

HEIR(ESS)

By Sofronia Anne Strong



ILLUSTRATED BY ONNALEE

A HER TV NOVEL

Copyright © 2000, Friendly Applications, Inc. - All Rights Reserved

Reluctant Press TG Publishers

This story is a work of fiction. Any similarity to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental. All situations and events herein presented are fictional, and intended only for the enjoyment of the reader. Neither the author nor the publisher advocate engaging in or attempting to imitate any of the activities or behaviors portrayed.

Persons seeking gender reassignment surgery, hormone therapy or any other medical and/or body-altering process should seek the counsel of a qualified therapist who follows the Benjamin Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorder.

Protect Professional Fiction on the Internet!

We need *your* help! We want to keep providing our readers with low cost, professional quality fiction on the Internet. We spend thousands of dollars to edit, illustrate and typeset *each story*. It is important, therefore, that everyone works to help keep professional fiction alive on the Net.

This story is protected by US and International copyright law, and is owned exclusively by Friendly Applications, Inc, DBA Reluctant Press, which retains exclusive rights to publish these materials. The civil penalties for copyright infringement can be severe, including substantial monetary damages, injunctive relief, and liability for attorneys' fees incurred in prosecuting a case. If a court determines that the infringement was committed willfully, statutory damages of up to \$100,000 for each copyright infringed can be awarded. Even if not found to be acting willfully, a defendant can still be held liable for statutory damages of \$500 to \$20,000 for each copyright infringed. **These penalties apply even if money was not charged.** In addition, criminal penalties may be imposed if someone willfully infringes a copyrighted work for commercial advantage or private financial gain. This crime is punishable by up to five years imprisonment, up to \$250,000 in fines, or both. State civil damages and criminal penalties vary from state to state and country to country, but are always severe.

The best way to keep professional illustrated fiction available on the Internet is to do *YOUR* part to protect the author's and publisher's copyright. *You can be part of the solution.* Encourage others to purchase our stories. Never share the access rights you've purchased. **You** make the continued availability of TG fiction on the Internet possible. Thank you for your cooperation!

“THE HEIR(ESS)”

By **Sofronia Anne Strong**

Introduction

It is at my insistence and under my guidance that Cynthia von Brougham undertook to write this volume. That she has done so under the pseudonym, Cynthia Modelle, was also at my suggestion.

Given her closeness to the subject matter, it was wise to keep her professional identity and her popular opera separated. Academia can be pretty mean if it thinks that one of its own has been pandering to the popular taste.

Cynthia was born Cedric von Brougham to my sister, Monica, and her husband, the Baron Ludwig von Brougham. Monica early determined that Cedric was feminine minded and had the sagacity to raise him from infancy as her daughter.

It was a wise decision. Cynthia took to finery and became a charming young lady, pursuing a career in modeling, hence her pseudonym, before she became an academic. It has been my privilege to steer her past the shoals of her doctoral research, and my delight to advise her in her popular derivative of that research.

I fall in between generations in the Brougham family and was not involved in Cynthia's feminine upbringing. Monica and Ludwig raised Cynthia on the Continent and I didn't even know that they had reared Cedric as a girl until, in his Cynthia persona, he was assigned to me as a doctoral candidate.

This is the story of dynastic empire building that runs through several generations and, as social history, is valuable as a narrative of American empire building and the decline of British hegemony.

It is also a marvelous exposition of the extent to which such people will go to ensure their continued growth and dominance. The characters are not altogether reprehensible nor even ill-intentioned, they are merely driven by their desires. Greed is the desire for possessions, money in particular, and it is a great motivator at all times in history. It is pointless to charge the greedy with immorality. Good and evil are merely terms we use to describe what does and does not suit us as individuals or as a society.

The Broughams and the Welleseleys are suited to wealth. It is what they desire. The degree of harm which they have done to others is a moral issue. Their desire for wealth is quite normal and ordinary.

As Lord Brougham used to say, “An ye harm none, do what ye will.”

It is not Cynthia's task, as a social historian, to judge her subjects, but merely to take account of their behavior for the benefit of us all.

Gender identity lies at the root of this history. At least two of its characters have lived lives in a transgendered state. In the case of Arthur Wellesley, the reason seems to have been dynastic, but for Cynthia it was merely a wise decision which her Mother made for her. The difference may indicate how far our culture has come between 1927 and 1993 in its understanding of the difference between sex and gender. Arthur is a forced transvestite, presumably, while Cynthia accedes to her female gender identity by her very upbringing. Both seem to have profited greatly from recognizing their *femme personae*, however they arrived at a recognition of it.

I commend this book to you, dear reader. Its author spent some years in its research and will tell you a tale of bizarre dimensions, populated with real people, acting out real history.

