before he had me sign, "Here, here, and, of course, here." I could have said, No, couldn't I?

"Think of Michael," said Paul harshly to Godfrey's astonishment. I did. I signed many times while Paul just looked at me stiffly. Only when I'd signed myself into servitude to him for life, I thought grimly, did Paul get up, lift me to my feet and put his arm about me.

I didn't care how insincere the gesture was. I shivered at his touch. Paul kept one arm possessively about me as he shook hands with Godfrey.

Paul told him to get on with it as he wanted us to be married as soon as possible.

“But your parents are still away,” said Godfrey, glancing at me. “I thought they were going to Monte Carlo for the summer.”

“They’ll come back as soon as I give them a date,” said Paul. “Tonight, I’m going to speak to Bernie about marrying us.”

“He’ll be angry if you don’t let him,” said Godfrey with an encouraging smile to me that only made cold shivers run through me more.

“So get your clerks to sit in the offices of whoever has to expedite Julia’s birth certificate and marriage licence application and get it done,” snapped Paul. “And send me your usual exorbitant bill. I won’t complain this time as long as I get results.”

“I can’t promise,” Godfrey began.

“Where wheel-greasing is needed,” Paul said with a frown, “do it and send the bills to me. I don’t want to be sitting here next year with my getting married still in limbo. I’ve declared myself to Julia,” I shuddered again at his old-fashioned way of saying that he’d asked me to marry him, “and there’s no reason why we shouldn’t be married save for registering her birth and getting her a birth certificate.”

“Save for the fact that I am not a woman,” I said to Paul after Godfrey had gone purposefully on his way. “A man can’t marry another man in this country.”

“You don’t keep up with politics,” said Paul bitterly. “It will be here soon, gay marriage. But you wouldn’t want to go that route, would you?”

I almost felt the blood drain from my face as I shook my head. My hair flowed about my neck as I thought about that.



“I love this perfume,” said Paul, swinging me in a waltz, my chest bouncing against him, making him raise his eyebrows as he felt my padding against him. He leaned over me and kissed my ear gently.

“I can’t marry you,” I insisted. “It would be wrong.” But it wasn’t wrong to kiss him. It wasn’t wrong to listen to his compliments about my clothes, my shoes and my stockings. It wasn’t wrong to put my hands finally about his neck and thrill to his kisses, my skirt swishing against him as he moved me, dancing with me until Mrs Salter coughed and we had to stop.

“Oh, for tonight,” said Paul as I fled from him. Annie Salter was glowering at me as she showed some bills to Paul. “I think a black cocktail dress is all you need to wear. See if you can find the necklace in a flat box that says, Bulgari. There are earrings with it to match. I’ll come and help you put them on.”

“I’m not going out with you,” I said from the doorway, sense returning that I’d lost every time he kissed me. “I have Michael to think of.”

“Annie is going to look after Michael tonight,” said Paul as Annie glowered at me. “And tomorrow, you can help me interview a number of girls who’d like to be Michael’s live-in nanny.”

*******The engagement party*******

My life was spinning out of my control. “Where am I supposed to be going?” I asked Paul as he came to my room, looking so manly and wonderful in his dark suit and blue, silk tie.

I'd primped for over an hour, getting my hair pinned to my head, curling my bangs, wishing I'd gone to a hairdressers' salon and had it properly permed for this party or whatever it was that Paul insisted I go to. I'd only been to a beauty salon a few times but it was always so heavenly to do so. I looked so good, to myself at least, when I came out with my hair cut properly in a woman's style.

"We're going to a party at a friend of mine, a bishop's house," said Paul with a grimace. "Don't be put off by that. Bernie's only a couple of years older than me and a fantastic rugby player. He mostly plays old boys' ruggie now. He and Kate have been my friends for years. I made Bernie a promise that, in the unlikely possibility I ever marry, I'd let him perform the ceremony."

"Sounds like a drinking promise to me," I said to Paul, standing up in my new, absolutely feminine, little, black dress, blotting the lipstick I'd just applied to my lips.

"It was," said Paul with a crooked smile, sitting on my bed to watch me finish getting dressed and made up as a woman, as if he owned the place. Well, he did. "But Bernie would hold me to it. You'll like him."

I slipped my feet into new, black high heels as Paul watched me hungrily.

"Why didn't you wear that black, low-cut lace number?" asked Paul. "I put it at the front of your dressing closet as that's the one I want to see you in."

I looked at him in surprise. "And how am I supposed to keep such a dress in place?" I asked him, indicating my padded breasts. I looked like a woman

in silhouette, I thought in pleasure. My new, all black silk lingerie, my bra, panties, slip and garter belt was a matched set, and a thrill a minute to put onto me.

But I didn't have breasts and half, at least, of the dresses in my closet couldn't be worn by me unless I got onto the Internet and ordered some disguising artifact that I'd never been able to afford. If I asked Paul, which I wouldn't, I was certain that he'd get anything for me, from gaffs to stick-on breasts, to make me look more like a woman.

"We must do something about that," said Paul with a frown. "How are you making the shape that you are in right now?"

"Mastectomy inserts," I began. That made Paul snort but not in laughter.

"My wife," Paul murmured, "will have to do better than that."

"She will," I retorted. "You'll meet a girl with big enough ones some day."

"I already have," said Paul and moved in on me, his arms slipping about my waist and squeezing me. I felt the acute discomfort at my groin when he did that. I trembled in anticipation of his kiss. He didn't disappoint me.

I was shivering as I had to sit femininely back at my mirror, after the little reminder of what I was, and re-do my lips. I crossed my legs in my swishy dress, still feeling the imprint of Paul's lips on mine. I could still feel his hands on my garter belt where he had played with my stockings so delightfully. I had to wonder if a real girl would find it as wonderful as I did to be touched and teased in such a fashion. I didn't want to stop Paul from doing that to me

once our lips melded together. Lisa had been quite right about me when she'd called me a tramp. I was sort of like that with any man I kissed.

Paul put the necklace of red stones on me, making me take off my studs and put the ruby-red earrings at my ears. With my hair pinned up, they looked so marvellously feminine against my neck. They even matched a little the bracelet Paul found for me to wear. My red, painted fingernails, the first time I'd done them, in over a month, gleamed as well.

"You should do your nails like that all the time," said Paul with a smile as he fastened the bracelet to me.

"It costs to keep them like this," I said to him.

Paul got a little angry at me. "Whatever you need to be the delectable woman you can be, Julia," he said to me, "makeup, dresses, foundation garments, new earrings or nail polish, just tell Mrs Salter and she'll order it. I'll show you how to do it on the Internet when I have time. I'm sure there'll be sites as well where you can order better padding than you have now, even if it is temporary."

"Temporary?" I asked Paul as he led me out of my bedroom, down the stairs, mincing girlishly on his arm over to where a smiling Michael was standing with Mrs Salter.

"Yes," whispered Paul as I swished slowly down the stairs with him, on my too-high heels. "I think you should have implants, I really do."

I shuddered. "Aline was going to buy them for me as a Christmas present," I told him. "After Lowell won his race and she collected our winnings from the bookies." I shuddered.

“She had a huge wad of money with her when she died,” said a stunned Paul Leisham as we reached the bottom of the steps. I had to do a girlie bunny dip to greet Michael.

“Hmm, mummy,” Michael said to me. “You smell nice.”

