



# I Am Woman

*Plus: If I Had It To Do Over*

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# I AM WOMAN

by **Bébé Talons**

## Chapter One

It was a pleasant afternoon in September that my life changed dramatically, in ways I would never have thought, not in my wildest dreams! At that time, I was twenty-two years old (almost) and attending a legal symposium on Fifty-Seventh Street in New York City, the symposium being part and parcel of my pursuit of a Juris Doctorate to go with my doctorate in electronic engineering that I had earned that same year.

I was attending law school as a favor to my father and grandfather, both attorneys and partners in one of the oldest law firms on The Street.

Oh, my name then was William Oliver Mann, V, being the fifth in the long line of attorneys going back to the original founder, Oliver Mann, somewhere around 1820.

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You might call me an overachiever because of my holding advanced degrees at such a young age, and you'd be right. I started the electronic thing when I was about seven or eight and by the age of fifteen, I held several patents for electronic devices of one sort and another.

Bored by repetitious dronings in high school, I quit shortly thereafter, attending university in NYC and Cambridge in Massachusetts for my degree requirements. For me, it was so easy to be electronically "gifted," a word my mother favors! Well, when she was alive, that is.

Now I was a pretty average guy then, neither aggressive nor passive, just more or less rolling along with the flow and having a good time overall.

I don't think I am too short, nor too tall and I am by no means "fat" or overweight. I do have emerald green eyes (from mom), flaming red hair (also from mom) and what are usually referred to as "delicate" features. In other words, I looked sort of sissyish without being a total sissy!

To complete the picture, I wore my hair rather longer than "normal," more to twit father and grandfather than anything else. No, it wasn't that long, just long enough to form a shaggy helmet style that I liked. They hated it. And said so! Often!

Anyway, we were having a rather heated discussion about civil rights and looking forward to our mid-morning coffee break when all Hell broke loose.

As I said, we were in seminar on Fifty-Seventh Street, on the top floor and facing downtown when this airplane drove itself right into the World Trade Center, exploding on contact!

Yes, it was that day in the year 2001, September 11, and I watched with horror as people jumped from the upper stories to escape the flames, rather committing suicide than face burning to death!

Then, as we watched, open-mouthed and shocked beyond belief, a second plane crashed into the Twin Tower, exploding upon impact!

Stunned and disbelieving, we watched as both towers collapsed leaving a huge hole in the skyline that was filled with smoke and flames!

Several of my classmates (both male and female), being off-duty firemen and police officers, left hurriedly to go help. I went with them!

I had no idea what I could do to help, but I went anyway.

At the scene, all was chaos and people were rushing into the burning towers to help where they could. Some of those first responders never came out.

Thousands of innocent persons died that day and I shall never forget the horror I witnessed. To this day, I shudder when I think about it!

I was soon covered in debris as I helped carry the injured to places of safety and medical help. I was on the scene two days before I collapsed from fatigue and smoke inhalation and sent to a near-by hospital.

Even there, I soon left my gurney and tried to comfort and calm some of the more severely injured lying about. Some of the medical personnel resented me being there, but most welcomed whatever I could do to help.

Two days later, I finally made it home to our Fifth Avenue penthouse where my father read me the riot act for, "placing myself in danger!"

I told him to, "stuff it," and collapsed in my bed, asleep as soon as my head touched the pillow.

When I awoke, I soon caught up on the rest of the world, learning only then of the attack on the Pentagon and the one crashing in a Pennsylvania farm field that had been destined for the White House!

One week after the disaster, I walked into an Air Force Recruiting Station on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and Broadway, determined to enlist.

When the recruiter found that I had a doctorate degree in electronic engineering, he suggested I apply for Officer's Candidate School.

So, we filled out all the proper paperwork, we both signed the agreements, and it went forward to be finalized. In the meantime, I was told to wind up my affairs locally and be prepared to go to Texas for O.C.S.

Now I had never been further west than Chicago and just the thought of going to Texas, land of cowboys and Indians and rustlers and gold prospectors and range wars and the like was enough to get my juices boiling, I tell you!

Then, my orders came, but not for Texas as originally slated! I was to be sent to Maxwell A.F.B. in Alabama.

Granted, it was O.C.S., but not the O.C.S. I had signed on for!

I cornered the recruiter at his office to complain. He commiserated with me, but pointed out that slots for candidates were a first come, first served basis and obviously, Texas was filled, thereby necessitating the change to Alabama.

Somewhat mollified, I accepted his explanation, took the plane ticket and flew to Montgomery, Alabama where I caught a shuttle bus to Maxwell.

And that's where the shit hit the fan!

The class I had been assigned to was for women, ONLY! No males need apply!

Then I got a second shock. My orders were made out for *Willa Olivia Woman*, sex "F," and that for sure wasn't me!

I was shuttled hither and yon for several days while "higher authority" resolved my special status.

When it came, I rejected it out of hand!

