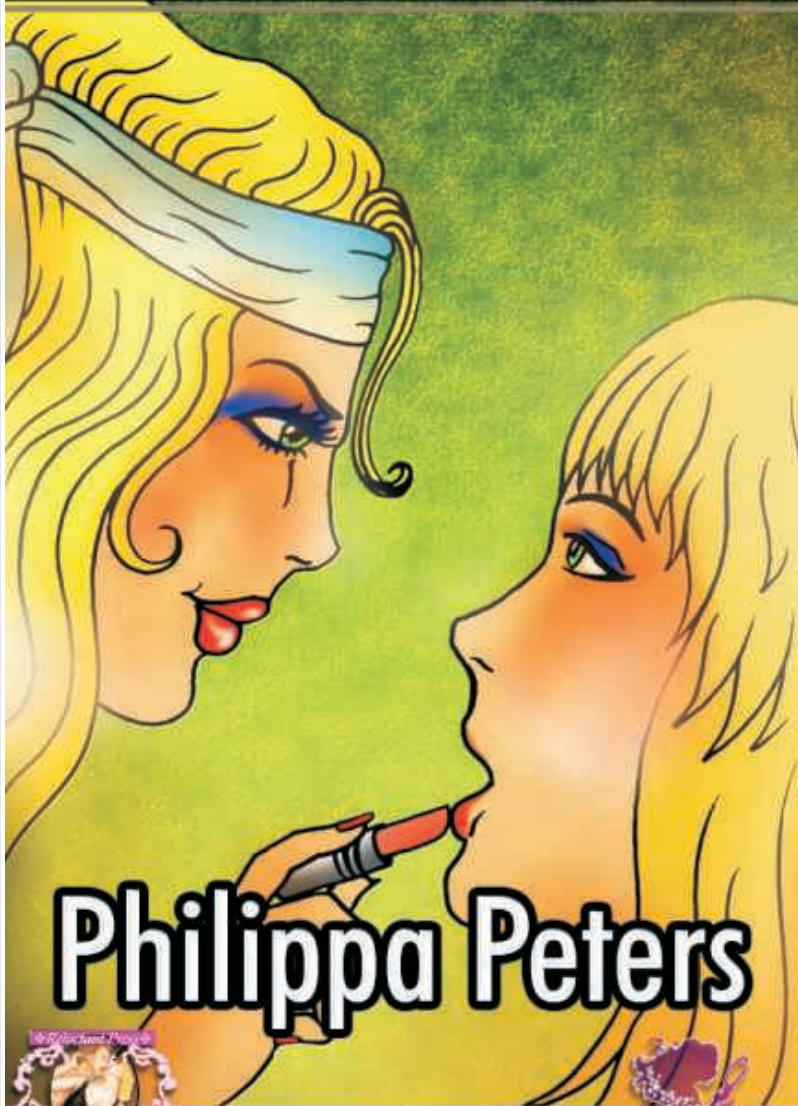


Another Fine Witch



Philippa Peters



An "Adult Tv" Novel



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ANOTHER FINE WITCH

By Philippa Peters

“Kiss me! Kiss me! Kiss me!” one of *Sword’s* riggers was taunting the retreating golden-haired Seafarers whom he was chasing out of the waterside bar. Of course, he had the assistance of ten or so others at his back as he grabbed the nearest Seafarer, dressed in non-sea whites as they all were.

“Uh-oh,” said Robady, the leader of us cadet officers on *King Tatheren’s Sword*. “We’d better break that up before the Watch interferes.” Unlike the bullies chasing the four, slim, white figures along the waterfront, we cadets could see down Front Street. We could see a patrol of the Watch sauntering along towards the Terraire docks. They’d stopped only to

sample something off a cart, part of the inevitable street market that formed when a great ship of the Seafarers was in harbor.

I followed Robady, glad to be behind him as he confronted Cluff, off our ship and leading the pack. "Now stop right there!" called Rob as he marched forward.

Cluff did stop, even though he was holding onto one of the Seafarers by his long, golden hair. "Look who it is," sneered the wide-bodied rigger to the other sailors behind him. "The girlie-boys all stick together, don't they, lads?"

I could see the back of Rob's neck turn red. But the younger Seafarers did look so girlish since they wore their hair so long. Everyone commented upon it and how fastidious the visitors were, from a Many Isles nation if there were such things, about their cleanliness. Their clean, girlish hair smelled like a hoyden's in one of the bordellos, or so I was told. "Cluff, Jerit, Losser," Rob named several of the little pack. "This is an order to all of you!"

Robady didn't have a chance to complete his words as a glass or a bottle, flying through the air, hit him in the face. He went down, blood streaming, his nose broken for sure.

I saw the look of horror on several faces in the front of the mob, as that was what it was becoming. Rob, like me, might have been a cadet, supposedly giving us officer standing, but nobody of our lowly rank pushed for that status. After all, at sea, cadets, even in their last year of indenture, were the lowest of the low on a Baract ship.

"We wanted to tell you the Watch is coming!" I yelled as I knelt beside Rob, trying to staunch the

blood and extract the glass pieces from his face before he clawed at them and made his wounds, and future scars, worse. Behind me, I sensed that my other companions had disappeared.

“See,” laughed Cluff, standing over me. “Doesn’t shave, like the goldhairs. Smoother than any harlot in Merenda’s House, isn’t she? Give me a kiss, darling,” he meant that jeering remark for me, he’d made it on board more than once, “and you can take your girl friend down there ...”

That was when the whistle sounded from way behind me. We heard shouts to stop and stay where we were. Cluff swore at me, loosed the Seafarer’s hair he was still clutching, kicked me in the shoulder and took off, his pack disappearing with him into the crowd. It had really grown outside the four or five taverns that served the immediate appetites of thirsty crewmen off ships in Terraire Harbor.

“Lie still,” I said to Rob as he groaned and thrashed. “There’s glass in your face I have to get out.”

I took out a vial of fessare I’d mixed in the apothecary ‘office’ on *Sword*, that morning, before we cadets had been let off the ship.

“Our witch is making potions again,” Rob had teased me, stroking my hair as if I was a girl, making me squirm as Hiridy had joined in. Now, they’d be glad I’d thought ahead.

The touching of my hair made me tense up, of course, as it always did. But it was common on the ship for new cadets to be teased as if we were girls, I’d found out. And yet, I hadn’t seen any strange liaisons aboard ship. I heard, however, that they ex-

isted in the deviate quarters of Terraire I'd been warned to avoid, as I did.

"Someone's going to need stitching after a first shore leave in a month," I'd said to Rob lightly, knowing his teasing wasn't meant to hurt me but to toughen me for what I'd face whenever we went on a long voyage. For our newest cadet, Mattle, the teasing was far worse as he really was soft-cheeked and 'pretty'.

"And this isn't witchery, Rob," I added as Rob had smiled on our early-in-the-morning shift and shrugged at me. "I wish it was. I wish I could make something that would prevent scars from tightening. No, this is just apothecary work, putting the right ingredients together, from the recipe, getting a clean poultice to carry the potion to the cuts before they go bad."

I'd looked at Mattle, younger than me and on his first sailing. I'd been in his position two months before, watching everything with wide-open, surprised, heavily fringed eyelashes. "You'll be doing it next, apothecary duties, kidsie," I'd told him with a smile. "So stick close to me if we find our men in a fight!" I'd never, however, expected men from our own ship to attack their own officers, well, cadets.

"Thank you," said a soft voice above me as I worked as quickly as I could on Rob's face, begging him to hold still. I looked up in surprise as I smelled sea flowers and sweet soap. Hardly likely a boy would use that. I saw the smooth skin, but all Seafarers had that. The seaman pushed his hair back and tied it behind his ears, twisting a knotted cord around the golden hair. They didn't like hair on their faces and had some salve that made facial hair

all go away, or so I'd heard, probably from Berley, the gossip on *Sword*.



“We didn’t do anything,” I said as I poured some fessare onto the clean poultice from the medical wallet I’d taken to carrying. That was when I noticed the glint of something metallic at the girl’s earlobes and saw how thick her eyelashes, like Mattle’s, were as well.

“You, you’re a witch!” exclaimed the Seafarer girl hovering over me, watching me staunch Rob’s deepest wounds and draw the visible glass from his wounds.

“Hardly,” I laughed, feeling tension grow inside me as I said that. I always tensed up when I talked to a girl; and this one was exotic and quite pretty. “I’m a boy, aren’t I, and boys ...”

“Can’t be witches,” the soft voice finished for me. “So you’re a warlock!”

I laughed at that, as well, as a member of the Watch loomed over us and grabbed the Seafarer girl just as Cluff had grabbed her earlier. He started berating her for being in a Russet bar, causing a disturbance. Didn’t Seafarers know they couldn’t just wander about, anywhere in Terraire? This wasn’t a free port, like Liss Island, or those in Quarrence, the kingdom across the great river from Malesia, was it?

The girl was hauled off to where her friends were standing. Some other bigwig was berating the three white-dressed figures, heads down, trying to look as small as Mattle, or me I think.

Finally, an older Watchman came over to me. “Goldhairs did that?” he asked me as I stitched the now stiffened cuts that seemed to be everywhere, like a lace shawl, on Rob’s face. I think the fessare helped, as did the heronswing I’d used when no one

was looking, putting the powder deep into the wound.

Robady was so proud of his handsome, boyish looks. Waitresses always served him first in the taverns. The girls in the bordellos always smiled at him when they saw him coming. With the way his face was swelling, they wouldn't do it now. I only hoped I'd prevented the worst of the scarring with the attention I'd given him. Yes, he might be the darling of the bordellos again some day as the older men teased and said about him now.

"Not them," I said to the Watch. "Glass came out of the crowd in front of the bars. Might not even have been aimed at us." I didn't think that for a second and, by the sudden tug of the Watch's mouth, I don't think the older man believed me, either.

"You know any of the riggers among that lot?" asked the Watch, his eyes fixed on mine.

What could I say to that? Give him the names of Cluff, Jerit and Losser, and then go back to face my captain and the officer mates, never mind the friends in the upper riggings the sailors would have had? No, I couldn't do that.

"Didn't see anyone I knew," I muttered. The old man looked at me hard and sighed. He looked like an ex-sailor and so probably knew the 'rules' as well as I did.

"I'll be escorting ye back to yer captain," he said, his accent similar to many of the old 'uns I'd heard talking. I must have looked a little alarmed. "Tell him what heroes he has in his crew," the older man went on, unable to keep the sarcastic grin off his face.

Oh, yes, that's where it all began, right there on the docks in the port of Terraire, just two ten-days ago, I thought in a panic. Now I was a captive on a great ship headed who knew were. I sat in Gennee's alcove, curtained in front for privacy, having been questioned and sentenced by a court of officers. The blonde-haired cabin boy, whom I was calling Gennee by then, sat opposite me, giving me an encouraging smile every now and then.

It made my throat go dry as I watched the feminine gestures Gennee made that had made me mistake him for a girl. I watched him take away the cord that had been holding his hair in place. He, 'she', closed his eyes in ecstasy, making chills run through me. Long, golden hair floated down over his shoulders. With the paint on his face and the thin lines of kohl about his eyes, his lashes now so long and vividly black, he looked entirely like a girl with the glint of gold flowers at his ear lobes. He was Gennee, the girl I'd first met on the Terraire docks.

I shouldn't call Gennee 'him' any longer. I didn't think of her that way any more. 'Her' or 'she', that's who I thought Gennee was. I copied the other cabin boys and kitchen staffs in the feminine names they used for us, servers and cleaners on the great ship. They'd feminized 'Genno', she told me, into 'Gennee'. Gennee loved it. She was even more feminine as she demonstrated to me how I was to tuck my manhood back between my legs and use a pad to hold it firmly in place, in just the same fashion as she'd done hers.

“Come on, Arrathee,” she teased me with the feminization of my name, ‘Arrat’, which I didn’t like to hear at all. “You have to do it. The Bluebands will take you and do this forcibly to you. They won’t be gentle as we girls are to one another. They don’t like doing it, you see, as it’s beneath their manly pride to dress us as women. Undress us now, that’s quite another matter!”

“I, I can’t, Gennee!” I hissed at her, knowing she was teasing me again as she took a pink stick and began to make her lips look as luscious as any real girl’s.

Gennee’s smile made me feel sick down to my toes. I was supposed to be ‘trained’ by her in how to be a Seafarer cabin boy. That’s why I was still alive. I was supposed to be made into a creature just like Gennee. Hirdy and Mattle were somewhere on this ship undergoing the same ‘training’. I shook as I wondered if it was worth this, dressing and being all girlish in mannerisms, just to stay alive.

Gennee was adjusting her slightly padded bra over the ‘pasties’; she’d called them that, which she had glued to her chest. They looked remarkably real under the pink and white flowered bra she wore as any girl would have worn it. I’d have to wear something similar soon, she’d told me.

I’d bathed and washed my hair, sensing the feminine fragrances that rose up to my nostrils from all over me. Gennee had had me soak much longer than her, adding ‘sea flower mist’, as she called it, a perfume, to my neck and body as I struggled to get out of the water and keep her hands off me.

Gennee giggled and danced down the hallway back to our hideaway in an alcove behind thick cur-

tains. Other ‘cabbies’, cabin boys like us, passed us, hurrying to the scented bathwater baths, squeaking in imitation girls’ voices as they prepared themselves for this Celebration we all had to attend.



Had to attend in girls' dresses and makeup, jewelry and high heels, to dance with any of the crew who wanted to dance with us. I almost vomited again as I thought of it. I had vomited, of course, when I realized it was true. I was considered a girl, like Gennee, on this great ship.

Since there were no real women on board the ship, we cabbies would be deluged with men who wanted to dance with us in the place of women. They would call us by girlish names, making them up, if we didn't do that for ourselves, laughed Gennee, she calling me Arrathee all through the makeup session inflicted on me. A blueband stood ready to beat on me in the walkway, as she, Gennee, painted my trembling face, making my eyes as vivid as hers, my cheeks as red as hers, and my face as pale and glowingly soft and womanly as hers.

Gennee shaped my eyebrows. I hated her for that and told her so. She'd concealed what she was doing, the girlie eyebrows I had like hers, arching prettily, as if I was a girl, over my painted eyes. She reached over as I was watching the silk underslip fall down her body, arousing me as I looked at her, so lovely and so feminine, her panties and garter belt and stockings covered by the slip.

Gennee touched my lips with the pink, sticky thing in her hand. "Make as if you are going to kiss me," she said, pursing her lips.

"Gennee, I'm not!" I began furiously. She seized my cheeks and forcibly pursed my lips and slashed the pink guck on them.

Gennee giggled at my distress. "Do this, like me," she said, in her lovely drawl that had become more

girlish through the day as she practiced being a girl, as she wanted to be.

Yes, that was the sickest part of all. If a seaman at sea wanted a woman, what was he to do? Well, that is what cabin boys were recruited for. To take the place of women on the Seafarer great ships that made such long, extensive journeys across the oceans of the world. And though I hadn't been recruited, I'd been kept alive, since I'd been captured, on this great ship, as a 'cabbie'. Many of the men I'd known on *Sword* had been luckier, I thought in pain, as I remembered the fight and the consequences of losing. Their decaying corpses, the men of *Sword*, were still swinging from different spars around the ship.

"One girl once who, who w-wouldn't do what the officer who selected her, wanted her to do," Gennee began as we bathed. I'd said that I wasn't going to join in the 'Celebration', the way for the crew to let off steam. I was going to hide and, if necessary, go over the side, even though that would kill me.

"She was found and dressed like, like, like one of those girls in the windows of those houses," Gennee muttered.

"Bordellos, prostitutes, whores," I said viciously to her.

Gennee nodded unhappily. "They dressed her like that and, and snipped off ..." Her face was stark white as gentle Gennee tried desperately to let me know how awful my fate would be if I didn't co-operate as all cabin boys did. They were pleased to act as girls for other men. I'd seen and heard it all around me, boys in girlish robes and makeup, preparing to be ravished by other men in the crew. No! I

cried desperately inside myself. I was not going to allow anyone to do that to me!

“Then they hung her in a loose rope,” said Gennee. “We all had to stand watch on the deck, even after she died. They wouldn’t cut her down for a ten-day. She was unrecognizable as human when they let her go. You know, don’t you, what it meant to her to go like that.”

That was when Gennee had begun to cry like a little girl. “Haruva wouldn’t accept a man mutilated as she was into his world,” Gennee whispered about some seafarer god. “She’ll wander the seas as a woman-spirit until one of the goddesses has pity on her and takes her in. We cabbies all gave to Alunis, goddess of the seas, to take her. We think she has, as her shade isn’t seen anywhere on this ship!”

That had made me shudder and think that I might, with the witch’s potion I’d found in the ship’s kitchen stores – I’d secreted it away – I might be able to get through the awful night I faced. That’s why I sat for Gennee and let her apply girl’s makeup to my face. I let her put dangling earrings in my ears and a black fall of hair that had cost her two dresses to acquire for me.

“Oh, you look so pretty, Arrathee!” cooed Gennee as she put a girlie ribbon about my hair and another; with an amulet to a sea goddess I didn’t know, about my neck.

I had to force myself to think of how I’d get through the night, how I’d save myself. I would have to dance as a woman swirling skirts about my legs that Gennee said were pretty. I couldn’t bear to feel the touch of the bindings at my ‘breasts’ or hear and feel the swishing of a woman’s dress about me. But,

I could do nothing about that. I'd have to dress as a woman. I'd have to act and smile as if I enjoyed being a woman. I'd have to smile at men's compliments on my femininity and act in ways that horrified me. If my old sea-mates could have seen me ... Ugh!!

It was so humiliating to have my manhood trussed away and wear a woman's panties over my male parts. I had to put on this dangling garter belt and women's stockings as well, so silky to the touch, so debilitating when they touched me and reminded me what I was doing. I hated the girlish thing that was me, looking back at me from any mirror I saw.