I had to laugh as it was the first time he’d ever said that to me. I caught the twitch of Annie Salter’s mouth and knew where that compliment had come from. “Thank you,” I said over his head, including Annie in my thanks with a smile.

“Now, be a very good boy for Annie, won’t you?” I asked him, knowing that Michael would be. He’d always been good for babysitters in the past. I kissed Michael as he complained how his lips felt. He should have. He had beautiful red lips after I’d blotted myself on him as I had on Paul upstairs and earlier.

Paul drove us himself which surprised me as I thought his chauffeur would have been on call. “Ramsey was up early with me today,” Paul said when I asked him. “You should be pleased as this means that I have to keep my hands off you as we drive to Bernie’s.”

Just thinking of his hands on me made me so warm and agitated. It became worse when we stopped and parked the car outside this lovely house standing in its own grounds. I sashayed up, loving the swish of my dress, on Paul’s arm towards the lit front entrance but Paul stopped me from going in.

“Wear this tonight,” Paul said huskily. There was the ring box again. He opened it. A huge, ruby ring, set in white gold, he said, gleamed at me.

“Oh, Paul, I can’t,” I said with a shudder as he took my ring finger and put it on me.

“You’ve signed the papers. We’re here to see my bishop about marrying Julia and me and you can’t wear my ring,” said Paul. “I don’t think that you’re thinking very straight, girl.”

He was right. I didn’t think very well around Paul. I hadn’t since he’d first seen me in my dance dress waiting for a bus in Rotherton. But I knew I wasn’t going to marry him. I’d probably let him make love to me again if he wanted. But I wasn’t going to marry him, I thought obstinately.

I clutched my hands together but that only worked until we were inside the door. Kathy let out a great shriek that made us the center of attention to everyone in the foyer or milling about in the dining room.

“Oh, what a ring!” shrieked Kathy, seizing my finger. “From Paul, isn’t it?”

My blushes confirmed what she thought. Suddenly I was separated from Paul as he was being congratulated and beaten on by the men in the group. I was being hugged by Kathy and introduced to everyone there as Julia Anderson, Paul Leisham’s fiancée.

I shivered as so many women said, “I don’t believe it. I thought this day would never happen! Paul Leisham’s getting married!”

“It hasn’t happened yet,” I said but they all dismissed my misgivings, going for drinks to toast us.

“I didn’t know this was an engagement party,” said a blonde girl, smiling at me as she held my hand up to look at my ring.

“Neither did we,” laughed Kathy. “Oh Bernie, did you know what a wonderful surprise that Paul was going to spring on us?”

“No,” said Bernie, a tall, really good-looking guy, coming to hug me and welcome me to his home. “But it’s really a fantastic idea. Come and sit next to me, Julia. I’ve so much to tell you at dinner, the real truth about the man you’re going to marry. I hope you don’t mind horror stories as I intend to tell you everything about my fellow reprobate.”

I didn’t know then that the ‘Reprobates’ were a rugby team that the two of them played on from time to time. “I look forward to that,” I said as womanly as I could.

As Paul and I were the last to arrive, Kathy declared that everyone should bring their drinks to the dinner table and get ready for the first toast to the future bride and groom. A bride? Me? I shuddered as I thought and listened to the women I was with talk about designers and fantastic bridal dresses. They all had to tell me about the perfect dress they’d seen to fit me, right away.

“To the guy who said that he’d never get married!” was the first toast by Bernie. I quaked inside as I had to take a sip of the cold, white wine I was served by Kathy to toast Paul, my future husband.

“And to the woman who changed his mind,” announced Kathy as she sped about organizing the extra cooks and servers who were smiling as they served the boisterous party. I hated being the center of attention.

I hated it when all of the people there, all who knew Paul, made outrageous promises about what they were going to do to him, to us, on the wedding

day. First, they all presumed that there was going to be a wedding day and that they were all invited; second, Paul must have been a real joker with his friends because almost every one of them recalled something he'd done to embarrass them. They promised him, and me, that they were going to get even for what had happened in the past.

Bernie reached for my hand under the table and squeezed it. I think he saw the stricken look on my face. "Their bark is a lot worse than their bite," Bernie said in a low voice to me as I could see Paul, on the other side of him, grinning at someone down the long table. "I am so delighted to meet you at last, Julia."

That sent a shiver through me. "You, you know about me?" I gasped.

"Well, not all the details," said Bernie. "But I do know that Paul has been mooning after a girl called Julia for years. Oh, he's chased and caught a few, some remarkable beauties who, strangely, all looked like you, but he always gave them up. I'd just say, 'Not Julia?' and he'd agree. I finally got him into seeing a shrink, you know, but even that didn't help him. Wherever did he find you again? He was so certain he'd lost you."

What could I say to all that? I felt chills running through me as Bernie went on and on. Then he stood up and spoke a Grace which shut every one up. We all said 'Amen' but Bernie took all the solemnity out of the moment by making another Grace in which he thanked the Lord for delivering me at last to Paul.

The women of the land were now safe, I learned. Everyone could give thanks throughout the meal for

Julia, me, the woman Paul had pursued for so long. Thank goodness, I'd finally given in to him. We all had to be so thankful for that.

"But I haven't given in to him," I said to Kathy on my other side as she looked at my ring again and complimented me on my choice. "I, I'm not going to ..."

I was trying to say that I was not going to marry him. "Oh, good for you," said a slightly tipsy Katherine Bach, taking what I said to mean that I wasn't sleeping with Paul. Well, I wasn't doing that, at least, not yet. "It will drive Paul crazy to have to be abstinent till you're married. When are you getting married, by the way?"

"Paul said by the end of this month, or next," I murmured to her.

"You're joking, right?" said Kathy in astonishment. "Paul," she shouted across her husband and me. "You were joking when you told Julia you were going to marry her this month, weren't you?"

Paul looked past Bernie to me, making me shudder as I felt so girlish all over with the admiration in his eyes. "No, I wasn't joking," Paul told Kathy against all the background noise as the wine flowed freely at the table. "Julia is going to be a bride this month. If Bernie can't fit us in, we'll get married at the registry office."

"But you can't get a wedding dress in a month!" wailed Kathy. "And the bridesmaids' dresses! It'll take a month just to decide on who and what to wear. I can't find the right dress in just two weeks! You can't do this to us!"

A few other women joined in as I sat there, shuddering, my legs crossed, feeling every item of female

clothing I had about me. I screamed internally at the situation I'd put myself into. I really should have taken off with Michael on my walk that morning, doing what Paul was afraid of me doing. I should have run away from him and his gilded cage.

We had to circulate after dinner. I was hugged and kissed, and told I was such a beautiful girl, by so many men and women whom Paul knew and I didn't. Paul was there to deftly deflect all questions about my background and about me.

I only slipped up once, I think, when someone remarked that Lowell would have loved to be there to see his elder brother engaged to be married. "Aline would have loved to be here as well," I said which flustered the speaker.

"Oh, yes," said Gervaise, or someone with an equally silly name like that. "Oh, Aline Anderson it was, wasn't it? By gosh, was she a relative of yours or something?"

"We used to call each other, sisters," I said before Paul intervened, asking 'Bunty' not to pester his girl friend until she learned how to deal with makeout artists like him.

"Really," said Bernie as we prepared to leave after half the guests were gone, revealing then, to an astounded Reverend Bernard Bach and his wife, that I had a five-year old son to return home to. "I can see why you want to get married so quickly, Paul. I'll do what I can if you really want to gallop to the altar after waiting for so long. But, Julia, can't you please convince him to wait a couple of months longer? Then we could get the Abbey Church, I'm sure. And a country wedding from Longview would be so much

nicer than here in the city, even though Lansdowne Court is a little paradise.”

