

Do These Gloves Make My Ass Look Fat?

Christina Oxenberg

<https://createspace.com/3449495>

and for Kindle)



The third and latest book by celebrated author Christina Oxenberg, ***Do These Gloves Make My Ass Look Fat?*** is a side-splitting collection of Oxenberg's true-to-life whimsical reminiscences of a nomadic existence within a singularly exotic background.

The book kicks off with a bang—Christina's painfully funny retelling of an excruciatingly slow and awkward blind date with a Hollywood comic legend—and continues to ricochet among locales and increasingly head-scratching scenarios. From the posh neighborhoods of New York City and Beverly Hills to the tony hamlets of the Hamptons and beyond, ***Do These Gloves Make My Ass Look Fat?*** is, in the words of Christina's erstwhile boss and once-rumored cousin (but that's a whole other story!) Robert F. Kennedy Jr., "a laugh on every page."

Also by Christina Oxenberg:



Royal Blue (<https://www.createspace.com/3428451> and for Kindle)

Royal Blue is the story of Maria Moses, the awkward and neglected daughter of a beautiful, cold princess ... "Given that *Royal Blue* is based on aspects of the author's life, it would be an understatement to say that her childhood, was, even willing for exaggeration, unremittingly awful. A testament to Oxenberg's powers of survival, the novel is, at best, reminiscent of early Françoise

Sagan—evocative and surprisingly funny." (*The Times (UK) Literary Supplement*)



Taxi (available on Amazon)

"Careening along like its subject, the book carries celebrity chatter, historical data, scam stories, and a dictionary of hackspeak....Jump in the backseat for Christina's raucous rides with exhibitionists, Mafia hit men and military tacticians and you'll find the subculture of New York drivers...provocative..." (*Vanity Fair*)

Christina Oxenberg

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Photo: ©Leigh Vogel

If the name Christina Oxenberg sounds familiar, there's a reason for it. Called "one of the most lethal wits of the western world" by Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Christina has created a literary niche as unique as her background—the daughter of a princess and the sister of a Hollywood star—and a (mis)adventurous life that is at times stranger than fiction.

In Oxenberg's 1997 second book and first novel ***Royal Blue***, 14-year-old protagonist Maria Moses returns home for the school holiday to the family house in England, only to find that the property had been sold a month earlier—an incident Oxenberg says actually happened. Not only had her mother forgotten to tell her, she'd also moved to America, leaving no forwarding address. "I regaled my friends with all the hilarious details of this story," she says, "and it was only their distressed expressions that gave me cause to question if what my mother had done was all that unusual."

In Christina's life, "unusual" was always a relative term. A direct descendant of George I of Greece and Tsar Alexander II, her maternal grandparents—Princess Olga of Greece and Prince Regent Paul of Yugoslavia—were exiled after dictator Josip Broz Tito took power. Christina went to 14 different schools (in England, Spain, and the United States), backpacked in Asia, lived all over the world, and married and divorced the painter Damian Elwes (brother of *The Princess Bride*'s Cary Elwes). In between, she found work as an assistant to Paul Simon, a door girl at the Roxy, and in public relations and party planning, and founded an eponymous knitwear line featuring luxurious, sustainable musk ox fiber.

Christina's third and newest book, ***Do These Gloves Make My Ass Look Fat?*** is a side-splitting collection of Oxenberg's true-to-life whimsical reminiscences of a nomadic existence within a singularly exotic background.

Of her famously strained relationships with her royal mother and regal sister, Christina remains sanguine: "We're Serbian," she says with a shrug. "We're genetically programmed to squabble."

Books by Christina Oxenberg:

Do These Gloves Make My Ass Look Fat? <https://createspace.com/3449495>

Royal Blue <https://www.createspace.com/3428451>

Taxi <http://www.amazon.com/Taxi-Christina->

[Oxenberg/dp/0704325179/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1286656662&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Taxi-Christina-Oxenberg/dp/0704325179/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1286656662&sr=1-1)



What People Are Saying About Christina Oxenberg...

“Oxenberg has always scandalized polite society—she is, after all, the daughter of a royal princess—and has chosen to live in the manner of her writing: outrageously, ironically, comically at times, but fearlessly brave and above all true and fresh.” —**Taki Theodoracopulos**

“...One of the most lethal wits of the western world.” —**Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.**

“Oxenberg depicts in exquisite detail the grotesque side of privilege.” —**Dominick Dunne**

“Cynics will want to knock it, considering the pedigree it comes from, but that will be tough because Royal Blue’s version of a bad and privileged childhood is funny, fetching, and full of gorgeous writing with a deep, tugging undercurrent of melancholy. Its intimate rendering of wealth without cliché is a triumph—imagine Evelyn Waugh rewriting Eloise. For a first novel, what’s most remarkable is that there’s not a bum sentence in the entire thing.” —**Bret Easton Ellis**