Truth, we hear, is stranger than fiction. If this story were fiction, it would not have to be believed, and would be. As it is not fiction, it will not be believed, and it should be.

Such is the nature of History.

Dr. Elise Brougham, Ph.D....

Dean, Dept. of Social History

Cambridge, Mass.

January 1993

Forward

At one time, the case of which I write was quite famous. The central character acquired considerable notoriety because of his great wealth and the bizarre circumstances which he was required to meet in order to qualify for it. At the time, the sensational press dubbed him, "The King of Queens," but eventually he was known in fashion circles as "The Queen of Couture."

When I found Arthur Wellesley, he was still living in his family's townhouse in suburban New Haven. He appeared for the first of our interviews as a handsome and dignified lady who I found extremely gracious and charming in appearance and demeanor. He did not seem at all reluctant to relate his story one more time, although he did refer me to the newspaper and magazine accounts from the time of his inheritance and called them tawdry and unfair. In that time, it was these scurrilous accounts that had made him a notorious celebrity, something which seems to have aggrieved him deeply.

In the past thirty years, he has been able to slip away into a considerable obscurity, which is why my thesis advisor suggested that it would be worthwhile to review all the facts in the Wellesley Affair and acquire a correct perspective about his enforced, bizarre, life-style. His circumstances forbade complete obscurity, however. The terms of his inheritance did not permit him to become reclusive. Therefore, his regular public appearances provided consistent grist for the periodicals and their ever curious readership. He seems to have learned to bear this with considerable grace and tolerance.

Once I had convinced the elegant Mr. Wellesley that I wished to present his whole case to my scholarly colleagues, without bias and with the perspective that only time can provide, he became wonderfully cooperative and helpful. It seems that even he had never understood exactly why he had been subjected to his strange legacy.

I promised to find him an answer.

Little did I know what I would uncover.

I must admit that coming to know Arthur Wellesley has been a superbly rewarding experience for me, as will become apparent. This project did much more for me than advance my career as a social historian.

This is Arthur Wellesley's personal story as I have uncovered it. His has not been an easy life despite his great wealth and beauty.

Cynthia Brougham Modelle

New York City

July 1993

Chapter I

The Wellesley estate in rural New Haven has long since passed out of the family's ownership, having first been converted into a mental hospital, later into a rest home and finally demolished, despite an offer by the Greystone Fathers who wished to turn it into a monastery. This latter use was specifically prohibited by Arthur Wellesley's Grandfather, who had no time for the Pope's minions.

The Wellesleys are Calvinists, through and through, despite their long separation from the kirk. Values, especially religious and moral ones, tend to persist long after their origins are lost in time. Persistence in meaningless rituals, those whose reasons are no longer known, is the real definition of sorcery. I will leave it to the reader to judge if the Wellesleys slipped into this practice, however unwittingly.

When it does happen, it is invariably unwitting enough.

The original Wellesley estate, comprising one hundred seventy acres of woodland on the edge of the City, was built in 1878 and '79 by Josiah Wellesley, a successful carriage maker who had profited mightily from a contract to make gun carriages for the U.S. Army, before and during the Civil War.

The postwar boom, after 1865, had created a high demand for fancy carriages for the nouveaux riche. Adapting the larger and more elegant carriage designs developed by Sir Henry Brougham in England, Josiah, without concern for patent rights, brought out the Wellesley Brougham in 1871, with its trademark forest green paint, and brass and mahogany appointments.

By 1910, the Wellesley Carriage had become the Wellesley Body, as the company contracted to manufacture automobile bodies for the Rolls-Royce Company, which was then importing engines to Springfield, Mass. for installation in Wellesley Bodies. These rare American Rolls-Royce cars have since become collector's dream items. There are now only six in existence.

By 1936, the Wellesley Body had been acquired by General Motors and the name retired in favor of the Body by Fisher. It was not the foundry nor the body works nor even the sale to G-M which amplified the Wellesley fortune so vastly, however.

It was a loan which Josiah Wellesley made to the young inventor, Elias Howe, which paid the major returns over the years. Howe had been the first to invent a practical sewing machine and the platform scale on which he weighed a horse in his summer kitchen in Poultney, Vermont, an act which caused his neighbors to deem him mad, but which, in fact, would make him rich.

In 1846, Wellesley loaned Howe ten thousand dollars with which to patent and market his scale. Fairbanks-Morse infringed on the Howe patents and decades of patent litigation ensued, after which Fairbanks-Morse and Howe were merged. As a result, every other scale made bore one or the other's name, in turn.

Through it all, Josiah Wellesley retained his seats on the Board of Directors on both corporations and his offices of Treasurer of both. His original investment had, by the fin de siecle, made Wellesley's millions a byword in American history, ranked along with the Astors, the Smiths, the Vanderbilts, the Rockefellers and the Whitneys.

