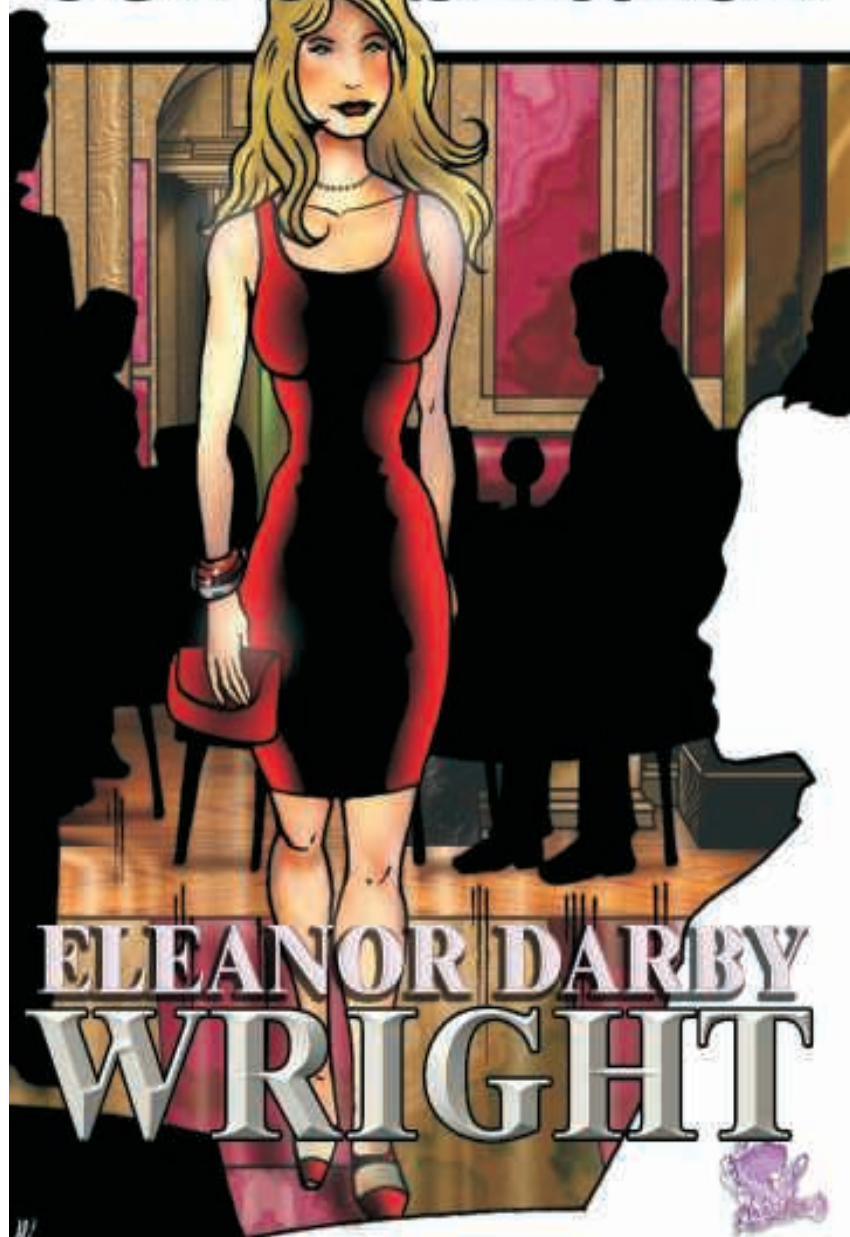


OUT OF SERVICE





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OUT OF SERVICE

by Eleanor Darby Wright

*A sequel to **In Service to Her Majesty** and **Rosalita's Pleasure***

******David******

No, I wouldn't do it. There, I'd finally decided. I wouldn't call Patricia Knowles at the phone number I'd said I'd called a hundred times. Twice was the truth. But she hadn't answered and hadn't had an answering machine for some reason. I'd decided. I rolled over and covered myself with the heavy blanket. I would sleep now and not think of 'her' any more.