“Oxenberg’s musings on local culture suggests a style that hints of Tom Wolfe, but with the detached wry and dry observation of Joan Didion, tossed with more than a splash of charming, classy, self-deprecating amusing neurotica that is all her own.” —**Dale Launer**

“[Royal Blue’s] characters are rich and beautiful, and its settings exotic...described with cool detachment and a touch of humour...” —**The Times (UK)**

“Oxenberg shows herself a master at pulling away comfortable, familiar ground.” —**The Independent on Sunday (UK)**

“A testament to Oxenberg’s powers of survival, [Royal Blue] is, at best, reminiscent of early Françoise Sagan—evocative and surprisingly funny.” —**The Times (UK) Literary Supplement**

“[Royal Blue] is a controlled and vivid account of a sensitive child’s survival in the milieu of the fabulously rich.... The catalogue of callousness is shocking.” —**The Guardian (UK)**

“Careening along like its subject, the book carries celebrity chatter, historical data, scam stories, and a dictionary of hackspeak....Jump in the backseat for Christina’s raucous rides with exhibitionists, Mafia hit men and military tacticians and you’ll find the subculture of New York drivers more provocative than either the Dynasty shenanigans of her big sister, Catherine, or the globe-trotting antics of her divorced parents...” —**Vanity Fair**

“...Do These Gloves Make My Ass Look Fat? is sure to make more than a few people laugh out loud.” —**East Hampton Independent**

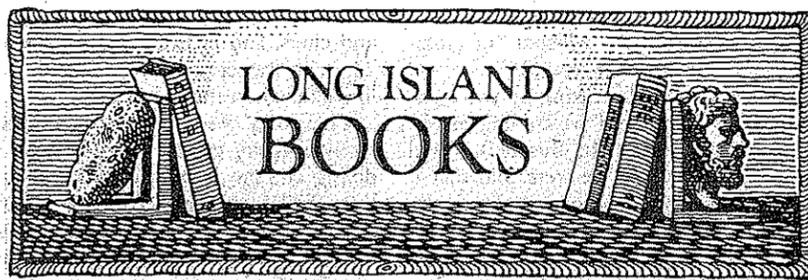
“Darkly funny.” —**The Chicago Tribune**

“Oxenberg creates a languid, ferociously beautiful and barbarous world, with an atmosphere reminiscent of that which pervades the work of F. Scott Fitzgerald.... It is an awful story in many ways, but one in which a laugh is never far away.” —**The Independent UK, Sunday Review**

THE EAST HAMPTON STAR

SHINES FOR ALL

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2010



A Writer's Pointed Implements

BY BAYLIS GREENE

Was it the ultimate male fantasy or was it an assault?

Russell, a dancer from the Centerfold Strips club in Mineola, describes stepping into an upstate nightclub's back room as the entertainment for a bachelorette party and being buried beneath a horde of screaming young women. Clothes and whipped cream fly. "There were hands everywhere," he relays, "a tongue down my throat," and a digit somewhere unmentionable.

"Do These Gloves Make My Ass Look Fat?"

Christina Oxenberg
CreateSpace, \$9.99

Once he's let up he recovers sufficiently to have serial, latexed sex with 16 women. All in a night's work.

The story is recounted in Christina Oxenberg's recent collection of essays, reportage, commentary, and flights of fancy, "Do These Gloves Make My Ass Look Fat?" Titled "A Final Fling," this particular article appeared in Penthouse and was intended to check in on the ever-evolving state of all-women parties and what really happens when hair is let down and the wilding commences, but the dreary details are what's memorable. Russell never left the house he grew up in, for instance. His friends tell him how lucky he is; he responds with a fatigued whine: "You go to the gym every day."

The dancer's life catches up to him.

One night after a show he goes home with "one gross fat chick." As he sits on her bed, he says, she undresses him "the way a mom would." More than his spirit flags.

Hey man, Thomas Merton tried to tell us this more than 60 years ago — what's solely of the body is depressing. And he hadn't even witnessed Internet porn.

The author is a daughter of European royalty (her mother is Princess Elizabeth of Yugoslavia) and a sister to its celebrity counterpart in this country (the actress Catherine Oxenberg of "Dynasty" fame), relationships that are at best strained, she writes. But to the extent that she has a bad-girl reputation — cutting, neurotic, askew, self-deprecating, dismissive of her pedigree — there's a thread of morality that runs through the book.

"Hellfire and Khakis," for example, is a luridly detailed tour of a "fully equipped S/M fetish dungeon" in Manhattan's meatpacking district. There, the outwardly strait-laced — office workers, Wall Streeters, tourists, you name it — let it all hang out, and Ms. Oxenberg is in her element, that is, a misfit among deviants, free to employ her impressive powers of observation where she will. (And sometimes in ways you occasionally wish were more forgettable, as when one avid participant exposes what is likened to a "button mushroom.")