What kind of world was I moving towards, I thought in a panic, as someone could refer to Lansdowne Court as ‘little’, in any sense?

“We are not going to Wellingsley,” said Paul firmly. “We are going to be married here as soon as Godfrey has the papers ready. We’ll be married under a special licence. I know it’s old-fashioned but so am I. I’m not going to let Julia go this time. She’s not going to have time to consider if life would be better somewhere else for our son.”

“Your son?” asked Kathy in the greatest of surprise, shaking her head to get rid of alcoholic fumes, I was sure.

“Yes, Michael is my son,” said Paul, tightening his arm about my waist. “Julia tried to tell me several times about him but I was too pigheaded to listen properly. I knew she had a child and made a lot of sarcastic, stupid comments that drove Julia away from me. I’m now starting over. I’m going to be the husband and lover I should have been in the first place.”

Shaking, distressed, I tried to walk away in my stiletto high heels but Paul hung on to me. I had to hug Bernie and Kathy, who was teary-eyed as she kissed me good-night, promising to see me really soon. I was teary-eyed myself but for very different reasons.

“You think you’ve got me trapped,” I said to Paul as I shivered and tried to sit far from him in my seat at the front of his car.

“I do,” said Paul smugly. “And, if you don’t admit that I’m doing everything you want me to do for my

transwoman fiancée, then you're the one fooling yourself."

"Your what?" I squeaked at him, quaking at all the femmy feelings that ran through me.

"Transwoman," said Paul with a smile. "It took me a year with a shrink for me to face up to it. That's what you are. There's a woman inside you and she's the part of you I'm in love with. She peeped out at me in Rotherton and I fell for her. It took me a year to realize I was being nasty to you for what you couldn't help, your few male appendages.

"Well, as my shrink told me, if you were so pretty that I was attracted to what I saw as a woman, I wasn't gay at all. Anyone as attractive as a woman as you should appeal to a red-blooded male like me. And I can't turn off this obsession I have for you, Julia. If it wasn't for Michael, I wouldn't be bothering with all this crap of getting married and stuff. That's just for my parents and for Michael. If I really had what I want, you'd be lying beside me, in a little bikini on a beach along the Riviera, making love in the afternoon in our hotel room and only surfacing when we absolutely had to eat or drink."

I finally gasped shakenly at the driver of the car as he, Paul, finished his incredible speech. I shifted, feeling all the tightness of the womanly clothing I was wearing, feeling the earrings at my neck, shivering as violently as I'd ever felt them. His hand touched my stockings and I pushed it away. I twisted the woman's ring around on my red-tipped finger.

"You're a romantic," I whispered as I felt quivers running all through me. "Life isn't like this. Rumors

about Julia Anderson will surface. Lisa will have a field day in the press and media.”

“Lisa has enough troubles of her own,” said Paul, reaching out and again putting his hand gently on my thigh, caressing my stocking and garter while I gasped with girlish pleasure at his caress. “The Honorable Nicholas Fleeting has currently got two women dropping paternity orders on him. His money seems to have evaporated. It’s your father bailing him out of several jams Nicky’s got himself into. That’s one of the reasons that your grandmother wants you back in the family. I think she’s remembering now that you were the only one nice to her. Lisa certainly isn’t.”

I didn’t know when Paul took me into his house on Lansdowne Court that he’d have to leave to put the car away in a garage some little distance away. “Ramsey does it for me normally,” said Paul, putting his hands about me in the quiet foyer of his house. Surprisingly, I couldn’t smell liquor on his breath. He seemed to have avoided drink as I had all night long.

Paul wanted to kiss me. It was so romantic in the dark hallway with my little, femmy dress swirling about me, my high heels lifting me so that he hardly had to bend at all to caress my lips with his. “You look so gorgeous in these earrings and necklace and especially with my ring on your finger,” murmured Paul as he kissed me again. I snuggled into him, all reason and logic disappearing as the man I loved kissed me, feminine desire rising in me. Well, I wanted him to make me feel like a woman as he once had. Once in five years just wasn’t enough, I thought cynically.

Paul kissed me good night and went off to park the car. I thought he'd come back to my room. I prepared myself in a black, silk nightie and creamed myself most carefully, even leaving my hair loose. But he didn't come. I waited and waited and didn't hear the door at all. I eventually dozed off to sleep. The kiss that finally awoke me the next day was from my loving son.

*******What I always dreamed of*******

Paul was in his office, working, when I saw him the next day. A young woman, in a dark suit, just like mine, smiled to me as I went in.

"Marianne Horton," said Paul in a terse introduction. "My fiancée, Julia Anderson. Marianne has been working as an au pair with some friends of mine and has been recommended to me as an ideal nanny for Michael."

"But I don't need a nanny for my son," I told Paul angrily. The smile on the pretty, dark-haired girl's face faded.

"Yes, we do," said Paul patiently. "We have a lot to do in the next few weeks, you and I, and we need someone bright and intelligent to be with Michael as a companion, until he goes to school in September. Then, you are going to need someone to assist you with all the duties I'll require of you as my wife. Marianne is ideal for the bright, intelligent boy you've raised. She will, in no way, take your place as a mother."

Marianne smiled at me, though she looked a little uncertain at the welcome I'd given her.

“I’m sorry,” I said to her. “I didn’t mean to be so rude but Paul is wrong about me needing help with my son.”

“You had to leave him with a babysitter when you were working,” Paul pointed out to me. “I don’t want you working, Julia, but there’s a lot of stuff we have to do for our wedding. We have an appointment this afternoon. I don’t want to palm Michael off on Annie. It isn’t that she can’t handle him or entertain him. She’s so conscientious she’ll do her own work at night so that nothing falls behind in her routines.

“Marianne is younger and her focus for the next little while will be Michael. She’ll live on the top floor with the new maid I’m also hiring to help Annie with her increased work load. That’s because I’ve heard from my mother and father. They’re going to be here soon to meet both you and Michael. Now, do you want to introduce Marianne to Michael or shall I?”

“I don’t have a choice, do I?” I asked bitterly. I didn’t want to say, in front of Marianne, that Paul had said he wanted me to interview applicants for the job of nanny to Michael. I’d already determined in my own mind that no-one was going to fit the bill.

“Not really,” said Paul pleasantly as the girl looked nervously at me. “When Godfrey phoned me this morning, I cancelled my call to the agency I was going to have help us find someone. I’m sorry to break the news to you so quickly but I only had to talk to Marianne for five minutes to know she’s the one for Michael in our situation.”

And you are the one for impulsive decisions, I thought furiously, unable to say what was on my mind as the girl, the same age as me, stared at me,

clutching her purse anxiously, clearly thinking I was a girl just like her.

“Come with me, Marianne,” I said to the girl. She looked to Paul for approval before coming after me as I led her to the playroom where I’d left Michael.

“Your, your fiancé hired me without consulting you,” gasped Marianne as we walked down the hallway. I saw us approaching in the shine of the mirrored front of an old portrait. Two girls in straight skirts and colorful tops swayed towards the mirror. I suppose I was emphasizing the femininity of my walk, comparing myself to the woman beside me.