Jeez, but that had been such a story 'she' had told me. I'd really thought that she was the man she'd said she was, Captain Rodney Rayfield. Through her recitation of Anisoyya and herself, their dressing as women and even being married, under whatever rites

they used in Subbujah, I'd been horrified for him, her. Him, definitely it was for him.

Yes, I'd had some inklings along the way. I just put it down to his being so English, though he wasn't, of course. Well, I'd thought he'd mixed so much with English officers, and travellers, in the East. Yes, I was thinking, as the marks of 'her' entrapment and feminization only became evident to me as she told her story. As the long tale went along, yes, I saw the signs. I'd even had nagging thoughts that I'd seen him, Rayfield, as a 'her' somewhere.

Then she'd switched to her feminine voice and mentioned the Atwell reception which she'd attended with Grace Townes. She'd shaken out her long hair, that had been tucked away by a uniform cap and, when that was discarded, pinned back, a little long for a man's hair, but that's how it was for someone back from foreign parts, sometimes. 'She' mentioned so casually that Grace was a sex changed 'woman'.

I'd been really shaken to hear 'her', in a really female voice, refer to someone I knew, someone who'd been married, who'd been the wife of Richard Townes, a friend of mine, whom she'd just divorced. For heaven's sake, I'd seen Grace as a bride! Now, Grace was engaged to another man, Leonard Payton-Smith, a banker whom I also knew! And he didn't know Grace had once been a man! She hadn't told him, according to Patricia, There, I've said 'her' name again as I said to myself I wouldn't do again.

What had Patricia called Grace? Something like Marasara, part of her real name, feminized from Martin Davenport, once a lieutenant in the same regiment as Captain Rodney Rayfield, I understood. The difference was, as Rayfield had told me, Martin Davenport was that strange sort of queer who loved dressing up in girl's clothes. He'd taken to the invitation to become a woman like a duck to water, at least, according to the long story Rayfield had told me.

No, it couldn't be true! Grace was a beautiful, blonde woman, a flirt, oldsters would have called 'her'. She dressed to attract men's eyes to her obviously female attributes. Gosh, she had flung her arms about Leonard when he had come creeping up on 'her', squealing joyfully when he grabbed her around her boobies, her arms then about his neck as she kissed her fiancé passionately in front of all of us, one of her lovely legs raised about the grinning Leonard. They'd charged off almost right away to some room in the hotel, the purpose of their business together very clear to all of us disappointed jocks, left behind.

That's when I'd got to talk to the classy, elegant and sophisticated woman, at least she'd said she was an Englishwoman, the same age as me, who was Grace's companion. I'd watched her come in, to meet the Atwells, admiring how she moved so femininely, loving her dress, the way she wore her blonde hair and admiring her lovely smile, her lips so red and glossy. I didn't think I'd have had a chance with her, not with all the randy, well-heeled guys sharing the room with me.

"Major MacKenna, of the Travellers' Club," she'd said in her lovely, lilting, female voice. "I'm Patricia Knowles. I came to a soiree at your club, years ago, and really enjoyed all the tales being told. I loved how you exposed the fake stories and how everyone shouted down and slammed the poor souls who'd made up howlers about their so-called travels!"

"I don't recall," I had to admit.

"It was a long time ago and I've changed a lot since then," Patricia Knowles said to me so prettily, letting me buy her another white wine. I should have pursued the reason why she was in the Travellers' Club. I didn't because it was so pleasant to sit with her, her lovely legs crossed beside me, and talk about the West Coast to which she'd just returned.

Yes, she'd given me her number, written on a napkin, folding it into my pocket for me, when she had to leave with Grace Townes. I'd thought of Grace only as a woman, Leonard's fiancée, hustling her friend off to meet with some fashion designer, to assist Grace in choosing an absolutely scrumptious bridal gown for her marriage to Leonard, "the man I love more than the last one, and he's richer, too!"

Patricia, just as womanly as Grace, gave me a wave as she sashayed off with her girl friend, as I thought, loving the way she walked away from me.

