



Reluctant Press presents:

The Captain's Seawife

Philippa Peters



AN 'ADULT TV' E-BOOK

Copyright © 2011, Reluctant Press

Mags, Inc/Reluctant Press TG Publishers

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

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

Protect Professional Fiction on the Internet

We need *your* help! We spend several hundred dollars to edit, illustrate and typeset *each story*. It is important, therefore, that everyone works to help keep professional fiction alive on the Net.

The civil penalties for copyright infringement can be severe, including substantial monetary damages, injunctive relief, and liability for attorneys' fees incurred in prosecuting a case. In addition, criminal penalties may be imposed if someone willfully infringes a copyrighted work for commercial advantage or private financial gain.

Mostly, though, we just want to be able to keep offering this service to our authors and our readers.

Report stolen books by using the contact form at reluctantpress.com or call us at 800-359-2116

Thank you.

THE CAPTAIN'S SEAWIFE

by **Philippa Peters**

Continuing "Boys Can't Be Witches"

XI. A WITCH'S PLACE

It took the arrival of two carriages, many trumpet blowings and the combined presence of both the Queen and a Seafarer Lord to quell the riot on the docks. There were bodies laying in the dust before it was all over. Five other young girls cowering in fear with me in the eating room, while a laughing cook recounted the battle for his friends, praising someone named Hedward for 'accounting' for four of the foe.

When the cook entered the room where the girls and I cowered together, I realized why he was so jovial. He must have been sprayed more than once with the solution of annovare. I guess that was all that my aunt had on hand as she tried to quell the fighting in the markets and on the docks.

All of the men who came in reeked of the mood-changing solution, seeming as happy as can be, though I saw several covered bodies being carried aboard. The young man who had led me aboard came back to collect us girls one by one with a wide grin on his face. I was the last. I felt distressed as I minced along with him, my golden hair tied back with the ribbons I had been given. I was sure the drugs my aunt had put into me must have worn off, yet I felt the urge to be dainty and feminine beside my male escort, so different in appearance from another boy like me.

Hedward led me along the seaward deck to the stern of the ship past many sailors who stopped what they were doing to stare at me. I wished I had kept the cap as I tried to keep my hair out of my eyes. I swung my hips as I walked but I did that naturally now. I couldn't have strutted like Hedward, like a boy, if I had wanted to.

"Nice," one muscle-bound sailor stated as I minced by him. That started a lot of catcalls after me as I was paraded the length of the ship. I blushed a bright crimson as I swished past so many men; they complimented me on being a beautiful young woman.

The young man who led me was grinning in pleasure at me even as he indicated to me to pass the guard and enter a cabin that must have been the Captain's. One man was sitting at a table while another stood to one side, looking out of a glassed window towards the

dock and whatever was still going on there. I remembered who I was and what I was supposed to be and nervously curtseyed to the men, who smiled. The one sitting gestured to me to rise and to sit opposite him.

“Thank you, Hedward,” said the man behind the desk. He glanced over at the man at the window. “Another one,” he said briefly nodding at the youth. Hedward had pulled out a chair and tugged on my arm to have me sit down before he left. I thanked him with a smile and sat, crossing my legs in my dress, feeling female and weak under the scrutiny of the two older men. I had been too long in dresses and curls. I felt that I was a woman now. I didn’t know how to tell the Captain about the predicament I was in.

The thin man at the window spoke with an accent I could hardly understand. “You should have corrected him,” I think he said, looking at me as I nervously tried, once more, to push my hair back. Oh, what wouldn’t I have given for a girl’s barrettes or a head scarf.

“And he would just have smiled at me and reassured me,” the man at the desk said with a forced laugh, “that everything was well and going to be well for ages to come.”

He was middle-aged, the man at the desk, his face lined as if he creased his eyes often. He wore white sailor’s clothes as all the Seafarers did. There were buttons on his shoulders and I took them to indicate rank of some kind.

“And who are you?” the man behind the desk asked me. “Hedward said that you were the first woman to seek our aid and that men-at-arms were chasing you.”

“Yes, sire,” I croaked, hugging the shawl tighter about me as I saw his eyes stray to my chest and the little tents I exposed there. Yes, please, please, think of me as a woman. “They, they were all going mad, seizing girls and pulling off their skirts. I ran with my friends, Lara and Maris, but they ran into a house and I was too far behind. They closed the door on me and...”