The Wellesley family, I have learned from Arthur's archives, arrived in America in 1734, settling in New Haven where the immigrant, Elder John Wellesley, a wheelright, opened a smithy and wheel works on the river's edge. His son, Josiah, found making gun carriages more profitable than conestoga wagon wheels and these frugal industrialists were on their way to the American Dream.

The Dream ended when the fourth generation, in the person of Arthur, strode on to the scene in 1948 in a Dior cocktail gown and announced to the world that he had elected to spend the rest of his life dressed continuously in female attire.

Arthur has continued to live in the family's splendid and elegantly furnished New Haven townhouse ever since. On my arrival at this three storey, red brick colonial mansion, I was ushered into a period drawing room furnished with authentic Louis Seis pieces.

Mr. Wellesley was lounging on a divan, wearing a frock of yellow silk charmeuse which had been made for him by Valentino, one of his six selected couturiers for the year. His silver hair was coifed in waves and coils atop a fine, wide brow. His blue eyes sparkled intelligently from his delicately made-up face. He had about him the unmistakable air of old money. He reflected an understated elegance and panache that I associate with a refined sense of style. He had acquired it through a lifetime spent in haute couture.

He rose to greet me as the maid announced me, took both my hands in his, graciously and warmly, and with a perfectly manicured hand, motioned me to a chair. Despite his sixty-five years, he was slender, lithe and fit. His skin was like delicately painted porcelain and his movements were graceful and refined. His feline movements and feminine comportment were those of a great lady.

"I am so pleased to meet you, Miss Modelle. I have so looked forward to our first encounter. Now, once again, just how may I help you?"

I restated the purpose of my visit. I wanted a first hand account of how he had become a forced transvestite and to know of his impressions, feelings and history in it as a lifetime role. He sat down, nodded thoughtfully and ordered tea. We settled right down to a relaxed and friendly dialogue.

"I was born with a proverbial silver spoon in my mouth. The Wellesleys have ridden the crest of affluence since colonial times. Prior to Elder John's immigration to America, we were a family of tradesmen and privateers, carrying letters of marque from the British Crown. The last of these legalized pirates was Eleazor Wellesley. About 1734, as near as I can determine, Eleazor was captured and imprisoned by the French who tried him for piracy and dangled him from the yard of a French Navy vessel. The British Crown, refusing to acknowledge Eleazor's status as their unofficial hireling, denied his son John's petition in the Admiralty Courts and seized Eleazor's holdings. This left John with a wife and seven children and barely enough money for passage to the colonies.

That was the beginning of our family in America and of our great good fortune. In this century, of course, we no longer make nor sell anything. We are conglomerated as WSE International. Even I can't keep track of everything that goes on under that name."

He smiled and sipped at his tea, chuckling.

“But what you want to know is how, with that kind of family history, I became notorious as the millionaire in frocks. Everyone has always seemed to want to know about that. It really is the most outlandish thing most people can imagine. Anyone who can read, knows all there is to know about it.”

“I am afraid people have short memories. Libraries and newspaper morgues are for the drudges like me. I want to hear the whole story directly from you, from the beginning. When we're done, I hope I can tell it one more time, and this time do it fair justice. I suspect there is more to your story than has been told before.”

“Well, if you can do that it will be more than anyone has been willing to do before. If you can do it, I will be much obliged. It has all got so muddled over the years. It would be nice to have the record set finally straight.”

“It depends on how open, candid and forthright you can be with me. Historical research is only as good as the historian's sources. Gender identity issues are finally out of the closet now. There are young people with new attitudes toward gender who no longer see gender identity as fixed, shameful nor inadmissible. These people want to understand gender, not hide from it, and you are a legend, the first public transvestite. Let's tell them about it.”

“How delightful!” he remarked, laying his wide skirt out on the divan beside him. Its bright yellow silk made a sharp contrast with the subdued red and yellow brocade of the upholstery. He smiled reflectively and began:

“The Wellesleys have, at least for a number of generations, lived by a simple and nonnegotiable code — profit and progeny. Make money and make heirs would be a contemporary way of putting it. When I was young, our code of profit and progeny was drummed into me from my earliest memories. I was told daily in one way or another that I had a mission on earth, that I was fortunate to be born into one of those families that constituted God's Elect on earth, and that it was my duty to promulgate our line. Further, I was given to understand that God's Elect are known by the rewards bestowed upon them by their industry, frugality and charity. Of course, one cannot give away money without first acquiring it, so it stood to reason that I must be profitable as well as fecund. God expected it of all His Elect, including the Wellesleys.”

“The concept that some families and individuals are recognizable as God's Elect by their material attainments lies at the very root of the Calvinist Tradition, Mr. Wellesley. Do you see a connection between this philosophical doctrine and your Father's strange behest?” He refilled my Spode teacup from a silver teapot, chased with filigreed nymphs.