I remembered with a shiver when Hatara had married my younger brother. I had come up the stairs and her door had been open. I'd seen her putting on this funny band around her panties with dangling ends. She'd pulled up the stockings as she sat on the side of the bed. She'd seen me looking, wide-eyed, and asked me if I'd ever seen a woman in her undies, that's what she'd called them, before.

Hatara had stood up and twirled around so that I could see her panties and her bra, which she padded as I watched her, as well. How she'd laughed when I retreated in haste back down the stairs, quite forgetting what I'd gone up for. And now I was dressed in undies just like she'd worn.

I had 'pasties' adhered to my chest. Gennee said real girls used them. After Hatara, I could attest to that. "That's what we call them," Gennee said with a smile. I shrieked in protest as Gennee put a bra around me, adjusting it so that it gripped me 'perfectly', as she said. It seemed to show there was

cleavage there and something womanly in front of me.

Gennee didn't help my nerves or my shame at all as she put more perfume on my chest. It was all I could smell for a while, that I was as fragrant as a girl. I'd had my nails done by Gennee's friend, Evvee, who owed Gennee some favor. She came and painted our nails for us while I squirmed with one of Gennee's feminine robes about me.

With stockings on my legs, an underslip dancing around me, I still had to put on a dress. Gennee couldn't have chosen a more girlie dress than the one she did for me. The crew would have taken it out on her, she cried at me, if she didn't make me pretty! The blueband snarled something at her, he still loitering in the walk, waiting for me to make a break for it, I'm certain.

"You must wear a dancing dress," Gennee said. "We're at sea and the men like to admire us, particularly any new g-, um, cabbies, like you!"

Gennee partly proved it true by wearing a dress as well, similar to the one she dressed me in. My blue and black dress swirled about my legs as it was put over me, making me feel so girlish, I really did. I trembled all over. Gennee had stopped herself using that word to me, but I knew that's what she and the cabbies, and the men, would call her, and me, in time.

That only made the humiliating, femmy feelings inside me even worse. The neckline of the dress plunged to show off the frilly top of my bra and the cleavage Gennee had coaxed from me. Oh, I felt so silly and girlie and ready to throw myself over the side of the ship if only I could. I really did feel so

girlie in the clothing I had to wear as it swished about me. I wanted my pants back!

In the high heels that I had to wear, Gennee insisted, I found myself in the hallway with Gennee and other 'girls', the cabin boys cheerfully calling themselves that. They were almost all blonde, long-haired and wearing makeup, looking like Seafarer girls. We lined up to look at ourselves in the mirrors. I didn't see myself at first, but then realized that I was the only one with dark hair. I stared in stunned amazement at what I looked like.

I was this beautiful girl, just my hair different from the others, with such vivid eyes and such a soft, pink mouth.

"Oh, she's so pretty, Gennee!" squealed a red-haired girl, swishing around and dancing along the passageway in a pink and white dress. "I'm going to dye my hair just like hers for the next Celebration! I'll want my fall back!"

"Only for three dresses, all unsoiled with your lovemaking essence," said Gennee loudly. All the 'girls' around us began to laugh, some of them in male voices, which they quickly squeaked apologies for.

I could barely walk with all the unfamiliar, female things that shaped and swung against me. I'm really a woman, I thought in panic, as Gennee took my hand in her soft one and lined me up with a horde of pretty girls, just like me.

"Now, girls," said Panella, one of the three 'mothers', an older, retired cabin boy responsible for training and supervising us cabbies on how to entertain and please the men who favored us. "This deck is now off limit to you until the sun rises in the

morning. The trysting cabins are entirely yours. Fessee will be on call to assist you. I shall have my own problems with Undercaptain Peveret!” Oh how the girls groaned and cheered at that announcement. “So celebrate, my lovelies! We’ve left Baract lands behind. Next landfall will be in a dozen ten days, in Cunya!”

I panicked at the idea I couldn’t go back to the sleeping area I’d shared with Gennee. She smiled girlishly at me and shook her tinkling earrings before pressing a small, girlish purse into my hand.

“I put your special concoctions in there,” Gennee murmured to me. “If I get Kaddo hanging on to me all through the dancing, I might be coming to you myself for one of your potions. I hope they’re the ones that make you all girlie and man-crazy! I prefer men just a little frisky like Garrin, don’t you? He wants you as well, Arrathee. He thinks you’re the prettiest girl on *Silvery Seas* before he’s even seen you all dressed up! He’ll be first of the men in a trysting cabin with his new love! Don’t look so puzzled, Arrathee! That’s going to be you, woman!”

After the ‘incident’ on the docks, Sea Captain Sottack waited until the Watch officer, the old man identifying himself as an Inspector of the Watch no less, had left before he turned to me. “Tell me it all,” he grunted at me, “every name and action. Inspector Darsh left justice in my hands but, before we sail, you’ll see his inspection team come aboard. They’ll want to see our records before we sail.”

“Damn that Cluff,” was all the captain said when I finished with the brief, truthful story I had to tell. “You fixed up Robady?”

“As well as I could, sir,” I answered.

“Look as good as new then?” asked Sottack, staring at me.

“He’ll have scars,” I said and shivered. It wasn’t because I was cold. It was because of the way that Captain Sottack was looking at me. It was just like the look that my stepmother had given me when I’d mixed the flux potion for my father and served it to him. It saved his life but she’d said to my father she thought that I was a witch.

“How did he know how to do it?” my stepmother had persisted in asking my father as I stood outside his door with the fortifier I just knew would make him better.

“He spends a lot of time with Polwer,” my father said wearily.

“Dolora,” said my stepmother firmly, referring to the village witch, “said the purge saved your life.” It had been rotten meat my father had eaten from some barbecue by his worst tenants. All I’d done was get him to empty his stomach with a foul-smelling purge I’d concocted from what was in the kitchen and stables. As I’d run about to get frettlebane from the sheds - we used it on sheep that stupidly ate marshweed which made them swell and could kill them - for the potion, I’d overheard my stepmother saying to my elder brother’s wife that the poisoning had been intentional. “The witch wants to talk to us about Arrat when you’re well.”

“Arrat saved my life,” muttered my father, “when she couldn’t even be bothered to walk up to the door.”

“Nevertheless,” said my stepmother, stalking up to the bedroom door and slamming it shut so that I couldn’t hear any more.

“You going to give him that?” Hatara, my younger brother’s wife, asked me as I went back and stood uncertainly in the kitchen, the flask of fortifier I’d concocted for my father in my hands.

“It, it should make him stronger,” I’d said. Hatara shook her head and took the flask from me. She didn’t tease me for once about being a witch or offer me one of her dresses and a shawl to wear, or, worst of all, new frilly, panties or a garter belt that she’d bought. I should look the part, she’d say to me, mocking me all the time about making potions.

“How much should he take?” Hatara asked me. I didn’t really know until he started to take it and I could smell his breath. She didn’t tease me or try to put one of her clips in my hair as she often did, calling me Lady Arrath, making my brothers smile, call me a witch as well, and tease me more. Now, Hatara was serious as I’d really saved my father’s life.

“Half a cup won’t hurt him,” I said uncertainly.

Hatara nodded and smiled sympathetically at me. “It came from Polwer, who brewed it up overnight,” said Hatara, nodding at me severely. “You’ve been out helping the herdsman with the swill for the swine. You’ll be surprised when you see him taking this and getting well.”

“I will,” I agreed anxiously.

“And something for me,” Hatara said, her smile turning most secretive. I shuddered and nodded. I knew what she wanted, what every young wife wanted, a love potion. I shuddered because I still wasn’t certain she used it to ensorcel my brother, or if it was for some other man. She always said we girls should stick together and help one another out, shouldn’t we?

I could wear her clothes if I wanted, Hatara teased me, saying she’d never tell, which made me feel really sick, her having such an opinion of me. I’d told her fifty times I was a boy like my brothers and no witch. But I did make the love potions for her. Then, she wanted a potion to prevent child-birth, not telling me that, just giving me a potion to be filled by Polwer but I could recognize it. I made it at Polwer’s while the old man slumbered in his rocking chair, taking it back to her, the anti-childbirth potion in its unmarked vial.

I’d found the first love potion I’d ever sensed by my father’s bed table, sniffing it, recognizing the star of the evening fungus. By itself, that usually was just a woman’s perfume. But it was mixed in with a strange assortment of herbs, babyroot, a tincture of colane, and more, something sweet and honeyed, as well as several wortbanes I didn’t know the names of, then.

I’d prowled around Polwer’s apothecary store after that first finding. Lo and behold, I found all the smells my nose had sensed in the ‘medicine’ my father was taking, or that I thought my father was taking. By then, I’d flattered Polwer by telling him - I was only a little boy - I was going to become a great apothecary like him. He’d laughed and talked to me a lot about medicines and medicine-making, sur-

prised at how I could remember and tell him back things he'd said.

Polwer didn't mind me 'helping him out' at first but later, and much more, lately, he watched me with a bemused expression on his face. I'd hoped it was because I was doing well and that he'd soon ask my father if I could apprentice with him.

"You have to be able to do more than read," the old, white-haired apothecary had laughed after taking the unlabelled vial I'd originally found in my father's room. I'd sounded out 'tincture' and 'pomander' on the labels attached to other vials he'd not stored, asking about the unfamiliar words I didn't know. I got to do that a lot as I was working for him in reality when I came in; he knew he could rest and watch me work, learning his trade.

"You have to know what it smells like as well," Polwer said seriously, not teasing me at all about knowing the potions Hatara used. She was always saying I had a girl's sense of smell. I shouldn't have complimented her the first time we'd met about the fragrance of upland violets, and some honey-sweet bane, that was mixed in the potion she wore so much as a perfume. Boys weren't supposed to be able to recognize women's perfumes, I'd learned from that.

"That's so you don't give a love philtre to a woman who wanted to put her husband to sleep," Polwer had said, eyes twinkling at me, after his remark about reading. I'd opened the tincture then. "So what's in that one?" Polwer had asked me.

"Collane, three times over," I'd said confidently, "Wortlebane, once, goosebane, once, star of the evening, twice, to make it smell and taste nice, and

something else I haven't ever smelled before, a little more than three times over."

Polwer's mouth had dropped open as I showed off for him. Looking at his face, I knew I shouldn't have. He was staring at me as Mistress Dolora came sweeping into his shop. The witch knew me, Arrat, the son of Rattern, and scowled at me. I'd told my father that the sheep dip, delivered for us to use on preventing rot in the sheep's feet, had spoiled. It was something Dolora had prepared and been paid for. My father had tested it on a ram, which had promptly died in convulsions the following day.

Someone had put heronsfoot instead of heronswing into the mixture, a poison instead of a soother to raw skin. That's what I could smell. I wondered why Dolora, if she'd made the dip, couldn't smell it. The whole flock might have been dead the next day, I'd found out much later, when I talked to Polwer innocently about heronsfoot and what it would do, say, if I gave it to my brothers, my cat, or the smelly sheep my father left me to tend in all weathers.

Dolora had been told I'd been the one who stopped my father using her concoction, saying it didn't smell like the last batch. Of course, one whiff and she knew what had happened, pronouncing the whole barrel contaminated. She'd glared angrily at me.

"Anyone with any wit can smell it," my father had said, seeing Dolora frowning at me. "Luckily, Arrat had the wit to act on what his nose was telling him, and not send the sheep through the wash as my other herders wanted to do."

“The little boy who can smell rancid sheep dip,” Dolora taunted me when we met that next time in Polwer’s shop.

I’d been going to tell her I could smell more than that; but Polwer changed the stunned look he’d been giving me and intervened. “He can’t tell the difference between collane and cauliflower,” laughed the apothecary, his hand on my shoulder, holding me down. “But his mouth is clean and his bedroom smells like a vegetable patch.”

“Never, ever,” murmured Polwer when the witch had gone on her way with the vials of the tincture I’d described to him. “Never tell anyone you can identify the substances in a compound or mixture.”

“Why not?” I’d asked him innocently.

“You know how witches make and recognize their potions?” Polwer had asked me quietly, in the back of his shop where no one ever went but him. I picked up the strangest aromas there and barely heard what he was saying. “By smell. A good witch can tell the differences between thirty active agents, like the six you identified.

“Most can only tell two, perhaps three in a mixture but not the amounts as you just related. A great witch can do what you do. She can hold over a hundred agents in her memory. The greatest of all witches, Lady Sherrene, Torthard’s Countess, can do more. She can invent combinations that will work and make new potions, new recipes that alchemists and lowly apothecaries like me can assemble.”

“So I have a good sense of smell,” I’d laughed at him. “What does that make me, a witch? Come on, Polwer. Only girls can be witches.”

“If you were a girl, you’d be trained, one like you,” whispered Polwer, leaning over me. I hated that as I could catch the aromas of all the work he’d done at his distillery since he’d awakened that morning, all he’d eaten and drunk, that which he’d spilled, and the telling aromas of the potions and powders he’d touched, before absently wiping his hands on his shirt or woollie. “You could be as great a witch as Lady Sherrene. You could rival her. If you were a girl.”

A motley band of fiddlers, drummers and pipers was playing a lively jig as Gennee grabbed me about the waist of my swirling dress. She forced me forward, my senses reeling in dismay at the way I was feeling, appearing in a dress, my face and hair like a girl’s, in front of the whole ship’s company. Gennee forced me to follow the other jiggling ‘girls’ out of the deck passageway into the large assembly area where lamps, all the colors of the rainbow, shone along the low riggings which had been strung up across the deck, leaving a large area clear for dancing.

Forty men or so were dancing in a line, the steps and motions they were making sort of military ‘hop’ which the men on *Sword* had liked to do as well. The crew sitting on the deck or rails or, braver, up in the riggings, all began to cheer as the piping ended. The line of ‘girls’ I was in moved forward, no, we wiggled forward, Gennee turning my hips hard, making my dress swish embarrassingly about me, just as if I was a girl like her. Which I knew she wasn’t, I thought in dismay, like me.

Another line of 'girls' was coming up the far stairs, led by Fessee I saw, who, her face so well made-up, looked staggeringly real. Her bust, yes, it was real, I was certain, bounced like one of the girls, the prostitutes, at Merenda's whom I'd seen in Terraire. I shuddered as I remembered Fessee being with us, cabbies, cabin boys, and talking about 'us' dressing up prettily, like her, for the Celebration.

The night air swirled about me; I shivered as did many other girls. But the cold was only masking my fright at what I was doing, heading out on a ship's deck, my legs jarred by the height of the heels I wore. I know my face must be crimson in shame as I thought what the men saw - so many young, silly 'girls', pretending to be real, swirling our skirts provocatively. Yes, I was choking as I did it, feeling like a girl, my dress caressing my stockings and my legs as I danced in gleaming, high-heeled shoes.

A third line of girls joined us, the 'mother' Lerrina in the lead, holding a tiny, dark-haired girl, whom I knew so well, by the hand. The heavily made-up girl, Mattle I'd have called 'her', looked exactly as I must, frightened to death, too afraid not to co-operate with those taunting her as they were taunting me as well. Lerrina twirled the girl and made her spin so fast that her dress skirts rose. She faltered as she fought to keep her skirts down and not expose her girlish underwear that she wore as I did.

"That's Mollee," whispered Gennee into my scented, bejeweled ear. "She's promised to the officer deck." She pointed, with feminine fingers like mine, to a darker part of the deck, up above the dance floor. A blue light glowed from there as a huge figure, in a costume that made him look twice the size of any man on board ship, stomped forward.

“And where’s the little hussy who says she’ll keep me warm all night long on this misbegotten, goddess-ruled stretch of ocean,” growled the huge figure in a voice I sort of recognized.

“Here I am,” called Panella, stepping forward and swirling round and round as she danced most suggestively across the floor. “Here is your reward, O Lord of the Revels, all-powerful Haruva, for allowing the men of *Stormclouds over Silvery Seas* safe passage through your sea of maidens and shapely goddesses!”

Panella, the crew, applauding, jeering and laughing at her, went archly up to the figure seated on a low throne and leaned over him daintily to kiss him on the lips. All the seamen began the greatest of roars with applause as many clapped and called to Panella who seemed glued to the man’s lips. I shuddered as I watched her and listened to the ribald shouts of the crew. I was supposed to behave like Panella, in my turn. Gennee had told me to watch, learn and copy ‘her’, Panella.

I trembled all over as I watched Panella, a cabin boy like me, kiss and wiggle her tush as if she was a woman. I wouldn’t ever copy ‘her’, I promised myself. Oh, it was going to be the first of many promises I made to the gods that I would break.

“Is that all?” growled whoever was playing the god. “Well, no woman has a safe passage, does she? Bring them all to me and show me them all, you hussy!” He playfully spanked a squealing Panella across her shapely tush. “Want to keep me all to yourself do you, my comely wench! Oh, these are all the girls you could find?” He sounded most disappointed as he glanced over all of us, shivering in

front of him. “This is going to be a short night, isn’t it?”

How the men, and I have to say the ones dressed as girls around me as well, shouted and squealed with dismay at that remark. But inside me, I felt my heart lurch as I begged the real gods and goddesses, if any truly existed, to make this awful night be over quickly. But my prayers weren’t answered.

It was all Panella’s fault. She wiggled in front of the Lord of the Revels, one of Haruva’s less godly incarnations, and gyrated in front of his manhood. She eased her wiggly, wriggly tush into his lap while she leaned her long, blonde, curled hair into his face and drew his head down onto her lap as she swayed her feminized body against the god. A huge balloon-like phallus grew at the front of his pants. Oh, how the men hooted. The girls put hands to their mouths as they giggled and raised their thin eyebrows to one another as if they couldn’t believe what they were seeing.

One of Haruva’s great hands lifted the front of Panella’s beautiful dress, revealing legs as beautiful, I thought, as any girl’s. Well, any I’d ever seen. “Oh, very well,” snorted the god with poor grace. “She has seduced me once more, my handmaiden. Let the Revels and Celebration begin!”

There was such a cheer then. Men jumped down from the riggings, the music swirled into a wild screeching and everywhere girls held out their arms to men who descended upon them in a hungry horde.

