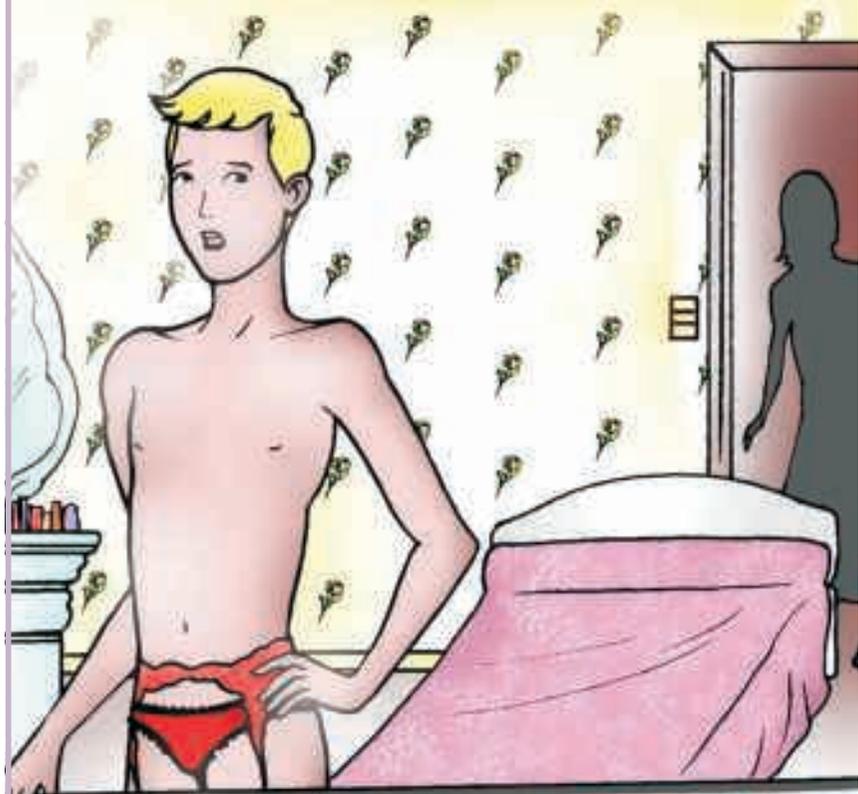


Leading Lady



Charlotte Mayo



A "Young Adult TV" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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For information address
Reluctant Press
P.O. Box 5829
Sherman Oaks, CA 91413
USA

Call toll free (800) 359-2116

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LEADING LADY

BY CHARLOTTE MAYO

Introduction

The story I am about to tell is all true. Every word of it. It is a strange tale. Quite bizarre in many ways. The action occurs in 1966 – the year England won the football World Cup – not that I was particularly interested in that! I was fourteen at the time and attended an all-boys school. In 1966 I was keen on drama and was a member of the school’s drama group. The story concerns what happened when I was asked to play the female lead role by our English and drama teacher, Clara Francis, in a play called *The Chevalier’s Conquest* by that great 16th Century English playwright, Sir Henry de Ville. Little did I know that there was a hidden agenda to Clara’s request and little did she know that I was a transvestite - although, in truth, I did not even know it myself it at the time...

Preface -1958

It was the rustle of skirts that first caught my attention. I was six years old and drinking Coke out of a bottle with a straw. My dad, Reg, had gone to the bar at the social club and my mum, Beryl, was sitting at the table with me, my older brother, George. Then she walked in. Auntie Christina – Mum’s much younger sister with her husband Bob. She was wearing a pink dress, shiny texture, maybe a satin or something with a very full skirt – I would come to know the style as the New Look – created by Christian Dior in 1947 and beloved by women around the world. She walked into the club on tiny, pointy, high-heeled stiletto shoes and all the men moved out of her way and smiled and the women gushed and she kissed cheeks and shook hands. Then she was at our table and we all stood up as if in the presence of Royalty and then she was kissing us all and bending forward and I could hear the rustle of her dress, smell the sweet scents that hung in the air and then Mum was talking,

“You remember, James,” Mum said to Auntie Christina and Uncle Bob.

Bob shook hands with my brother George and me. Then Auntie Christina was patting my head and bending lower so I was given a grandstand view of her ample cleavage – although, thankfully, I was too young for it to make much of an impression but I could smell her lovely scent and hear the rustle of the dress and feel the soft texture of the satin skirt which rubbed against my bare legs (at that age shorts were de rigueur). I was in rapture and she was talking and saying how long it was since she had last seen me or any of us and then she was standing up and my Dad was kissing her cheek and cracking a joke and she was laughing and. As she turned, that pink dress

brushed across my face and I could smell it and then the dress just seemed to hover in front of me. And I could still smell the delicate fragrance of her body and then her husband, Bobby, was talking to us and Auntie Christina was moving to the bar, her red handbag over her right shoulder.