Marianne had short, dark, wavy hair but there the comparison between us really ended. She was taller than me and wore flat shoes while I wore heels. She was cheery almost all the time and sympathized entirely with me. She didn’t want to be foisted on Michael and me by Paul. She’d have left right away if I’d wanted her to.

I couldn’t be that rude to her, nor that contrary to Paul, though my womanly pride was still hurt about the night before. I was glad that I took Marianne into the playroom, however. Paul was entirely right about Marianne. In two minutes of greeting Michael, she and my son were like best buddies. Michael opened up the massive Lego castle set he’d found stored away at the bottom of a cupboard. He’d tried to inveigle me the day before into doing it with him. I wouldn’t have minded but it wasn’t a quick play toy. I had my doubts that it would be worth playing with after it was all done. Marianne read the directions that Michael showed her.

“Wow,” she said with a smile to Michael. “This will take days to put together.”

“That’s what I thought,” my wonderful son said with a bright smile. “But if we do a little today, such as sorting out the bottom, we could do a little day by day until we eventually got it all done, couldn’t we? I could do the ghost’s chamber if I could find all the right pieces.”

I left them to it and went back to see Paul.

He rose from his desk, came around and put his hands about mine. I wanted to give him a piece of my mind. “You look so lovely today,” Paul said huskily, putting his arms about me inhaling the fragrance he’d bought for me to wear. Well, I was wearing it just for him as I had the night before.

“Paul,” was all I was able to say before he kissed me. His hand went round the back of my blouse. I felt it on my bra strap as he hugged me to him, his lips so firm on mine. My heart seemed to be doing back flips in my chest. I moved my lips. He followed mine with his; and so I couldn’t break apart from him. All I could do was just enjoy the tremendous rush of girlish emotions that surged through me as I held on to Paul as any woman would have.

Paul kissed my neck and my new earrings and muttered his praises for my choice of clothing and jewellery. I felt so womanly myself as he held me, stroking me until I recalled how he’d left me the night before.

“About last night,” said Paul then huskily. “You wondered what became of me?”

“A little,” I lied to him as he held me against him as we sat on the sofa, me in his arms, he stroking my leg as I crossed one over the other at his feminizing touch.

“I can barely keep myself out of your bed,” said Paul, stroking my hair and my neck. Don’t, I wanted to tell him, my heart rate zooming up. “You can see why I had to get Michael a companion. I have to have time with you for this at the very least.” He kissed me again as I nervously put my arms about his neck. Just like the first time, I couldn’t stop kissing him. He had to stop me by taking my hands from about him.

“I do want to wait just a little, Julia,” Paul said to me. “Because you were right. I have you trapped here. You do have choices, though. I wanted to say that. But if I’d come creeping into your bed last night, what choice would you have had but to let me make love to you?”

“I could always refuse you,” I murmured to him, feeling so much a girl in his arms. “I could scream and wake the whole house.”

Paul smiled. “No-one would have heard you. Well, save for Michael, I suppose. But, when Marianne and Annie’s niece move in, I’ll be in trouble if I lay a finger on you when you don’t want me to.”

Paul ran his finger down the front of me, over my padded breasts. I felt so wonderfully feminine as a man did that to me, intending to arouse me as a woman. My panties were definitely hurting me. I turned my face in invitation. Paul lowered his lips to kiss me so marvellously again.

“I do have something to ask you,” Paul went on as I snuggled against him, not holding back in being a girl, touching a man, even though I knew I had to be so careful where any caresses I gave out might lead me.

“Ask away,” I murmured.

“Aline was going to pay for a breast augmentation for you,” said Paul. I felt my hair stand on end. “That’s what you said, didn’t you? She was going to give you breasts for Christmas.”

“She, she s-s-said that,” I agreed as Paul tightened his grip on my bra.

“I’ve more money than I know what to do with at times,” said Paul firmly. “I want to take up Aline’s promise. That money she had all came to me. I’ve done nothing with it except just put it into general accounts. It should have come to you, your winnings, shouldn’t it? You should have had hormone therapy and breast implants by now as you wanted.”

“I don’t want them now,” I blurted out at Paul, pulling away from him on the sofa, uncrossing my legs with the familiar sound of nylons easing together, shivers going up my back and around my bra straps as I thought about what he was suggesting.

“I did something else without telling you about it,” said Paul. “I made an appointment with a doctor for this afternoon. He said that he had a cancellation and would fit you in. I’ll cancel your breast augmentation if you don’t want it done.”

“Paul!” I yelled at him, all kinds of conflicting emotions running through me. “One minute you say you’ve trapped me and the next you’re planning all sorts of changes in me! And you didn’t say a word to me about what you’re doing!”

“You know what I’m doing,” said Paul slowly, staring at me. “I’m getting everything lined up so that I can marry you. I want you to be my woman

and my wife. I want you to be as much a woman as you want to be. I know I'm rushing you. I want so much to catch up on the last five years that I've wasted, getting my own head together. That's why I'm in such a hurry. When you walked in today and stood beside Marianne, I could only think how lucky I am that you're going to be my wife. I can't wait any longer to make it true."

My head began to spin as I heard dreams I'd had, threatening to come true. But it had never really been like that at all in my life.

"You want to change me," I whispered.

"No," said Paul. He picked up the phone and called someone as I watched him anxiously. "Doctor Romano," he said. "Yes, I understand. This is Paul Leisham. I have to cancel the appointment I made with him this afternoon. Yes, for my girl friend, for my fiancée actually. Please cancel it. Thank you."

Paul hung up. I didn't know whether to be happy or sad. I didn't know whether I'd blown a chance to have a procedure done to me that I'd only dreamed about. I had a feeling that I wasn't going to be offered it again any time soon.

"Tonight we dress for dinner," said Paul with a crooked smile. "I think I'll have to get used to you in high-necked dresses, won't I?"

"Yes," I said, feeling as if I was going to cry. "But I'll still be the one in a dress, anyway."

Paul grimaced at that. "And very pretty underwear," he said as he moved down the sofa towards me. "So, since you're not being examined today for breasts, how about we get you measured for your wedding dress? Or shall we fly over to Paris for that? Yes, I think that's what we'll do. It's what my mother

will be doing, anyway, as soon as I have a moment to talk to her and to my father.”

“You’re going to tell your parents that, that you want to marry a, a, what, a, transwoman?” I asked him sourly. “Oh, Paul, don’t you see how hopeless this whole affair is. You, you can’t marry someone like me.”

“When Godfrey has done his work,” said Paul, a dark flush on his face. “You will legally be a woman. No-one will question that. You will legally be Michael’s mother. No-one will question that. We’ll be married. You will legally be my wife. No-one will question that either. Not even you, darling Julia.”

I tried to stand up and run away but Paul was quicker than me. He beat me to the door and locked it. I tried not to co-operate with him. I really did but he had me at the first kiss he managed to plant on my lips. Despite all his fine words about me having a choice, I really didn’t have one at all.

We seemed to have an affinity for sofas. I was soon beneath him, my mind giving way to the bliss that flooded all over me as Paul undid my skirt and took it from me. His hands really caressed my legs and my panties and especially my garter belt. I was a girlish wreck as I clawed with my long, feminine fingernails frantically at his shirt and his pants.