But then, as she follows a sex worker



Christina Oxenberg © Leigh Vogel

out the door at 5 a.m., she sees across the street a nice-looking garbage collector handing rhododendrons to a waitress just getting off her shift — it could be a scene in a 1950s Hollywood musical. It doesn't amount to even a full sentence, but it's there for a reason, the rebuke is made, and the reader comes up for air.

In "Man and Machine," trouble with technology has her call Jacinto from a Washington, D.C., hotel's front desk to her room to help with the TV's remote, but while she might take eager note of his "scandalous ass," she doesn't devour him, she only looks. She isn't a Mary Gaitskill character, after all, she just reports on them.

If sex, obviously, is a theme, so is life on the South Fork, and for some of us there's always a thrill in seeing it lambasted. We all know about summertime boorishness, what's refreshing is Ms. Oxenberg's fascination with the "dismal" Hamptons winter, whether experienced house-sitting, renting, or while kicking back at her father's place in Southampton.

Writing for the British magazine Tatler, she describes being "holed up in an attic in Sag Harbor, a deafeningly quiet former whaling village," which during the nine-month off-season "is returned to the locals and their small-town peculiarities already deftly portrayed by the likes of Stephen King." Even in summer, she invokes the Maine man: A ride on the back of Dan Aykroyd's motorcycle takes her through a "gangly East End forest" in Springs, "where it was moonless and shadow-filled and Stephen King-creepy."

Say what you will, that gets it — from the hair-raising nighttime backwoods to the New England-y speech in certain quarters.

It's an odd though charming book, in places merely a compendium of thoughts and anecdotes in the form of pieces barely over a page long. (When

I see an essay that short I think of the character in "The Big Chill" who says his People magazine articles are written to match the length of a stint in the john.) But if some seem like diary entries, there's almost always a striking passage or phrase in them: At a dinner, scissors snip the end of a child's finger, spraying blood across a plate of uncooked prawns, which, curved and fleshy, are themselves finger-like.

She's funny, too. A gold digger is

"shovel-ready." (She gets her comeuppance in a similarly hued, watery way suited to the aforementioned sex dungeon.)

The book's title, it should be said, relates to Ms. Oxenberg's decade or so as a sweater designer, a business she was driven from, in part, by her annoyance with women's ceaselessly shaky body images and too-frequent "shopping trances."

Another title, that of her previous

book, "Royal Blue," once elicited a response from Prince and Princess Michael of Kent that applies here: "The title is certainly uncompromising," they wrote of the coming-of-age novel, before continuing with words that bear repeating in any number of life situations — they planned to "explore it with care."

Christina Oxenberg lives in Southampton Village.

AVENUE

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summer reads by E.F. ULMANN

Between the Covers

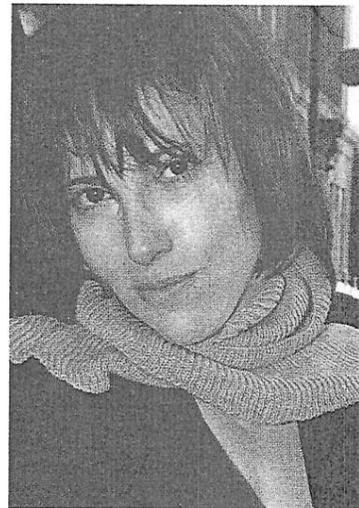
Some irreverent, saucy and charming summer reads from some of *AVENUE*'s favorite authors . . . just in time for the beach



Summer reads, beach reads, call them what you will. If you have decided to postpone Proust or Joyce for another year, here are some new books that may amuse.

Critic Dale Launer described Christina Oxenberg's writing style as having hints of Tom Wolfe by way of Joan Didion. Maybe so. Oxenberg, an essayist for several magazines, among other endeavors, and the daughter of Princess Elizabeth of Yugoslavia, is very funny. "One of the most lethal wits of the western world," says Robert Kennedy Jr. about her latest book, *Do These Gloves Make My Ass Look Fat?* (CreateSpace). Taki Theodoracopulos, who has published her pieces on his website, says, "Oxenberg has always scandalized polite society—she is, after all, the daughter of a royal princess—and has chosen to live in the manner of her writing: outrageously, ironically, comically at times, but fearlessly brave and above all true and fresh." She is uncommonly exotic: her mother is the aforementioned princess; her father, Seventh Avenue socialite Howard Oxenberg. Her sister, Catherine, is the actress. She is a direct descendant of George I of Greece and Tsar Alexander II, during whose reign the serfs were emancipated. Quite a background.