“She’s nice, she is,” was all I could say. And I meant it, I really meant it.

Then, she was standing at the bar and I was watching her. How the zip ran down the back of her dress like a railway track and, and how apart from that, the material was quite smooth across her back. How the dress had a little pink collar and how the dress burst into a full skirt at her tiny, nipped-in waist, like a flower which had come into bloom and how slim her legs were and thin her ankles were. I gazed in wonderment at how she perched on the red, high-heeled stilettos with their tiny, tiny pointy heels – it was amazing that she could walk on such things as they defied gravity. All evening I keeping looking at Auntie Christina, watching her, staring at her, taking in her elegance and beauty. She must have felt my eyes drilling into me because she came over again, later in the evening, and bought me and my brother a Coke. Then she was talking to Mum and I sat next to her, not wanting to leave her side. I could feel the softness of her skirts on my bare legs, the sheer elegance of her femininity which was in such stark contrast to the masculine shirts, suits and ties which the men wore. I was in rapture.

I think about that day and think that is when I became a transvestite. Of course, it was not the first time I had seen women wearing pretty, feminine cloths – although it was not a regular occurrence. My mother’s clothes were pretty drab and boring, unlike Auntie Christina who always dressed well. Years later I would tell a shrink that I had wished that

Auntie Christina had been my Mum. I wonder how she would have reacted when I was exposed as a transvestite? Better than my Mum and dad? Hopefully. I would like to think so, in any case.

But that day, watching her stand at the bar, in that full-skirted dress, well, it changed my life forever. Or maybe it didn't – maybe I had always been a transvestite. Of course, back then I didn't know about such words or their meaning – all I knew was that I loved Auntie Christina's dress and that it was wrong of me to admit it. Boys shouldn't like female clothes – I knew that much. At that time, I don't think I had a strong desire to dress. I just liked looking at women's clothes and the more feminine, the better. When I had fixated my gaze upon Auntie Christina, I had been at Uncle John and Auntie Sue's wedding anniversary. John was my mother's older brother. Unfortunately, Bob and Christina had relocated up North and we didn't see much of them. More was the pity. The party was in a social hall and went on all evening. It was boring for us kids. We had to be seen and not heard – but I could look, couldn't I? And I spent my time admiring Auntie Christina's lovely dress.

Chapter One

I was born in a dead average family – Mum, Beryl; Dad, Reg and a brother, George, who was four years older than me: my Dad was a draftsman in the aero industry and my mother was a housewife. My Dad pushed us academically and we both went to an all-boys grammar school. I noticed I liked seeing film actresses and was fascinated by their clothes but I realised I was the only one. Most boys liked looking at girls in the nude. Back then, seeing naked women was not that easy so the fact that they were looking at

their breasts and I was looking at their clothes, well, that could be easily hidden. I didn't know why I was fascinated by their clothes. When I "tested" out my friends and brother – well, there was no such love for what they were wearing. Their view was that clothes should be taken off and the quicker, the better.

I did alright at school, joined the drama group, liked English, had a few friends. Then, in 1965, Miss Francis became our English teacher and my life changed. Forever.

She was young and blond and fashionable and she immediately became my favourite teacher - as well as that of every other pupil for she was easily the most popular teacher. She also ran the drama group and that winter we were due to stage our annual play. Miss Francis had chosen a sixteen-century play called *The Chevalier's Conquest* by Sir Henry deVille. However, the problem with being at an all boy school was that it was often difficult to find boys prepared to play female parts. There was an all-girls school fairly near-by and they would occasionally provide girls to play the female roles but our Headmaster, Mr. Draggers, who was ancient and, in my view, sadistic, preferred to keep everything "in-house" – he was not too keen on girls. For that reason, most of the plays were reviews and sketches where the female parts were brief and comical and it was obvious the boys were dressed as girls. I have to admit here that I had always longed to play one of these female parts but had never had the courage to volunteer, fearing my admiration for female clothing would be revealed.

"Come, on now," Miss Francis said one day to our drama group. "Who will play the part of Cordelia?"

No hands went up.

“James, you have been in the drama group a long time. Why don’t you give it a go?” Miss Francis asked.

I blushed to the roots of my blond hair. There were off-putting titters all around the group.

“No, Miss, I am sorry,” I said.