I wished later, after the astounding story she'd now told me at the Travellers' Club, confessing that she was both Rodney Rayfield and Patricia Knowles, that she'd have left me in the same fashion as she'd left me in front of the Travellers' Club to go away with Anisoyya. Even in Rayfield's uniform, her long hair set loose by 'her', I'd felt her slender waist, her projecting breasts and her wonderful lips on mine before she'd gone off with another beautiful woman, the Anisoyya of her, Rayfield's tale.

All my emotions were like water, boiling over, as 'Patricia' left me, dancing away to the other woman, no, the other man, Anisoyya, so sexy and womanly in her leather skirt and boots, whom Patricia said was going to have her sex changed, as Grace had. Oh, but the way Anisoyya kissed Patricia after she'd left me and scolded her that 'nothing had changed. They were still going to have it done together," something like that, left me stunned, motionless. If Patricia hadn't turned as the cab left and made a sign about phoning her, I wouldn't be lying here in bed, still sweating over a woman whom I really didn't know was a woman, not for sure.

How easily I'd moved to thinking of Captain Rodney Rayfield as 'Patricia Knowles'. My body was twisting as I thought how I'd held 'her', how she'd kissed me. I'd hardly had time to return her ardent

kisses before the car horn had captured her attention and she'd swirled away, out of my arms and into those of another, a really fabulous, dark-haired woman.

I didn't sleep. I replayed that kiss a dozen times. Even though it was early, I picked up the phone, and started again to touch in the number that she'd written on that napkin, for me.

Oh, Patricia, I thought to her as I hesitated over the last number, what am I getting myself into. She wasn't a woman. Yes, that was the problem. I probably should talk to her anyway about the fantastic story she'd told me about the city of Subbujah, about the Living God and what she claimed had happened to her, to Anisoyya, and to Martin Davenport/Grace Townes, whoever, in that unbelievable place.

And Tom Scully. His story of his Rosalita had been just as unbelievable. That woman on Tom's doorstep, welcoming him in her negligee and nightdress, her long hair floating all about Tom's face as she hungrily drew him into their house, Tom not even turning to acknowledge the ride he'd been given. He'd been as loving as 'Rosalita', it must have been 'her', as her arms went about his neck and he lifted her up, as if she was a bride again, and disappeared into the dark house.

I need to talk to 'her', I, David MacKenna thought, with a shiver. I needed to confirm that the story was true before we entered anything into the archives, didn't I? Oh, I couldn't do it! I couldn't enter stories like the two I'd heard in one evening into the permanent records of the Travellers' Club. What would anyone who read them think of the club they'd been invited to join?

Shudders ran through me. I need a drink, I thought. I was reaching for ice in the fridge when I remembered that I had nothing to drink in the place, nothing since the weekend. I'd been going to replenish from stores in the Club. But I hadn't.

It would have to be coffee. Yes, I was far too wide awake to sleep now. I looked at the napkin from the Creighton Hotel, the numbers there just numbers. Good job I'd stopped before I'd dialed the last number in the list.

But the phone started to ring in my hand. Startled, I raised it to my ear. No, it wasn't someone calling me. I must have touched a last number. I was ringing someone. I fumbled trying to hang up.

"Hello," said a sleepy, very seductive, girlish voice that I recognized right away.

No, I don't want to talk to you, I thought silently. My throat was far too dry to speak. I must hang up, I thought, panic overcoming me, but somehow I couldn't. She was talking. Patricia was talking to me. She knew it was me. How could she know that?

"David, that is you, isn't it?" Patricia asked, again so seductively. "Do you know what time of the morning it is, my darling?"

Darling! She called me her darling! Another man called me, David MacKenna, 'my darling'!!! I couldn't believe the quivering feelings running through me. I must hang up and deny, deny, deny, I'd ever phoned 'her'.

"It's seven-fifteen, darling," Patricia Knowles' voice whispered in my ear after just a brief period of silence. I couldn't answer 'her', could I, not when she called me 'darling'. A longer period of silence followed and then she began to giggle.