“Please call me Arthur. By the way, I do admire your dress. The white pindots on the navy silk are so stylish and feminine. May I call you Cynthia?”

This compliment pleased me. I had dressed with care for this interview. High style demands high style. The beautiful deserve as good as they give. If Arthur Wellesley could cultivate a refined feminine persona, I thought it appropriate that I emulate it as best I could.

“Please, do, and thank you so much, Arthur.”

"I'm not sure I can answer your question. I really haven't considered it before. It would seem difficult to make a connection between our family motto, our status among God's Elect, which is something I have come to doubt, and my Father's decision to provide me with an imperative to assume female dress. Do you see a linkage there?"

"Not necessarily, Arthur. I was just hoping that you might have done so."

"Well, I was very aware that I had failed him in both categories — profit and progeny, when I was young. I begat no children, at least before he died, and I failed utterly to take the required interest in profitability. It seems rather a large leap to conclude that these youthful shortcomings caused my Father to arrange to force a transgendered life upon me." He refilled his own teacup and leaned back into the cushions of the divan, delicately keeping his knees together and his ankles crossed. I noted that his entire manner was a poem of feminine grace. I decided to go directly to the key question.

"Do you know why Nigel Well-lesley chose to give his only son a choice between poverty and a life-long transvestitism?"

"No, I really can't say that I have ever quite actually understood it. Frankly, I hope that my work with you and your research might finally shed some real light on it. I have given it a lot of thought, of course, and do have my opinions about it, but every time I think I have it figured out, some new fact or finding pops up that makes me question it all over again. I keep coming up with apparent reasons, but don't seem to find the real one."

"Well," I responded, "I had rather the same hopes. I think it's very good that you distinguish between the real and the apparent here. Neither of us seems to know what was in your Father's mind, but perhaps we can ferret it out."

"I sincerely hope so. You can't have a real idea of what it has been like to spend the last forty-four years living in lady's dresses, a living mannequin for haute cou-



ture, without knowing why I was made to do so, except that it was necessary in order to gain a legacy which was mine by right of birth anyway. I can't say it has been altogether dreadful, but it's not a mode of living which I, or any other man, would willfully choose."

My heart really went out to him. Arthur Wellesley is such a genteel, intelligent, compassionate man. That, of course, may be just the result of the very impediment with which he has been made to struggle. Even should that be true, he is still quite a wonderful person. These realizations deepened my determination to get to the bottom of the real facts behind his unique and bizarre legacy.

Arthur rose from the divan and delicately dropped his skirts evenly onto his petticoats and held his hand out to me.

"Shall we walk in the garden as we continue, Cynthia? I like to watch the play of shadows and the orange light on the roses as the twilight falls. My garden is a great pleasure to me. It seems to be a place where I can find a sort of relaxed composure, especially at eventide." Together, we stepped through the French windows into a lovely, enclosed garden with profuse perennial borders. "My garden is my solace in recent years," he continued. "Come, let us sit on my abend bank and watch the light fade."

We sauntered along the brick path between the rose beds and he led me to a wrought iron bench beneath a shaded trellis where we resumed our interview as the sunlight softened and the profuse blooms slowly turned to shades of mauve and lavender.

"My Mother was Deirdre Wentworth of the Rhode Island shipping family. The Wellseleys and the Wentworths had been rivals on the high seas since the days of old Eleazor. There was even a story that one Lucas Wentworth had a hand in turning Eleazor over to the French to reduce the competition in the Caribbean. Mother always discounted such tales, however. Whatever the truth, the two families became an American dynasty with Mother and Father's union. She was one of the great beauties of the belle époque. While I wouldn't say that Mother and Father were expatriates, exactly, they did spend most of their time in Europe in the early years of their marriage, before the Great War. I was born in 1927, during one of their brief stays in the old mansion. Mother was born in 1888 and was nearly forty by the time I came along. Father was born in '85, as I recollect. They met in Paris in 1905 and were married there at the end of their respective grand tours. They had met on the P & O steamer, Grand Orient. POSH, you know! For a family that made a fetish of progeny, it took them twenty years to make me, although three girls came along ahead of me. Of course, sisters weren't regarded as true progeny. They didn't count where the profit factor was concerned either. They actually were a cost."

"Are your sisters alive? Do you see them at all?"

"Yes and no, respectively," he rejoined. "They are forever angry that I inherited everything. They really tried to get it all, I think, but for some reason, it didn't work out for them. They feel quite cheated and feign revulsion at my appearance. They all married very well and are quite well to do. My feminine masquerade just seems to infuriate them, so we don't meet."

“Why is that?”