I had a lot more of my story to tell but the man with the insignia of rank raised a hand and stopped me. Keen eyes as blue as my own studied me. “There are women now at the end of our sally-ports. They will examine you as you leave the ship. If you are a woman,” he said that with emphasis and a smile, “you will pass them unharmed. If you are not a woman, you will be taken by them to the Queen.”

I stared at him as he studied me. I had the last of Bredden’s gifts in my sleeves but I had not used them as I didn’t know what they would do. Some might have been deadly or they might have been slow-acting sleep powders which would be like tossing water or dust into the eyes of whoever was trying to take me.

Well, there was always the river, I thought. But in skirts like I was wearing I would surely be tugged down and drowned if I couldn’t get the dress off. Then, if I survived, the men who might rescue me would see me in my women’s underclothing. I shuddered as I thought of what I would look like, part man and part woman.

“Thank you, sire,” I said woodenly, standing and trying not to betray the fevered thoughts coursing through me. I felt my skirts moving against my legs.

“This is the one,” said the man behind the desk, looking at me intently. The thin man behind him be-

came instantly alert and a throwing dagger appeared in his hand.

"She could be one of us with that hair, couldn't she?" the middle-aged man said as I froze, staring at the dagger about to be launched, wondering how I could avoid it.

"You are the witch they are looking for, aren't you?" the man at the desk said to me. "Sit, my Lady, please. Can you tell me why my men are so happy after the bloody fight they were just engaged in? Are they indeed bespelled?"

Sitting would put me at a disadvantage with the dagger thrower but I would be able to reach Bredden's weapons in my sleeves. I sat and smoothed my dress beneath me as femininely as I could, palming something, I knew not what, in my hand, ready to try to protect myself.

Then it came to me that the Captain, if that was what he was, had called me 'My Lady' even though he had said I was the witch the Queen was looking for. I squirmed in my feminine underwear and female dress as I glanced up fearfully at the older, watchful . If he thought I was the witch, then he would also think...

"Yes, they are bespelled," I whispered across the desktop to the man who must be the of the ship. I had to trust someone if I was to stay on this ship, I thought in a panic, even if he thought I was a boy in a dress. I might as well start with the . "It's annovare but not a strong solution. It will wear off within half a day, save for the few who get double or treble doses."

"Annovare?" asked the man at the desk, turning to the man beside him.

"A mood-changer, a euphoric," said the man with the dagger still in his hand. "Used deliberately at nobles' parties here. All things appear brighter, gayer, more brilliant than they really are."

"Where did it come from?" the Captain asked, smiling again at me, studying me. I felt distress coming over me as I thought about what he had said would happen to me if I wasn't a girl. Stupidly, I had confirmed to him that I was a witch, the one the soldiers had been searching for. That meant, of course, that I must be what they said of me, not a witch at all, but a boy in a dress. I waited for the men opposite me to laugh at me but, strangely, they didn't, these Seafarers.

"The Queen's carriage was wafting it into the air as they went down Castle Street to the Street of the Apothecaries. I saw it come into the market from the round window in the other room," I said. They both grinned at me when I said that. I guess they had their own term for such a thing and I had just shown myself to be a real landsman, or landsgirl. I bet they had a word for that as well. "They wouldn't have had time to change to other, more controlling agents," I finished.

"How would you know?" scoffed the thin man. "It's like a mist that evaporates in the air."

"It's like a mist but it floats and stays in the air until it attaches itself onto whatever moves through it," I told him.

"And you knew it was *annovare*, how?" asked the Captain.

"I can smell it," I said wearily. The two looked at each other as if I had just said something of great importance. "I don't know why you can't. Hedward reeks of it but the big man with the blue scar on his cheek..."

“Our cook,” said the man at the desk, smiling at me.

“He’ll sleep for a day with what he has clinging to him and wafting about him,” I told him, drawing on the knowledge I had learned as I helped my mother assemble her potions.

“What do you have in your hand?” the man I took to be the Captain of this immense ship suddenly asked.

“I don’t know,” I told him, shivering. I saw the thin man with the knife tense. “I was given it to defend myself with when I escaped, or I think I was. It might kill whoever I loose it on or I might find that it is a love potion or an agent to cure sheep-rot. I won’t know until I use it and can smell or taste it out of its wrapping.”