"Well, I did ask you to call me, didn't I, darling," Patricia went on in her so lovely, enticing voice. "I wasn't sure that you'd seen me, gesturing to you! But you did, didn't you, my darling. I expected to hear from you almost right away, but this is lovely, too, my darling, to be awakened by your call. You are going to speak to me, sometime, aren't you, darling David?"

Her words were followed by more giggles down the phone. No, denying I was there, later on, wasn't going to cut it with her. "I, I, um, I d-did s-see you," I stammered, not daring to return any of the greetings she'd given me. "I, I, s-saw you w-with Ani-Anisoyya!"

"Oh, clever, darling David!" exclaimed Patricia. "She's talking English now, isn't she, but I thought that you might not realize it was her with the high-class accent she's developed. Yes, that was Anisoyya with the cab to pick me up from the club. Sometimes, darling, she takes her wifely duties quite seriously with me.

"Did you hear what she was saying to me, darling, as she made me get in the car first? She treats me like that a lot lately, and claims she's my husband as well, as she is to all her handmaidens. That's why she wants me to be changed, her wife, as she calls me, darling, into a woman. But I don't see the point, do you, my darling, if she's going to become fully a woman, as she says she is. Ooo, Ravusajji, my lord and master in Subbujah, will be so angry with her when she has that done to herself!"

"Rasuvajji was the English-educated, leader of the Slaves of the Living God, right?" I asked the girl who sounded to me as if she was Patricia and not Rodney Rayfield who'd given me the information.

"Oh, clever, clever darling!" Patricia said to me, clearly waking up. "Oh, darling, what did you think of Anisoyya? Weren't you intrigued by her, by her outstanding beauty? She is the goddess, you know. Isn't she the most beautiful woman that you've ever seen, my darling? It won't upset me if you say that, my darling. A goddess will always outshine us poor mortals, won't she?"

"All Anisoyya's handmaidens love her, you know, love the children she brings to them. When she goes back eventually to Subbujah, she's going to change

some things that will make Ravusajji apoplectic. She's going to have a new court with all the handsomest men she can obtain, serving her just as if they were handmaidens. Only she won't get pregnant any more. She wants me to go with her, as the Living Goddess's companion! I'll have to do everything she does, my darling, with a harem of men to love me, every day of my life. They love golden-haired women in Subbujah, you know, my darling.

"There, I've said far too much. I've been rattling on like a true girl, haven't I, darling David. What do you think, my darling?" She giggled for a long time, then. "Should I go with my wife and have my sex changed with her? Should I go with her and be her handmaiden until I die, young men fawning over me, and keeping me in sexual ecstasy until the moment I expire? What do you think I should do, my darling?"

I was shuddering so much at all the words that flowed so freely from her mouth into my ear.

"Isn't Anisoyya the most beautiful woman you've ever seen, darling David?" she asked me again, seduction oozing from her lovely voice. I should just have agreed with 'her'.

"Um, I think she's beautiful," I managed to say. "Not the most beautiful of women ..." since she's not a woman, I wanted to add but I didn't. I wanted to ask her to arrange an appointment for an interview with Anisoyya, and Grace Townes. I really should prove that some of the outrageous things said to me by Captain Rayfield were, in fact, true, confirmed by others.

Patricia laughed as she yawned in my ear. "Oh, David, darling," she murmured femininely in my ear. "I'm so tired. May we talk about this later today, or maybe tomorrow? Today, I should help Anisoyya. She's decided to defy Ravusajji and the Slaves of the Living God! She's going to the same surgeon, in the same clinic, where Grace went. It's all arranged. But she did want me to go with her, and hold her hand.

That's what we girls do, darling David, when we set out to do something that's going to be very hard for us."

"She said it was all arranged for you as well," I managed to say. My voice sounded as if someone was strangling me, I was sure, as I could barely say what I meant. "You might be taken there and trapped ..."

There was a silence on the phone. "Would you, could you, my darling David," the soft girlish whisper in my ear asked me, "come with me and protect me, darling, if, if, things aren't quite the way I think they should be?"

