

Chapter 6 – The Copernicus Society

Once again, Teagan needed to transform into Ellis Stark. Standing behind the dressing screen at Roscoe and Archie's, she was stripped down to a man's smalls, a sleeveless short chemise, and a set of stays. Her long hair was wound around her head and pinned down, then a tight-fitting net cap covered her head. She poked a finger under the cap.

Archie was standing behind her, tugging the strings of her stays, which laced up her back due to the manly features built into the front. "Quit wiggling," he said.

"I have an itch," Teagan said.

"So do I," said Roscoe.

Teagan went up on tiptoe to peer over the screen.

Roscoe Marrick was relaxing on a chaise a few feet away, wearing a Chinese silk banyan, and holding his cat, Mr Sullivan. "But mine is a bit lower," he added, cupping his genitals.

Teagan shook her head at the bawdy remark. She adored these two. She'd met Archie on her first day at Hartwell, the Sisterhood School, where Lord and Lady West had sent her to get educated. She and Archie had instantly become best friends. He was a couple of years older than her, assuming Lady Eleanor had guessed correctly about her age.

Throughout her time at Hartwell, not knowing her age or birth date had been a yearly irritant, because the school celebrated birthdays. When she'd said she had none, they had encouraged her to make one up. That never

appealed to her, so she went without—just like she went without a mother or father.

When Archie had left school a couple of years ahead of Teagan, she'd felt so alone, as if she'd lost her family all over again. He'd come to London, where he met Roscoe. They became lovers. Roscoe was a celebrated actor, the toast of London, and Archie now worked as his dresser. And hers too, when she needed to go about as a man, mostly after dark.

"Patience, sir, is a virtue," Archie said over Teagan's shoulder.

"So, I have heard," Roscoe replied.

"Once we get Teagan set up, we have the rest of the evening to ourselves."

"Until she comes back," Roscoe pouted.

Teagan poked her head around the corner of the screen. "My apologies, I have not figured out how to get in and out of this getup by myself."

"Do not fret," Roscoe said. "I am just being contentious. We worry about you when you are out there alone, even as a man. Despite those impressive Sakegawa fighting skills you learned at Hartwell; it is still dangerous."

"Do not forget my short sword," she smirked.

Roscoe barked a laugh, tinged with just a bit of naughtiness. He loved double entendre. "Yes, Archibald and I each have one of those, too."

Archie chuckled.

She stuck her head out from the side of the screen and addressed Roscoe, "Lord West thinks I have too much fun gadding about like this." She waved her hand down the

front of her.

"I think he is correct," Archie said from behind her.

She elbowed him for his impertinence.

He swatted her. "Quit that, or you'll be late."

Archie returned to lacing the corset that held her breasts tightly in place. The padding across the upper front gave the appearance of a man's chest. Bits hung down between her legs at the bottom of the corset. They were secured by a ribbon that ran through her crotch and fastened at the back, giving her the genital attributes of a man. It was her own design. She and Archie had constructed it.

She felt Archie finish tying off the strings, securing them with a knot and tucking in the ends. He picked up a man's shirt, hooked his foot around the leg of a stool, pulled it towards him, and stepped up. "Arms," he said firmly.

Teagan lifted her arms and Archie dropped the white linen shirt over her head. She pulled it into place, turned, and offered him one of her wrists.

Archie tied first one of her cuffs, then the other.

When he finished, Teagan fastened her shirt at the neck.

Archie pulled the stool in front of her. "Lift your chin."

She did and he tied a white linen neck cloth into a modest and distinctive form.

Teagan sat on the stool he had vacated and donned her hose and garters. Next, she put on fine wool breeches of a dark buff color, then slipped her feet into plain,

well-broken-in men's walking shoes.

She heard Roscoe's feet hit the floor; he must have stood. Then she heard the patter of four small feet: Mr Sullivan.

Finally dressed, Teagan stepped out from behind the screen. Roscoe waved his hand at her. "Go sit down so I can put on your wig and finish your makeup."

Teagan plopped down on the bench at the dressing table, facing the mirror and sighed.

Archie brought a head form with a wig pinned to it.

Teagan rolled her eyes. "If we cut my hair off, you could have it fashioned into a hairpiece that I could wear when I choose to be girly."

Archie tapped her on the head. "It would be a sacrilege to cut off your beautiful locks. I knew when we were children that you saw no merit in being a female, but really Tee, I thought you would grow out of that sort of thinking."

"What are you going on about?" Roscoe asked.

"Teagan never liked being a girl," Archie said.

"Are you one of us?" Roscoe asked, wagging his brows at her.

Teagan sat quietly, thinking. "I do not think so. Archie is not representing my aversion accurately."

"*Is that so?*" Archie said.