Miss Francis was unperturbed. “In Shakespeare’s day it was often the case that boys and men played the part of females on stage so by one of you playing the role of Cordelia, we are going back to how the play was originally performed.”

There were other female parts, of course, and there was a fat lad called Jenkins who always volunteered to play a female part, and, indeed he volunteered to play the role of one of the other female characters – but Cordelia was a main role. The actor would be on stage most of the time, along with the leading man.

Not surprisingly there were no volunteers. At the end of the class, when the bell had gone off, Miss Francis took me to one side.

“James, you would be an ideal candidate. We could easily make you look like a girl, you are good at drama and it would help with your English ‘O’ level. Think about it, please.”

“I will, Miss,” I said and went off to Maths. And I did think about it. A lot.

The next day she asked the English class if there were any volunteers to join the drama group and play Cordelia. Again silence.

One boy said, “Homosexuals dress in women’s clothes, Miss.”

Miss Francis went red with rage. “Nonsense. I could show you a photograph of Lawrence Oliver playing a female lead role and the great American novelist, F. Scott Fitzgerald also played the female lead whilst at Princeton. It is those old square attitudes that hold us back. There is nothing wrong with it, particularly in the confines of a play. The boy who volunteers is very brave. Very brave indeed.”

There was no further argument.

Once again, Miss Francis asked me to stay behind.

“Have you thought it over?” she asked.

I had. I took a deep breath. I wanted so much to do it but I was scared of the teasing and mocking of my peers, not to mention the reaction of my “square” parents and my older brother who was at university. I felt myself blanch. I hesitated.

“I don’t know,” I shrugged. “I’m really not sure...”

“Someone else has come forward,” Miss Francis said. “But I think you would be better. You have more acting experience and, to be honest, James, I think you would be very convincing and far better than the person who wants the role.”

“Who volunteered?” I asked naively.

Miss Francis smiled, all gleaming white teeth. “You know I can’t tell you that, can I?”

I thought of the other boys in the class. There seemed no likely candidates but then again he could be from the drama group or another class Miss Francis taught. He might have even been a boy in another year as Miss Francis had put up posters around the

school asking for volunteers to help with the play. She wanted to stage a lavish production and wanted a number of stagehands and extras. She really wanted this production – her first at the school — to be the best.

“It’s up to you but I will have to come back to the other boy today,” Miss Francis said. “I told him I would give him an answer when the bell goes at the end of the school day.”

“OK then,” I said quickly. The part was slipping through my fingers and I so desperately wanted to play Cordelia. “I’ll do it.”

Chapter Two

It actually wasn’t that difficult. Not at first. I didn’t have to dress. Just read and play and act the part in the hall and in classrooms after school or at lunch-time when the group met. The drama group was great – a Cordelia was needed and a Cordelia had been found and, as Miss Francis said, many men had played female leads throughout history as acting had not seemed to be a proper role for a woman. She reminded us that in Shakespeare’s day a woman that went on stage had been seen as a “loose” women or a harlot, an attitude which had persisted to the Nineteenth Century.

I tried to put the thought of dressing as a woman out of my mind. I wanted to do it but I was still afraid of what my peers would say, what they would think... and my parents. One night I plucked up the courage to tell my parents. They were surprised but I did a “matter of fact” announcement.

“I’m in the school’s production of the new play *The Chevalier’s Conquest* by Sir Henry deVille,” I said one night.

Proud.

“I’m playing a leading part.”

Prouder.

“And, as there’s no girls in the school, they have asked me to play Cordelia.”

Raised eyebrows.

“Is that a girl?” Dad asked.

“Yes, it is,” I said.

“Well, I hope you don’t go getting any funny ideas,” Mum said.

“Leave it, Beryl, he is only playing a part. He is not one of those,” Dad said and went back to reading his paper. Dad often worked late as he had an eye for pretty, young girls. He had a reputation in the office where he worked. My mother knew all about his dalliances but just turned a blind eye to them. Nothing was ever said – no raised voices, just the odd remark which I had not understood when I had been young but I had grown to understand as I had gotten older. My brother had been the first to reveal to me that Dad liked younger women. He had gone to Dad’s office once and had been surprised by how he had been treated when he said he was the son of Mr. Watkins. Some of the girls in the typing pool had tittered and blushed and when Dad had come out to fetch him, they had laughed and one had said to my Dad about my brother,

“I hope he’s not going to follow in your footsteps, Mr. Watkins.”

Dad had apparently laughed and said. “Don’t be so cheeky, Susan.”

“Or what, Mr. Mathews?” Susan had said.

“I might just have to spank you,” Dad had replied.

More tittering and laughter. And some red faces.