Imagine, they wanted me to give them the O.C.S. orders and go to a nearby air base for training as a basic airman, quite a letdown from O.C.S.!

I told the major who informed me of the higher decision to shove it where the sun didn't shine! I was supposed to be an Air Force officer and as far as I was concerned, that was that!

She threatened to throw me into the stockade for refusing to obey a direct order and again, I laughed in her face.

As you can imagine, that teed her off no end!

"Now see here!" she began.

"No, you see here! You seem to forget, I am still a civilian!" I snapped angrily. "You have no more authority over me than any other asshole major in the USAF!" I stormed. "And until I take the oath as a commissioned officer, I am beyond your grubby little paws and even filthier little mind!" I taunted, which only made her even madder!

I turned and strode from her office, her shrill voice commanding me to, "Halt!" right there, which, of course, I did not.

So, to "punish" me, she restricted me to the base and when I refused to stay in an enlisted barracks (women's barracks with a private room to keep me separate so that I would not "corrupt" one of their innocent minds, I was assigned a room at the B.O.Q.!

So, a week passed. Then two. Three. Four. Two months. Three months. Four and five and six months, and still no decision from the Pentagon about what to do about me and my unique situation.

While they were screwing the pooch, I kept sort of busy. I went to the movies, made friends with the projectionist, learned how to operate the booth and had a ball with the projectionist, a woman, of course!

I had been given a mess pass when I first arrived, so I didn't starve. Being more or less self-determined, I

quickly made friends with the cooks and they let me come in early or late or whenever and I soon started eating my main meal after midnight when the food was at its best and only those who worked that shift came around.

Peace and quiet.

Clothes became a problem. You know, women's base, women's clothes. If I wanted anything male, I would have to drive down to Biloxi to get it.

All well and good.

Except that I was restricted to base, remember?

That meant, no travel off base!

Now I could not have given a hairy rat's ass except that I liked getting paid and the pay-master, a first lieutenant, refused to pay me because I was out of uniform.

Gee whiz, golly gee! Think of that! Horrors!

So I got into a loud argument with her and she called the A.P.s. Now as soon as that A.P. lieutenant saw me, she grasped the predicament immediately. Still, the pay master refused to pay me. Finally, after some discussion during which others behind me in line grew impatient, she agreed to give my check to the A.P. lieutenant, but in future she would not give it to me in person unless I was in uniform. And in the pay master's mind, "uniform" meant a female dress uniform, or nothing!

The A.P. went to the Finance Officer, explained my predicament, and thereafter every payday, my check was hand delivered to me at the B.O.Q.!

Problem solved.

One day over six months later, I got a letter directing me to report to a two star at the Pentagon. But, no travel arrangements. So, I didn't go. They wanted me there? OK, pay my fare!

I explained why to the A.P. and she contacted Washington. That afternoon, an electronic voucher

was delivered to me, so I caught the shuttle to D.C. and the shuttle to the Pentagon, where nobody knew nothing! Now why was I NOT surprised?

So, I signed the visitor book and went back to Bolling AFB for a flight back to Maxwell. That's where the D.C. A.P.'s caught up with me.

And they were as dense as the two star!

Denser even!

They were as hard headed as could be, accusing me of failure to report. When I was finally able to talk to a reasonable person who discovered that I had indeed tried to get in (the visitor's book) and had been turned away, they all started speaking softly!

So, around 5:00 P.M., I was finally ushered into this two star's office where she started in.

She had gotten out no more than two words of her vindictive when I turned and left her office, heading for the shuttle back to Bolling.

Well, she screamed like a stuck hog when I kept going and before I got to the front door, the A.P.s had me in tow again.

Back in her office, I lit into her. "Look, lady, I don't know who the Hell you think you are, but you're screwing with the wrong person! I am not a member of your fucking Air Force and as far as I'm concerned, you can go to straight to Hell!"

She glared at me as if I had hit her with a pole ax! "You're an Officer Candidate, and as such come under my purview!"

"Like Hell I am! Which class am I assigned to?" I demanded.

"You were supposed to be in Class 11-01-Max!" she snapped.

"Look at that graduation roster. Do you see my name on it?" I snarled.

"Well, no, but that's because you signed up under false colors!" she retorted.

“I did like Hell! I signed up under my real name, William Oliver Mann, V, and was assigned, supposedly, to Class 12-01-RA in Texas. Somebody screwed the pooch and changed my name to Willa Olivia Woman without my knowledge. When I pointed this out to my recruiter in NYC, he told me it would all be straightened out once I got to Maxwell. Instead, those dunderheads there took one look at me and wanted to throw me into the stockade because I was not of the female persuasion!” I thundered.

“Then I reminded the commander that I was still an R.E.M.F. until I took the oath as an approved candidate or duly commissioned officer and that horse’s ass restricted me to the base until a decision by your office would straighten things out. But it didn’t happen that way because you’re as thick headed as those dunderheads at Maxwell!