“Why, it's obvious, Cynthia, dear, so long as I appear in my frocks and gowns, they don't inherit, really!”

“If, under the laws at the time, they didn't stand to inherit in any event, why do you think they're so resentful that you did?”

“Why, my dear girl, it stands to reason. Had I not put on my dresses they would have contested Father's behest to Mother's charities and tried to get the estate. They each received a dowry of ten millions upon the advent of their weddings. Some people are just never satisfied. It seems what was left, a mere one hundred and thirty two millions landed in my dainty lap as soon as I put on a skirt to catch it.”

“I see. Their attitude is not too hard to understand at that,” I allowed.

Arthur rang and a maid appeared through the French windows.

“Will you ask Madame if she plans to have me dress for dinner this evening, Marian?” Arthur turned to me. “I certainly hope not. We're proceeding so well with this that I would sooner not be interrupted. You will stay to dine, will you not, my dear?” I had not expected that I would be here as long as I already had, but I acceded to the invitation gladly. The maid curtsied smoothly and left.

“Arranged marriages had passed out of fashion by the time my parents were wed, but their union was one which would have satisfied the strictest parameters of such dynastic unions. They were both exceedingly wealthy, correctly schooled and the children of an interconnected, affluent and privileged society. My parents' marriage was neither an arranged nor convenient one. It was a real love affair. As a child, I found my Mother was a fairly awesome figure. She was stern, strong, demanding, and utterly delightful.”

“That sounds contradictory,” I interjected.

“Well, she really loved us. She had her standards and expectations and so long as we tried to cooperate, she was a lot of fun, affectionate and kind, but if we got out of line, she was all iron. It seems that most of the women of her time were like that. My friends' Mothers seemed about like mine. These women were not directly concerned with nurturing, however, but rather preoccupied with society and their charities. I liked Mother and she liked us, but she was not often directly involved with us. She was a beautiful woman, statuesque, and highly accomplished in music, languages and art.”

“Do any of her charities stand today?”

“Oh, yes. There's the Brooklyn Sailors' Home, which she set up to provide a retirement shelter for Able Bodied Seamen. Their lives were quite wretched under sail and her family employed hundreds of them. Most were broken men by the time they were in their forties. Today, it includes longshoremen. She was very fond of visiting the home and taking tea with the old salts. They really loved her.”

“How wonderful,” I thought. These people were getting more interesting by the minute. The maid returned with Mrs. Wellesley's message.

“Madame has suggested that as Miss Modelle is staying to dine, that you may dine in your tea gown, Sir.”

Arthur thanked her.

“Tell cook that there will be three for dinner, please. Now, then, where were we?”

“Your Mother's sundry charities.”

“Oh, yes! There was also the Native Artists' Foundation which she founded with several of the other society matrons. They pooled their resources to buy works by American painters. It eventually turned into the collection which is on permanent loan to the National gallery in Washington, D.C. and contains a remarkable number of early Peales and Sargents. Mother called them her 'Darling Dabblers'.”

“That is fortunate for us all, isn't it?” I mused as the last fading light cast lengthening shadows across the garden. “Your Father must have adored her. She sounds like a woman of parts.”

“She was, and he did.”

The maid arrived with a tray and a decanter of sherry.

Chapter 2

As the sun settled behind the hills, we took cocktails in the library of the lovely townhouse. I noticed that the library art collection was no less distinguished than the art collection Arthur's Mother had bequeathed to the Nation. Rich leather bindings, gilded and enscrolled, filled the shelves. Autographed first editions were stacked with paperbacks and I noticed books in seven languages. Arthur said these were his own collection, built on a foundation of rare volumes begun by his Grandfather.

We were joined shortly by Mrs. Wellesley. I learned that she had been Nadine Zworst and had once been European editor of "Paris Vogue" Magazine. She was in that position when she had been recruited forty years ago to supervise Arthur's compliance with the terms of his Father's will; in short, to become his Wardrobe Mistress.

Theirs had been a long and stormy courtship that resolved in mutual admiration as Arthur learned to accept her complete authority over his attire, appearance and social calendar. Mrs. Wellesley was statuesque, model thin and as elegantly attired as her husband. Looking at the two of them side by side, I was awed by their beauty. I asked Arthur to continue his story as Nadine poured a round of DuBonnet cocktails.

"I remember Father very well. He was cut of the same cloth as Mother. The paradox you seek to unravel lies just here, I think. He, who quite clearly loved me, and of whom I have only the best recollections, did, in death, condemn me to a life which is widely considered a perversion. This remains yet inexplicable to me. I can only assume what he intended, but so long as he lived, I found him only a kind, considerate, caring Father. He was always all that a lad could wish for in a parent."

"What a wonderful commendation," I assured him, but privately I wanted to use the word "accommodation." "Did you ever have the feeling that somehow you may have disappointed him as you grew older?"