“Put your knife away, Wesset,” said the man, looking to his companion, who obeyed him most reluctantly. “Can you put your package away, my Lady? I assure you that I have never had sheep-rot in my life. You have nothing to fear from us, my Lady, nothing.”

“You don’t intend to keep her, him, on board, do you?” asked the thin man sharply. “With whom else we have on board.”

I shuddered at his use of the male pronoun as the one called Wesset looked at me. I could almost sense the disgust rising from him as if he had ingested one of my aunt’s potions. I glanced down at my chest and saw by the evidence of my clothes and of my shape that I wasn’t a normal boy.

“I heard what the men said that the Baracts told them,” said the Captain, “but they had it the wrong way round. The witch who escaped wasn’t a warlock in disguise but a young witch who resembled a Seafarer who made herself look like a man to escape. The poor, foolish Baracts are searching people of the wrong

gender. They should be looking for a man who is really a girl."

"The men will never believe that," said Wesset doubtfully.

"They will if you tell it to them now as a great joke played on the Baracts," said the Captain with a sardonic smile. "Just tell a few of our men like Sando or toprieger Mallo. It will be all over the ship in one bell and through the dockside and into the castle before dark."

"The Queen and her witch will know it's not the truth," Wesset went on, staring at me.

"Who cares?" said the Captain. "Lord Assonder isn't going to get a treaty here anyway. Our other guest is quite right. It is a coup taking place here. And the best we can do in this situation is get out onto the river. Tell the Baracts we have returned all the ones who sheltered with us. Confuse them with different numbers at each portway and include the boys we released as well."

"But we didn't," began Wesset. "Oh," he said, with a sudden wide grin. "Oh, yes. This will be fun."

"Act like you've had a dose of the medicine they gave us as well," said the Captain. Acting like Hedward, the thin man left. The Captain rose and came round the table. He bowed over me and took my hand, while my heart fluttered. "My Lady," he said softly. "I'm Sea Captain Anjaro and I see that you have Seafarer blood like me."

Captain Anjaro then kissed my hand, treating me with every courtesy as if I was a woman sitting with him. But I had just heard the two men discussing me and they knew very well that I wasn't a woman, I

thought. I looked at the smiling man caressing my hands, admiring my long, woman-shaped fingernails.

"We shall get you finer clothes than the dregs you are wearing now," said the Captain. "I will get Wesset to shake down some of our cabin boys of your size. They will not like giving up their finery but I will promise them all new dresses once we get back to Bridgewater."

I stared at him in horror as he smiled confidently down at me. "Oh, come now, My Lady," said the Captain, an amused smile on his lips. "You must know how long ships like this are out of harbor. It's a four-month run for timber to Omason and four months back with no female company. If you stay with us long enough, we will have a ball in your honor. You will see that a ship of this size will have a fine, feminine turnout for such a ball.

"No, we are not like these cold, repressed northerners on this ship. We can appreciate feminine beauty in whatever guise it appears. At sea, no one will care that you wear a dress, My Lady, or that you accompany the cook to his cabin each night. Once we start a long voyage, our cabin boys keep us all sane and we treat them with the love and courtesy they deserve."

I felt so awkward then. I wanted to deny that I was a boy. But one look at his watchful, intelligent face and I knew that I couldn't. He had a look on his face that showed me that he didn't care what gender I was. At least, that's what I thought as Anjaro treated me as if I was a girl. And that made me feel strangely nervous. I answered his questions about the last ball I had attended and the dress I had worn, my heart fluttering when he said, "I would have loved to have seen you in such a creation."

Wesset returned so I was able to contain my maid-enly confusion as he and the Captain talked openly about what I needed as a woman. I was stunned at their frank discussion about who to get cosmetics from and who would have the nicest dresses and female underclothing.

"I think we need a ladies; maid as well," said the Captain, shocking me to the roots of my long, blonde hair. "Gresso or Taleo?"

"Gresso," said the thin man immediately. When he raised an eyebrow, the thin man went on unabashedly, "Well, he is the prettier girl."

"Very well," said the Captain, amused. I wondered what kind of world I had stumbled into. "Arrange it, Wesset."

"Captain," I said nervously, flushing intensely, thinking of what a maid would see, what she, he, would say to the crew about me.