Oh, his manhood was so inflamed, so huge and so masculine. Paul pulled on my blouse and buttons flew all over but I didn’t care. I only cared about the ardent, womanly desire that swept through me as Paul kissed my shoulders and the tiny, straps of my lingerie and my bra, kissing all the scented areas of my false cleavage as his hands made short work of taking down my panties, exposing my erect append-

age. He pressed down against it, kissing me into female ecstasy, as he spread my legs and lifted me onto him as if I was his woman. He penetrated me as I writhed and wiggled in co-operation to everything he wanted to do to me. Oh, I was really a woman again!



Paul ignored his phone and the knocking on the door as he stroked and kissed my legs as he lifted them about him. I gyrated and bounced so gloriously as I felt like a girl again. Paul made love to me as he'd done once before. This time there were no recriminations. I could kiss him as hungrily and as lustfully as I wanted while he did the same to me. I could rock on his penetrating member and drive it further into me as feminine bliss beckoned me as Paul and I were one.

I don't know how long we were joined together in a convulsing, passionate mess but it seemed like an eternity. Even after the explosion of every nerve in my body, the spasms that wracked me, the awful squealing I made as I rolled and wriggled, Paul driving into me, emptying himself into me as a man should do to his woman, I still wanted more.

Paul recognized what I was doing, kissing him so frenziedly. He caressed me, releasing my womanly desire for him. My panties covered my male appendages between his abdomen and mine. Even as I climaxed there, too, he began to work inside me again and stiffen so. Ooo, it was so marvellous to be 'done' as a woman, all over again. A half dozen phone calls were ignored as was another anxious tapping on the door.

"My wife," Paul whispered to me.

"Oh yes," I murmured back to him, feeling the passion rise in me yet again but the heavy knocking on the door had to be answered.

"Yes," Paul yelled. A muffled message came through the door then.

"I'm fine," Paul yelled again. "I'll be out in a few minutes."

Whoever it was went away. I don't know if Paul actually heard anything. I know that I didn't.

"I hope this makes up for last night," a naked Paul said, squeezing me tightly beneath him as my legs were closed about him. I felt his manhood rising again against my poor tush.



“Again?” I asked him desperately as he kissed my ear, my hair in a terrible mess.

“I’ve five years to catch up on,” said Paul, stroking my bra, opening it to actually find my hard, little nipples and caress them. “This is only a taste of how I’m going to love you when we’re married. My wife will not be allowed to turn me down, ever. I’ll have my conjugal rights. You’ll submit to me, Julia, just like this, whenever I want you.”

“J-Just l-like th-this!” I squealed as Paul made love to me slowly and passionately, every part of my body seeming to have been kissed and caressed by him until, finally, I was filled again by a man with the desire to treat me as a woman. He wasn’t content until his kisses made me a complete, bouncing, wanton woman, completely out of her mind with love and passion and ecstasy as he established his physical power over her, me, as his woman.

*******Meeting the parents*******

I murmured in bed one night with my lover beside me, my baby dolls long gone from me that, if he wished it, I’d go to Doctor Romano’s and have my breasts enlarged. He’d suckled enough on my little nips as it was that I knew what he liked in a girl. My lover had pleased me so much I wanted him to have the same sexual pleasure from me as I got from him.

“I’ll arrange it,” murmured Paul into my ear. I felt the urge move in him again to have me. I stretched out luxuriously as he kissed my shoulders and caressed my thighs, encouraging me to wiggle like a belly dancer against him. He’d brought lubricant with him to my bedroom. He slipped more easily

into me, intensifying my girlish pleasure so that I had to contort myself, turning my head so that I could kiss him and enjoy him as he pleased me in other ways at the same time.

Ordinary couples could not be doing what we were, I thought, as Paul tweaked my nipples again. I opened my mouth a little so that he could possess me as he wanted. He loved to French kiss me. Well, he loved kissing me anywhere and everywhere. But ordinary couples could not be doing what we were doing, not as often as we were doing it.

I shivered at the thought that Paul must be getting chemical assistance to be able to take me as often as he did. That time on the couch in his library had broken a dam between us. We retired now at night within an hour of Michael going to bed. We also had to have a 'nap' ourselves in the afternoon to make sure that we both did continue to feel the way that we said we did for each other.

I was making use of all the wonderful, feminine lingerie Paul had bought for me. I was wearing the bustier that he wanted me to, the perfumes and colognes he liked, and I'd been to the hairdressers' and female spa to have my hair cut and styled as he wanted it. I'd spent an awkward day in the spa being feminized, having a wonderful manicure and a pedicure as well as waxes and skin treatments, all the while trying to conceal that I was the most flat-chested of girls.

It didn't faze the girls who worked on me. I wore the tightest of gaffs about me and tight, panties, two pairs which made one or two raise their eyes at my extreme modesty. Other women in there were totally unconcerned about nudity and prying eyes. I wanted to crawl out of there several times but I

stuck it out, largely because Kathy Bach was with me.

It was worth it as well to see the look on Paul's face when I came out with the new makeup on my face and with my hair so perfect. Michael had even been impressed and told me that I was beautiful, again. Marianne cheerfully added her praise to that and for the lovely, flower-patterned mini-dress with a black top I wore. The short dress made me feel like I was in my underclothes walking down the street with all the men staring and smiling at me, even though Paul's arm was about me.

"You'd still love me to have real breasts," I'd said to him as I lay in his arms after we'd put Michael to bed.

"No," Paul had said with a smile. "I like my girl just the way she is. I don't want her ever to change."

That led to an early to bed where I pleased him as best I could for such wonderful remarks, bringing out the frilly babydolls that I didn't get to wear for very long.

We must have done it longer and more intensely that night because we both slept through the quiet alarm clock. It was a mischievously smiling Michael who awakened me in the morning with a sleeping Paul Leisham draped all over me.

"Oh, Michael," I said, unable to raise my arms or he'd have seen that I was totally naked. I wiggled my tush against Paul and he drowsily kissed my cheek.

"Can you dress yourself, darling?" I begged my little boy. "I'll get up in just a moment."

“Is Paul going to be my new daddy?” asked my excited son as I tried to hold the covers over myself and push my long hair from my eyes.

“Yes, he is,” said Paul pushing himself up behind me as I felt his body suddenly move and caress the entire length of me. Paul stroked my arm as he bent and kissed my shoulder. “Your mummy and I are going to be married very soon and, yes, I’m going to be your daddy. And when I’m your daddy, I’m going to forbid you to enter Mummy’s bedroom until you’ve kicked the door loudly at least ten times!”

Michael laughed. “Will I have a baby brother soon?” he asked. My breath was taken away completely as he’d never said anything like that before.

“I’m working on it, Michael,” said Paul, his hands stroking my tush under the bedclothes and I felt his hardness against me. “I’m working on it.”

“You idiot,” I scolded Paul as soon as Michael had withdrawn. I pulled a bedsheet over me and fled to my chest of drawers to find a new nightie and negligee set. I had panties and a bra to find as well as I didn’t dare to descend the stairs without those in place for the breakfast that we were very late for. “How, how are you going to explain that there’ll never be any other additions to Michael’s family?”

“Adoption, surrogacy, an in-vitro pregnancy, your sister might have a baby for you,” said Paul with a wicked grin. “I’ve heard it all from Lisa on the rare occasions I’ve been over at Seymour Hall. She’s got all the facts and figures. Your Gran thinks she ought to kidnap Michael and make him hers. Oh, I forgot that, kidnapping another child.”

“Don’t, don’t joke about it!” I said to him, with a shudder as I’d thought so often of Paul stealing Michael from me.

