

Inside & Out A Woman 2



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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 pajamas, 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 agony. 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?"