"Gresso knows how to be discreet," said the Captain, forestalling what I wanted to say. "Taleo would be bullied right away into disclosing all your personal secrets and we cannot have that, now can we? But if you can show some of the cabin boys how to make up so prettily as you have and how to walk as femininely as you do, I know all the crew will be praising you."

And with that, he bent and kissed my hand again, laughing at my absolute confusion and distress at being assigned the gender I wanted to belong to.

XII. A WITCH'S MAID

The great ship got under way. It seemed like a dream come true as I was given a cabin to myself. I watched Hillaire disappear from the porthole while I

sat on my bunk in my dresses, wondering if I was doing the right thing. I hadn't yet dared to ask about my father, if he even still existed. He might be a great man. And how would such a man react to know that he had a son like me, a boy in a dress, on a ship.

I shivered as I thought about what the men on this ship expected from boys in dresses. I didn't doubt that they would expect the same from me, especially if I proved not to be a true or great witch as they also clearly expected me to be.

I had realized that what I was telling the Captain of this massive, Seafarer ship was partly unknown to them. I had been giving away Baract secrets, I thought. I had the impression that they might have suspected but not known about witches and witchery. But they had secrets of their own as well.

I would not have expected the feminine wardrobe that was supplied to me unless there had been many females on board the ship. Men must have bought such silky nighties and panties for their women back in the Islands. I quivered in delight at the nightie I wore to sleep as the great ship swept at fantastic speed down the great river estuary we called the Mouth of the Desseny.

"Oh no, milady," said my 'maid,' one Gresso, in response to my inquiry. He arrived to meet me the second day out, in identical garb to all the other members of the ship. He might have been Hedward's younger brother. "We never have women on board the ship save as passengers, like yourself. And the men don't spend money ashore on women unless they can have them in their hands."

"But, in Terraire, earlier this year," I said, wondering suddenly at what had happened to me since that

day my mother had been murdered, "I met a Seafarer girl. She was with other members of the crew who called me a Turling. The men smelled of sea salt but she smelled of seaflowers and sweetsoap."

"If she was part of a crew, she was no woman," said Gresso, his blonde hair held back in a braid, his thin face young and beardless, like mine. "Some cabin boys so like being on the sea that they never go back to land, not in the Many Isles, anyway. Wearing a dress off ship there would mean the pillory and public shaming. But some can go ashore on the Russet Foreland, if they are pretty enough, like you, milady."

I smiled nervously and thanked him for the compliment. Gresso then wrapped his arms about himself. "It's the women that come to jeer at one caught in his petticoats who are the worst," he whispered in a show of real fright. "That's why some, like Niccuro, the Captain's seawife, never go ashore."

I had a guest cabin to myself. Gresso brought bath water, scented with the seaflower the Seafarers call the water rose for me to take a womanly bath. Its aroma is like a rose but it really isn't a rose at all. It gets richer as it decays and releases its pleasant, dreamy fragrance into the air. It was thrilling to bathe again like a woman, to wash my hair and sense the sweetsoap and water rose seeping into my every pore.

Gresso had brought a basket of water rose and placed them in the little closet for the dresses he had brought me. He scattered them through the drawers that contained a wide collection of a girl's underthings. I loved the aroma as I didn't want to smell of violets any more as my aunt had made me.

The Captain, or so Gresso said, had paid handsomely for all the items surrendered to me; at the next

stop we made, the seamstresses were going to find days of extra work at making pretties for Seafarer sailors' 'sisters.'

I bathed, trying to keep cloths over my male parts but it wasn't that which Gresso's eyes kept straying to longingly, but to my breasts. It wasn't that they were huge or even entirely obvious but, with my long hair and thin body, they seemed to stand out. After a few meals, I was sure that they wouldn't. I wouldn't be ingesting any of my aunt's potions and so I should soon be shifting back to being Dedrick again.

Finally, Gresso could stand it no longer. "You, you are a warlock, aren't you?" he asked. I looked up at him, quivering, not knowing how to answer. "I mean, you passed yourself off as a woman, didn't you?"

Gresso looked at my face, his eyes adoring as they circled my face, taking in my hair and some of the curl still in it, my thin eyebrows, my thickened eyelashes and pierced ears. My skin, of course, was completely hairless, soft and pale like a girl's. A seven-day stay in a dungeon didn't appear to have changed that greatly.