Below: Christina Oxenberg, author of *Do These Gloves Make My Ass Look Fat?*



THE INDEPENDENT

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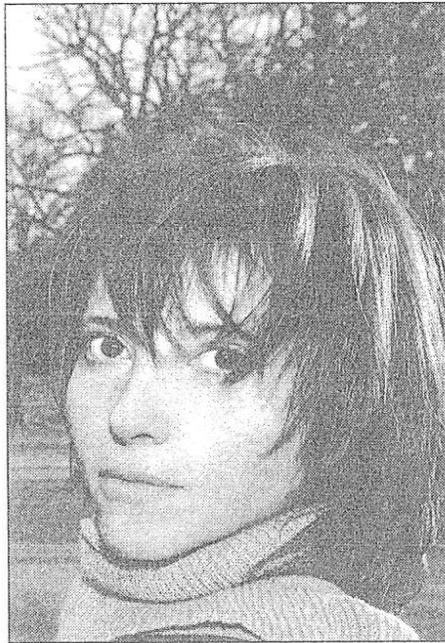
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Oxenberg's Book Looks Just Right



Independent / Leigh Vogel

Christina Oxenberg

By Kerry Goleski

Local girl Christina Oxenberg came out with a new book on May 23, *Do These Gloves Make my Ass Look Fat?*, that's sure to make more than a few people laugh

out loud. The book is a compilation of articles and anecdotes, some published in magazines such as Penthouse, Allure, The London Sunday Times, Tatler and Takimag.com. She wrote her first book, *Taxi*, which is a collection of shorter pieces, in 1986. *Royal Blue*, published prior to her new book, is a semi-autobiographical novel about growing up in a royal family. "Writing non-fiction was often scary but the challenge was

appealing," she said. The stories she tells involve parties, Hamptons' outings, a date with Steve Martin and more. All the stories are honest, sometimes to the point of self-deprecation. "That is part of the challenge -- to force myself to forgo pride," she confessed. Her writing is honest and her portrayals of those she interacts with often humorous, warts and all. "There is no greater compliment than the accumulation of

enemies," she said.

Royal Blue has its roots in the truth. Her sister is Catherine Oxenberg, the actress. They are the daughters of Princess Elizabeth of Yugoslavia.

The next book is a collection of three novellas, "Burning Daddy Alive," "The Real Story Behind Sex and the City" and "My Life as a Kennedy." It will be published next year.

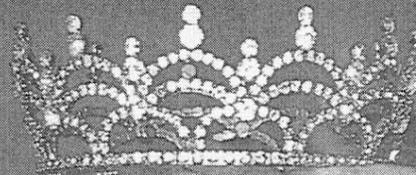
Do These Gloves Make My Ass Look Fat? is available at Canio's in Sag Harbor and BookHampton in Sag Harbor, East Hampton and Southampton.

SEX-OBSESSED ARTISTS • CRONKITE ON KURALT

JULY 21, 1997

NEW YORK

Royals Rule



Exiled, overthrown,
or just bored with
their kingdoms,
the world's
crowned heads
are invading
Manhattan.
Fawning is optional.

BY CHRISTOPHER
MASON

CHRISTINA OXENBERG,
ROYAL AUTHOR

royal flush

New York is crawling with kings, queens, princes, princesses, and lesser regal exiles. Some flaunt the crown jewels, others flog them. By Christopher Mason

PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHRIS BUCK

THE PUBLICATION THIS MONTH of *Royal Blue*, a largely autobiographical first novel by Princess Elizabeth's daughter, Christina Oxenberg, suggests that having an exiled royal princess for a mother can inspire some unusual identity problems.

"Dad's Jewish, so I've always considered my sister, Catherine, and I to be authentic Jewish American Princesses," she says, adding that Howard Oxenberg, a Seventh Avenue businessman, is paying her rent these days. She dismisses persistent rumors that her *real* father was Jack Kennedy. "I hear it's *possible*," she says. "But I don't think I look anything like him."

Her mother has declined to read the book. "I hear she calls me a Menendez child for writing it," says Christina. Were she tempted, however, Princess Elizabeth would discover that the royal-born mother in the novel emerges as a mostly sympathetic character—and a loving, if somewhat distracted, parent. But she might find some passages irksome.

"I have never liked the fire-engine-red lipstick she wears," writes Oxenberg. "To me it looks like the bloodied mouth of a predator."

Although mother and daughter both live in Manhattan, they have not spoken in over four years. "The silence between us probably won't go on forever," says Oxenberg. "This is just a breather. Don't forget, we're Serbian. So we're genetically programmed to squabble."

The fledgling novelist has always found her mother's royal status disquieting. "I asked to be sent away to school when I was 8 years old," she says. "We had to write to our parents, but I could never figure out how to address her on the envelope—Princess Elizabeth of Yugoslavia or Elizabeth Oxenberg. And the *HRH* thing always looked weird."

