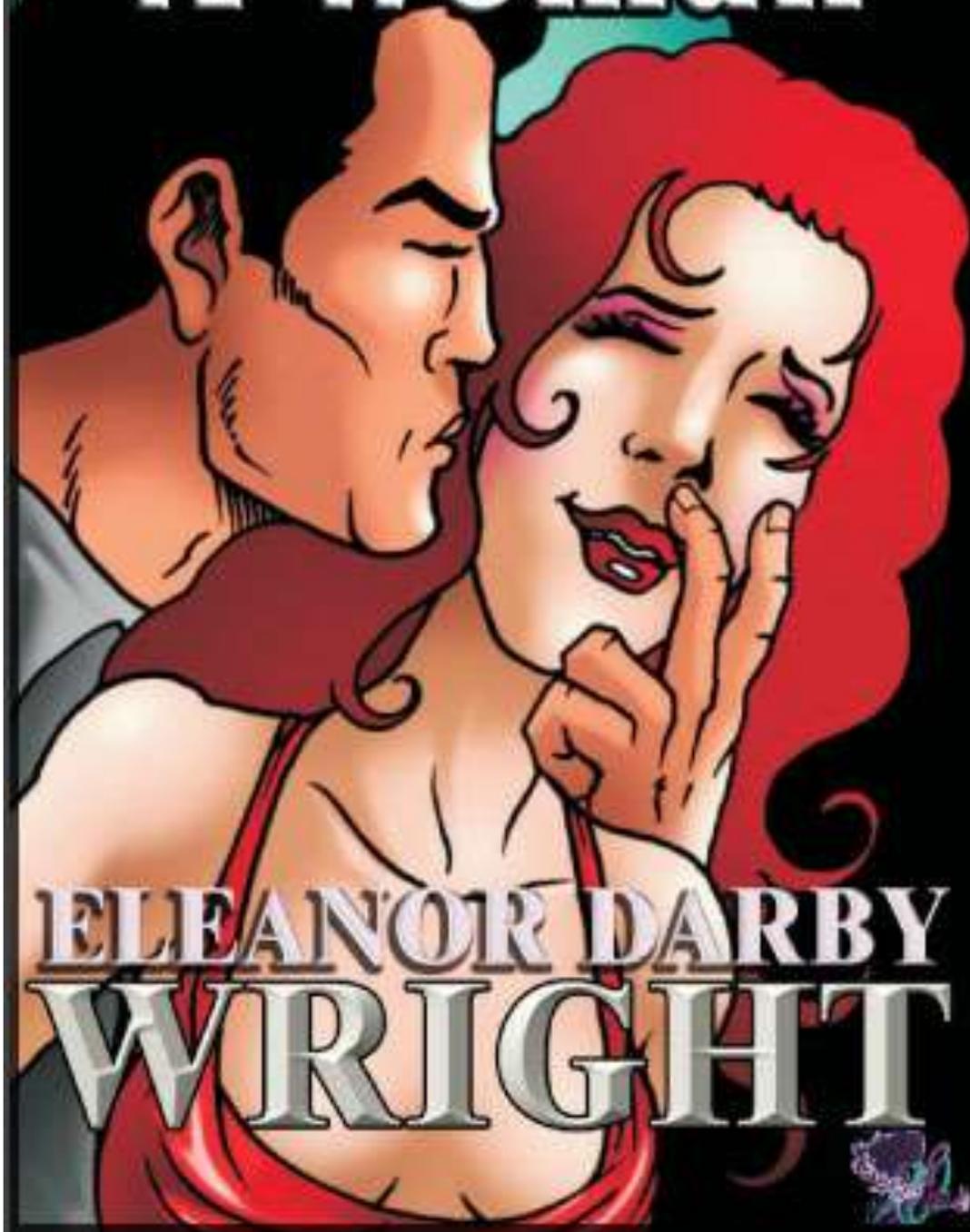


# Inside & Out A Woman



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## INSIDE AND OUT – A WOMAN

by Eleanor Darby Wright

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

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

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

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

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

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

I turned swiftly at my boss's touch, my lips moving but no sound

coming from me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I believe that a Miss Julia Anderson is employed here at this time," Paul Leisham said in his deep, pleasant voice, belieing the hawklike, predatory look the frown gave to his face.

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

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

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

"Here," Mr Nazir protested, running after him. "You can't go in there!"

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

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

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

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

I turned and locked the back door properly, my hands shaking. My shoulders, however, seemed to sag as I felt Paul watching me. I had

to put a hand on the stone wall to steady myself before I finally turned back to speak to the invader of Mr Nazir's shop.