“I told you it would be Garrin!” laughed Gennee, spinning me, almost making me topple in my high heels as she made my dress swish femininely about

me. A fairly tall rigger, whom Gennee had said was handsome, but I wasn't qualified to say that, not about another man like me. What did I know about handsomeness and attraction in men? It was what girls saw in men, I guessed. I did know that Garrin was admired by many of the cabin boys with whom I'd had to work, in the kitchens.

Strong, manly arms went about me. I wanted to fight right away. "By the gods, Arrathee," said the man who held me so tightly, lifting me off my feet and swishing my dress skirts even more about me. "You do make up so incredibly beautifully into a woman, don't you?"

I would have sworn at him and probably hit him but for all the coaching that Gennee had given me over the last few days. Men would say such things to me, Gennee had told me, even if I looked like the Sea-Hag herself in how I was dressed. I would receive compliment after compliment all night long as men knew we loved to be praised for our womanly attributes.

"I didn't know you had such lovely cleavage," Garrin said, burying his nose into the crease in my chest muscles. I screamed in fright as he kissed me right there, in front of everyone, between my breasts, in the scented triangle Gennee insisted not be covered up in any way.

I was supposed to say "Thank you!" for every compliment and curtsy to the man who'd given it to me? I couldn't even find the floor with my feet as Garrin swung me around and around. I had to clutch at him so I wouldn't fall on my head while he smiled more broadly and kissed my chest even more fiercely, his arms and hands caressing me through my lovely, girlish, swirling dress.

“Stop!” I yelled hoarsely. Garrin smiled at me and then did something even worse. He kissed me, as if I was a girl, on my sticky, pink lips, me wiggling and shaking in my stockings and skirts.

A blueband slammed a beefy hand on Garrin. I was lowered to the floor, my hair swirling as wildly as my earrings as I stood there, the skirts of my dress, my dress (!), tantalizing me with female sensations. Fear ran through my feminized body as the older man swore at Garrin.

“Contain yourself,” the blueband snarled. “Lace it back in, seaman. The start of the Revels is for dancing. Your tryst with this beauty follows after the Lord himself retires and opens the trysting rooms. Now be a good boy to this pretty girl or I’ll find her another man who will.”

Garrin promised with ill grace, putting his arms about my waist and swirling me high in one direction and then another. Oh, gods and goddesses, I’d just been called a ‘pretty girl’! I wanted to throw up but, all around me, I saw other girls being danced with in the same way that I was. Here and there, other bluebands admonished other men as demure ‘girls’ leaned in their arms and smiled as the men were warned as Garrin had been to treat their partners as good girls.

I felt a flood of relief but it only lasted a moment. “Aren’t you supposed to do something when a man makes a compliment about your female loveliness?” asked Garrin. I saw Gennee smiling up at some hard-looking, older rigger. She took his hands and went into a curtsy, clearly thanking the man with her vivid, sparkling eyes for what he’d said.

I trembled at the admonition to behave like a girl. I tried to do my curtsy exactly as Gennee had done it, my hands trembling when I saw how girlish they looked in Garrin's strong, tanned fingers. "Thank you," I whispered as I tried to curtsy as Gennee had made me in our alcove but I wobbled. Garrin didn't lift me up right away as other girls in dresses as lovely as mine whirled by me, flicking their skirts as they circled the deck, their adoring, heavily made-up eyes on the faces of the men who'd favored them.

Garrin had to give way at the end of the dance. Darris took his place. He was staring at my lovely cleavage in its revealing, frilly bra and dress neckline. "I can scarcely believe I made love to you for so long last night," he murmured in my ear as I shivered in fear in his strong, manly arms.

When I could cheat, and pretend I'd reached my adult majority, I went to the theater that passed through Cormallen, where we lived. I saw Sarlie's Company, the finest in all the Kingdom of the Baracts, their playbill stated, put on *The Witch and The Warlock*, the classic play. I hadn't heard the word, 'warlock', before. I didn't know that a boy who could do what a girl-witch could do was called by a different name.

I sat enthralled by all aspects of the play as the warlock went slowly mad with all the things he did on stage. Oh, the lovely women, so delightful in their frilly, stylish dresses, whom he loved and killed! So often, I blushed as the audience cheered while the warlock always stripped the lovely maidens he killed

first, their beautiful, maidenly bodies, so femininely rounded, exposed to us all by his lust for women.

I didn't understand at first why everyone whistled when he took one of the girls in her frillies, that hid almost nothing of her from us, kissed her romantically and even took her to bed. We couldn't see what they were doing in there but the bed moved and creaked! We all knew what they were supposed to be doing. We could see the girls' legs sometimes up in the air and, of course, the actresses were always mussed up a lot as they clung to the man they loved. That made them even lovelier, I thought.

Some gorgeous women, the older ones, asked the warlock for things like drugs to make them more beautiful or to keep their looks or to make the 'right' man love them. I was enthralled to see him provide the women with what they wanted. I loved the play. I watched it every day, for the four days it was performed in Cormallen. I wished I'd enough money to be able to follow it on to Doxford and see the new play, about a bordello, they were putting on there.

I had my first crush on beautiful, young actresses. I had the proverbial 'wet dreams' about them. I was hopelessly in love with several girls, from the older Mithi, whom the older men and women applauded more than the others, to the younger, giddier girls like the ravishing, red-haired Sura. She played the virginal, good witch who finally saved the kingdom from the mad warlock. She took on 'dorospell', whatever that was, dosed herself, and kept a cache, a packet, in her mouth which she fed to Tregell, the warlock, after he took her as his bride. He didn't know at first that he was being loved to death, literally.

I dreamed of the heroine, Sura, and of Grace, the older, beautiful girl, who'd danced so wonderfully in the court scenes. I wanted so much to dance and hold her as Tregell had. I wanted to kiss her breasts as the actor in the warlock part did. I had really, really 'wet dreams' about both of them, Grace and Sura, in my lonely bed.

I felt awful when Polwer laughed at me for being so taken in. I'd explained where I'd been for the four days of the shows and how I'd used visiting him as an excuse to my stepmother for being out of the house. I was only trying to warn him in case she asked about me, as she was likely to.

"You know that women aren't allowed on the stage, don't you?" Polwer asked me, his eyes twinkling in merriment. I gaped at him, chills running through me as I realized what he was saying and how abysmally stupid I was. I really did have to grow up before I went to another play! "Every lovely girl and woman you saw in that play was a man, you know."

"But their breasts!" I'd exclaimed. "We saw them without breast bands ..."

"Lady Sherrene makes potions for those actresses," whispered Polwer, looking about his shop as if certain that we were being spied upon, overheard. "The first gorgeous girls on stage that I saw were all Seafarers, lovely golden-haired boys, all married now, I believe, and living out their fantasies as women and wives around Torthard. But don't tell anyone that, little Arrat, ever. Or you'll have the same warlock's fate as Tregell."

"The same fate?" I asked stupidly.

“All warlocks go mad,” murmured Polwer, staring at me, a perplexed look on his ancient face. “Always! That’s why any boy who can do what the witch does - I mean, to use her nose to make controllers, fortifiers, euphorics, love potions that really work, and terrible pellets for the harquebusses that destroy great ships - a boy who has the capacity to do all that,” Polwer’s voice was trembling as he stared at me, his eyes wild, his hair standing on end, “such a boy must be a warlock and put to death right away.”

I don’t know if Polwer ever spoke to my father while he was recovering from the food poisoning. Two ten days from that time, however, having saved my father’s life, I was presented with a cadet indenture to a ship, me who knew nothing of the sea and boats, only about herding sheep, swine and haying. And about making concoctions that Polwer, his eyes starting to weaken, passed off to everyone as his own. I shuddered when several people complained that the older man was becoming more finicky in his old age; must be, it was declared, as his potions were always stronger than Polwer had claimed they would be.

I worried about Polwer and how he’d get along without me. But he was immensely relieved, or so it seemed, that I was becoming a seaman. So, I was genuinely glad I was going off to learn a new profession, the sea. I was not to become an apothecary like him, which I’d have enjoyed. I had dreams on occasion of providing a lovely actress with the potions and concoctions she’d need to be the loveliest of women.

I even dreamed of how the lovely actress would reward me! Oh, I had such a wet dream on those occasions! I knew I could make a different, womanly

fragrance for all of them, the twelve I'd seen in the 'ball' the warlock attended. There, he'd charmed the lovely princess, Grace, and poisoned her. Oh, I had twelve fantastic dreams about twelve lovely women.

The sea meant order and an end to such dreams. Surprisingly, on board *King Tatheren's Sword*, there was an apothecary's lab that Hirdy had been most pleased to hand over to me. "Just don't kill anyone," had been the total of his advice and instruction to me. Up to the time when we'd seen Seafarers being attacked unfairly, I hadn't.

In fact, I'd done the opposite. I'd cured a few men. I remembered Polwer's advice and didn't admit to being able to smell the badness leaking from a sore. I didn't tell anyone I seemed to know, I don't know how, just what was needed to counteract the sickness I often had to reel away from.

Captain Pollack had looked at me strangely when Berley had been yacking that Bregg would be without a leg but that the cadet witch had cured him. "It's just the recipe for greenleg," I'd muttered. "Probably caught it before it became really bad. I didn't want to cut his leg off without first trying the stuff we have on board."

The captain gave me the same look after the incident ashore, in which someone had thrown the glass at us, when we talked about Robady. He'd stopped for a moment and stared at me. "Why do you keep saying the girl Seafarer?" he asked me. "Have the Seafarers done something different I haven't heard about?"

I looked at him, mystified.

“There are no women on a Seafarer ship,” the Captain told me harshly. “Can’t you even tell the difference between boys and girls, Cadet Arrat?”

“I, I think so, sir!” I gasped.

“It’s hard to tell with Seafarers,” said the Captain, relenting his harshness but still staring at me. “They have cabin boys, you know, boys who mature very late and look very girlish when you see them for the first time.”

“She smelled ...” I began but Polwer’s words came back to me.

“Yes?” asked the captain, his eyes narrowing.

“She was wearing perfume,” I gasped, “like Mistress Merenda’s girls ...”

“You’ve been there?” asked the captain in surprise.

“Rob insisted,” I began with a shudder. Yes, it had cost me dearly to be with a naked woman for the first time ever. The older woman had been quite bored with me. Only when she’d grabbed me and ‘worked’ me had I come, as a man should, as I did in my bath, dreaming of Sura. Yes, I still thought of ‘her’, I still did, refusing to believe that ‘she’ was a boy.

“Robady, yes,” said the captain. “Well, with him out, you move up a slot in assignments, Arrat. Turn over your potions and recipes,” he smiled tautly at that, “to Cadet Mattle. We clear the decks tonight and sail with the morning tide.”

Poor Sura. She was shunted aside by a golden-haired woman in my dreams that night, one who smelled sweetly of sea flowers, and soap made from roses and sunlight. ‘She’ spoke huskily and

sexily to me, lowering 'her' sweet lips to mine to kiss me with all the passion I wanted in a woman.

I'd danced femininely with a dozen men, my terror not abating at all, as each one who took me had to tell me how pretty I was, how delightful my perfume was and how shapely my dress made me appear. Some men admired my hair, some my earrings, some my shoes and the glimpses of stockings that had occurred again and again.

I bobbed up and down in my curtseys, my dress always swishing so interminably, when I did that, making me feel so silly and so enervated as I tried to be as girlish as a cabin boy should be at such a Celebration.

We had a break at the sixth dance when we were served a pink, frosty punch from a large bowl. It was sweet but laced with alcohol and something else, one of those indefinable substances that I'd wanted to talk to Polwer about but he'd always refused. The honey fragrance, as I thought of it, must come from some kind of wortlebane. I watched the girls ingest a lot of the 'punch'. They seemed to be livelier then, more willing to adore whatever men they were with, several drawing the ire of the bluebands as they initiated the kissing they seemed to want to do, with whatever men they were dancing with.

"Let the dancing now be paid for!" decreed Haruva. Panella and he started off a new round of dancing in which she was draped all about the god as if she was a sea viper sliding around its prey.

Greff seized me and danced with me as several of my admirers had been heading for me. I was almost crushed in the arms of the silent man. I thought I'd gotten by lightly but Greff didn't let me go as the chimes sounded. He almost bent me in half as his thick lips took possession of mine. I struggled, hating the thought of a man kissing me, and tried to get free, wondering why the bluebands didn't interfere. Then, I realized that there was a silence over the dance floor even though the male voices from the outer rail and riggings were sort of excited.

Greff's hand caressed my back and my bra strap as I was hugged. Through slitted eyes, I saw that other girls were being kissed like me. The chimes sounded before I was swung to my high heels by Greff.

"I like a girl to open her mouth," he snarled at me. "Do it like that, Arrathee, the next time if'n you wish a tryst with me."

I was burning as I staggered back towards the row of men, Greff holding my hand. He gave me to another man like him. At least, I thought so.

"I'm not like Greff," said the hard-faced man with a gentle voice. "He had a hard upbringing on Faroy. I'm surprised he even danced with a girl like you. He's a pureblood and usually avoids girls like you, even in the bordellos."

"I'm not ..." a whore, I'd been indignantly going to tell this man who hadn't even told me his name.

"No, I can see that you're not a whore, like Fessee and some of the girls she gathers to her," this hard man said to me. I'd been about to tell him I was a cadet-officer, a man who should give him orders.

“You have female class, Arrathee, and that’s a compliment.”



Flushing, I held both his hands in my feminine ones and curtsied to him gracefully, as if I was a girl, in my pretty dress and silky stockings. Well, I'd had to do it so many times, it was no wonder that I was getting better at it. His strength was impressive as he drew me up and held me tightly, making me slow dance, despite the speed of the pipes to the music. Oh, the way he held me and moved me so gently made me quiver all over. I did feel so silly and girlie, at the same time.

"I would treat you gently in a tryst," whispered the man. "I really like girls like you, Arrathee. I'm Richo and I'd be good for you. I usually watch the dances from the third lines up, below first spar. Look for me, give me a wave and I'll take my tryst with you. If you have a bad time with someone like Greff, choose me next. I don't make any demands on a girl as lovely as you."

Richo gave me a wry smile that changed his harsh face and expression immensely. "Do call on me," he whispered, kissing me softly and gently, his mouth sliding over mine, making me shiver all over as he held me against him, not pressing me, as Greff had, into him. It was amazing how I felt my bra rise on my chest as we kissed and kissed as the chimes didn't sound. Oh, a man's mouth devoured mine, as my hair swirled against him.

Richo gave me a quick, final kiss at the chimes. I felt chills all over me as I seemed to find pleasure in his touch and his lips on mine. I was struck dumb for several moments as I realized I was reacting to a man's kisses as if I was a girl. My dress was swaying against my stockings, my panties and bra were so tight. I felt like a girl. I should throw myself over-

board, I thought, but I couldn't move as the rails were lined with grinning men.

I stood there shivering as Richo left me for Kaddo to take, the rigger smirking as he took hold of me. He swirled me as fast as he could, my dress flaring out as it was designed to do. I couldn't keep him from swirling me and exposing my legs and my stockings, even my garter belt and panties, to the ship's company as we 'danced'. I was often off my feet and floating around as I saw happening to "other girls"! But they were smiling in delight. I wasn't, as I felt, and heard, my dress so softly swishing about me.

"You and me, Arrathee," sang the bulky, muscled rigger. "I got a yen for a dark-haired girl but the other one, that little Mollee, she's been taken off to officers' quarters to sit on bony laps and get her little tush awakened!"

"You're crude!" I said without thinking, shivering as I knew that I sounded just like a girl remonstrating with her man. He twisted me from side to side, making my dress twirl even more against me.

"Oh, I am crude," leered Kaddo. "That's why all the girls like me. They want me. You want me, don't you, Arrathee?" He stared at me, a little frown appearing on his face. I knew then what the aroma was that came off his tunic. It was honeyed and metallic at the same time. It had been in the punch. I was fighting it inside me as it seemed to be making me want to obey whatever a man said to me.

I relaxed and let the honeyed aroma wash over me before wishing I hadn't. It made me want to cuddle up to Kaddo, do whatever he suggested and believe I liked what he was doing.

Kaddo drew me against his tunic, laced with the punch, deliberately, I guessed. It took me a few moments to break free from the honeyed effects of whatever he was using to control me. To control me! Of course! He, or he and some of the men, had laced the punch. All around me were girls being so friendly to the men they danced with, clinging to them. At the sound of the chimes, they almost jumped with eagerness into the arms of the men who held them, even a russet-haired girl who must have been Hirby, my cadet shipmate.

I leaned back as Kaddo tried to kiss me. "You want to kiss me," he said, fondling my tush, and the panties I wore as I wriggled and shuddered.

"No, I don't," I whispered. He looked at me in shock, but his hands didn't stop caressing me.

"The punch ..." he began, frowning.

"Was far too sweet," I said lightly. "I spat it out. Oh, oh, here comes the blueband. I should be kissing you, shouldn't I?" I said the last as sweetly as I could. Kisses weren't anything, after all. I needed time to think how to counter the other, worse feeling inside me, worse than just being a girl. Kaddo grabbed me around the waist and furiously pounded on my lips with his. He wanted to force his tongue into my mouth but I refused him. It was almost a relief to hear the chimes again.

There was a great shout as the dance ended. The god and his goddess, Panella, strolled down from the throne from which Haruva had ruled the Revels. She swished really femininely as they headed towards a great, closed door. He waved at it with his sword. The door opened to the god. Haruva, Undercaptain Peveret, I presumed, entered. A horn burst into a

triumphal fanfare that Haruva acknowledged with a bow, his 'lady' with a graceful curtsy.

As they disappeared, Garrin appeared beside me and furiously showed some kind of token to Kaddo, who snarled, before letting Garrin take me. I was as mystified as ever, hating to be seized as if I was a woman. "While he and his cohorts were forcing themselves on the prettiest girls here," Garrin said with a laugh, "I and my friends were procuring the trysting cabins. See, there's Lavoro with that russet-haired girl from your ship."