Oxenberg believes that her actress sister, Catherine, who played a princess on *Dynasty*, has been less troubled by the dichotomy. "I was always the tomboy, and Catherine was the little princess," she says. "A friend who was at school with Catherine told me she would always insist on all the other little girls' curtsying to her."

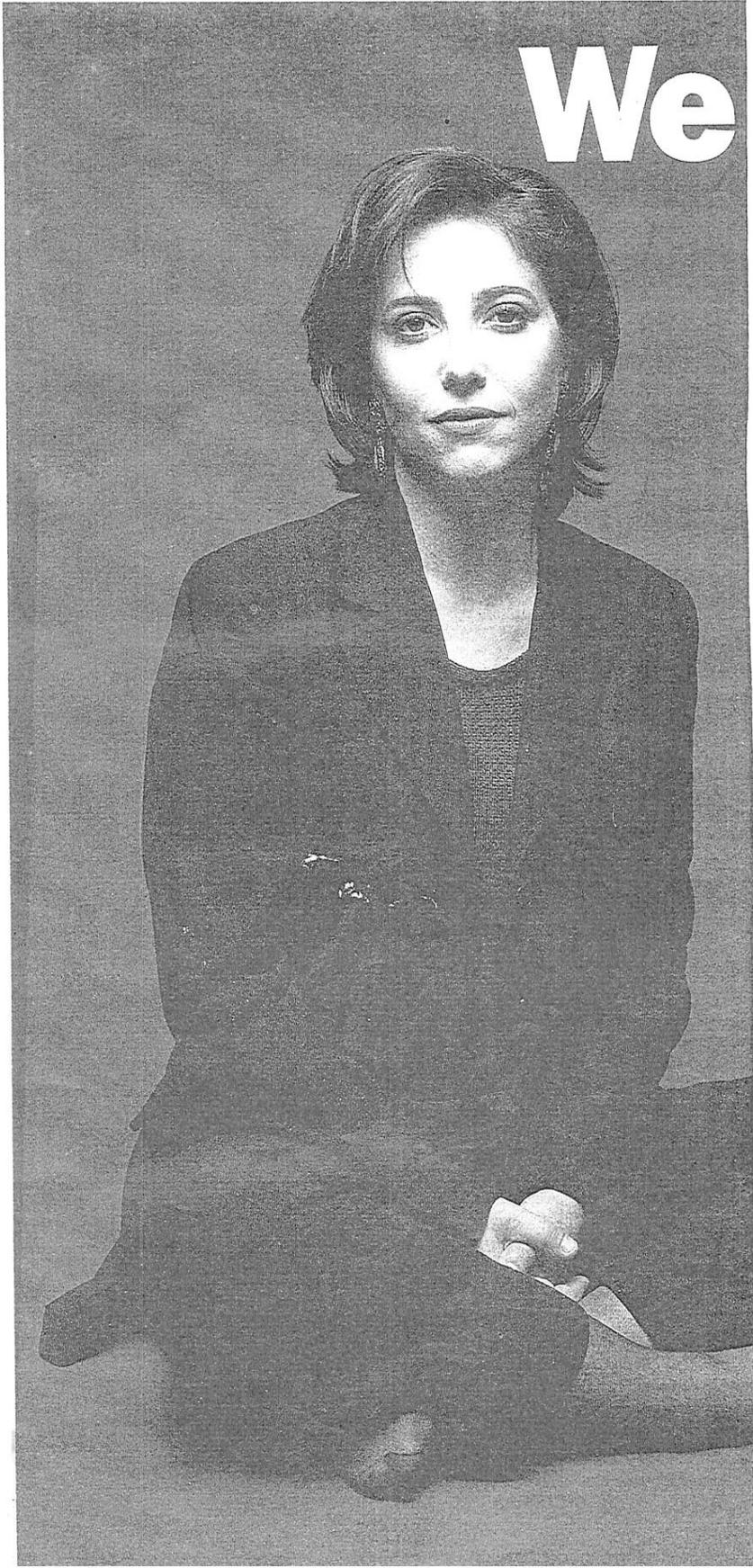
Oxenberg jokes that she spends most of her time these days at home, channel-surfing in the hopes of catching a glimpse of her mother hawking her perfume on QVC or her sister doing celebrity endorsements on Dionne Warwick's *Psychic Friends Hotline*. "If Mery Griffin had any class, he'd just *give* my mother the money," she says. "Instead, she has to humiliate herself cashing in on her name like the rest of us."