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

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

For a while, Paul just stared at me, noting every detail about my dress and my female figure, I was certain. I made no move towards the letter he'd placed so carefully. The pause went on for a long moment. Paul started to say something else but I raised my chin, blinking away tears that came to my eyes. I prepared to be castigated and insulted about my hair, the fact that I was wearing makeup like a woman, a dress for goodness sake, as well as the fact that my stockings and bust must show that I was entirely clothed as a woman, on the inside, as I was, again.

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

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

The inner door that divided the store room and store swung easily as Paul shrugged at me and withdrew. Mr Nazir looked at me as Paul left. I couldn't help it. I was standing so still by the back door of the shop. I was still torn between running away and running after the man who'd left so precipitously. I didn't move, however, as the front door opened and closed. Mr Nazir hurried back into the shop.

I finally moved, in time to see the Rolls-Royce pull through the little parking area in front of the store and disappear into the early evening traffic.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

couldn't. He had just, so, so, nonchalantly, dropped off a letter from my grandmother, the last person in the world I ever wanted to hear from. He must know that and that he'd left me humiliated and embarrassed, no, mortified, by my reactions to his presence.

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

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

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

I'd have to leave Mr Nazir's, though, and soon, I thought with regret. I might look up some day and find that spiteful, old woman, my grandmother, there in the shop, there to gloat over how far I'd fallen, ready to expose all my sins and peccadilloes to my employer. Mr Nazir knew none of them. He didn't have to hear my grandmother say hurtful things about Michael, the only joy in my life. My grandmother would want to know, loudly and publicly, I was sure, if her grandson knew that his 'mother' could never be a mother, of any kind, though 'she' probably was his father.

I wouldn't let my son go through that with my grandmother, I thought angrily, as the ghosts of past angers passed over me. I wouldn't let any member of my family anywhere near to Michael,

not after the last time. I was disowned and disowned I'd stay, I thought, iron returning to my system as it always did when I thought about how my family had treated me.

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

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

I almost ran around the corner and onto the main street to the bank that Mr Nazir used. My low-heeled shoes enabled me to do that. My dress and shoes were so different from the clothes I'd worn before I came to the city, before even Michael was born. Then, I'd tried so hard to be a pretty, outgoing girl to the boys who'd been interested in me. I was sure, by the way I was treated, by all the kisses I received, that I was succeeding in being a 'pretty girl'.

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

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

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

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

Richard Anderson, me, yes, that's my proper name, never let his family know the real extent of his cross-dressing all through his awful, tense, teenaged years. I'd known they'd laugh at me. Only my mother, who'd found out about me when I was small, me having forgotten to lock the bathroom door while I tried on Lisa's bodice and garter belt, had been at all sympathetic to what I was. She'd smiled at my predicament and just told me not to do it again.

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

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

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

I'd cried and my mother had consoled me. I'd promised I'd never

do it again. And while my mother lived, I'd kept that promise. It had been hard but I hadn't touched my sister's clothing again, even though my fingers had itched and itched on occasion.

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

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

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

#### **\*\*\*\*\*Learning how to be a girl\*\*\*\*\***

I did more than just moon about the house. I had to or I'd have been in hot water much sooner than I actually was. I got a job in the local store, stocking shelves. I saved every penny I earned. I bought a money order one Monday, in excitement that must have been obvious to the clerk in the post office. Then, my fingers trembling, I posted my order for a 'foundation garment for a man', a corset, from one of the advertisers in the Sunday paper.

When that came and it was so perfect, I felt so shapely and thought I

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

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

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

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

I put on my 'undies', as Mom had called panties and a bra, pulling and making everything fit, made up my face, trembled with the wig and earrings I put on and thought that I looked 'good enough'. The mirrors at the ends and top of the stairs to help walkers avoid collisions were so spectacular when this thin, dark-haired girl would come sashaying down the hallway like a model. I loved seeing the dress I was wearing swirl about me and feel my legs in nylons. Oh, it was so wonderful! I practised my female walk and tried all sorts of makeup 'looks' until I was thrilled at the girl, who looked nothing like me, I thought, who smiled so prettily, her lips bright red.

And all the time, I shivered with the desire to go out and be a girl on the street, in cafes and shops! I was so thrilled just thinking about it. Slowly, I began to think I could do it. I could just walk down to town and back as a girl would. I dared myself and, one fateful night, I did it. I went out of the house as a girl and walked into town,

dressed completely as a girl. My face was made up and my wig pinned and glued to my head. I felt my dress swish against my tantalizing stockings in the breeze. I was gasping for air as I swayed femininely on my high heels for the enervating stroll.

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

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

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

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

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