“When we’re married,” said Paul, sending more shivers through me as I tied my long negligee about my waist with a silky, cord, “we’ll talk about it seriously. We will have more children, Julia, you and me, in some fashion.”

John Romano was another friend of Paul’s, another member of the Reprobates rugby club. “Actually, I’m the team doctor these days,” the sandy-haired man said to me as I had to sit up on his examining table and try to keep my dark-patterned blue and black dress down while Doctor John, ‘My patients call me that’, opened the front of my dress and gently unhooked the front closing bra that I’d decided to wear for this excruciating visit.

“Well,” said Doctor John. I flushed at his tone. I knew what was coming as he palpated my hard, little nipples and measured the area, the areole, about the nipple. “Well,” he went on with a kind smile as I refastened my padded bra. He wrote something I couldn’t see. “Paul said that you were so concerned about this procedure that you didn’t want someone who was his friend to see you. You have to know that the relationship between us, Julia, is like that of a priest in a confessional.

“Now, what I propose for you, is not only that we put a silicone pad behind your chest muscle to make a breast for you on either side but also that we do a little cosmetic work on those nipples. Oh, not anything, before you object, that’s going to get in the way of breastfeeding as Paul says he wants a larger family than the one he grew up in. Actually, if we enlarge your nipple, it may make it a lot easier

for your next child to feed from you. I understand that Michael was bottle-fed by you. Correct?”

“I, I had to work,” I said, hating myself as I missed this doctor who looked at the face beneath him. He only saw the work of very talented beauticians who’d made me look like a woman whom a man like Paul Leisham would want to marry.

“Not for your next one,” said Doctor John Romano, helping me to swing my black-stockinged legs and black high heels to the floor and stand up in front of him. “Now, with Paul it’s always right now, right now, let’s get it done. I understand that he’s trying to organize a wedding ceremony for the two of you this month. He’ll never get all the licences, church and catering in place that quickly. This that you’re doing, well, I suppose you’re doing it to please him.”

I shuddered. I couldn’t let Doctor John think I was that altruistic. “I want it done for myself as well,” I said, blushing so badly as the doctor nodded and smiled at me. “It, it j-just seems like the right time.”

“Of course,” said Doctor John. He tapped his teeth with a pen, looked at and thought about something. “Oh, hang, we’ll squeeze you in on Thursday and make Paul happy. When he gets the request for my charity, that’s for plastic surgery for kids overseas, the New Life Foundation, you just tell him to double what he normally sends us.”

“I-I don’t want to put you in trouble,” I said as I adjusted my dress about me and sat in as womanly fashion as I could while Doctor John smiled at me, saying he appreciated me crossing my legs for him.

“They’re all easy implants,” John Romano went on. “Save for the nipple enlargement that is. I do have surgery until five but we were planning to finish early. No matter. We’re going to squeeze you in. It’s the least I can do for an old reprobate like Paul Leisham.” I didn’t know if he was really saying something negative, but affectionate, about Paul, or if he was referring to the rugby connection again.

“On Thursday,” said John Romano cheerfully to a tense Paul Leisham who rose in the waiting room to greet me as Doctor John began to assemble forms and procedures for me to follow prior to surgery. “And then, old man, no hanky-panky for a couple of weeks.”

Paul’s face was quite a picture. “The things that Julia told me that the two of you get up to in bed,” said John, tut-tutting and pretending I think to consult his notes.

“I did no such thing!” I said hotly to Paul, trembling in his arms.

The older receptionist was grinning up at the doctor in a kind of hero worship. Paul squeezed my waist. “I don’t care what you said to him,” Paul murmured to me. “You didn’t have time to tell him half of the things I do to you.”

“And I can’t repeat a one,” said Doctor John solemnly. “Doctor’s hypocritical oath.”

“That’s ...” I began to correct him hurriedly as Paul got my jacket for me.

“He got the word right,” said Paul with a wide smile at me. “See you on Thursday then, John, and thanks.”

“You’ll love my work,” said Doctor John. “Oh, and Julia, a prescription for you. A very light dose of female hormones. They’ll help you all over.”

“He knows about me,” I told Paul as I stumbled out of the office onto the street where Ramsey was waiting for us with Paul’s Rolls.

Paul frowned and waited until we were seated in the car. Then, first, he had to kiss me, his hand caressing my leg, stopping at my garter belt and raising such feminine feelings in me once more that the examination had partly taken from me.

“What makes you think ...?” murmured Paul.

“Why,” I asked him, trembling, “would he put me on female hormones?”

“You should have read more about the procedures,” said Paul, hugging and squeezing me. “That’s what John does for all his patients. He has some idea that estrogen will help you to regain any sexual desire that surgery takes from you. And it’s only a week that I mustn’t arouse you, until your stitches are out. His instructions don’t say anything about you arousing me.”

I shuddered and let Paul press me back into the seat and kiss me most thoroughly, his hand hovering along my dress, wanting to lift it and pleasure me. We’d missed our ‘nap’, but knowing that Ramsey would see so much in his rear view mirror, of my pretty panties and my lovely stockings, we couldn’t do it in the car as Paul dared me.

The window to the front opened. “Your phone,” said Ramsey, holding one receiver himself to his ear. “Mr Leisham, it’s your mother and father.”

Paul sat up smartly and took the car phone from the chauffeur. I hurriedly smoothed down my skirts and looked for my purse. I was going to need to fix my makeup as I always did of late before I left the car after being out alone, save for Ramsey, on a ride with Paul.

“Yes, all right,” Paul said. “I’ll have Ramsey drop us and come to pick you up. It is the rush hour, Mother, and so, yes, he’ll be late. You should have called me sooner. Yes, you’re going to surprise me. And Julia as well. Yes, she’s sitting right beside me. Listening to everything I say to you. She’s looking forward to meeting you.”

Paul hung up, leaned forward to tell Ramsey to pick up his parents at Heathrow where they were just landing. They were calling him from the airplane.

Just the thought of meeting Paul’s parents as Julia filled me with dread. “We shall have dinner late tonight,” said Paul with a sigh. “My mother will insist as well that we dress for dinner. Well, it’s time you wore one of the evening gowns I’ve bought for you, isn’t it? Wear the smokey-grey gown.” The one with the Dior label in it, I thought, a lovely thrill going through me. “It’s the one I think that will set off your ring, necklace and earrings so well.”

I shivered as I looked at my ring which I was so used to wearing right now.

“I must phone Godfrey as well,” said Paul a little grumpily. “And get a progress report from him what he’s doing for us.”

So-so, I gathered was the answer. And if Paul kept phoning him, Godfrey apparently said, it would

take even longer as Godfrey would shuffle his requests to the bottom of his to-do list.

“Don’t change right now,” said Paul as we went into the house. I sashayed through to the kitchen where, outside, we could see Marianne, Mike, the upstairs maid who was named Chantal, and Michael, of course, involved in a furious game of soccer on the open tennis court.

“Oh, Mr Leisham, did you hear?” asked Annie Salter. “Your mother is flying in right now.”

“My father as well,” said Paul with a smile as Annie turned her back to him and began to dash about the kitchen.

“May I help you?” I asked.

“Rather you didn’t,” said Annie Salter with a look of surprise at me. “I’ve got everything on a schedule. Having someone else in the kitchen will only mix me up. Now, the dishes afterwards.”

“No, Annie,” said Paul with a laugh. “You’ll have plenty of help for that. Morton, Frances and Bingley will be with my parents for sure.”