THE SUNDAY TIMES

We

29 JUNE 1997



are not amused

Main picture by Justin Saccilife/Dmitri Kasterine/Alpha



Larger than life: Christina Oxenberg, main picture; and, above from left, Princess Elizabeth of Yugoslavia with Mrs Blair Stewart-Wilson; with Richard Burton; and Howard and Catherine Oxenberg

Christina Oxenberg might be of royal extraction, but that doesn't mean she isn't prey to the same problems as we lesser mortals when it comes to her bank balance. Two years ago, divorced from her artist husband, the daughter of Princess Elizabeth of Yugoslavia found that her savings were not, after all, a bottomless pit. She was stony broke.

"I was in a series of dead-end jobs," she says. "Flipping hamburgers in Colorado and door-checking at the Roxy in New York. Then I was called by this publisher, Bob. He'd been given my number by a friend. I was in a bad mood, and I think I was rather nasty to him on the phone. When he came to take me out to dinner it was almost a challenge — inviting him into my miserable mushroom-growing slum."

Luckily, Oxenberg's guest was not put off by her insalubrious surroundings. Having seen an example of her writing, he offered her a contract to write a novel. *Royal Blue*, a thinly disguised memoir, is published in America this month, and it will appear here later this year.

Thanks to the fact that the events contained in it bear some remarkable similarities to Oxenberg's own life, the novel is already attracting its fair share of controversy. The American socialite Nan Kempner obviously doesn't regard it as a piece of fiction; she remarked in a recent interview: "She trashes her parents, who are friends of mine."

The author's mother, Princess Elizabeth, is a one-time beauty whose three dashing husbands and string of famous lovers — including Richard Burton — once made her the talk of two continents. Her father, Howard Oxenberg, is a retired millionaire Brooklyn-born dress manufacturer. Her sister is Catherine Oxenberg, the former Dynasty actress who played Princess Di in a big-budget, made-for-TV movie. More glamorously still, there have long been rumours that one of the Oxenberg girls is really the daughter of John F Kennedy.

Royal Blue, on the other hand, tells the coming-of-age story of Maria, the awkward daughter of a beautiful, self-possessed princess with emerald green eyes named Helena, and a handsome social-climbing Jewish father, Sam Moses. Maria's tall blonde sister, Miranda, is vain and mean-spirited. She is also her parents' favourite. As a child, Maria is haunted by the fact that she may not be Sam Moses's biological daughter. Sound familiar?

"I did my best to make it a work of fiction," she says. "At least half of it is made up. I don't see it as a scandalous document or as

Christina Oxenberg's racy first novel has upset her mother, Princess Elizabeth of Yugoslavia, by its portrayal of some rather familiar characters, as she tells JULIETTE DOMINGUEZ

an angry rant." Even so, she admits her family has been upset by the book. "If I were one of my family, I would probably take it badly. But if I lose my entire family as a result, I'll just think it was a shame they had such a sense-of-humour failure. The characters in the novel are caricatures, to an extent. They are so obviously exaggerated that I think it's obvious I'm attempting to be comic."

"My relationship with my mother is actually the opposite of the one between Maria and Helena in the book. Sure, sometimes there has been distance between us, but my mother is warm and bubbly. We are very similar, like magnets: sometimes we are drawn together and other times we flip over and can't get near one another."

Even so, Oxenberg, who separated from her husband Damian Elwes in 1991, is game enough to admit that her exotic lineage makes for great publicity material. Her own life, she claims, is as interesting as any novel.

"My mother is not your average princess, and my dad's not your average Brooklynite," she says. "My mother's parents, Princess Olga of Greece and Prince Regent Paul of Yugoslavia, were exiled after Tito took over. My mother was just a girl. They were given 24 hours to get out, and left virtually empty-handed."

Oxenberg adored her grandmother, although she was a distant figure. "I used to have to curtsy and kiss her hand — even in private. When I think about that now, it seems incredibly weird. My sister was the one who took the royal thing seriously. She always wanted to have a title herself. I was always more of a meritocrat."

From the outset, Elizabeth, her mother, was something of a rebel. She met Howard Oxenberg at a party in Italy and, in 1960, the two

eloped, causing a scandal. Not only was Oxenberg a commoner, he was divorced from a former beauty queen, to boot. The marriage lasted just six years. Now 61, her last husband, a Peruvian politician, died in the middle of their divorce proceedings.

Christina's father, meanwhile, once an understudy for Buster Crabbe in the Tarzan movies, is now married for the fifth time, to a French woman, and spends much of his time "playing tennis".

"The more English she learns, the trickier things might get," says Christina of her latest stepmother. "But, for the moment, in a kind of mute silence, there is perfect harmony." Having been through eight different step-parents in all, Oxenberg's attitude is easy come, easy go: "Nice to meet you, but don't slam your door on the way out."

Her childhood seems to have been far from easy. She was constantly shipped from one school to another. In *Royal Blue*, 14-year-old Maria returns home for the school holidays to the family house in Chelsea, only to find that the property had been sold a month earlier — an incident that Oxenberg insists actually happened. Not only had her mother forgotten to tell her, she'd also moved to America, leaving no forwarding address. "I regaled my friends with all the hilarious details of this story," she says, "and it was only their distressed expressions that gave me cause to question if what my mother had done was at all unusual."