"Well, I suppose I must have, but you will have to discover how, if that be the case, because it mystifies me. I was raised by the customary succession of nannies, although Elizabeth was around the longest and I liked her the most. She had me in charge until I was shipped off to St. Grottlesex at the age of ten. After that, I was obligated to Yale."

"Of course," I agreed as Nadine filled my glass.

"I was never a very good scholar — gentleman's C's, you know. My department was never exemplary either, although I never got into any serious scrapes at



school. I always knew my limits, just a little wild, but never in any real difficulty. The folks seemed rather to smile at my peccadilloes. Maybe there was more disapproval there than I could read underneath their kind smiles, but that would have been very hard for me to judge.”

Marian announced dinner and the three of us went in to a repast of roast pheasant and quail, the smaller roasted in the cavity of the larger.

Nadine was a gracious hostess, splendid in a rose colored cocktail dress from the Ferragamo collection. Mrs. Wellesley was lean to the point of being gaunt. The severity of her figure was relieved by delicately rounded contours that gave her a youthful appearance despite her years. As with Arthur, decades of involvement in the fashion world had taught her the art of gracefulness and made her clothes seem an integral part of her whole being. She was as charming and refined as her husband. We lingered over dinner which was accompanied by a very old and lovely Pouilly Fume'. We finished with a delightful trifle and a Chateau Haut Brion.

“When I had finished school and done my Grand Tour without yet finding a bride, I returned to take my place in the family business. Father made me start at the bottom, as a janitor in the factory. He said that my status as scion of the Wellesleys afforded me no special skills and that I must learn the business from the bottom up, just as he had. I think this is where my real difficulties began. Having no wife, I made no progeny, and sweeping floors didn't let me feel that I was adding to the profits. I began to feel that I had little aptitude for either profit or progeny. I also couldn't seem to get a promotion to a position above the janitor closet. I felt that Father meant to cast me aside.”

“Well,” I interjected, “it's not uncommon for wealthy men to be so sensitive to charges of nepotism that they fail to recognize their son's talents. One acquaintance of mine was kept in menial work by his Father for so long after he graduated from Harvard that he eventually went into business with his Mother.”

“And did it work out?”

“Yes, quite well. They built a hotel with her money and went into competition with the Father. It worked well, but it didn't sit well.” We all laughed as Marian filled coffee cups for us.

“Wonderful! Perhaps I should have thought of that. Eventually Father began to work me up the corporate ladder, but by that time I think I had discovered that I had little aptitude for the family businesses. I was away from the offices too much of the time and chased too many sweet young things. It became increasingly clear that I was not contemplating marriage. Nothing was ever said, really, but it became apparent that I was one of those young men who show up in the best of families, from time to time, whose wealth and advantage keep them from taking their responsibilities seriously. We are what were known as 'Great Disappointments.'” I could hear Arthur's parents' disappointment in his tone. Nadine lit a cigarette and offered one to me. The interplay of sparkling lights from the chandelier's crystal facets and from the jewelry worn by we three well-fed ladies, danced on the polished surface of the table.

“Weren't young men who were such great disappointments called 'playboys' at that time?” I asked.

"I'd forgotten that," he rejoined. "Yes, indeed, that was the popular term. We did have our fun, but I could never see why, with all the serious drudges among the men in the collateral branches of the family, I shouldn't have a good time with my life. There were others who would have been happy to marry on command, beget kids, and drudge away at corporate affairs." Nadine leaned back in her chair and smiled knowingly.

"I think that may have been the problem, Arthur. You just didn't share your Father's priorities. You didn't perceive the same necessities."

And for that I have had to pay these unusual dues for the privilege of my wealth. Well, my dear, it's all been worth it if just for the serendipity of marrying you." Nadine smiled again, this time with a glow of pleasure. She looked across at me.

"Isn't he precious, Cynthia? He's been doing this sort of thing to me for years and I can't seem to get enough of it. Really, Arthur, you are such a darling!" She rose, walked behind his chair and kissed his forehead when he tilted his head.

"I don't think I would tire of it either," I rejoined. "How do I get him to say such nice things to me?"

"Stick around, dear. To know Arthur is to love him. If you keep up your looks and stay fashionable, he'll start complimenting you, too." We all rose and walked into the drawing room, carrying our Serves cups. I steered the conversation back to the task at hand.

"This dialogue is raising more questions than it's answering, I'm afraid. That's how it works, though. Out of it, I'll eventually squeeze the truth. So, Arthur, you were chasing about the world, having a good time, ignoring your family's imperatives?" I prompted.

"Yes, indeed, I was eating up a copious allowance and paying no attention to return on invested capital at all. I didn't even see a conflict in this behavior, nor sense that I conflicted with Father. He never complained. I was twenty six when he was suddenly taken ill, and died."