"I'm not a warlock," I told him, as I thought of all the tales of warlocks that had circulated through Malesia and the Lowlands as I grew up. A warlock inevitably became drunk on power and became a great evil. Everyone knew that. A warlock was evil. A witch might be, in some tales. But witches could be good as well. It was why only women could be witches. Men who tried witchery invariably went mad, became warlocks and had to be killed by a great hero, often aided by a faithful, loving witch.

Gresso stiffened and stared at my chest. "Apologies, my lady," he babbled, looking away and flaming a

bright red. The poor idiot did actually think that I was female then.

Wesset, the Undercaptain, had brought the boy into the cabin I had been assigned and told him he was to be my maid and that he must help me bathe and dress. Then he could 'get pretty' himself for the rest of the journey. You'd have thought that Wesset was the Giftbringer himself at Harvest's End, the way Gresso reacted.

Now, Gresso kept his eyes away from me and looked distinctly embarrassed as if he was ashamed to be in the room with me. He thought I was a girl, I realized. I thought how this strange, inner world of the ship was totally different from normal life.

"Look," I said as I stood in the bath tub and revealed myself to my maid as a male.

The look on Gresso's face changed right away. The embarrassment and dismay were swept away to be replaced by something akin to pleasure or delight. I was already regretting my impulse to show him that I was a man when he burst out in a babbling speech. "Oh, my Lady," he said in awe. "You are just like us."

"You're a Turling as well?" I asked him as I took the towelling from my maid and began to dry myself.

"Oh no, my lady," said Gresso earnestly. "I am true bred on both sides of the blankets, my lady." And he explained all about cross-breeds and 'true bloods.' I mentioned the ship, *The Breeze of Far Oceans*. He told me that, yes, that was a Faroyan ship, from one of the smallest islands, Faroy, on the Inner Sea, where purity of breeding was a condition for settlement and crewing on their ships.

“But they only have four or five ocean farers,” said my maid as he dried my legs, then tried to help me into the tightest pair of panties I had ever put on.

I was about to tell him that they were far too tight when he moved me around, pushed my male parts into me and pulled the panties tighter. He laced me in them as he lifted them over my buttocks. I felt as though I had been bound and taped by my aunt.

Chattering on, ignoring my discomfort, Gresso then assisted me into frilly, white panties that any girl would have enjoyed. I hadn’t noticed that there was a looking glass inside the door of the closet. Gresso opened it so that I could see myself in my panties. He smiled over my shoulder as I looked at the girl in the glass. Gresso chattered on about how lovely I was and how all the men were longing to be with me.

“But I’m sure you’ll be for His Lordship, won’t you?” said Gresso gaily. “Or for the young guest next door, milady. If that one wasn’t royalty, he’d be in a dress as well as you and me very soon. But you can’t do that to a Prince, I suppose.”

“A Prince?” I gasped.

“Oh, yes, milady,” smiled my maid as he brushed out my hair, twisting it in nimble fingers and fixing the curls tightly with barrettes. I had bought spices that would combine to make masheen and make my hair curly again. But I would have to set up a workshop before I could make myself a supply. I wondered how the men on the ship would like me in a mass of ringlets. I turned my head this way and that to admire my girlish face and curly hair in the looking glass. Oh no, I thought in dismay, don’t think such thoughts, don’t, I pleaded with myself.

But the more I told myself not to think of men treating me as a woman, holding me, dancing with me, and even kissing me, the more I thought of it. In the few moments I had had in the market, I had bought spices mostly that would make potions to either keep or to enhance my feminine looks.

“But, my Lady,” said Gresso thoughtfully as he curled my hair over his nimble fingers in ways I could never have done. “If you are, if, if you are like me,” he said very carefully, “and you know witchery, then, well, then you must be a warlock, as they say in the Foreshore.” That was the Seafarer term for all of the Baract Kingdom and its neighbors. “Or is it that you do not know witchery as the men say that you do?”

I had to smile at the confusion in the thin, earnest face of my maid. My hair was set in some kind of liquid he had concocted while I bathed. It was interesting that he talked of the men, always excluding himself from that number.