Neither did she have much of an ally in her sister. "Catherine was always very sophisticated as a child, whereas I was very much a tomboy," she says. "She was also much cleverer than me. When she was only 11, she asked Richard Burton, who was my mother's lover at the time, to sign his name on 100 bits of paper. Then she sold them at school. It was brilliant."

Could their fraught relationship be down to the fact, if the JFK rumours are true, they have different fathers? "I am convinced that Howard is my father," says Oxenberg, "despite the fact that my parents' marriage was rocky, and I think they might have done a bit of their own thing. Now and again I've asked her. She is vague but, then, I have never gotten a straight answer from my mother about anything, even about what she had for lunch. Of course, it is much more interesting to suppose that one is a Kennedy or a Presley or the Pope's child..."

For a second, she sounds almost wistful. But perhaps her eye is simply on column inches. After all, even this most meritocratic of royals doesn't fancy going back to burger flipping.

Queasy Riders

Christina Oxenberg's
taxi tales



JONATHAN BECKER

Christina and husband Damian Elwes.

The joy of cabs is that you are risking your life," explains *Taxi* writer Christina Oxenberg. Careening along like its subject, the book carries celebrity chatter, historical data, scam stories, and a dictionary of hackspeak. Christina, twenty-three, zooms around too. She went to fourteen different schools (in England, Spain, America), backpacked around Asia, lived in Paris, New York, and Los Angeles, then got married in Jordan in April to Harrow- and Harvard-educated painter Damian Elwes, who did most of *Taxi*'s illustrations. Jump in the backseat for Christina's raucous rides with exhibitionists, Mafia hit men, and military tacticians and you'll find the subculture of New York drivers far more provocative than either the *Dynasty* shenanigans of her big sister, Catherine, or the globe-trotting antics of her divorced parents, Princess Elizabeth of Yugoslavia and Howard Oxenberg.

—Angela Janklow

CLAUS VON BÜLOW

Taxi drivers have a strange reaction to me if they recognize my face, which due to all the recent publicity happens quite often. Either they quiz me excessively or they treat me like Greta Garbo, acknowledging my presence by doing their best to ignore me.

JACQUELINE ONASSIS'S OFFICE

Regrettably, Mrs. Onassis does not have a story to recount for you.

CATHERINE OXENBERG, actress

It was a lovely sunny day and I was on my way to meet some friends for lunch. I was rather late, so I jumped in a taxi. "Hello, beautiful!" the driver said. "You know, you could be in the movies!" I thanked him for the compliment and decided against telling him anything. But he went on: "Hey, you ought to listen to what I'm telling you. I happen to know quite a few people out in Hollywood, and if you turn out to be a nice girl I might even be able to help you." It sounded dubious to me, but I didn't have far to go, so I let him ramble on. Soon enough I was paying my fare, and just as I got out of the cab he looked at me very seriously and said, "Why don't you give me your telephone number? I'll bet I could get you a spot on *Dynasty*!"

JERRY ZIPKIN, boulevardier

What do you call the man who drives the taxi? Most people call him "driver," and that is what I call him.

I got into a cab one day and I said, "Driver! I want to go to..." and I gave him the address.

Whereupon he turned around and said, "Don't you dare call me 'driver'! I find that rude and demeaning!"

And I, who was taken aback, said, "What do you want me to call you? Florence?"

"Oh!" he said. "That's my nickname! How did you know?"

FRANCESCA BRASCHI, designer

It was right in the midst of a terrible blizzard one winter in New York. I had hundreds of bags. It was impossible to walk and I was trying to get a cab. An hour must have gone by and still I couldn't find one. Then suddenly I saw the sacred lit halo atop a yellow mobile, and waving my arms frantically I flagged it down. The driver's window was down, but in order to be heard in the blizzard I yelled at him, "Are you free?" I don't quite know what got into me, but I was almost hysterical and I kept repeating myself, "Are you free, are you really free?"

The driver, who happened to be black, looked at me very calmly and said, "Lady, we've been free since 1863!"

DIANA VREELAND

There was a time, years before you were born, when there was such a scare about the Mafia it was unheard of to take taxis after dark. Mobsters used to use them for their own purposes, like the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre.

Excerpts from the book *Taxi*, by Christina Oxenberg, to be published this month by Quartet Books/Salem House Publishers; © 1986 by Christina Oxenberg; printed by permission of the publisher.