"Oh, dear! What a dreadful shock that must have been. How dreadful for you," I cried sympathetically.

Nadine broke in. "You have no idea, Cynthia, how hard it hit him. I didn't come on the scene for some weeks after, but he was still grieving and depressed when he acquired me as a very unwelcome baggage, assigned to take charge of his life, in a manner of speaking."

"Ah, but you were the cure, my darling, the end of my grief as you took charge of the mess into which I was thrown. You were also there to see that I would never put on a pair of trousers again, but that isn't the point. You took me on in my confusion, shame and fear when you first put me in a dress. I know I should never have survived without your firm, loving hand."

"Quite so, my love, you did need someone to take charge of your wardrobe and its wearing. You hadn't the least sense of women's clothing when I took you in hand.

You would have appeared in a burlap bag if it hadn't been for me!" We all laughed.
The image was just too, too hilarious.

Chapter 3

Arthur carefully arranged the short, beige skirt of his stylish, single breasted suit of silk crepe, over his knees. The cool color of the suit set off in sharp contrast the cranberry silk shantung blouse and golden beads and gold earrings that he wore. His feet were in taupe pumps, and a fur jacket of Canadian lynx was slung over one shoulder. Atop his tresses was perched a beige pillbox hat trimmed with a red ribbon.

We settled in to lunch at “21.” I had been unable to get to New Haven for this second interview, but he had amiably agreed to meet me in New York for the afternoon. Over sazerac cocktails, he began to muse on his life as a transvestite.

“It's amazing how slowly one assumes a female persona, regardless of the speed with which one is thrown into it. I think it must have taken me months, years, perhaps, to begin to recognize the lady in the mirror as myself. On the other hand, perhaps the lady who I had become happened as quickly as I took up female dress, and it was just I who was slow in accepting the new persona who appeared there. I think maybe that is the conundrum. Did I, in becoming feminine, become a new person, or did a new person arrive to take me over, a person who was feminine? At any rate, it seems to have been a long time before I could acknowledge and accept the new person in the mirror.”

I sipped at my cocktail, glanced at the menu and ordered the turkey tortellini with scallops. This was an unaccustomed treat. It was on Arthur's account and not on my paltry stipend as a doctoral candidate. Mme Elise always expects me to be on someone else's account. She says that third-partying costs is the key to success in the academic life. “

“I wonder if you are talking about the difficulty in assuming a new identity so quickly. Surely you must realize that would take some time. Or, are you talking about the time necessary to sort out a change in identity? In the first instance, that was your reality, given the suddenness with which crossdressing was thrust upon you. In the second, you are talking about the slow process of realizing who you had become.”

Arthur ordered the second round and lit one of his ubiquitous English Ovals cigarettes.

“Well, it was so difficult at first. I was so frightened, so confused at first, so uncertain of my own identity. Once I had acceded to my Father's mandate and had agreed to assume female dress, Nadine was thrust upon me so suddenly, and I was caparisoned so quickly in lady's attire, that I had no time to think about what was happening to me. One moment I was Arthur Wellesley, playboy, in the customary white slacks and blue blazer, and the next, I was before the press in a Dior cocktail dress, explaining why I'd agreed to always live in haute couture. In Nadine's defense, I have to admit that it was her job to deck me out in feminine finery and present me to the world as a lady with barely enough time for the fitters to create a bosom for me, but that was my fault, not hers. Had I been less truculent about accepting my fate, poor, patient Nadine would have had more time to dress me as she had to.”

“Then what you're talking of is the difference between your sudden appearance as a woman and your eventual awareness that you could be attractive and acceptable as that same woman?”

“Yes, I think so. One day I was a man and the next afternoon, I was presenting myself to the world as a wealthy heiress in a blue satin A-line cocktail dress. It's a bit of a sea change, don't you think?”

I laughed aloud at his delightful, ironic look. He cocked his head with a kind of “I showed 'em bitchiness,” tempered with a sort of, “God, I still don't believe I really did that!” ingenuousness. It was perfectly hilarious. Arthur was a real mistress of this kind of delicious satire. When he held the mirror up to society, he saw us all in the glass with a marvelous clarity and knew that none of us would ever again be quite so certain about our gender.

“Well, if you weren't exactly reconciled to this bizarre, overnight gender switch, how could you expect the public to be so, especially in the 1940s? You were not, as we would say, today, gender correct. Basically, they were not prepared to see one of their beloved symbols of affluence and the American Dream change genders overnight.”

“Oh, indeed. Heaven forbid! I was quickly made aware that it enraged millions when wealthy, eligible Arthur Wellesley popped up one afternoon in a Dior frock. You should have seen the awful mail I received.”