I shuddered as I watched Hiridy, padded as he must be, looking like a girl, as I was as well, his lipstick all mussed, cling to a thin, tall seaman whose hand was definitely caressing Hiridy's padded tush. The pink dress was like a little girl's party dress, shorter than most girls' dresses, showing off more of Hiridy's stockings and petticoats that bounced all around him as he swayed girlishly in the other man's arms. Hiridy seemed to be stunned, in shock, his makeup messed, his hair so girlishly styled.

Hiridy and her man, he stroking and kissing 'her', were into the trysting cabins before I was, with Garrin, my purse clutched on my arm, thanks to Gennee. She'd anticipated the tryst, being there with a top rigger, smiling at me as well, to thrust my purse into my hands and ease my panic. I even turned and smiled girlishly at Garrin, staring up into his handsome face with a little smile.

"Oh, yes, darling Garrin," I promised him, actually batting my eyes as Gennee had showed me but which I'd claimed I could never do. Yes, to do what I had to do, first, I had to make this man think that I was as girlish as Gennee. In disgust with myself, I swayed my dress against him and accepted his

hands on my tush as I put my arms around him, murmuring, “This will be a night for both of us that we will never forget!”

“It’s a Seafarer great ship,” the lookout informed the captain while I stood near to him, waiting for orders, messages to be carried to others. It was all I was good for, *Sword’s* fifth mate had said with a sneer. “Looks like the Seafarer ship that was loading at Terraire when we were.”

“*Stormclouds over Silvery Seas,*” whispered Hirdy to me. “Maybe you’ll be seeing your girl friend soon!”

I wasn’t ever going to live it down, not after Sea Captain Sottack, too much wine in him at supper, had regaled the officers, and us cadets at the foot of the table, about my thinking a Seafarer sailor had been a girl.

The knowledge had spread quickly to the rest of the crew.

“Takes one girlie to know another,” Losser had whispered to me, moving his shoulders and muscles forward and back in a gesture that frightened me. He must still be sore after the whipping he’d got on captain’s orders. It had been recorded in the ship’s log, which had been inspected before we left Terraire. It must still hurt him, and Jerit, who’d got twenty lashes, too. Both Mattle and I had been specifically commanded not to give any treatment to the backs of those men. I didn’t doubt they blamed me for the whipping, for telling on them, as I had.

Cluff had not returned to the ship. He’d been formally declared an outlaw by the Watch of Terraire.

“It’s in the hands of the witches now,” Inspector Darsh had said to Captain Sottack, loud enough for us all to hear. “And they’re very good at catching runaways. It’s the iron cage and Traitor’s Gate for Cluff. You’ll be able to see what’s left of him when you return from the patrol.”

“Going into Liss Isle before *Silvery Seas*, captain?” asked Robady, turning away from the sea breeze he’d been looking back into. It was just his second shift since the swellings on his face had started to subside. His slashed face looked absolutely terrible. He looked concerned at what we were doing. I’d never have asked such a question about what the captain was doing with the ship. But Robady came from an aristocratic family and was allowed to ask questions that cadets like me would have been scorned for asking.

“Can’t see why not,” grunted the Captain. He didn’t look very pleased to have his judgment on where the ship should sail brought into question. I saw Second Mate Herritch glowering at Rob, too. “You know Seafarers. They’ll clean out the markets if they put in ahead of us at Liss afore they’re off across the Ocean of Clouds. There won’t be a bottle worth drinking left in the inns.”

“Since we’re nimbler than a great ship at sea,” suggested Rob doggedly, as Herritch sneered at him, “don’t we lose our advantage on the Seafarers if we put out a sea anchor and drift in the roads? They can’t be very happy with members of the crew of this ship ...”

“They don’t know who we are,” growled Herritch. “And why would the captain of a ship as great as that,” the oncoming vessel looked huge, like a castle

on the horizon, a huge, moving castle, “care about some of its cabin boys being roughed up!”

“I thought that we should stay out of the port, and the roads, to preserve our mobility ...” Robady persisted. I felt sure the captain would slap him down, though I’d heard Rob was a Count’s heir. From his retort to the second mate, I guessed the rumors were true about Robady. He’d never acknowledge it to us cadets, of course. Anyway, the captain didn’t attack him as he had me at my slip-up about the Seafarer girl. I still thought she’d been a girl. Maybe she was an officer’s daughter off to see the world. Could be, couldn’t it?

“But then Cadet Arrat wouldn’t get to meet his girl friend again,” growled the Captain. I think I went red with embarrassment at the looks I got from Rob, Herritch and other officers on deck. I hated the smirks directed at me.

I thought about the blonde person who smelled so sweetly of seaflowers. They weren’t real flowers but a feminine scent definitely came from whatever plants or rock barnacles produced such light aromas. Her fragrance had been subtly blended together by an expert perfumier, I’d guessed, remembering her fragrance when the ‘girl’ accused me of being a warlock.

I stood woodenly as the officers dutifully laughed at the captain’s display of wit. What a way to run a ship, I thought, thinking how each of us cadets was belittled in turn by the captain or first sailing mate for whatever errors we completely new-to-the-sea landlubbers committed.

Rob tried to wink at me sympathetically. He looked even more ghastly, with the scabbed cuts on

his face as he did it. I think he and I were the only ones to notice that the captain never addressed his question about why we were not keeping our distance from the great ship heading after us. Rob's face looked even worse half the day later with us at sea anchor in the Liss Isle roads as *Silvery Seas* bore down on us.

"It's going to ram us!" a lookout screamed as third mate Maresey, the highest-ranking officer aboard, swore. He frantically tried to get us to cut loose the sea anchor in any way we could.

It was like a mountain, however, moving against us, a mountain under full sail. The high, bow deck reared over us, smashing into *Sword's* rear castle, where we had arquebusses firing at its hull. They'd no power to stop such a monster. *Sword* was sucked in front of the moving mass, still under full sail. My ship was easily cut into two main parts and several smaller ones.

It was most clearly no accident. A patrol ship of the Kingdom of the Baracts was deliberately destroyed by a Seafarer great ship, run down and broken up. There was nothing we on *Sword* could do but wish that Robady had been in charge, and not the captain, safely ashore. He was probably dining well while a lumbering leviathan swept down on us, out to kill Baracts.

There was a mad scramble for floating debris scattered over what we called the roads, the shallow anchorage the Captain had said was safe. I think I'd have drowned, I didn't swim well, but Robady grabbed my shirt and pushed me over a floating spar.

I was high enough to see boats lowered from the great ship as she slowed, her sails being taken in. I was hauled off the spar, along with Robady, and thrown into the bottom of a cutter along with other men from *Sword*. That's how I came to be dragooned into the marine merchant service of Cunya, the largest and most formidable island-nation of the Many Isles.

I was told to join the service of the great ship, and do what I was told, or join Jerit and Losser, who were given no choice. Nor were five others who'd been part of the mob on the dock insulting the Seafarers. They'd been pointed out, as we climbed onto the great ship, by several seamen at the top of the sea ladders. A Seafarer officer presided over a sort of 'court' on the ship's largest, open deck.

Now, the men who'd been in the mob on the Terraire dock were all swinging from ropes lowered from mid-spars that stretched over the ocean. It would make disposing of the bodies, each man was hanged from the neck, easier whenever the sea captain of this ship decided his lesson to us Baracts had been learned.

"Not that one," a soft, girlish voice proclaimed as I was hauled up, terrified of dieing, to stand, bedraggled, before the table of officers.

The 'girl' who had spoken to me on the dock stepped forward from a group of youngish-looking Seafarers just like 'her'. I shivered and told myself not think of 'her' as a 'her' as I was doing. She wasn't a girl.

"He admits he was on the dock and saw the mob attacking our, our sailors," said the younger officer, some sort of fighting man, I thought, as he wore a

blue band over his very neat sea whites. There was a snicker in the casually assembled ranks of sailors. I didn't know why.

"Cabin boys," the young officer, flushing a little, corrected himself to the older officers conducting what was a ship's court of justice. It would be over in minutes. I felt such a sickness sweeping over me. Very soon, I'd be hanging from a spar with Jerit and Losser. "You, Genno," said the young officer, being snickered at again, "picked him out from among the rabble we've taken aboard."

"He was with that one," said Genno, 'her' girlish voice not being mocked by any of the sailors. Nor did anyone call down any remark on the way she posed, hand on hip as I'd seen her do before on the dock, as if she was a girl. She folded her arms like one, in front of her. On *Sword*, she'd have been hissed at, all the time, in front of officers as well, as Mattle and I had been, for doing nothing (!), really, and told to act like men.

'That one', whom Genno had just identified and linked me to, was Robady, who was being held behind me, along with Hirdy, Mattle, Maresey and the remaining twenty or so survivors of *Sword*. Several riggers I knew, I didn't see at all. Probably they were drowned in the deliberate ramming of *Sword*. Or maybe they were hanged.

"That one tried to stop the men chasing us with bottles and was hit in the face by a glass," said Genno, casually swishing her hair back girlishly, as she indicated Robady. It was a gesture that she seemed quite unaware of as being feminine, or 'effeminate', I should say, she being a boy and not a girl as I keep calling her.

“This one,” Genno went on, pointing at me, “was behind the man hit. He stayed and helped him, pulling the glass out of his face. The little one,” that was how she described me, “put some kind of potion on the man’s face, including a powder into the deep wounds when no-one was looking. I thought he was going to be attacked like his friend. The Watch arrived just as he told the mob they were coming.”

“You can’t be a sailor,” said the older, thin-faced man conducting the hearing, leering at me.

“I am,” I gasped. “Sir!” A blueband had told me I must call everyone that on *Silvery Seas* as everyone was superior to me.

“How long have you been at sea?” asked a gruff-voiced man beside the first, leaning back on the chair set out for him.

“Ten ten-days,” I said. That made them laugh, the sailors in the rigging, and the officers.

“Name?” asked the gruff-faced man.

“Cadet Arrat,” I said.

“Cabin Boy Arrath,” ordered the first officer who’d spoken as the second man raised bushy eyebrows to him as if in question. I was so relieved to hear him say that. I was going to live! I could almost hear my heart singing all in the joy I felt in living! “Genno, you testified for him. He’s yours. Teach him how to be a good cabbie, just like you.”

That brought a lot of hooting from the riggings. I shuddered, my euphoria disappearing, as I looked at the effeminate Genno, who advanced on me and took my hand, walking me to the open hatchway, past grinning sailors with blue bands across their

chests, while there was whistling, which I didn't understand, from the riggings.

I think all the blood drained from me when Genno described to me what I'd have to do as a cabin boy, a 'cabbie', on *Stormclouds over Silvery Seas*. "It's the same on every great ship," Genno explained to me. "Don't you have cabin boys on your boats?"

"We have kidsies who clean up, store supplies and help wherever needed!" I said, dressed in the grayish-white sailor's shirt and pants, the sailors' 'working' uniform. The officers wore buttons of different shapes and sizes on their shoulders to denote rank. Bluebands were like the Watch on board, easily spotted in the sashes and special shirts they wore.

"You don't go on long sea voyages," said Genno, closing the curtained alcove on the colorful girls' dresses hanging there. I'd asked him whose they were. Genno had said, "Mine", in the soft, girlish tone I'd come to associate with him. Then, he'd quite innocently said I could borrow what I needed when there was a celebration, horrifying me as I realized that he, and me, I supposed, had to dress like girls for the dancing that was part of 'Celebrations'!

"We do go on long sea voyages!" I insisted. "We run all about the Black Sea, sometimes for three ten-days at a time!"

"There're ports all the way around the Foreshore and two days' sailing south is coastline everywhere," Genno said with an uncertain smile. "But do you

ever go on a voyage where you don't see another ship for four months, or a year, and then have to make the same trip back to home port with the masts and trees you've cut in, say, Omason, never having seen a woman.

"It would drive men mad if they didn't have feminine company, the mothers tell us. That's what we cabbies are on the ship for, to relieve the pressures on the men, to entertain them, dance with them, be what they want us to be ..."

"Lovers?" I'd asked, knowing my voice was choked and scratchy as I stared at the lovely dresses and women's high-heeled shoes in Genno's curtained closet. It was just like the clothing I'd seen in several shop front windows in Terraire, or on market stalls. I'd seen the first Seafarers I'd ever seen, femininely posed, I'd have said, tossing their hair girlishly as they argued and clustered in women's stores, or about stalls in the market. They weren't at all embarrassed with purchases of dainty, women's underthings.

Genno hadn't wanted to admit that she liked being a woman at times to me but I could see it in the soft, delicate face opposite me. She had such lovely, full lips. No, he had such femininely, full lips that he bit at anxiously, as he tried to explain things about the ship to me. "Some of the men want love from us, once we're a long way from land," Genno's soft voice told me. "The mothers scold us, spank us, if we don't do what the men want. After all, it's why we're on the ships. Look at my hands."

Genno's hands were soft and delicate, a girl's hands. His nails were long and pointed and shone with some sort of shellac or paint upon them. "I'll never have to climb a rope in a storm and haul in

sails; or, set them again, in frosts and fierce gales,” Genno said. “I’m awarded marks in the ship’s accounts to use in foreign ports to buy what I need. Of course, we do have shoemakers and seamstresses on board ...”

“Seamstresses?” I gasped, shivering at the term, thinking of the lively, girlish actresses I’d seen on the stage at Cormallen. “Boys like you?”

Genno flushed and nodded. “There are lots of ways to be a good cabbie,” she whispered. “There are always riggers who need stitching done. We do our own as well but Laffanee is really the best for making a dress fit as it should. I can do a little once she’s pinned it and padded ...”

“She?” I asked again in a shuddery voice. I couldn’t help it as a horror was creeping through me as Genno had gone on and on about how I must be a good cabbie or I’d be punished by the men which was much worse than being chastised by the mothers. No, I didn’t want that, ever! Genno shook as she said that to me.

“We all call ourselves ‘she’ and ‘her’,” Genno went on, casting her long-lashed, gently curved eyelashes down, refusing to look at me, closing the closet she’d been so proud of before. “The riggers all call you that, and the cooks, but not the officers, not unless one of them makes you his seawife, which some do. That’s when you get to be waited on as a Lady by all the rest of us. You spend all your ship days in your pretties or your scanties, having just one man to please and love you.”

Genno said that with such longing in her voice, no, in his voice, that I couldn’t believe it. This whole world was upside down. It was debauched and ob-

scene. I wasn't going to be a cabbie, a cabin boy-girl like Genno! The Seafarers could do what they liked without including me, couldn't they, I told myself furiously. I wasn't going to be a little femme like Genno who sailors laughed about and made jokes about. I'd heard enough on *Sword* where it wasn't real! I'd rather hang, I thought wildly, than succumb to being a little girl, sucking a man's you-know-what.

"I'm a cadet officer on a Baract ship," I said savagely to Genno, her eyes widening in alarm as I went on. "I need to go and see the officer who put me with you. He didn't understand. I'm an officer like him ..."

"Don't talk like that!" hissed Genno, looking around in alarm. I suppose the curtains all about us must allow a lot of eavesdropping. "The Undercaptains will have you tossed over the side, just like that, if you, a cabin boy, approaches one of them. I've seen them do it! A boy like us was crying and saying his lover hurt her. She wanted off the ship! It was off Asumel and the blackbacks were rising to feed.

"Basco made me go to the rail and watch the feeding. I didn't know her well but she was screaming as she was cut in half by this huge blackback. It threw what was left of her body up in the air and was playing with it before it sank into the red waters. I think I cried for days after that. I had to stop as Basco hit me every time he caught me. I don't want that to happen to you, Arrath!"

I hated Genno saying my name that way. I wanted to tell 'her' that the ending 'she' was putting on my name was changing it from masculine to feminine. Men's names ended hard while women's were

soft and sibilant like 'Arrath' among us Baracts. It never occurred to me that the officer who called me 'Arrath' probably knew that.

So, trembling almost as much as Genno, I went with the cabin boy to the kitchens where I was treated as if I was a girl, not a cabin boy at all, several men asking Genno, "What's her name, the new one?" I couldn't respond as I looked around in awe and fright at all the men filling up the long deck to be served at the tables by us cabin boys. Many of the sailors touched and caressed 'cabbies', I witnessed, as if the boys were waitresses serving them.

What was worse was that the boys seemed to take no notice of the caresses and strokings that they received as if they were women. I just couldn't do that, I knew. Tentatively, I set out as I was ordered, knowing I'd slap the first man to caress me as if I was a woman, a cabbie.

"You take this over to Kaddo," one of the cooks, a huge, swarthy man, said with a grin. "He likes to meet the new, pretty ones first!"

"I'll show Arrath what to do," Genno said quickly. "She's very, very new, Darris. Give her a chance to find her sea legs. Tomorrow is soon enough to expect ..."

"Today!" laughed the cook. "Get her an apron and the two of you serve the tops! Yes, Kaddo," he waved across the assembly. "I'm sending you a second bucket! Get with it, Gennee, Arrathee. We've second shifts to get ready for. We aren't servers on this side of the kitchen. You girls, get to it!"

I was furious at what was said to me, what they were calling me. But I became a waitress. I did what Genno did and endured what Genno endured. Actu-

ally, I probably endured more. I was red-faced in embarrassment and shock at the number of men who pinched my tush, hard, to make me squeal, thinking it amusing when I did that.

“Jop! That’s no way to treat a cabin boy,” Genno protested to a third man who did it to me. “You know better!”

“I do,” said this tough-looking man with a scar on his chin. “Sorry, Arrathee. First time in here, isn’t it? Just drop some boiling tea-water in my lap if I do that again, or in Kaddo’s. He needs a lesson in being a gentleman.”

That made the table laugh, the riggers all around me making ribald comments to Kaddo. He’d started the pinching as I brought him the extra bucket of thick broth, the main part of that meal. But serving, men talking about me as if I was a pretty girl, was absolutely mortifying.

“Now, Arrathee wouldn’t do that,” Kaddo said, standing, his dark hair long, his eyebrows thick and overhanging his eyes, giving his face a menacing appearance. “Come here, cabbie.”