THE SUNDAY REVIEW

Loitering with good intentions

BY RACHELLE THACKRAY

ROYAL BLUE

by Christina Oxenberg, *Quartet* £15



Oxenberg creates a languid, ferociously beautiful and barbarous world

IT IS tempting to dismiss, a little spitefully, a first novel by an apparently B-list celebrity author whose sisters are Princess Elizabeth of Yugoslavia and Catherine Oxenberg, who left *Dynasty* to play Princess Diana in a mini-series. But before one condemns Christina Oxenberg's story of a little rich girl, it is only fair to read it; literary snobs will be dealt as short shrift as the appalling aristocrats who people these pages.

Maria Moses, the wry, likeable teenage heroine of *Royal Blue*, eschews both self-pity and the snobbery which comes from connections. Her family and associates are cold, distant jet-setters; her mother, a princess who inherited "a rusting title from long-defunct European royalty", is "genetically inclined toward encouraging serfdom in the folks who loiter in her life", with at least one unpaid court jester, confessor and secretary for adulatory purposes. Her children, unless they loiter, are forgotten.

Meanwhile, Maria's father – if he is her father; it is never confirmed – dangles money in front of his children's faces, bribing them to praise him. On taking their photographs, he instructs: "Everybody say 'caviar'! Say, 'Please, Daddy, more caviar!'"

The book tells of Maria's progress through boarding school and several sets of step-parents. Pages are dotted with exclamation marks; they are a prerequisite for the easily-bored, as fleeting as the excitement they purport to portray. Oxenberg creates a languid, ferociously beautiful and barbarous world, with an atmosphere reminiscent of that which pervades the work of F Scott Fitzgerald.

Failed relationships abound in Maria's story, invariably commencing: "He's it! He's the one! Sensitive, charming, funny, good looking... And he's mad about me!" and ending with: "Why didn't I listen to my instincts? I knew there was something wrong with him when I first laid eyes on the son of a bitch."

Meanwhile, soul-wrenching moments stand out

starkly in lives as thin and pathetically festive as confetti. Pathos seeps from the collision between raw feeling and triviality; when Maria is told that her only friend, Alison, has died, for example, she remembers the closeness of her mother's thumb, "rubbing almost imperceptibly against the bone of my wrist", followed by the aloof command: "Calm down, darling. Mama's in no mood for theatrics."

Oxenberg shows herself a master at pulling away comfortable, familiar ground. The trademark fire-engine-red lipstick worn by Maria's mother is a potent symbol of their relationship (her mother's arrival signals disaster, yet also the possibility of relief). And there are clever surrogates in surreptitious details: Maria fusses over her grandmother's Russian miniatures, clinging to her battered suitcase and the ghosts of Alison and her vanished father-figure Charlie to shore up the tatters of her life.

Even without a plausible plot, the book would entice, with the dark, ugly side of wealth glinting from a profusion of detail, observed from Maria's alternately childish and cynical stance. She seems to stand at an angle to the narrative, never quite confronting the reality of the events she relates.

As it is, the plot is so unbelievable it seems wholly true. Our sympathy – if we are allowed any – is entirely with Maria, who lets her mother off as "a charming and bizarre and utterly ineffectual fool" after the latter sells up and moves to America without thinking to inform her young daughter, still at boarding school. The melodramatic, despairing yet oddly perky dénouement is perfect; things can only get better, surely?

It is the small, unimportant points of life – the smell of coffee, the colour of the walls – which become the rocks of Maria's existence in this novel. Oxenberg, writing with the sure, blasé touch of the insider, makes much of them, revealing the fragility of life. It is an awful story in many ways, but one in which a laugh is never far away.

metro

Right first time



ROYAL BLUE

By Christina
Oxenberg

Quartet, £15

(Fiction)

ISBN 0 7043 7110 3

Each of these books is not only a first novel, but also represents a sub-genre of contemporary fiction. Christina Oxenberg's *Royal Blue* might easily be dismissed as the confessions of yet another Poor Little It Girl; but even though its characters are rich and beautiful, and its settings exotic, the picture the novel presents is anything but glamorous. Far from being indulged by her wealthy parents, the book's narrator, Maria Moses, is abused and neglected by them most shockingly when she is sent away to boarding school as a punishment for her inability to get over the death of her best friend.

Incidents such as this, described with cool detachment and a touch of humour, contribute towards the indictment of a privileged but emotionally attenuated world.

Christina Koning

The **Guardian** NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR

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New fiction

Royal Blue, by Christina Oxenberg (Quartet, £15)

Written by the daughter of an ex-Yugoslavian princess, this is a controlled and vivid account of a sensitive child's survival in the milieu of the fabulously rich. While her selfish mother jet-sets, Maria is shunted between the homes of her mother's lovers and her father. When Maria's best friend dies, Maria is sent to a sort of reform school to grieve alone. She returns for the holidays to find that her mother has sold their house in London and moved to New York without telling her. The catalogue of callousness is shocking and the author's note confirms that the novel is semi-autobiographical.