"Women's apparel is ridiculous. Pushing up here—" She mimicked cupping her breasts. "Waistlines are moving north," she continued, pressing her hands against the bottom of her ribcage, "and excessive flowy materials down below that inhibit a woman's stride." She shook her head. "And for what? To attract some man that promises to

be a loving partner, but turns out to be a mulish, condescending tyrant who does not give a whit about what she wants or thinks."

"I get your point, dearest," Roscoe said from behind her.

"Now, back to this hair business," she said, tapping her head with her right hand. "Most males of my purported age and status have ceased wearing wigs, and if they powder, they are powdering their own hair."

In the mirror in front of her, Teagan could see Roscoe and Archie roll their eyes and shake their heads. She chuckled.

Archie stepped up and painted her hairline with a floral scented goo that would hold her wig in place.

Her nose twitched from the scent of the goo and she frowned.

"Quit pouting." Archie slapped her shoulder.

"Tip your head back, love." Roscoe stood behind her with the wig in his hands.

Teagan complied and Roscoe began fitting the wig over the black net covering her hair.

When he had adjusted and pinned the wig in place, Teagan studied her reflection.

"You do make a devilishly attractive fellow, you know." Roscoe tapped her on the shoulder.

She gave him a cheeky grin. "I shall keep that in mind." The hair of the wig was swept back from her face and forehead. On the sides, running from front to back, were sausage curls. At the nape of her neck the hair was gathered into a queue.

Roscoe moved forward and picked up a box of dark

powder from the dressing table and a large fluffy brush. "Archie, would you place a drying cloth over Teagan's chest. I wouldn't want anything to dull her linen."

"Perish the thought," Teagan said, turning towards Roscoe as Archie laid the cloth across her chest and pulled it tight about her neck.

"Chin," Roscoe said, pointing with the brush in his hand.

Teagan tilted her chin up.

Roscoe brushed the powder across her jawline. He stepped back and squinted at his work. "No, no, that shan't do. Archibald, dear, hand me that tub of grease."

Teagan grimaced.

"Tut-tut." Roscoe wagged his finger at her as he set the powder canister and brush back on the dressing table.

Archie handed him the crock of lard. Roscoe dabbed the index and middle finger of his right hand into the grease.

Teagan pulled away.

"Don't be such a baby," Archie said.

Roscoe ran his fingers lightly across Teagan's jawline and upper lip. Then he picked up the powder and brushed and jabbed it over the greasy bits. He stepped back, resting his left arm across his lower chest at the bottom of his ribs, with his right elbow propped on his left wrist. His right hand held the brush pointed at Teagan. "What say you, Archibald?"

Archie came and stood beside Roscoe. "Oh, I say well done. She truly looks as though she's in need of a shave."

Teagan rolled her eyes again.

"Look for yourself, Tee," Archie flicked his hand at her.

She turned about on the bench and gazed at herself in the mirror. Earlier, Roscoe had applied some highlighting down the center of her nose and on the outer corners of her jaw, making her jaw look squarer and her nose longer. He'd thickened her brows with some kohl. She waggled her brows at herself in the mirror. Roscoe's final touches were shockingly effective; nevertheless, she kept her voice droll. "I look positively manly. Thank you, Roscoe."

Archie tied an elegant, black silk bow on her queue. Roscoe returned to the chaise.

Archie held out her waistcoat. Teagan turned about, giving him her back, and slipped her arms through the armholes, then quickly buttoned all but the top three buttons.

Her waistcoat was made of a thin-striped blue and buff woolen fabric and double breasted. No flash or fripperies, just a conservative young man dressing for an evening out. Giles had loaned her one of his pocket watches, so she fastened the end of the chain through a button hole and deposited the watch in the right, outside pocket of her waistcoat, draping the watch chain across her stomach.

Archie tucked the ends of her neck cloth becomingly into the open top of her waistcoat. Even without lace, she looked well-to-do.

He then picked up a dark plum colored frock coat and held it open for her to slip her arms down the sleeves. The coat had no collar and the narrow cuffs were adorned

with the same buttons as those marching up the front of the coat.

Roscoe jumped from the chaise and came to stand in front of her.

She shot her cuffs as Roscoe walked around her. "Will I do?" she asked.

"Your hat, sir." Archie held out a stylish black felt bicorn with a plum and buff ribboned cockade.

Teagan placed the hat at a jaunty angle, with the two corners running parallel to her shoulders.

Roscoe stepped close. Taking her chin in his hand, he moved her head to the left and to the right.

Teagan was five foot eight barefooted. With the added height provided by the heels of her shoes, and with Roscoe in flat slippers, they were nearly eye to eye.

"Yes?" She raised one eyebrow.

"You will do." He kissed her lightly on the lips.

When their lips parted, Teagan fluttered her lashes. "Sir, how dare you take such liberties."

Archie, Teagan, and Roscoe laughed.

Teagan bent to pick up her gloves and a walking stick that conveniently hid her short sword.

Roscoe slapped her on the rump. "Be gone, you rascal."