Annie Salter sniffed. “Well she did ask,” she said as she looked slyly at me. I had the feeling that Annie was looking forward to some kind of conflict heading right at me.

I went with Paul to his office for a little privacy. He explained that Frances was his mother’s maid and companion while Morton was the head butler and his father’s valet, though two others, one very young, were at present butlers at Longview, keeping that place squeaky clean. Alison Bingley was mother’s social secretary. She made all the appointments and reservations that his parents needed. All

her carefully worked out itinerary had just been abandoned as the Leishams were coming home.

“To see me,” I said in fear as Paul hovered over me as I lay beneath him on the sofa.

I was saved from the proverbial ‘fate worse than death’ that I enjoyed so much, and was longing for, by the telephone. It was Paul’s mother again. They’d landed and were coming by taxi, I gathered, though who ‘they’ were, I didn’t know. I did know that Bingley was staying at the airport to secure the luggage and would meet Ramsey whenever he got there.

I knew all that because I could hear Mrs Leisham clearly on the phone.

I smoothed down my dress as Paul didn’t want me to change. “I love the way you look in that dress,” he murmured as he caught me at the door. “It suits you so well with those dangling earrings. Your hair is so lovely as well. Have I mentioned your perfume lately?”

Paul had, many times. Our kisses, before his parents arrived, gave me quite a loving, female glow.

But that didn’t survive the arrival of Mr and Mrs Leisham.

“Is this the so-called girl?” asked Mrs Leisham as she barged right into Paul’s study, her husband behind her staring goggle-eyed at me as Paul took his hands from me and stood up to greet his mother.

“Paul,” she said, her older, smooth face aghast, as she stared at her son and offered him her cheek to kiss. “Don’t you know who this Julia Anderson really is? She’s not a woman at all. She’s Richard Anderson, Lisa and Aline’s younger brother. Hasn’t

that family caused us enough grief as it is without having you marrying a sex change? Have you gone stark, raving mad?"

"And welcome home to you as well, Mother," said Paul flatly, kissing his mother's cheek.

"My boy," said Mr Leisham, silver-haired and silver-mustached. "We couldn't believe it when we got your cable and Bingley told us all about Julia Anderson. Is this him?" He indicated me.

I had to wobble to my high heels, the glow that Paul had put into me turned to an iceberg as I looked at the hostility in the older people's eyes.

"This is Julia Anderson, my fiancée," said Paul, enunciating each word so clearly that it was as if they were hanging in the air after he'd said them. "She's the woman whom I intend to marry just as soon as Godfrey arranges all the paperwork for us. If you'd like to come to our wedding, Mother, Father, I hope that the pair of you will tape your mouths shut before you do."

Mrs Leisham stared at me, the force of her personality making me back to Paul's desk, my skirts swishing as I glanced at her. I had to shudder and look down. Paul's mother was quite correct. Of course I was a man. I hadn't felt so silly in days as I did then. I used to feel so stupid often when I first started to cross-dress in my sister's clothes. I felt like a man in a woman's panties and a woman's bra.

Right there, I felt like a man with my face painted. I was perfumed and bejewelled like a woman and I wasn't. Not a mini-dress and stockings with a garter belt could make me into what I wasn't. And when Paul's mother looked at me the way she

did, with such piercing blue eyes, I knew what I was. I was still a man, a man in a dress.

Paul turned and came to me, taking my hands in his as I trembled, my dress swaying seductively about me. But the wonderful feeling of being his woman, and some day his wife, had evaporated. "Julia, these are my parents," said Paul, his eyes glittering.

"I, I said we could never be married," I murmured to him.

Paul seized me angrily and kissed me, his hands sliding from around my arms to about my waist. Oh, I wanted him to do that, to chase away all the silly sensations floating through my mind and to restore me, Julia, to myself. It almost worked even though his parents were sniffing and saying things like, "Paul, please," and "I say, Paul," in front of us.

"She," said Mrs Leisham, sitting down in the middle of the sofa and owning it. "Is that right? Is she some sort of she-male now? Should I be calling her a she? Has she actually had a sex change? Don't tell me, Paul, that she hasn't!"

"Of course, Julia hasn't had a sex change," said Paul angrily as he hugged and squeezed me. "I wouldn't fancy her then, would I?"

"Good god, Paul," his father said. "Are you gay? Is that what you're telling us?"

There was a firm knock on the door. A grey-haired, older man entered the room.

"Yes, Morton," said an irritated Mrs Leisham. "What is it? We're in a family conference here, Arthur, straightening out the business we've been talking about ever since we got Paul's cable."

“I think there’s someone else here whom you should meet, madam,” said the butler, his eyes on me with definite interest. He turned. “Come in, young man.”

Michael came into the room uncertainly.

“Michael,” I croaked. He ran to me. I bent down and hugged him.

“Who’s this?” asked Mr Leisham, Paul’s father.

“This is my son, Michael,” I said. Mrs Leisham rocked tremendously on the sofa while Mr Leisham seemed absolutely surprised.

“Julia,” said Paul. “Tell them the whole truth. He isn’t just your son any more. Michael is my son as well. I freely acknowledge, Mother, Father, that Michael Leisham is my son and heir, and your grandson and, when that’s all cleared up, I am going to marry his mother, the woman I made pregnant over five years ago. Yes, Michael, I wanted to tell you all this later, after I married your mother, but it seems that it’s best that it’s all out in the open now.”

The older folks were gasping for air. Mr Leisham sat down heavily in an armchair with a few, “My god” remarks finding their way past his lips. “You’re really my dad?” asked Michael, even as he hugged me.

I would have told him and the others the real truth but Paul’s hand suddenly squeezed my arm tightly. I gasped like the others as well.

“Yes,” said Paul, kneeling beside me. “I’m your father, Michael. I’m so sorry for the way that I treated your mother in the past. I’m going to make it up to her in every way I can for all the things I’ve said and repeated. They weren’t true, like me denying that

you could possibly have come from me. If you can go with Marianne now, I'll come to you later, or your mummy will. We'll answer all your questions."

"Okay," said Michael brightly. He frowned at the older people staring at him but gave a very friendly smile to Arthur Morton who smiled back at him.

When Michael was gone, Morton turned to the older Leishams. "Did you see it, madam, sir?" he asked. "It's as if Mr Lowell was alive and running through the house, madam. I must bring you the photo albums, sir. I'm sure you'll see the resemblance right away. That boy is a Leisham as sure as, well, as sure as I'm Arthur Morton and have worked for the family for thirty-two years."

"Good god," said a stunned Mr Leisham the elder.

Morton withdrew and closed the study doors quietly. Mrs Leisham stared at me.

"Well, mother," taunted Paul. "How many, what did you call Julia, she-males have given birth to sons like Michael Leisham? Yes, his birth certificate has my name and Julia's as his mother on it. When Julia came to Longview years ago and you had Morton's helper, Vannell, drive her off, she was coming to us to tell us, to tell me, I had a son."

"But Bingley said," the words almost exploded from Mrs Leisham.

"Alison Bingley has been altogether too friendly with Lisa Anderson Fleeting," said Paul bitterly. "I heard the rumors, the horrible things that Lisa and her husband, even Richard's grandmother, were saying about him. Richard went off to the States to a job in a stable in Kentucky. He was always good with horses. Lisa made up these stories that Julia is

Richard until I think that she half believes them, or actually does, herself.