"Where's Anisoyya right now? Is she with you?" I asked Patricia, thinking again of the scene, two girls getting into a cab, thinking what I'd heard said. Thoughts then of the two kissing so enthusiastically, in the back of the cab as it drove off, dominated my mind, as I recalled a blonde head burying itself in the darkness before it suddenly re-appeared, gesturing to me, rooted on the walkway to the Club, her signal clearly meaning for me to call her.

Well, I had.

"No, she's not with me," said Patricia, a feminine yawn also being fed down the phone to me. She giggled again, sending shivers through me. It was so girly, her giggle. "It's all Grace's fault. She knows so many guys who like girls like us. They call us girls with a little extra, girls like Anisoyya and me!"

"And Anisoyya's with one of these," I asked, doubtfully. Patricia heard the disbelief in my voice, and laughed.

"This someone she's with is a big someone, someone you'd know very well, darling," said this girl on the phone to me. "Yes, before you ask, this someone is very famous, this someone whom Anisoyya is with. Everyone knows this someone. You know, darling, that it will be one of the last times that Anisoyya will

be using her whole body for sex, don't you, darling? That's why she's with someone nice. Grace is with Anisoyya as well and probably doing all three of his bodyguards. She said she was going to try, anyway. Ooo, isn't it great to be a real woman, sometimes! That's why Grace is with Anisoyya, and not me.

"Oh, darling! Did you know that the sun is coming up? I haven't been up this early in the morning since I left Subbujah! You don't want to hear that story about me and the silk train through the pass, do you, darling? I'll tell it to you sometime when we're both exhausted!"

Patricia didn't say what we'd be exhausted from; and I didn't dare to ask.

"Oh, darling," she went on as I just grunted. "Did you have things you just have to talk to me about, as well? Things you want to ask me about, things to say to me, something, darling, that's really important? Oh, darling, I really do need my beauty sleep, I really do! I'm not as young as I once was, darling, as you must have noticed ..."

"Don't fish for compliments," I cut in which led to another round of her giggles. I spoke more harshly than I intended, and the giggles led to silence.

"Tom Scully talked to me after you'd gone," I began, not knowing whether I should just arrange to meet her and hang up. "Bunny's stories inspired him to open up, as you did." I was about to say 'Captain Rayfield' but it didn't sound right with the soft, womanly voice that was tantalizing me with all of her 'darlings'. "Tom told me all about the beautiful girl he's married to, only she's not really a girl. She's like you say you are!"

"Oh, darling David," whispered Patricia gently, once more. "I saw Tom Scully on the bench by the river, in the park area. How long did you have to listen to him? I thought that he was in his cups." Yes, that ex-

pression I heard from English officers in the Travelers' Club all the time. "Anisoyya laughed at all of the men she saw staggering down the walk in front of your club, darling. And at all the cabs pulling up and taking them off, into the city, or wherever. She saw Tom Scully and pointed him out to me. She thought he might be going to drive himself ..."

"No, I drove him home," I said to her. "His story, the one he just had to tell me, about marrying a guy who thought he was a girl, took him three hours, just about."

"Oh, darling, as long as my little confession lasted!" Patricia exclaimed. "Oh, my poor darling David! Three hours with me and another three with Tom! Was his story as incredible as mine?"

"It was sort of like yours," I admitted. "But yours, it's seeing you there, in front of me, unpinning your hair, and what you did ..."

"It was only one kiss!" gasped Patricia in mock surprise, I'm sure.

"Tom wasn't the one in a dress, either," I just had to add to my evaluation.

"Darling," Patricia tried to laugh, but was yawning again. "I'd love to hear Tom's whole story, I really would, darling! I'd love you to tell it to me as I love to hear your voice when you tell your and others' stories, but I'm afraid that I'd go to sleep, listening to you. Let's meet and talk about Tom's story and other things, later on tonight, in the Star bar, say at eight, for supper and drinks ...!"

It was only after I'd hung up that I realized what I'd done. I'd made a date – with another man! I was going to meet him in a bar, among other people. He was going to be disguised as a girl! I was such a stupid idiot!