“What? Over your knee, Mr. Watkins?”

“Yes, over my knee,” Dad had said, much to my brother’s shock.

“Oh, Susan would like that!” one of the other girls piped up.

My brother had been old enough to understand the innuendo – my Dad was a womaniser. It made sense; on numerous occasions we had found Mum crying and we had all taken “wrong phone number calls” from mystery women. It all added up to a father who liked his dalliances and a mother who turned a “blind eye” and that was maybe why she had let herself go a bit appearance wise and spent no time or money on her presentation. She obviously thought she could not compete with the young women Dad chased after.

So that was that. Fortunately, my brother George had left the school by the time I got the part of Cordelia. He had started at University as he was four years older than me. And despite what the young secretary had said, if rumours were to be believed he was very much a “chip off the old block” and like Dad took to bedding “plenty of birds.”

So, I got into playing the part of Cordelia and I kinda “forgot” (or at least tried not to think about) about the dressing though it was always there in the back of my mind. Once I had volunteered and started to learn the lines, Miss Francis didn’t mention it again. I guess she was trying to lure me in, make out it was no big deal. After all, I wasn’t the first boy to play a girl part and I wouldn’t be the last. We rehearsed in the evening after school and it was good fun. And because I was central to the play, I had a lot of lines to learn. I learnt them in the bath and bedroom and recited them over breakfast, a book in one hand, a spoonful of cornflakes in the other. It was how it was.

Miss Francis liked me. I could tell that much. She praised me and that led to “teacher’s Pet” teasing but I could stand that. In fact, I secretly quite liked it. Miss Francis was the most popular teacher in the school and loads of us boys had a crush on her.

Weeks went by and then one day, at rehearsals, Miss Francis took me to one side. The other boys were being fitted for costumes, the boys that prepared the scenery were hard at work banging and painting and sticking. The play was coming together and entering its final lap.

“James,” she said. “We need to measure you so I can get an idea of what I need to get for you clothes wise. I think the best thing is if we have a private dress rehearsal first, before you are shown off to the other boys as Cordelia as it were. We need to make sure we get it right.”

My heart started to beat – palpitations. My hands were clammy. I knew I was as red as a beetroot. I wanted it so bad but I didn’t want to show it. I had never dressed in women’s clothes before in my life.

Never. But I had been tempted and resisted. It was wrong. I knew that much.

The next day Miss Francis approached me after English. She handed me an envelope.

I opened it in the toilet, sitting in a cubicle. I kinda knew it was what I was meant to do.

It read:

Come to my house at 6 pm tonight. Do not tell anyone.

Then there was the address. I knew it was not far away.

So that evening I told my parents I was going around to someone's house to rehearse and I set off on my push bike for my date with destiny.

Miss Francis opened the door of a small, neat suburban house with a tidy front garden and a picket fence. The house smelt of roses. She invited me in. It was kind of strange seeing her in trousers as normally she wore dresses and skirts for work which was the dress code for female teachers.

"Hello, Miss Francis," I said when she opened the door.

"Call me Clara," Miss Francis said. It seemed funny calling a teacher by her first name. I came into the hall. We stood for a moment in embarrassed silence.

"We're just going upstairs, Mum," she called to a room second on the left. She explained that she lived with her mother. She also said that the house was

her mother's house – it had been fortunate, she said, that she had managed to get a job a short bus ride away from the school having left University three years previously and working briefly in another school where she had not enjoyed teaching the disruptive children, Saint Herbert's was, in Clara's opinion, a lot better and the pupils were polite and well-mannered. It was strange hearing her talk to me as if I was an adult, as if I were her equal. I guessed she was one of those "trendy teachers" who thought the children should be shown respect.

We arrived upstairs and she pushed open the door to her bedroom. She had the main, double bedroom and I could see a large double bed dominate the floor area – it had a pink quilted bedspread over it and smelt of lavender. The wallpaper was white with delicate watercolour flowers in greens and yellows and a dressing table was under the bay window covered with beauty products and ... and... and... and.... My heart started beating and my hands felt clammy for I could see the clothes on the bed: the pretty red and black French knickers, the bra, the false breast forms, the waist clincher, the stockings, the suspender belt. I gazed, wide-eyed and disbelieving. I was Aladdin in the cave, the kid in the preverbal sweet shop. This was Heaven. I moved from foot to foot nervously.

"Perhaps you can see now why I didn't want to dress you for the first time in school. I think we need some privacy."

Those words "dress you" rebounded through my head. It was the teacher again. Taking control. She was in charge and wanted to dress me. She added to my ecstasy.