“Don’t go!” said Genno and Jop immediately.

“You do to Arrathee what you did to me on my first serving,” said Genno in a lively, animated voice, threatening the man with a ladle, “and I’ll drop a hot coal in your lap, Kaddo. You keep your hands off her before Celebration!”

“What’s Celebration?” I asked Genno when the men finally sprang to their feet and went rushing off after a strange whistle summoned them. Genno and I had to clear the tables then, several other cabin boys, I guessed, doing the same thing, all in frilled aprons like mine. But all had long, blonde hair

pinned back in buns or bundles at their necks. Earrings, small ones, glinted at their ears as they scurried from one job to another.

“The first ten-day out from shore,” said Genno, flushing as she looked at me. “The men like to see us in what we bought, or in what they bought for us, in the ports we visited. I think we cleaned out Liss Isle before Terraire. That’s why we didn’t have to stop on the way out, save to chastise those who’d insulted us on the docks in Terraire. That place is usually nice to us!”

“So what did you buy?” I had to ask. Genno flushed again at that.

“You’ll see,” ‘she’ said, “some time.”

Garrin stroked my arms and I wanted to scream and tell him not to do that. I didn’t want a man doing that to me but I couldn’t. I was so feminine, wasn’t I, in my swirling dresses and long, dark hair. I stepped in front of a mirror, the first since I had been lined up with the other ‘girls’ behind Panella. It was true. I was a girl. I stared, mesmerized, as I looked at the dark blue and black dress of the dark-haired girl. Her boy friend smiled at her shocked face as she looked at herself, turning her so that she could see her figure in silhouette. It appeared that I had rounded, womanly breasts,

Garrin leant over me and took possession of my pink mouth, as I stared, wild-eyed, at myself as I was kissed as if I was a girl, my eyes so vividly feminine. My earrings danced daintily on my neck. Garrin kissed me forcefully as if he was my lover. I

recoiled, trembling at just the thought of what was happening to me, kissing another man as his lips pressed on mine, stroking the long, false hair over my bare shoulders.

I swished past the mirror, his arm about my waist, the man hugging me as if I should like it, being a woman. Suddenly we were in a narrow hallway with cabins going off on either side. Oh gosh, there was Gennee in the arms of the man she'd been dancing with, her arms about his neck as he fumbled with the door lock before letting them into a cabin that firmly locked behind them.

I thought I heard someone sob behind me. I think I heard my name called. I think it was Mattle's voice, Mollee's, that is. I went to turn but Garrin had another door open. I was pulled in, seeing a woman's frilly nightie and panties on the pillows. There was no more dallying around. Garrin took me in his arms, putting my arms about his neck as I had seen Gennee do with her man. Garrin kissed me with absolute confidence he was the male and I was the female in what was going to happen in the little room.

Garrin's tongue forced my lips apart, his tongue inside my mouth, forcing mine back, as Garrin showed me what he was going to do with another part of me.

He threw me on the bed, tearing at the catches on my dress as I rustled beneath him. "Oh, oh, please, Garrin," I gasped. "It, it's my, my first time. I, I'm so, so hot, and so, so dry! I must get a drink!"

There'd been a carafe of water and some kind of liquor beside the bed. "That's not the way Darris told it," Garrin murmured to me, lifting me up, kiss-

ing my face and my lips. “He says you were the best lay he’s ever had, not a first-time girl. He told me to be really nice to you as he’s going to have you again and again once this Celebration is history!”

“I need a drink, Garrin,” I whispered, my mind reeling at the images he was planting in my mind. I forced a nervous smile as I looked up at him.

“First, you kiss me,” insisted Garrin. “Yes, Arrathee, I want that first. I’ve been the one doing all the work so far, haven’t I? Now you kiss me as a woman should and I’ll drink with you before you do for me just what you did for Darris last night. I want to be as blissful as he was today when I stagger out of here!”

Oh gods and goddesses, I’d forgotten all about Darris being my ‘first’! Not that he was, of course. Oh, would it hurt to kiss a man as if I meant it, as if I was a woman and found him irresistible? I quaked through every part of my body as I put my arms about my would-be lover and he squeezed me. Garrin actually closed his eyes as our lips met. I tried to press gently against him.

But he moved his lips, making me move mine as well. His hands slipped down onto my tush as I was pushed into his erect manhood which made me startle and squeak. Garrin kissed my chest as his hands caressed my panties and stockings beneath the underslip I was wearing. I was still trying just to kiss him but he kept his mouth moving, his body leaning against me and the side wall, as he lifted my leg, slid his hand under my slip and stroked my stockings and the garter belt on my soft thighs. I was squeaking, more like a girl than a boy, as he kissed me more firmly, whispering to me to pull more firmly on his neck and hair.

Oh gods and goddesses, I felt so like a woman as I kissed Garrin. Yes, it was me, my hands about his neck, kissing him as his hands slid over me, caressing me. His greys were off. I had a man's penis on my leg, between my legs against my panties, my slip being gently raised over my head. Goddesses, how I hated myself, my skin crawling, as I thought about what I was doing, abasing myself so.

Garrin didn't want a drink but I insisted, quaking in fear at what I knew was going to happen to me.

"That's it," murmured Garrin. "That's how a girl should kiss her man. That was the way to do it. I bet Darris loved that last night, didn't he? And you loved being all girlie as well, didn't you, pretty Arrathee!" Oh, how I reeled in horror as he said that. "Let's drink to absent friends, shall we?"

I had to perfume my throat and breasts, I proclaimed, such as they were. I didn't think that Garrin noticed the small powder I dropped in his alcoholic drink. I demurely said that water would do me fine when he poured glasses from both bottles. I took the one he gave to me, sipped it, and put it down to move in what I thought was a girlish way, close to him. I climbed onto him so that I could kiss him again, all the effort on my part so that I could infect the water he'd chosen to drink instead of alcohol.

"Better," said Garrin, having stroked my long hair against me as I kissed him, all my nerves on edge as he was so affectionate with me. His mouth was gentle as he welcomed me being so girlish with him. He pushed me back on the bed, his drink with the sleeping potion untouched, I suddenly saw in fear.

“Our drinks!” I pleaded as Garrin threw himself on me, spreading my stockinged legs beneath him and around him. I felt the scream rising in my throat at what I was doing with a man, what he was doing to me, lifting my dress and underskirts so that he could caress parts of me that no man had ever touched. I writhed to get away from him but his long, strong body pressed me down so frighteningly easily.

“We’ll celebrate later,” said Garrin, grinning down on me as his manhood was between my thighs. He was pressing it fiercely into place between my legs. “Oh, but your panties, darling Arrathee! You only lowered them a little, didn’t you, for Darris, and he penetrated you. I didn’t believe him but let’s see if we can make that work again like that tonight, shall we, my beautiful girl!”

I didn’t think that my parents had bought me a cadet commission for me to become a waitress, I thought, as I lay, a captive, in a hammock for my first night on this new ship, not wanting to share the bed with Genno as the husky whisper had invited me to. She was just too feminine, too inviting, too female, I thought with a lump in my throat. I wanted to cuddle up with Genno as she said all of us ‘cabbies’ did at night. I think she was really going to say, ‘girls’.

‘What will they think at home?’ dominated my nighttime dreams. I knew that they’d be sorry that I was gone. They’d think me dead as so many of the crew of *Sword* were. There’d be some relief, I knew, that I wasn’t around any more to embarrass anyone

by doing things only witches were supposed to be able to do.

Yes, I'd finally worked out why I was where I was and why my parents didn't want to keep me at home where I might be discovered for what I was, some sort of witch or warlock.

Maybe Polwer would grieve for me, when he heard. But he'd been as terrified as the others, at times, that I'd turn out to be a warlock. I could sense that my stepmother was waiting for me to go mad and kill them all, probably using a vile poison so I could gloat over their death throes. I didn't need any special potion to be able to see that in my stepmother's face. It was there, the message and the anxiety, all the time.

Poisoning was what Tregell had done in *The Witch and the Warlock* to so many lovely women, who'd performed such intense death scenes. My hair still stiffened when I thought of Sura and how 'she' had died so awfully and so convincingly. I could never have killed a girl as pretty as her, never, ever, never. So I would have been a terrible warlock, I told myself, as I tried to sleep on the great ship, speeding along all through the night, taking me further and further away from the world I knew.

Cabin boys ate with the cooks after the night shift and two day shifts had breakfasted, the eating deck only filled when the night and one day shift were together. That's when I saw some of my *Sword* companions again. Mattle was helping the cooks, a bossy woman criticizing everything he did. He saw me. The look he gave me was as if he was in despair, as if he was begging me to release him from the nightmare we were in.

“Your friend’s under Fessee,” said Genno, wrinkling her nose in disgust. “She hasn’t been a mother as long as Panella or Lerrina. They’re much nicer to new, um, cabbies,” I guessed she’d been going to say ‘girls’ as it seemed so clear to me on this terrible ship that was how ‘she’, Gennee, as the cooks called her, feminizing the end of her name, thought of ‘herself.’

Fessee was making Mattle wear a really girlish pinafore as he helped the cook’s helpers to cut roots for some stew that was being made for a later meal. It looked like he was wearing a dress. Gold rings gleamed at Mattle’s ears. He was red-faced, trying not to look at me, though I was the same as him. Genno had taken the tasseled ones she’d had me wear the night before and I’d forgotten about them, so light were they, until we went to bed. Then, she’d given me short, golden studs to wear ‘as we all do during the day.’

Of course, Mattle cut himself, possibly on purpose. Fessee was all a-twitter about what he’d done, about what Peveret, the gruff-speaking officer, I gathered, was going to say to her if Mattle had to go to the infirmary.

Mattle must have told Fessee about me, what I had done on *Sword*, because Fessee was standing beside me suddenly, concern on her face, and so shapely that she must really be a woman. “Can you stitch up that fumble-fingered boy from your other ship?” Fessee asked me. I gaped at her as she sounded as if she was a woman, her voice just like those of the actresses who’d fooled me on the stage in Cormallen.

“Peveret told me to bring Arrathee in,” said Genno quickly, putting her hand on my arm to stop

me from getting up and following Fessee to the unfortunate Mattle who was bleeding quite profusely.

“Panella won’t mind,” said Fessee, turning and showing me her silhouette. I couldn’t stop gaping as the mounds on her chest bounced like those on a woman. Her hips were wide and womanly, her waist narrow. Her eyebrows were thin and her hair was long and braided down her back, a ribbon, yes a woman’s ribbon, preventing the braid from unraveling. A little makeup on her face and she would be very pretty.

Genno held my hand, so different from Fessee’s. Fessee had long, thin fingers, accentuated by long, shaped fingernails. They were painted a gleaming red.

“Fessee used to be a seawife,” whispered Genno as a smiling cook’s apprentice laughingly brought us the ‘medical’ supplies, for this deck. “Lost her place to Medda, younger, more willing. You’ll see, at the Celebration. She’ll never get back into officer quarters again. We all know it but her!”

“Don’t you have finer needles than these?” I asked the cook’s helper, who looked at me as if I was strange. “You mentioned seamstresses,” I said, turning to Genno. “I need a sixteen needle, or something smaller, a twenty-four or thirty-two.” They were all looking at me, the cook, his helper, Fessee, Mattle and Genno. “The smaller the stitches, the quicker the scarring will go. What do you use to cleanse wounds? Fessare? Trimweed?”

“I knew you were a witch,” murmured Genno as the others there, save for Mattle, all jumped as if she’d stung them. “We don’t have a clue what you’re talking about.”

“It’s not witchery,” I told Genno as I’d told sailors I’d worked on, Rob, Hirdy, and Mattle before. “It’s just standard apothecary care for cuts. You must have something you put on wounds to prevent them festering.”

“Saltwater poultices,” said the cook’s helper, Garrin. “That’s all we ever need.”

“Get me some boiling water,” I said to Garrin as if I was still a cadet officer.

Garrin looked at me, raising his eyebrows. “Do it, Garrin,” said the cook, looking really amused. Garrin went off to fetch the water with surprise on his face.

“We humor new cabbies, Lady Arrathee,” the cook said to me. I went cold inside as he smiled at me. “You’ll soon learn your place, my darling, and learn to ask a man if he can do something for you. And we will. We always like to please the newest ladies around here.”

Mattle was staring at me, wild-eyed, as Fessee clipped his head and scolded him for not being more careful. She looked haughtily at me. I think Fessee was put out by the way the cook, Darris, was smiling at my blushing face and shivering body. I think she would have liked the attention. I wished that she’d had it, as well.

“I’ll get needles from Merittee,” Genno said in her feminine drawl and went over to another cabin boy clearing the room with others.

I made clean, salt poultices for Mattle’s thumb and wrist. I watched another cabin boy, as graceful and girly as Genno, cleaning off a table top with some liquid. I asked Fessee to hold the wrap tighter on Mattle’s arm and went over to the other cabin

boy. I took the small pail and sniffed it. There was collane and some other things in the mixture in there.

“Hey!” protested the cabin boy.

“Where do you get the cleansers you use?” I asked him. He pointed at another cook who was glowering at me. It took me a while, and the help of an amused Darris and a laughing Garrin, to get the man to show me what he had. He actually had a container of collane.

“Don’t use too much,” he told me. “We dilute it! Two drops to a bucket!”

That wouldn’t have done any good in keeping anything clean. I was tempted to tell him that he had put twenty parts, at least, in the small pail but remembered Polwer’s words in time.

I had an interested, little audience as I repaired and cleaned Mollee’s arm. Fessee produced a pink ribbon to hold the final poultice over the two different sets of stitches, both coated with collane. One set was inside the worst cut and the larger along the arm that was so smooth I couldn’t believe it wasn’t a girl’s arm. ‘Mollee’, as Fessee kept calling Mattle, shuddered at my touch of his arm and hastily pulled it away, once the poultice was in place.

“Neat piece of work,” said Darris approvingly. “What say Garrin and me show you the ship and the new ocean, Gennee, Arrathee?” My name was undergoing change as well, I heard, shivering and knowing I’d be in trouble if I objected.

“We’d love you to,” murmured Genno, Gennee, I suppose I should say, “but we can’t go off-shift, Darris, as we have to report in to Panella and Undercaptain Peveret. I think Arrath-ee,” she added

the last part with a sudden grin at me and I wanted to slap her hard for feminizing me as Darris had done, “Arrathee is going to be reassigned from the kitchen.”

“Pity,” laughed Darris and Garrin together.

“Never mind,” said Darris, continuing on, putting an arm around my shoulder, making me freeze in dismay. “We’ll walk you out now and put out our mark for you tonight, Gennee, Arrathee. Ready for a little romp beneath the sheets?” Darris directed the last to Garrin.

Fessee huffed most noticeably, taking ‘Mollee’ by the hand and leading her off to some other cook who would have an assignment that a new ‘cabbie’ could do. I wished I could have gone with ‘Mollee’ and found out what was going on with him, Mattle. I’d have let Fessee walk on deck with Darris. She would have loved a stroll with a man’s arm about her shoulder and then about her waist, as I positively didn’t!

Next morning, after Celebration, I joined a long line of frazzled looking girls back to our quarters, the bluebands saying awful things to us about what we’d done the previous night with our boy friends, our lovers.

I tried to close my ears completely as the teasing made me think of the teasing I’d endured on *King Tatheren’s Sword*. But it had never been real. If I’d stroked one of the seamen teasing me about looking like a girl, he’d have clouted me hard, probably

kicked me in the stomach, or lower, for good measure, and told me to get off him.

That's what Robady had said he would do, just as Losser had said it before him, Rob claimed, when a couple of the rigger cadets had begun to tease Rob about his good looks. I could see by the color in his face that Rob hadn't appreciated the deviate teasing directed at him but he did it as much as anyone else to those of us younger than him.

So it was sort of nice when a soft, girlish hand slipped into mine. Gennee whispered to me, in what's called a stage whisper, that meant that the Bluebands could hear her, "Those are the guys who didn't get anything last night. Watch out for Statch and Mooth. They like us more when we girlies are in our little sailor suits, you'll find!"

One of the bluebands pulled out a thick, heavy stick. I froze in my swirling, long dress, sure someone was going to get beaten. "Ooo! Statchie!" an over-emphasized, girlie voice declared. "Come to my cabbie and do me now, lover boy!"

Statchie seemed to see the funny side then and began laughing at what he held in his hands. "You girls!" he laughed. "Take a couple of pimply kids inside you and you think you're ready for a real man!"

Two golden-haired girls who'd been trailing us immediately swished into Statchie's arms and began to kiss him and pretend that they were being aroused into some immoderate, female passion.

Statchie finally patted them on their rumps and was grinning and bandying words with every girl who went into quarters, some who stripped off to the skimpiest of female underwear before entering

the bathrooms. Very few looked as feminine in the morning as we all had the night before.

Gennee squeezed my hand again. "You had three trysts on your very first night," she cooed to me, trying to maintain her feminine drawl and not succeeding very well. "Did it all work out as you planned?"

"Not all of it," I told her with a shudder. "I never thought that it would be so hard to get a man to take a drink before he made love to a pretty girl. It never was a problem with me!"

"I really want to hear the stories they have to tell about you," said Gennee, hugging me as we went into the alcove we shared and began to shed our female clothing.

"Look at my stockings, Arrathee," Gennee complained. "Look what Darris did to them!" She yawned. "He was my fourth and last. He wanted me with my stockings on and look what he does. And we don't make port for another four tendays, not even at Liss, now. I won't be able to buy any more unless I give away dresses and panties for them!"

"Ow, owee," I gasped as I turned away from her and finally released my manhood from the taping that I'd done to hold me in place. When all my male things descended from the place I'd tucked them, as Gennee had shown me, I really hurt.

"You, you're still tucked!" gasped the 'girl' opposite me, who was sitting in her panties and bra, brushing her golden hair over her shoulders.