“No, Julia is not Richard. She couldn’t be Michael’s mother if she was, could she?”

“No,” gasped Mrs Leisham feebly.

“You’ve listened to Lisa too much,” Paul went on grimly. “Did you know she wanted to take Michael and raise him as her own? I even told Julia she was selfish in not giving him up to her cousin. Old Mrs Anderson asked me track Julia down last month and, the moment I saw Michael, I knew what an idiot I’d been.”

I couldn’t say a word. I was trembling far too much as my lover spun out a wonderful tale to his parents that wasn’t true at all but I could see that they bought into.

“Oh, my dear girl,” said Mrs Leisham putting out her hand to me. “Whatever have I been saying? Oh, I do apologize. Oh, that Lisa Anderson! I should have known! Aline never had a good word to say about her!”

That jolted Paul as well as me. I took Paul’s mother’s hand and stared up at Paul, wondering when he was going to tell them about Lowell and Aline, that they were really Michael’s parents and not ‘us’.

“You knew Aline?” I asked tentatively.

“A beautiful girl,” said Mrs Leisham. “The pick of that family. I told her Paul was too much of a play-boy ever to settle down. I begged her to go with Lowell. He really needed a smart woman to keep him on the right track. She did really well with him in the short time they had.” Her eyes had begun to

mist over. "If only that pair had had the time to have a child."

*******Paul's rules*******

"You can't keep the fact that Lowell and Aline are Michael's parents from them," I told my lover when he crept into my bed in the early part of the night. Paul was naked and cold and so he put his feet into the lower folds of my nightie and pulled me over on top of him to get warm.

"I didn't know my mother knew Aline well," whispered Paul. "I might not have declared Michael to be mine if I'd known. But it all worked out, didn't it? Think about it. They accept you as a woman and will insist now we get married. Bingley and Lisa are discredited. Michael is my heir and my parents' grandson. Geez, are we ever going to have to watch him now! They're going to spoil that little boy unmercifully. Thank goodness you're his mother."

"You lied to your parents," I said with a shiver at his words. Paul lifted me over him, pulling my nightie up about us, lubricating me so I could soon receive him inside me as he clearly intended.

"Where?" Paul asked me. "Aren't you Michael's mother? You are, you know, and aren't I going to be Michael's father as I said. Leave it as it is, Julia. Aline and Lowell would approve. You know that. They'd hate to have you being maligned by that ugly sister of yours. Now, enough about them. How about you concentrate on me for a while? I'm pining away, loveless, down here!"

"You, loveless?" I had to say to my lover as I sat astride him, my hair falling down over my shoulders, over the frilled straps of the soft nightie that

was between us. "I think that you're the most over-sexed man in the country. Why, oh, why, did I ever have to fall in love with you?"

"Say that again," said Paul as I began to tremble ecstatically as I made love to him in the rare position of being on top. It was so strange to be like that with him.

"Say what?" I asked him coyly.

"That bit about love," said Paul, drawing me down so that I had to arch femininely to kiss him as he held me in position so that I felt him working away to entice me into being his woman in bed with him.

"I love you," I whispered to him as I kissed Paul Leisham. He stroked me but finally we had to roll over. He took me in the most traditional of positions with my legs, all wrapped around with my long nightie about his waist as my lover whispered the same words to me over and over again, when he could get his lips free of me.

*******How it all ended*******

I didn't like all the deception but I shuddered at the alternatives which all seemed so much worse. I made a promise to myself that I'd tell Michael, soon, about his real parents but he was in heaven for the longest time.

After having just me as a mother to him, Michael suddenly found himself with three, or four. Marianne loved him and was great with him. My future mother-in-law doted on him while Annie and the rest of the staff loved him as well. I couldn't be-

lieve how the house was full of people and how, after I was married, I was supposed to organize them all.

“Well, it’s not my job any more,” said Mother, Mrs Leisham, making me so nervous as she always did. “I’ll help you, my girl, but you are the mistress of the house now.”

Alison Bingley, an older, elegant woman, couldn’t get over me or Michael, who was being a little shy with a whole new set of strangers in the house. “That bitch, Lisa,” I heard her say once as she walked off to do some task for my mother. “I’ll never believe a word that woman says ever again.”

I’d dutifully gone to John Romano on Thursday and got my breasts. I took my pills religiously and didn’t say anything to John about whether he knew that I was what I was. I do think that he does.

“Darling Julia,” said Mother, just after I could bear to walk down the stairs with these wobbly things on my chest. “You just have to persuade Paul to postpone your wedding to September, you must.” She was almost crying at me. “I can’t organize my son’s wedding in such a short time as a month! And your dress. It has to be made in Paris!”

So I had to fly over to Paris with an extraordinary document. It was my passport. It said that I was Julia Anderson and that I was female. I think I was in shock, and in a glow. all the time that we were in Paris and in the marvellous House of Revy de Brasseur. Patrice Revy was so nice to me. Beth Calder, the most famous model in Paris, modelled fabulous dresses for me but Patrice insisted on designing a new dress for me, one that was completely without straps.

“You have such lovely breasts,” Patrice said to me. “We must show them off, mustn’t we? Beth will bring you your dress and all your trousseau in August and model them for you. Your mother’s dress will be ready for you then. I promise you that you will be the bride of the year in your country with my beautiful design.”

I clutched the designs that Patrice gave me and chatted to Beth Calder, whose golden beauty took my breath away. The way that Paul was looking at her as if he was dumbstruck made me so glad she was going to America to model very soon. I hoped jealously that she stayed there for good.

Paul had proclaimed that he didn’t care at all if I had breasts or not. I didn’t believe him at the time and it was the truth. He loved me even more, I think, when I had breasts than it was possible to say. He loved coming behind me when I was absorbed with something else and putting his arms about me and caressing my bra, my nipples immediately coming to attention for him. In bed at night, we would often lie together while he explored my breasts softly until he had turned me into a demanding, aroused woman who almost attacked him in her desire to be intimate with her lover.

I wore all the dresses that Paul had bought me with low-cut necklines. He fondled me repeatedly as soon as Doctor John said that it was all right for him to do so. Paul only had to touch me gently and I was immediately ready for him. I wore loose skirts and mini-skirts deliberately so that he could flip them up, flip down my panties and have me while I exulted in being my future husband’s woman.

Apparently, I got pregnant on my wedding night. I was in such ecstasy that I can only remember the

bliss of my dress and the way all the attention was on me and not on my wonderful husband. I remember going onto the beach in my bikini on our honeymoon in the South of France but, since my husband had me so many times, I don't recall which one of my orgasms made me pregnant. But Paul told me seriously that I was.

The surrogate mother dutifully delivered me with beautiful Aline Louise Leisham. With Doctor John's help, he'd organized it all, I was even able to lactate a little and breastfeed my daughter a little, the most wonderful feeling imaginable, especially with my husband's arm so proudly about me as I did so.

And no, I am not having any more surgery. When I was breastfeeding Aline, I couldn't feel anything 'down there'. When the feeling came back, it made making love to Paul so much more intense. I missed that and so I'll remain as I am. Yes, the woman inside me at times longs for completion of my journey to womanhood. If I didn't have the advantage of two means of reaching a climax, ecstasy and orgasm, I'd consider it.

I live my life now by Paul's rules. I remember how I shuddered as I promised to love, honor and obey him. I promised to worship him with my body. And with all of my body, the woman inside me makes me keep to every promise she has made.

*****end*****