“You’ve been as much a hindrance as solution as anybody could be!

“I will not become a lowly airman recruit just to smooth the paperwork out for you. I signed up to be an officer and a commissioned officer I will be, or I swear I’ll sit on my duff at Maxwell drawing my full pay for the next two and a half years when I will leave free and clear having fulfilled my commitment to the Air Force and if you don’t like it, you can go straight to Hell for all of me!”

With that, I spun around and strode from her office. This time the A.P.s did not follow. I caught the shuttle back to Bolling, another flight back to Maxwell and finally got back to my B.O.Q. billet shortly after midnight.

I expected all sorts of retribution, or attempts thereby, but surprisingly, nothing!

I had been able to secure some suitable clothing while in D.C., so that problem was solved. I slipped back into my usual routine, movies, midnight chow, sleep late and watch tee vee. It was boring, but not un-

fruitful as I continued with my legal studies, graduated in absentia, took the New York and Alabama bar exams, then settled back to await results.

So, there I was, more than a year after 9-11, still in limbo at Maxwell with nothing being done to rectify the original clerk's mistakes with my name. For some odd reason, known to me at the time but forgotten soon after, I had taken both exams under my Air Force name, Willa Olivia Woman and when my acceptances arrived, they were both in Willa's name!

Now what?"

I had had sad experiences with bureaucratic minds (witness the A.F.!) and their great reluctance to tamper with the written word, which to them, was carved in stone!

I had not gained an inch!

In fact, I had lost ground!

Talk about being frustrated? I was, in spades!

Then one afternoon, I was awakened from a sound sleep by a loud rapping at my B.O.Q. door.

Stumbling to the door, I threw it open. "Wha'd'ya wan'?" I snarled.

"Are you Officer Candidate Willa Olivia Woman?" this gigantic, blonde Valkyrie of a female Air Force Captain demanded.

"Yeah, so whut?" I mumbled, still half asleep.

"May I come in?" she asked as she pushed by.

"Yeah, sure," I told her back since she was already in!

"I'll come right to the point," she told me as she spun around.

"Oh, please do," I replied sarcastically.

"How badly do you want to be an officer?" she asked.

I stared at her. "Lady, I . . ." I started.

"That's Captain," she interrupted hastily.

“Look here, *Captain*,” I snapped, “that’s why I signed up.”

“I can arrange it so you can have your wish,” was her soft rejoinder.

I stared at her in amazement. “You mean you can undo this bureaucratic blunder and get me to Hell out of it?”

She nodded. “That I can.”

“Well, have at it. I’m all ears and a yard wide,” I enthused.

“You may not like what I’m going to say,” she went on.

“Captain, almost anything’s better than this limbo I am in!” I replied firmly.

“It involves becoming female.”

I stared at her in shock. Except for a few times I had worn girls’ clothing at Halloween, those masquerade parties at New Year’s, the two seasons I had played girl’s roles at University and a few isolated incidents that had meant nothing to me, I had never considered being female full-time! Part-time either! No time ever!

Strangely, the prospect of becoming a woman and putting one over on the Big Brass, namely a certain bull-headed two star, appealed to my sense of revenge!

“Becoming a female?” I asked, my mouth hanging down to my knee caps.

She smiled and nodded. “Exactly.”

“But, how is such a thing possible?” I gasped in disbelief.

“First, I have investigated your past quite thoroughly and am fully aware of those times when you masqueraded as a female, and quite successfully, I might add, so the concept is not all that alien to you, is it?”



“No, but how? I mean, twenty-four-seven, three sixty-five? I’d be found out the first time I opened my mouth!” I objected.

“If you agree to our prospects, we will send you to charm school, and after that has been completed, no one, and I mean no one, will be able to read you!”

“Well, I be go to Hell!” I blurted

She giggled. “Well, not on my watch!” she teased.

She began to explain. I would be taken from Maxwell and spirited off to a secluded spot that I never did learn its location, where I would be taught to be a female. Upon completion of such, I would be transferred to a major city where I would become part of a secretarial pool for six months.

If at the end of that six month period I was still accepted as a female, I would return to Maxwell, attend Officer Candidate School and subsequently become a full fledged commissioned officer in the WAF.

Then I would have to commit to six years because of the expense involved.

“When do I have to give you an answer?” I equivocated.

“Before I leave here you will either be one of us or you will be an honored guest at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas for the next six years.”

“Right now? Today?” I gasped.

“I will leave in ten minutes, either with or without you.” It was final!

“Wait a minute, who do you work for?” I demanded. “And let me see some ID!” I blustered.

“Whom I work for is immaterial. As for ID, you’ll just have to take my word for it. If you accept, you will be amply rewarded in ways you cannot even imagine!”

I gaped at her like a fish out of water. “I . . . I. . .”

She giggled. “Say yes, you know you want to!” she wheedled.