"I shouldn't do that?" I asked, my mind in a whirl at what had happened to me the night before. Well, with Gath and Nemmo, it had gone as I expected, save for the fierce kisses I'd had to exchange with them. I'd wrestled frantically with them as they

mauled me as if I was a girl; but they'd eventually drunk the wine I'd prepared for them which meant that I'd been spared hours of being sexually attacked.

Garrin, however, had been quite another story. He wouldn't take the drink, not unless it was in celebration for having me, and have me he did as if I was, well, as if I was a woman, as he said. He kissed and kissed my almost bare body, his manhood thrusting into me, as I writhed beneath him, fighting to get him off me but he wouldn't stop.

Garrin filled my tush with his male essence over and over. Oh, he had to be on some drug himself because he swung me up on him. I was squealing and squealing at the strange feelings that coursed through me as I bounced up and down on his pole, he driving it inside me. His pleasure seemed endless as he stroked my bra.

Garrin pulled tightly on my panties, squeezing my manhood as if I should enjoy him doing that. I finally realized that my wriggling was arousing him more and more. I forced myself past the shivering and terrible, debasing hurts and tried to pretend I liked what he was doing to me, having me as if I was a woman. I even kissed him lovingly and that sent the worst kind of shivers through me, shivers of some kind of weird pleasure. Oh, and the swishing of my dress wouldn't stop. I felt like a girl as my lips stuck to his as my hair was caressed softly. I could see why the cabbies gave in, in time, to such caresses and attention. All you had to do was relax and pretend you were a girl. That was sort of painless and even pleasurable.

Garrin couldn't stop kissing me. My lips were still numb and imprinted with the force of his mobile,

caressing lips. He hadn't been content to violate me just once. No, he held me and caressed me and did me face down on the bed, my tush high as I wept as he entered me, caressing my stockings as he drove and drove into me.

Then, he wanted me to love him as he had loved me. I was almost sick at the thought of putting my manhood into another man. But it wasn't that. I had to kiss and clean his manhood while he stroked my bra, the tugging and caressing making me think that I really was a girl! Then Garrin aroused me with his hands, rolling me over and lifting my legs high in such an awful, unmanly position as he made me stroke him and guide him all the way inside me. I had to be a willing woman for him. He insisted.

Humiliation swept over me as I wrestled with him and tried to get him off me. Strangely, though, the more I struggled, the more Garrin loved what I was doing. He told me to keep doing that as I was arousing him as a man. What a sweet woman I was! I cried and he kissed me more. He stroked me, lifting me high, my manhood aroused by his hands and, to my greatest shame, I came with him and covered him with my emissions as he was grunting in manly fervor as he filled me with his seed, deeply inside my tush.

"Now that was fantastic, lovely Arrathee," my lover finally told me, not seeming to notice how mortified that I was or how I could barely respond to his kisses and caresses any more. "You've done this before as a woman, haven't you, and with more than with Darris. That Russet the court made into a sailing officer, he's got eyes for you, hasn't he? He's the one you've been fooling around with, isn't he? I bet he's not as big and strong as me, is he? You needed

this, lovely Arrathee. You needed a real man to show you what it's going to be like to be a cabbie on this ship!"

How my heart sank at that. How I cried again at the thought of Garrin doing me like this, degrading me, making me treat him as if I was his woman, for that was what was really happening to me. But if I screamed it out, I knew what would likely happen to me. And I'd willingly kissed Garrin when he'd asked me to, thinking he'd take my drink and I'd be saved for a little while.

But he cuddled me and kissed me gently. His hands played with my garter belt, my legs, my stocking tops and my tush. Garrin made me wiggle beneath him as he kissed me. I felt his hands all over my body, stroking, teasing my bra and my freed manhood, the second panties and taping not having lasted seconds under his strong, determined assault on me.

Each wriggle I made only aroused my male lover even more. He placed my arms about his neck with a sigh, making me feel so terribly girlie. We went at it again fervently, as he kept asking me if I enjoyed this, if I liked that and, oh, I really moved for that one, didn't I?

I guess for some time I was reacting like a girl as well, clinging to his arms as he slowed and stroked me so gently as he did me again and again. Whatever could Garrin have taken to give him such stamina, I almost screamed at him in desperation. As he kissed my face and stroked my hair and my earrings, crumpling my fake breasts against his powerful chest, I did have a few moments where I thought that I was really a woman, a woman terrified of her man and doing anything she could to satisfy him, to

get the lovemaking over with. But Garrin didn't seem to stop, ever. He only slowed when I touched him and kissed him softly and quivered beneath him.

"Oh, that's so womanly," Garrin murmured as I writhed and bounced softly beneath him as he entered me once more, as slowly as he could, as I shivered and guided him into me. We were skin to skin, he delighting in my womanly fragrances and squeezing me gently until I did rise, to my shame, and finally spurt once more against the man holding me to him, my legs at his neck. No, I couldn't seem to help the pleasure I felt as a man made love to me, called me his woman. I shivered in the thrills running through me that told me he was partly right. I was his woman.

So, what could I say the next day as Garrin took me in his arms when he met me and kissed me passionately in front of everyone, the riggers cheering him on as if he was doing something wonderful. Well, I was feeling something through me as his tongue touched my lips. Thrills did pass through me as I pushed back at his kiss with one of my own. I stopped, of course, when I realized what I was doing.

"So, you're Garrin's seawife now," said Gennee with a smile. "Are you moving into his cabin with him? Do I have to find a new cabbie to bunk with?"

Gennee took me to meet Panella, the 'mother' who was nominally in charge of me, the day before the first tenday Celebration. Panella would decide

the tasks I'd perform on the great ship. She, Panella, I couldn't think of 'her' as a man, looked like my stepmother, sounded like my youngest sister-in-law, Hatara, and was so feminine. She was fragrant with delicate, flowery, very womanly scents. She was also motherly in every mannerism to me. She, I don't see how I could have called my new 'mother' anything else but a woman, was as shapely and graceful, and yet twice as feminine as Fessee.

"You must be settling in well, Arrathee," Panella smiled at me, leaning forward to put her manicured hand, like Fessee's, on my shivering knee. "I saw you out for a stroll with Darris. That man never lets an opportunity pass, does he? And you have a tryst with him, off-shift?" She looked to Gennee who nodded, not looking at me. "Why, that's just wonderful, Arrathee. You are going to be such an asset to the ship! I was talking to Fessee about you ..."

I couldn't get a word in edge-wise or set my 'mother' straight about me. I was not going on any tryst with a man, not even one who'd told me he loved my dark hair and dark eyes. He loved foreign women, Darris had said. He had them every time in port at every bordello he could. He was delighted that a cabbie like me, I must let my hair grow, and let Gennee style it for me, was on board.

Darris had even tried to kiss me as his strong hands held me in the hatchway to lower decks. I'd been frantic and tried to pull away. His mouth had landed on my neck and he'd kissed that. I wrestled with him to get free while in the background Gennee had her eyes closed and looked so pretty with her long-fringed eyelashes as she kissed Garrin passionately. I guess I should have kissed Darris the same way.

“You’re new,” Darris had laughed at me, squeezing me, driving all of the air out of me. “And foreign besides. You’ll learn soon how we do things here, pretty Arrathee. I’ll teach you what you must do off-shift, when the light is faded. You girls,” yes, he actually said that to me, though I was entirely dressed like him, a guy, “love the moon on quiet water and a handsome guy, don’t you, on deck? I’ll catch you later, pretty Arrathee. You tell Kaddo or any of his mates that you’re mine off-shift. You hear me?”

I’d managed to gasp something he took to mean ‘yes’ as, then, my heart racing with distasteful emotion, I ran girlishly, danced really, with Gennee to Panella’s work station. Gennee had become more what she normally was on this ship, I guessed, as she skipped everywhere like a little girl in delight, making many men we passed smile encouragingly at her. She encouraged me to do the same but I blushed and felt so embarrassed at myself each time I did it to please Gennee.

Panella had her own cabin, it seemed, just one bunk and a workspace as well. Luxury of luxuries, Panella had a door as well, with a bolt, I had noticed, on the inside. Oh, she shared her workspace with Undercaptain Peveret.

“We really do need a nurse on this deck,” Panella said to him. I thought I was going to scream. No, I couldn’t do that! Screaming was such a womanly gesture! No, I definitely couldn’t do that! I couldn’t be called a ‘nurse’. That was a woman’s task, not a man’s. I almost said I preferred to be called an orderly but Gennee pinched me when I went to talk. I gathered that I shouldn’t.

Undercaptain Peveret listened to Panella's florid, feminine voice for much longer than I'd have been able to, in his position. She praised me and told how I'd saved Mollee's life. The undercaptain frowned at that. Panella said I'd make such a wonderful nurse to the men and cabbies she was responsible for. They would be made well just by my presence as a pretty cabby always cheered anyone up! The men had already noticed me. Why I even had a tryst for the very next off-shift!

"You're the one who patched up Robady," said the undercaptain, ignoring almost everything Panella had said. "Know a lot about potions and powders? I was going to send Rob to the mothers and get them to find you. He needs some repairs, I think."

I gulped as I stared at the gruff-voiced undercaptain. I was so intimidated. I didn't know if I'd be thrown overboard if I contradicted what Panella had said or even tried to correct his idea of what I was. Were there male nurses among the Seafarers, I thought with a gasp? Only women were nurses among us on the Foreshore, I could tell him. I had no idea how to be a nurse.

I could barely be an apothecary without having a proper place, equipped with all the potions I'd need. I didn't think there'd be anything like Polwer's shop on this huge vessel.

Rob stared at me as hard as I stared at him when a blueband escorted the white-dressed sailor into Peveret's office. Despite the awful, obvious scarring that laced over his face, Rob moved and ordered the blueband to do tasks for him just as if Robady had been a member of the *Silvery Seas'* crew for a year or two. There was no doubt of his authority no mat-

ter how his face looked. Rob's crisp, clean whites, too, had single golden, buttons on his shoulders.

I quivered in despair inside as Rob looked me over. I had to wonder what was going through his mind as he saw what this crew was trying to make me do.

"Sailing Officer Robady," said Undercaptain Peveret, wincing as he looked at Rob's face. "You trust this cabbie to work on you."

"Yes, sir," said Rob precisely while I shuddered. He was frowning down on me, obviously seeing the gold glinting studs at my ears as well as the dark, green cord about my hair, tied in a bow somewhere, holding it back behind my ears. Gennee had done that before taking me to Panella's, saying that I had to look sweet for Panella to get anything out of her.

"Quite a mess," said the undercaptain with a grimace.

"I've seen Cadet Arrat, sir," said Rob distinctly, "clean up worse messes than this in the short time he was with us on *King Tatheren's Sword*."

The undercaptain didn't like the reference to Rob's former ship or to the definite 'he' as Rob referred to me. I wanted to tell Rob not to lie about me as well. So, I'd done some stuff at home, and possibly with Polwer, which wasn't strictly apothecary work, but I'd never told Rob about that.

"Mogen said you went to see him about that last night," said Peveret to Robady. Again Rob pulled a face. Funny, but Rob's face looked as bad to me as it had when I'd cleansed his wounds that very first time and stitched him up. I couldn't see improvements to the left side of his face. Suddenly, I got a small whiff of something emanating from him, not a

normal smell. Rob turned to show me the full swelling on the side of his face.

“You scratched it when it was itching,” I said with a shiver at the mess that needed to be cleaned right away.

“I caught it on splintered wood, sir,” said Rob briefly, ignoring me and speaking to the undercaptain. “One of the guards, don’t know who he was,” that was directed at the undercaptain who looked ready to interrupt, “had caught a rat and was having it lick my blood as I was lying on the deck. I was out of it. One of my new,” he hesitated, “shipmates, sir,” he finally chose to describe the Seafarers as, “told me I was out for almost a complete shift. The rat was playing with me, amusing the men watching, most of that time.”

“Mogen gave you a salve,” said Peveret, a trace of annoyance in his voice. “He’s been a surgeon on upper deck for ten years.”

“He said the infection was beyond him, sir,” said Rob levelly with a frown. “I thought that was why I was told to come here. I told Ship’s Mate Mogen that Cadet Arrat had cured infected rat bites on *Sword* when no-one else ever had.”

Peveret gave me a searching look then while Panella and Gennee stared at me as if I’d suddenly grown a second head. I could almost hear them calling me a witch. My strange, part-girlish appearance must cause them to think that way as they looked at me. “It was just a potion off the farm, sir,” I said nervously but as politely as I could. “I remembered the recipe for it, that’s all.”

“Take him to Mogen,” Undercaptain Peveret ordered Robady. “Fix up the Sailing Officer as you

can,” he said to me, looking me over as if judging what I would look like in a dress instead of grays. “Mogen should have whatever a, a, cadet,” cabbie, girl, witch, were all words he could have used, I thought with a quake passing through me as the undercaptain intended, I guessed, “like you, will need in that sick bay of his. And then,” he glared at Panella who had been about to interrupt, “report back to Panella. We’ll see how your nursing is, Arrathee. Let’s see how this goes for a while, Pansee, before we give her a permanent assignment.”

There, he’d said it. I stumbled away after being called ‘her’ by an officer. Robady had caught it as well as he was very stiff as he walked beside me. I could hear Panella laughing most girlishly as Peveret’s voice boomed on behind us as the blueband ushered Rob and me away from the undercaptain’s office.

“What are they doing to you?” asked Rob from the side of his mouth. Several riggers whistled at us as I was walked to the surgeon’s, as Rob had called Mogen. Rob scowled but he must have known what the men were whistling for, or rather, at.

“I’m a cabbie,” I murmured. He missed a step in his seaman’s stroll. I had to wait and let him get ahead of me again. “That’s what they’ve made me, Rob. And Mattle, but they call him Mollee now. You know why they do that, why they’re calling me, Arrathee.”

“Gods, Arrat,” said Rob. “You can’t let them do that to you! They treat cabin boys quite openly as if they’re girls among the lower ranks. It’s, it’s ...”

“Perverted?” I finished for him bitterly, noting he was keeping a noticeable distance between us.

“Well, it’s this or I’m fed to the blackbacks,” I muttered to him, alarming him. Rob quickly went back to impassiveness as there was more whistling from up in the rigging as if it was a pretty girl, or someone like that, passing working men drinking outside a tavern, in one of the great towns of Malesia. “What would you do if you were me, Rob? I did have visions of you being made a cabbie with Mattle, Hirdy and me, once, but you’re doing all right, aren’t you?”

“So that’s where Hirdy and the other cadets are,” gasped Rob, directing me up a deck I’d been told was off limits to those like me. “I heard my, my shipmates talking about the Celebration coming and what they’d do to the prettiest girls. I only figured out last night who they were talking about. You, you’re going to have to dress on your off-shift today like a girl, aren’t you!”

“Or go over the side,” I told him. “With Mollee, Hirdy, and Kaff. I’ve seen them but haven’t talked to them. There should be others.”

Rob shuddered. “Three more cadets,” he said. “Rassent was swinging with Jerit before I could save him. There’re about twenty more of us from *Sword* alive and scattered about, all but me in rigging groups, even Maresey.”

“You?” I asked but Rob understood the one word question.

“I’m a hero,” he said. “I tried to stop *Sword*’s riggers and save the Seafarers ashore. So, as a reward, I’m the most junior sailing officer there is on this ship, which means I’m a messenger for all the older officers.”

“You’ll learn the ship,” I said to him.

“Get you out of here if I can,” Robady whispered to me as I headed into what was clearly a surgical cabin. He, saying that, at least made me feel a little better. I hadn’t heard anything about getting away. All I thought about was surviving and what would happen to me if I was rude to someone, another man; so, I had to make men like me, as if I was a girl. But it wasn’t like that with Rob.

The surgical workroom was long and had beds, only a couple occupied. A tall, mustached man, his hair white and grey, frowned as Rob brought me towards him.

“Bring her over here,” croaked one of the men in a bed. “I need to dip my wick. I ain’t had any since before we hit the Foreshore.”

I flushed and shivered as the white-haired, taller man stared down at me, his lip lifting into a cruel smirk as he studied me and seemed to consider what the man had asked for. “Did Peveret send comfort for the patients ...?” he began.

“Or for the orderlies?” asked a grinning, muscular, blonde seaman, rolling up hammocks and storing them away.

“This is Cadet Arrat,” said Rob, trying to be stone-faced and not react at all to what was said. “He will try to treat my face, sir,” that was to the white haired man with his arms folded, “with your consent.”

Mogen studied me, his eyes registering a slight contempt, I thought, as he saw the studs in my ears and the colored, feminine string about my dark hair. I resented being pigeonholed so easily by another man on this huge ship. I wanted to tell him I wasn’t the deviate. He was, in the way he could smile and

assign me so easily to a group that was obviously far 'below' him. And what do you do for sex when you head out of a long sea voyage, I thought sourly as I looked at him.

"Come into my workplace," Mogen said.

I knew what I wanted but it wasn't there on the small shelves of what Mogen called 'medicines' in his 'sick bay'. There were no painkillers or paineasers. There was little but cleansing salves and sweet-smelling ointments that didn't do anything as far as I could sense.

"You have questions?" asked Mogen, with a pull of his lips in amusement at me, at the frown on my face.

"You don't have heartsease or trimweed," I said to him, ingredients that I had thought were in every apothecary store. "Or fessare?"

"We don't have witches concocting potions to bespell the unwary in Cunya," said the surgeon smugly. "What you see is what we have. So go ahead and cure your patient, Arrathee, with whatever you can." I couldn't help the quiver running through me as he used the feminized name for me, even though Rob had given him my proper name. "You cabin boys have to find something useful to do for this ship, don't you? Besides warming the bed of the sailing officers? Is that why our latest ca-, um, recruit, wants your loving touch to cure him?"

"Steady on, sir" said Rob, his stoic demeanor beginning to crack, the last word spat out of his mouth but Mogen, I didn't know what rank he had, waved him to silence. Rob grimly held his tongue.