“Why do you think it enraged them so?”

Arthur leaned back in the banquette as his blackened redfish was set before him. He dropped a napkin into his lap and sighed.

“You must have noticed, Cynthia, that crossdressing enrages people. transvestitism begets anger. No, I have never understood why it gets people so on edge. My Mother was a child of the fin du siecle. The whole public issue of gender seems to have arisen in that period between the war of 1879 and the Great War. Mother called the period one of sexual chaos.”

“How interesting,” I rejoined. “Whatever did she mean by that?” I dug into my tortellini with gusto, not forgetting my manners. Lunching at “21” does require that we remember what we are, the delicious cuisine notwithstanding. “Eat,” Mme. Elise would say, “but eat as a lady.”

“It was just something I overheard at one of her dinner parties when I was too young to understand it. Over the years, the remark has stayed with me. She came from a time when men were indisputably men, and women were corseted, hatted, gloved, bustled, camisoled, and bedecked. There was no confusion about one's gender in her day. Whatever the reason, dress was completely gender specific for both sexes. No one confused the difference between haberdashery and couture. They were too preoccupied with proper dress at the peril of their social standing. Now, female dress is no longer quite so gender specific, although I am painfully aware every day that male attire is.”

“That is very astute of you, Arthur, if a little obvious. You're right, of course. What was your Mother referring to when she called the fin du siecle a period of sexual

chaos?" The waiter poured a nice chardonnay and I sipped at it appreciatively. It tasted good. It was in such good taste.

"Well, it was in the Edwardian period, in her youth, that corsets went out. Poirot freed women from their grip. Bobbed hair then replaced the long coiled chignon and dresses went loose. This was a long way from the assumption of male dress by women, but it would evolve into that before Mother died. I think she called it sexual chaos because women began the process of gender bending. God, I wish we fellows had been afforded the same privilege. It would have saved me a lifetime of embarrassment."

"Why do you think that women, who certainly pioneered the process of non-gender-specific dress, have refused to extend the same privilege to men?"

Arthur sipped at his wine and pushed a piece of expertly burned fish into its sauce. "Power, I think, the will to power. You know, Adler had something there. A lot of what we see in society is concerned with the will to power."

"What power?"

"Oh, the power which women think is inherent in males, and which they long to arrogate to themselves."

"Aren't they right about that? Don't men control our society?"

"In some ways, I suppose, but I have had a unique opportunity to live in both pastures, and in some ways, I think women have, inherently, more control of things than they realize. They just think the men are in charge."

"So, then this power thing is somewhat a matter of a person's perception? Women don't perceive themselves as powerful?"

"Yes, I think to some extent that that is true. I think that is what Mother must have been referring to. I know she certainly called the shots in our family, Father's apparent sole right to run everything to his own choosing notwithstanding."

"That is a fascinating idea, Arthur, just fascinating."

I was stalling, trying to sort out the implications of what he had said. I speared a tortellini and scanned his face for any emotion lurking behind the make-up.

"Do you think your Mother's distaste with a woman's apparent role in life had anything to do with your Father's later move to cast you in the female role in the drama?"

"Well, that's certainly possible. But, as I told you, every time I think I have read his mind, something new comes along to confuse the issue again."

"That has to be very hard to live with. You made the observation that from your experience, it is apparent that being cross-dressed enrages the public. What do you make of that?"

"Why, it's so scandalous! It tells the truth about gender. You know our social gender roles are all artificial and contrived. It's rather a matter of the old fable of the emperor's new clothes. If the emperor were to actually put on some clothes, and they were women's clothes, his subjects would be scandalized, would they not? The trans-

vestite challenges everyone's perceptions about being male and female. People don't like that at all. It makes them feel too foolish.”

“Are you saying that is why we can't look transvestites in the face? It's because a transvestite calls everyone's perception of his own gender into question?” Arthur grinned and sipped at his wine.

“Absolutely! I'm the living proof of that, aren't I? Why old Dad should have wanted me to play out this role, the scandalizer, to be the living symbol of society's artificial gender identities, I can't tell you.” He sighed heavily and finished his luncheon. I could now see the pain and sorrow that crept across his face. “I really am a freak, you know. People love to look at freaks, but they don't want to accept them. It's been terribly hard. Maybe that's what Father wanted; to make it hard for me to have his money. I just don't know. I guess that's for you to try to figure out. I hope you do.” I finished my wine.

“You poor fellow,” I said. “It has been terribly hard, hasn't it? Let me get into the background research a little more and I will see what I can come up with. There has to have been a powerful motivation behind your Father's strange bequest. Let me see what I can learn about it.”

Arthur put me into a cab and I went directly to the New York Public Library to see what I could learn about the Wentworths, the Wellesleys, et al, in the past. I learned a lot.