"I shall look for you at the next ten-day Celebration, Arrathee," drawled the older man, reminding

me of officers and older men on *Sword* who always made weird, sexual jokes at the young cadets. “We like the riggers and the shift workers to soften you new girls to our Seafarer ways. That’s what you call us back where you came from, isn’t it? But, for our officers’ next celebration, we like the newer girls softer, broken in, on this ship. There’s always the chance, pretty Arrathee, that you’ll be a major prize for some line officer on board.”

I’d always felt uncomfortable around men like Cluff and Jerit. The smarmy officer, Mogen, reminded me so much of those arrogant, bullying men. Well, there was no need for me to feel uncomfortable now about Jerit and his friends, was there?

I shuddered, though, as I recognized that someone had already told the surgeon about me. He was using the feminine form of my name every time. It had only started in the shift before I had come to this upper deck. Robady’s introduction of me as ‘Cadet Arrat’ was ignored, as if it was nothing, by the surgeon. Mogen looked at me as if, well, as if I was a woman, making my skin crawl with ugly feelings. I’d hate him to ever minister to me if I was sick or ill. His touch would be horrible, I had no doubt.

It was absurd but I felt as if I was a girl being inspected by a man for her sexual receptiveness to him. I shuddered as Mogen studied my hair and my ear studs. I forced girlish thoughts away. I tried to be boyish, martial, and follow just Rob’s clipped commands.

I investigated what there was in the poor excuse for a sick bay to find something I could use on his face. *Sword*, with one tenth of the complement of *Silvery Seas*, had twenty times the prepared potions and a hundred times the raw supplies, drying herbs

and such, for the ills of the tiny ship. And that was nothing, compared to Polwer's apothecary store.

In the end, I found some rat poison I could distill. There was a still in the medical station that Mogen waved nonchalantly for me to use. I extracted the active agent, as Polwer would have called it, making a potion to fortify Rob's blood against the inevitable infection that was coming. I bathed his cheek, his bites, and the lattice of cuts the broken glass had left him, with a tincture of collane, the mixture refined for work on wounds and skin. I hastily concocted it as if it was the simplest of potions to make, guiltily using the aromas from the kettle to sense when the potion was active but not overly so.

Rob winced at my touch several times as I opened the offending areas and removed tiny granules that might once have been grass or fragments of stone beneath his skin. I took liberties with Mogen's few ingredients, making the collane-based cleanser to keep all infections at bay as well.

"Explain what you've done," said Mogen curtly as I was handing the potions and the anti-itch salve to Rob, whispering to him how to use them. I didn't react quickly enough to Mogen's orders.

"Alchemy," snarled Mogen, seizing what I'd given Rob.

"Apothecary recipes, sir," I said with a nervous shiver I couldn't hide. "I'll write them out for you, sir, with the quantities to be used in their formulation. You might find this anti-itch salve works better than the saltwater feathers you gave Sailing Officer Robady. When someone's healing, this brings instant relief to the skin and stops someone spreading an infection like an insect bite."

“This is the sea,” snapped Mogen. “We don’t get insect bites on the ocean, only in hellholes like the last port we were in.”

Rob argued and begrudgingly was given his potions and salve. He claimed that Undercaptain Peveret wanted to see what I’d done for him before he, Rob, was to use them.

“He’s pretty bad, isn’t he?” said Rob about Mogen as he escorted me, making shivers run up and down my backbone, at the many frowning looks directed at us. He put his hand on my elbow as if I was a girl being escorted. I shook off his hand but we were still being stared at, mostly because of our dark-colored hair, I think.

“As an apothecary, he is,” I said, my voice trembling with nervousness at the looks directed at me, at us, as if we were a couple.

“Yes,” said Rob, looking hard at me. “If they do make you what, a nurse, or um, an orderly,” he corrected himself as if he couldn’t believe what he was saying, using a term for a woman for me, “don’t do anything a witch would do, Arrat, please!” He was begging me as if I was a woman. I was furious with him, wanting him to stop. I’d enough of that all day from Gennee.

But Rob didn’t seem to get why I was so jumpy. He seemed more concerned about me being taken for a witch than taken for a woman.

“You got the attitude, didn’t you, from Mogen?” he hissed at me, gripping my arm tightly as Kaddo and his friends had done until Jop and Gennee stopped them. “He’s not the only one like that. They’re diabolically afraid of Baract witches and what they do in battle with swamp gas.

“They wanted to know what it was, where it came from, and I couldn’t tell them. They wanted to know if we’d a witch on board *Sword*. I told them we never had women on board, save as passengers. If your potions work well, and I know they will, they always do, someone is going to ask you those questions, Arrat, whether you’re in sailor whites, or a pretty dress.”

I didn’t tell Rob that I’d discovered a really strong sleeping drug, merenthe, at the back of one of Mogen’s shelves. I’d only found it as a witch would have, by opening the unmarked glass jar and smelling it. It could have killed someone if ingested with no dilution. It needed a hundred to one dilution, Polwer had told me, of the dangerous potion he’d been making which, at first, had seemed to me to be clear water. But nothing was marked on the glass on Mogen’s shelf, dusty as if forgotten.

I stole half the powder by simply pouring it into my pocket while the orderly and Rob went to restrain the rude patient who’d wanted me, the cabbie with such lovely hair, in his bed to comfort him. Mogen had gone part way into the ‘ward’ to supervise, of course. Salt, there was plenty of it around, I added to the merenthe jar while Mogen snarled at his orderly for his incompetence.

I’d thought the safety procedures for merenthe should have been known to everyone in healing. It was the easiest of killing medicines as no-one could prove an overdose, something known to all apothecaries in Malesia. I’d mixed it often, later on, for Polwer, diluting it as a matter of course when I made vials, cutting it again with innocuous, powdered, herbal flavourings, to weaken it even further.

I learned nothing about caring for men on a huge ship in that workroom that I didn't already know better from Polwer. Mogen, however, did teach me one thing. He taught me what it was going to be like to be a new cabin boy at the Celebration. It would've been absolutely awful if I hadn't armed myself a little at least. Despite what I did, however, the Celebration turned out to be as awful for me as I'd expected it to be.

Poor Darris became my test subject. I was shaking all over as I planned what I was going to do with him. I actually hadn't accepted his invitation to 'tryst', the idea of a sexual favor making me want to throw up, but Gennee agreed for me that I'd tryst with him that night after they, he and his friend, Garrin, had shown us the stars.

As soon as we were dismissed off-shift, we couldn't retreat to the relative safety of the 'cabin' as Gennee called her alcove. No, Darris had his hands all over me as Garrin also did with Gennee. Yes, I was touched as if I was a girl. Gennee told me to pretend I loved it, right in front of the men. They laughed at me, wriggling and trying to keep Darris's hands off my tush and hips.

We were escorted, Darris's hands about my waist to the open deck on our level aboard the ship. It was a dark, cloudy, hardly romantic night. But that didn't disturb Darris at all as he treated me entirely as if I was a woman. It was so disgusting even though the darkness hid most of his pawing and caressing. Gennee had begged me not to fight with him as we'd danced back along the decks, she waving to differ-

ent men who called to her. She told me to do everything that Darris wanted. It was for the best, she said, she who was as much a boy as I was. I fingered the powder in my pocket, worrying about obtaining a bottle to confine the merenthe properly.

Gennee was snuggled into Garrin's arms as soon as they hit the deck, kissing him passionately in seconds, giggling throatily at whatever Garrin was saying to her. I think she was trying to model for me what I should be doing, the way I should be acting. I couldn't do that! Darris wanted me to be like Gennee, but I couldn't. I could barely let him squeeze me as he wanted to all the time. Other seamen went by us in both directions, one or two murmuring that we should go to our cabin to do that, what Gennee and Garrin were doing so excitedly.

Darris had his arm about me all the time, grinning at his sea friends who went by. He fondled my hair and trapped me by the pillars that held up the various ship decks. He so much wanted to kiss me, as Garrin was doing to Gennee, just a little distance from us. I tried not to but, finally, Darris was too persistent. His lips met mine. My femininely scented neck, courtesy of Gennee's 'sea flower mist', wasn't enough for him.

The world didn't come to an end. A man kissed me firmly on my lips and possessed them as he squeezed my waist. I was trapped too tightly to a pillar to get free without hurting one of us. So, I gulped inwardly and let Darris have his way with me. I let another man maul me, slobber all over me, and tell me he couldn't wait to see me as a darling girl at the Celebration. I must dance only with him, I was told, funny feelings spreading all over me. I wanted only

to get away from the repulsive man kissing me again and again as if I liked what he was doing.

This was how it would be all through the Celebration, I thought, shivers running through me. Gennee had told me enough times that men expected to share partners. I could expect to dance with ten men and probably tryst with at least three if I was a lucky girl!

I didn't want to be a lucky girl. I should climb up over the side of the ship and throw myself into the sea, I told myself. No, I couldn't do this, this acting like a girl, time and again. The defence I'd prepared from the merenthe wouldn't work quickly enough, I thought in a panic, at the plan I'd made to save myself.

Gennee said that she and Garrin wouldn't be coming back to her 'cabin'. I'd have the bed all to myself, with Darris. She actually expected me to tryst with another man, to make love to him, when she knew I was a man! She even tried to give me tips on how to have a man make love to me as if I wanted to know such things!

Darris seemed to think he was fortunate to be kissing me, 'trying me out', before the Celebration began. He picked me up as if I was a girl, squeezing my legs together as I wriggled to get free. He carried me back to Gennee's cabin and her wide bed, the one I hadn't wanted to share with a cabbie who didn't know if he was a boy or a girl.

Now, I'd have given anything to be cuddling up to a giggly Gennee, she fragrant and kissable, in her frilly, dark blue woman's nightie. But here I was, on my own, with a man who was trying to do to me

what Gennee would have let me do to her. I hadn't known what I was passing up earlier.

Darris took the drink I gave him and tossed it off quickly as I simpered, nervous as could be at the femmy wiggles I made against my male would-be lover, just as a giggling Gennee had made me practice. She said men loved us to do that. So, I wiggled for Darris, as she'd said I should do, holding Gennee's pretty, woman's nightgown against me while Darris slugged back a second glass of the 'wine' Gennee left for us, or so I claimed.

His lips on mine slowly lost their vigor as Darris was kissing me, pushing me down on the bed as if I was a woman and he about to have his way with me. Was he ever strong when he was aroused! He tried to order me to put on the nightie, his hands caressing my tush, making me squirm under his bulk. But, he'd ingested too much merenthe in the wine. In no time at all, Darris was fast asleep. I rolled him away from me, trembling at what he'd have done to me, another man, if he was awake. He snored so much that I'd real difficulty sleeping in the hammock across the alcove. The sway of the ship lulled me finally into oblivion.

Gennee's hair was disheveled when she crept into the alcove. I think I awoke the instant she entered. She went to the bed and actually moved Darris, possibly thinking little Arrat was being crushed beneath the cook's bulk. She whispered, "Arrathee!" which I hated.

"Here," I murmured. She felt her way to my hammock. I didn't know why she'd such trouble seeing in the dark. There was enough light as far as I could tell to illuminate all the corners of the drab alcove.

“What are you doing here?” Gennee asked, new, sparkling earrings hanging from her earlobes. She was clutching a light-colored robe to her as well. “You should be cuddled up to Darris! He likes his, his girls,” she said that defiantly, “to be all clingy and cuddly after sex ... Oh!”



Her eyes must have adjusted. She could see what I was wearing, the gray pants I normally wore to bed.

“You didn’t have sex with him!” Gennee whispered to me, fear in her quiet voice. “What-what did you do to him?” There was panic in her voice. I heard the sound of feet moving outside the curtain. The night shift was on the move, waking those who prepared their breakfasts for them. Others who’d take over from them on the next shift aboard, also awoke in the great ship.

“A little sleeping draught,” I whispered to her.

“He drank it?” Gennee asked, still afraid, before she saw the glint of the bottle. The smooth, wooden cups I’d wiped and put away where Gennee always placed them. I’d only drunk water.

“I said the wine was a gift from you,” I murmured, not letting on that I’d taken the tag ends from the riggers’ drinks on the first shift we served, having made a special trip to the head to hide and prepare the ‘wine’ for Darris.

“He’ll think I was in on it!” gasped Gennee.

“He won’t remember right away,” I murmured. I’d seen people befuddled by merenthe before. I remembered Polwer winking to me as he’d talked to one of his friends about the women they’d made love to at Mistress Sether’s establishment the previous night. Soon the man was adding details of his own before he went off, a smile on his face.

“Old fool,” said Polwer, grinning at me. “His back’s been aching him for a tenday. I gave him merenthe for a good night’s sleep. See how a double dose works, Arrat, son of Rattern? You believe whatever you’re told the next day! Something useful to

know if ever you're in a position of wanting to delude someone completely."

"But people all around you will say ..." I'd said.

"That's why I gave it to a man who lives alone. He always checks with me to see how well he is before he starts his day," laughed Polwer, going off into a wheezing fit.

"You tell him how you saw him and me," I shivered as I spoke to Gennee, seeking the right words to make her understand what I was going to do when Darris awoke. She stared at me, a frightened look still on her face. "He'll believe anything said to him before the effect of the potion wears off."

"Making love to you," murmured Gennee, relaxing and giving me a pretty smile as she took the ribbons from her hair. She picked up a brush to girlishly turn her hair style into a tight braid. "You with your legs about him and up in the air as you rocked my poor, lumpy bed!"

"You don't have to be so graphic," I protested, shaking at the image she put in my mind. Gennee stood for a moment beside me before turning on her heel and disappearing into the darkest part of her sleeping space.

I smelled the fragrant aroma of whatever Gennee put onto the sleeping man in her bed. "You can do this," she whispered, beckoning to me, as we heard more voices outside of those going to heat water for us cabbies to use to wash ourselves.

I was sure someone would come in as Gennee lifted the bedcovers and there was Darris in all his nakedness. "Gently smear this on his manhood," she whispered to me. "It's what I always do. It pleases men like Darris when others catch a whiff of

their crotches in the heads. They like to brag about the girls they've had."

"Cabbies, too, I bet," I added, my stomach threatening to revolt as I knew I was referring to Gennee and myself. Gennee was mute and stiff for a moment.

"That too," she finally said.

We couldn't leave Darris alone. I bathed without Gennee, still appalled at what I saw all the young boys around me doing. They were all talking about the Celebration and how long they were going to take to make themselves 'beautiful'. It was like being with my brother's wives and their sisters for winter festivals.

So, I was with Darris when he groggily tried to sit up, Gennee off with her friends. Darris wasn't really awake as I whispered to him about how much he'd enjoyed making love to his cabbie.

"I made love ..." Darris slurred at me. I agreed with him again.

"You kissed and kissed," I was saying as Gennee came in. She stood in wonderment as Darris just repeated everything I'd said. Then, she began with salacious details about where I'd kissed him and how enjoyable it was for him, how he'd made me call out in pleasure with all he'd done to me. She told him how girlish I'd felt in Gennee's nightie and how my lips were so wonderful he'd kiss me forever when he had me again.

"What are you saying?" I hissed at her as Darris leaned back on the bed. He seemed to be going off again, a smile on his face as he began to writhe on the bed.

“Look,” murmured Gennee as Darris was spurt-
ing all over the bed. “He wouldn’t believe it if he did-
n’t find the evidence of what he did to you. Now he
thinks you’re really a cabbie, no, a girl, Arrathee,
like me!”

“Arrathee like Gennee,” muttered Darris, relaxing
back into the bed.

Darris made quite an entry on the second shift’s
breakfast. I hid in embarrassment behind the
coldwater vats we used to clean the used dishes. He
went around with a silly grin on his face, agreeing
affably, so unlike him, that he’d been with a cabbie
all night, it being sensational. Far surpassing,
Darris declared, the trash he’d screwed in Terraire’s
finest brothels.

Men were shouting and laughing at Darris, some
telling him what an idiot he was, dipping his wick
before the Celebration. He could have had a girlie
girl then, not a scrubber, as they called us wait-
resses.

“Whose bed were you in, lover?” I heard Garrin
asking, teasing Darris, knowing quite well where
Darris had been, in bed with me. I shuddered as
Garrin went on, speaking in a high, girlish drawl,
just like one affected by so many of the cabbies,
Gennee being one of them.

“In Arrathee’s bed,” said Darris shakily.

Several of the guys were crudely yelling at him,
asking him what I was like. What did I do the best,
guys like Kaddo were asking, as I shook with re-
morse? It was so terrible what the men said about
me, asking Darris if he’d split me up the middle.
They couldn’t see me and didn’t know I was hiding
behind several other cabbies, who glanced back at

me with huge smiles. Their stopping and staring at me, and the ribald byplay of the men, gave away to some where I was, flushing, wanting to die in shame at the words the men used about me.

“You had Arrathee before Celebration?” demanded an angry Kaddo when Darris strolled by his table, I heard in fright.

“Best lay I’ve had in years,” Darris was saying. “She kissed me so sweetly right here,” he was miming a huge erection, “that I ...!”

The rest was all lost in the general hubbub of the men yelling at one another. All I could think about, in the dismay and turmoil, was that Darris had referred to me as ‘she’. Gennee looked straight-facedly at me, as she hung up towels, screening me from some of the men before she winked.

Darris staggered off to his bed, unable to concentrate on doing anything else. He kept talking about my, Arrathee’s, sweet body, how I squeezed my soft legs around him and kissed him so wonderfully with my sweet mouth and tongue. I felt sick as I heard every word Gennee had said repeated again and again. Finally, a laughing Garrin told him to can it and took him off, to wherever his sleeping area was, to get more rest.

“Sounds like you’re as perky as Gennee in bed,” said Garrin, stroking my arm as he came behind me as I was helping to clean off the table tops, the collane and fessare solutions making me feel less nauseous. “Looks like I’ll be looking you up at the Celebration tonight.”

I shuddered, jumping uncontrollably before I removed his hand from the stroke and squeeze he made between my legs. I doubted I had enough

merenthe to knock out all the men who'd said something about having me at the Celebration and welcoming me to the greatest lover in the fleet, them, as they left the tables.

"It's your hair," said Gennee with a smile at me as we were dismissed after the slight noon rations we prepared for the riggers. They'd be drinking hard as soon as the sun went down, save for the 'bones' crew who had to maintain the ship while the majority of the men partied.

"Your hair is so dark," murmured Gennee. "We have to find you some long fall to match it. I'll bet Runda has a hairpiece to fit you."

I protested. I said I was ill, too ill to go to any Celebration and infect everyone; but a thin boy came and looked through Gennee's dresses, selecting red, silky, women's undergarments for himself. He smiled at me as he deposited a bag with a long dark wig of hair that Gennee thought was so beautiful and wished she could wear herself at the Celebration.

"You can ..." I whispered as I sat on her bed, the curtains drawn back. All around me were the excited voices of young men preparing themselves to look like young girls for a ball. They rushed in to talk to Gennee, who apparently understood all about makeup and cosmetics, seeking advice and help in making themselves look as girlish as could be. Some made my stomach turn over. No, not because they were ugly. The opposite, so many of the boys who cleaned tables and such with me were speedily transforming themselves into the prettiest of young girls.

“You have to wear panties and a bra,” said Gennee to me as she stripped off her work greys. She was in pretty, white, frilly panties anyway. “You don’t expect any man to take a drink from you if you don’t look as girlish as me, do you?”

It was awful of her to do that to me. It was awful to hear the stories of cabin boys being hurt, that’s what I would have called it, by their supposed ship-mates. Some were even killed. So, I dressed like Gennee from the skin out, doing everything she did, putting on panties and undies, even a bra over the padded excuse for breasts she insisted a girl like me had to wear.

I finally managed to get out of the trysting room, the last man, Nemmo I think was his name, sleeping it off, after repeating all I’d told him he’d done to me, and I’d done to him, as a woman and how he’d loved it.

The Revels were definitely over, the morning sky lightening by the moment. I slipped along the deserted rail to where we ‘girls’ had come up from our deck, swirling our skirts. When the crew saw us, for the first time, a line of pretty girls, I’d shuddered at the roar I’d heard when we swished across the deck, all of us cabbies dressed as girls. It still terrifies me, horrifies me, as I recall how femininely I was dressed.

My high heels clicked on the empty, silent steps as I eased down a dim stairwell by myself. I thought I was completely alone until a hand suddenly went about my waist and pulled me back into an alcove. I

was about to scream when I heard the loud voices of men talking as they scurried up the inner 'ladders'. Someone was saying that Runda had been so perfect that night, hadn't she, while Laffanee, the seamstress I'd heard about, was 'magnificent'.

"And so inexhaustible," said one of the men with a laugh.

"The witch's potion the top riggers bought in Terraire worked in the punch like a treat ..." one was saying as his voice died away.

I was released suddenly but my nose had already identified my assailant. "You didn't want to be dragged back for another tryst tonight and with two of them, did you?" Richo whispered in my tasseled ear.

"No," I said with a shiver as I felt his hand on my arm. Richo led me in the direction I wanted to go, where we cabin boys had sleeping accommodations.

"It must have been a very hard night for someone as new as you," whispered the hard-faced man leading me. Despite the weatherbeaten look that turned my way, his hands were actually soft and gentle as he stopped, peered in through a hatchway we had to pass and checked that there was no-one there, lurking, as he'd been.

"The, the punch was spiked with a witch's potion?" I whispered to him as I could hear my dress and heels announcing that a cabbie was passing to anyone there to hear.

"I can carry you," said Richo. I caught the gleam of a smile in the dark shadow. "Or you might like to walk like a real sailor, in bare feet."

“Wait,” I murmured. He did, holding my arm as I climbed out of my high heels and so walked, small and slight, beside him, my feminized hand in his.

“Your fragrance is so inviting,” Richo said as we slowed where we had to go through a hatchway and down. He scouted it for us and led me to my own deck at last. I was close to the space where Darris had kissed me for the first time, only now the sea and sky was calming, even a warm breeze flowing in unexpectedly that made me shudder anyway.

“What you asked,” Richo murmured, slowing and making me walk hand-in-hand with him, his overshirt about my bare shoulders, making me tense as he treated me as a small girl walking with him. “Kaddo and Basto worked some deal in Terraire. They said it was a controlling agent, something witches feed you. You obey everything said to you. It worked well at the Celebration. But not on you.”

“If it was just in the punch,” I lied to him, “I didn’t get to drink any of it.” I’d felt something was pressing on me each time Garrin or Gath, the second man who’d grabbed me, told me to make love to him. Only they’d used a much cruder expression for a man and woman having sex.

“Lucky you,” murmured Richo. “You’ve recovered well, Arrathee. I thought you’d be distraught after what they put you through, your lovers, tonight!”

“Y-Yes,” I remembered to say. “It was pretty awful.”

Richo swirled me in my long dress, the feminine sound of my skirts making a lump come to my throat. “I don’t ...” I began, remembering how I’d danced with him and the kiss he’d given me. Gently,

softly, swaying and dancing with me along the open, deserted deck, Richo kissed me.

“Don’t,” I gasped as he swirled me again, his arms about my waist as he kissed my lips, tickled my ear, making me shudder, and kissed my neck softly. “I’m not ready for ...”

“Another man?” asked Richo softly. “No, but I told you, lovely Arrathee, that when you were in trouble, you should look for me. Now, let me take you back to your sleeping quarter.”

Of course, as we reached there, we heard the noise of someone else coming and so he had to press in with me. He had to kiss me again as he had outside and set my emotions all a-whirl. He wasn’t like Garrin at all. He lifted me in my pretty dress and stockinged feet and laid me on Gennee’s bed, leaning over me to kiss me so nicely on my sticky lips. I should never have put my arms up around his neck, the soft warmth of his kisses making me feel so odd. I actually liked kissing him.

Richo lay on the bed beside me. His hand went on my hip but I didn’t push him away. He stroked my blue and black dress so softly and helped me to get out of it and ready for bed, in Gennee’s nightie, which he thought was mine.

This is so silly and stupid, I thought as Richo told me what a lovely girl I was which I knew wasn’t true. “I just want to console you after such a night, pretty Arrathee,” murmured my lover. I couldn’t believe the pleasure and emotion coursing through me as he caressed my hips, panties and stockings.

I never thought I was bespelled at all, that the fragrance he gave off was of something called ‘lovebane’. I learned that and how much of a con-

trolling agent lovebane was, later on. It seemed so innocuous at the time, just a lovely scent and the hint of something that told me that this man was really likeable. Ooo, I shivered at his obvious liking of me.

I was saying to myself that I wasn't going to do this, make love to another man, even as I did it, recognizing gentle, feminine feelings in me hardly enough, or so I thought, to object to. I acceded to everything Richo wanted. I spurted all over him, hugging him as he entered me, my legs so tight about him. I wriggled and bounced as Gennee had told me I should with a man. Then, I couldn't think how I'd got to that stage with a man, welcoming him into me, and joining with him as if I really was the girl Richo said that I was.

I squealed and thanked him for loving me while Richo's lips slid all over my body, sending sensations through me I didn't know existed. How wonderful it was to be a woman and to feel as I did. I was in love with him but he wouldn't stay with me.

I finally understood after he'd left. The feelings I'd had began to evaporate. Ooo,

Richo, my wonderful lover, had used some love philtre on me! I'd fallen for it so easily, loving it. I, the one supposed to be a witch, was bespelled by him! I had to admit to myself that I had, for a time, anyway, loved being a girl with a man. It was an awful realization.

I could do nothing but re-tape myself hurtfully as an atonement. I put on my panties and stockings resentfully, reset my breasts and my bra, brushed my hair and re-did my makeup savagely. I'd been a girl. I had to find out what that philtre was from Richo.

I'd thought it was his masculine essence that had entranced me at first but, of course, it wasn't.

I still had loving thoughts about Richo and the joys of making love as a woman when I met Gennee at first shift. She enthused about me making love to three men. Well, that wasn't right, I thought sourly, feeling so real and boyish again, no matter how I'd re-dressed myself so femininely. And it hadn't been three men who thought or knew they'd made love to me.

It was four. Only one had I really enjoyed and it had been the shortest. If I found whatever Richo used on me, I'd be an avenging witch and have my revenge on him. After I got the recipe, of course, and, I shuddered at the thought, I'd have to check out that it worked, wouldn't I?

That thought probably made me look distraught which made the other cabbies be really nice to me after the 'hard' first Celebration I must've had. It wasn't like that at all, I wanted to tell them, but I didn't dare. I didn't want to discuss, as they were all doing, what men had done to me and what I'd done for Richo. I didn't want to talk about that, not even with the bubbling, utterly girlish Gennee.

Every 'girl' seemed to have learned a different walk at the Celebration. The girls were swishing and swaying as if they were still in dresses and high heels when they moved to their morning tasks. Tushes wiggled and got the attention they seemed to crave. Hands stroked and tushes wriggled more in delight. Lipsticked smiles sometimes turned into

kisses as all the girls, save for just one exception, me, seemed to be man-crazy!

Lots of men, too, were paying attention to all of us girls, sitting different girls in their laps at the tables. That was when I saw, in shock, several of my cadet brothers from *Sword*, delighting in kissing other men. Hirdy looked like his sister! He seemed to have completely assumed his role as a girl, necklace, earrings and hair clips in view, as he settled in one man's lap and definitely encouraged the man to press between 'her' thighs. Maybe it was just simulated sex but the way Hirdy's rounded tush was moving, I don't think the guy she was sitting on could have failed to come with a 'girl' like her.

I could also see why I hadn't recognized two cadets in dresses at the Celebration as their hair color had changed. Now they were as blonde as the girls around them. Grebb was wearing fake, bouncy breasts as well, I saw, a cold shiver passing through me, while Kaff's makeup, complimented by long, long earrings and fake blonde hair down his back, had turned his sulky features into those of a pouty girl. The crewmen at 'her' table all had to touch and caress 'her' while she ignored all indignities, pausing only to kiss several men, smiling and batting dark-outlined eyes in pleasure as she did so.

Garrin picked me out of the line of scurrying servers, as we 'girls' tried to ready the tables for the incoming changes of shift. He stopped me as I swayed by him. I was mincing like Gennee. She'd told me to walk just like her. I was actually doing it. Yes, my hips swayed and skirts swirled, my chest and 'between my legs' tightly bound. I didn't see Garrin until he grabbed me. Oh, he had to kiss me

passionately in front of everyone, as he had the night before.

“He really believes he had you,” Gennee laughed at my flushed face as I broke free from Garrin and held onto Gennee’s hand. Embarrassment and humiliation must have showed there. Most of the ‘girls’ called out compliments to me on really being one of the crew now. My face was as red as my mouth as I was congratulated by all the girls I finally joined with, men hollering at me from everywhere to come and sit on their knees. What they would do with me was described by many in exaggerated detail.

“It’s a good job you came down here in a skirt,” Gennee laughed at me. “As I told you, grays on the outside except after a Celebration. Once we’ve celebrated, we girls,” how I shuddered to hear her say that but she said cabbies always used that word to describe themselves. I should get used to using it, “are expected to be feminine underneath, in panties and stockings. The crew calls it being a real cabbie.

“We girls have to wear perfume, too. We have to wear our makeup and do our hair as girls do. Or we’ll be criticized and told we’re ugly hags. I don’t know about you, Arrathee, but I can’t take a whole shift of insults, or trysts in the storerooms.

“So, you do what I do, Arrathee my girl. Don’t wipe that lipstick Garrin smudged off you! Put some more on. The crew will leave you alone, believe it or not, till the next Celebration. Now, you, my girl, learn to wiggle that cute tush of yours. I can’t have a girl friend, you know, who isn’t at least half as girlie as me!”

“You should get yourself a new friend,” I’d said to the feminine, chattering Gennee, who followed me

as I set up tables. Yes, Gennee was wearing stockings and a garter belt with her panties. That's why I wore the same. Girl friends were like that, Gennee said! I'd call my fellow cabbies 'girls' now, I'd promised Gennee. And I did because everywhere I looked, madeup eyes and lipsticked mouths smiled at me. She began putting paint on my face and gloss on my lips.

"Be best friends with Fessee!" I hissed at Gennee as the blonde 'mother' sashayed past us cabbies as if she was still Goddess of the Celebration.

"No can do," said Gennee with a pretty pout. "The undercaptain said I was to teach just you and crew you in! Everyone thinks you crewed in last night, anyway. I mean, three trysts! We tease you new ones about three and four men doing you but most girls, after a first man like Garrin, think they're in love! They only do one man, really! It'll take until the next Celebration for the infatuation to wear off."

I'd been trying to do what Gennee was telling me to do, act like a man-crazy girl, and look what it was getting me, the opposite of what Gennee said. Yes, Garrin grabbed me again, his lips once more assaulting mine.

Garrin kissing me forcefully was a reverse of custom, I gathered later from other 'girls' like me. But I shook in deep chagrin at the time at what was done to me, that I allowed to be done to me. Garrin was infatuated with me, or, as the girls said it, in love with me. They didn't seem to know, any of them, that there'd been witches' potions at work in the Celebration. More than one, I'd learned so femininely from Richo. Thinking of Richo having me, made me shiver all the way to the tips of my stockinged toes.

Familiar hands went around my waist as I prepared to take more tea and hot water to the tables I had to serve. Garrin had found me again. He put the pans down and lifted me up. I squealed and kicked but everyone heard and was cheering as Garrin carried me, a huge grin on his face, into a room at the back of the kitchens. He threw me on bedding arranged there for the purpose he put me to. He began to make love to me, demanding I be a woman for him. Hadn't once taught me anything, he wanted to know sarcastically!

I was squeaking as his hand covered my mouth, my skirt pulled down to reveal the female under-clothing I was wearing. Garrin seemed to think I'd worn panties just for him!

"Shall we have that drink now that you wanted me to have?" hissed Garrin as I tried to push him off me with my so feminized hands and fingernails. He frightened me terribly as he grinned knowingly at me. "I'm not as gullible as Darris," he said, his mouth turned down in a sneer as he revealed to me he knew I'd spiked his drink.

Garrin's hand left my mouth as I gurgled in protest, my insides churning. He possessed my lips firmly, as a man does a woman's glossy, sticky lips like mine. He jammed himself firmly between my legs, stroking my stockings as I wriggled and bounced beneath him, trying to get free.

That was how a stiff-faced Darris found us. "Get out of here!" snarled Garrin. "If you really want her, you can have her after I've finished with her!"

"Bluebands are here for Arrathee," said Darris. "Undercaptain wants her. Gods, is that how I looked

when I was having you, Arrathee? As besotted as this boy does between your legs?”

“Tell them to get their own girls,” snarled Garrin, as I cringed and tried to hide beneath Garrin from Darris’ prying eyes, the touch of his hand on my stockinged leg. “Arrathee is mine!”

“Tell the undercaptain yourself,” said Darris, edging away from us but staring at me with a grin on his face.

He was about to go out the door behind him, but it was pushed open some more by someone else, I saw in fright, someone big enough to push Darris to one side. “Tell me what I’m supposed to say to the undercaptain, Garree that used to be,” growled a big, blueband-sashed man who pushed contemptuously past Darris.

“Maybe,” the deep baritone went on harshly, “I’ll have to return you, pretty Garree, to your former occupation and try you out once more myself. I seem to recall a girl in stockings and panties like your cabbie love-girl there.” I shuddered as he meant me!

“Oh, yes,” a second blueband said as he pushed into the room. “The cabbie we recruited from that Quarrence ship we collided with. Such a clumsy ship we’re on, Mooth, aren’t we? Yes, I do remember ‘her-r-r!’” The last word was really stressed! “Lovely Garree danced a pretty frenzied reel, her flimsy skirts flowing all over me, I recall, showing me legs that were so nice to touch. Got me to bed her, did Garree. What was that fragrance she used that she gave me for my sister when I went ashore in Bridgewater? Some Foreshore thing with upland flowers, wasn’t it?”

Garrin shoved me away from him, his face flaming, as mine had did when men talked about me as if I was a girl. "You'd never have done that to me if it wasn't for the witchy stuff you forced on us!" he snarled.

I gasped at him, someone who'd once been a 'girl' like me. He'd been a girl like me and he'd managed to stop! Now he was a boy, a man! I could do whatever Garrin had done, I thought with a tremble, my skirt swishing. I could, I would become a man again, like him.

Garrin jumped up, boiling mad, bouncing off the bedding he'd pushed me down on, the girl he was going to make love to. I shuddered with fright. as I frantically tried to conceal the womanly panties I'd worn because of Gennee's girlish.

Dressed all girlie, makeup on my face, jewellery in my hair, I wouldn't stand out, Gennee had claimed. Right, with hair like mine, I should have known that men wouldn't leave me alone. Garrin hadn't. I shuddered at the memory of how exotic and feminine I'd looked as I danced with crewmen. And thoughts of Richo and how I'd wanted him, his kisses so wonderful that I'd had to have more ...

Oh no, I thought bitterly, shivers and chills stampeding through me, driving away the images of being another man's woman, I wouldn't stand out, would I, not one of the few dark-haired 'women' on the ship!

Garrin stood in front of the bed, staring at the blueband, breathing hard, his hand on something at his belt.

"Want to go for it, Garr-ee?" the blueband taunted the cook's helper, a former girl, who wanted

to make me his girl friend now. I looked at Garrin as well with a shiver, wondering how he'd made the change from cabin boy to this. Was this what happened to the 'girls' if they became too masculine? Could I be like Garrin, and get away from skirts and dresses, makeup and perfume, as well?

Garrin's muscles rippled as he pulled his shirt back on, his hand free from the belt knife that he'd probably been reaching for. "I'll see you later," he said thickly to me.

"Yes," said Darris, a smile on his face. "Garree," he rolled his tongue around that, making Garrin flame in fury, "will be waiting for you, darling Arrathee. Doesn't she look so sweet with your lipstick on her lips?"

I thought Garrin would strike Darris, the cook, his supervisor. But after another furious glare at Darris, Garrin left at a run as if he couldn't trust himself one more second in the other's company.

"Put your panties on," said the blueband to me.

*****end of part one*****