“I know some witchery,” I told my maid as he fitted breast bands to me. He already had pads ready that fitted under the mounds on my chest. In my breast bands and panties, I looked like a real girl. A young girl just starting to develop, but a girl with breasts nonetheless. It was a disquieting image. I stared at myself and Gresso clapped his hands together like a little girl and gushed at me, telling me how wonderful I looked.

“You know some witchery?” Gresso then asked hopefully, returning to a theme he seemed determined to follow. I looked at his flushed, eager face. “If you did that,” he motioned at my chest, “by witchery, could, could you do it for *me* as well? Seamen love to nibble there and we all wish we were bigger there. Baro

would love me and make me his seawife, if I could be a girl like you, I know he would."

The white, silky undergarment Gresso slid on me made me tingle all over as the silk caressed my body and my thighs. "If you are not a warlock," said Gresso with a little smile, holding up stockings that 'she' had found for me. He had begun to speak like a girl to me and I was seeing him more and more that way even though he was still in his male clothing. He smiled wickedly, "then you must be a witch!"

"Well, if you can be a woman," I told my maid, shaking as 'she' began to smooth the stockings over my legs, "I guess I can be a witch."

That made Gresso start and his mouth began to twitch. Together, both of us said, "But boys can't be witches," as if our mothers were there, telling us that. Gresso stunned me then by giggling with me, raising his shoulders and pursing his lips in a girlish way.

"Oh," I said. "You sounded just like a girl when you laughed with me."

"Oh, milady," beamed Gresso. "That is so nice of you to say that. I am trying." He knelt, lifted my dress and put a garter belt on me to which my stockings were attached.

Gresso insisted then that I must have my nails done and makeup applied to my face. "I can do it," I said and moved the heavy chair in front of the looking glass. Gresso watched me avidly as I did my eyes with kohl and lightly shaped my eyebrows. I had learned to do this from Maris, my maid in my aunt's house. It was second nature to me now. I loved seeing 'Lady Sherrene,' me, emerge in all her glory. I loved making up like a girl; by the way Gresso was looking at me, he

shared my joy in being feminine. I painted my lips with pink lip gloss and lightly dusted my face with scented face powder. A delicate seaflower mist, something akin to violets, went on my shoulders and chest and wrists as my aunt's maids had always done for me.

The red gown floated about me then; it was tight at the waist. When I stood in it, it clung to my female figure and I needed no enhancements, I could see. Gresso brought me shoes but I had to try on three pairs before I found high heels that fitted me well.

"A ship like this keeps a shoemaker," said Gresso, his voice higher-pitched than when we first met. "We cabin boys are always begging him for new shoes with higher heels. He will do them for a kiss and a, a, well, milady, you can guess what we have to pay but he wouldn't dare charge you the same for new slippers."

"I'm not female enough for a shoemaker?" I teased her. A little voice inside me told me to stop doing what I was doing. I wasn't a girl. I mustn't behave like one.

"Oh, milady, you would be far too much for Farro," insisted my maid. Gresso giggled again and smiled at me, looking so girlish that I could believe everything he said about how the cabin boys must be treated on the great ships. "But he likes me and he would make them, and some for me as well, if I did, well, flip my skirts for him."

I had an instant picture of Gresso over a table, in a maid's dress, the skirts flipped up over her back, while some man began to plunge into her rear.

"No, Gresso, no!" I told my maid, almost squealing in horror at the images in my mind. "Not on my ac-

count, never. You never have to lower yourself to that to get me a pair of shoes."

"But I'm your maid," said Gresso in puzzlement. "It's what maids do. When I worked for Niccuro, she had me do it all the time when she wanted new pillows or silk draperies for the Captain's bed."

"You let men make love to you to acquire pillows for, for the seawife?" I asked Gresso in disbelief. I couldn't refer to this Niccuro as 'she,, not having met her yet.

"It's one of the boons of doing the tasks of a maiden," said Gresso with a worried smile. "I, I don't mind my Lady, really. It's actually a lot of fun."

I looked at myself in the looking glass. I was a woman again as Gresso brushed my hair. Soft waves fell about my face. I put on the earrings, the necklace and bracelets, even an anklet my maid had selected from the jewellery box that had appeared for me in all of the other 'borrowings.'

"Oh, milady," said Gresso as he finished with my hair, putting a red ribbon through it to keep my hair together down my back. "I must hug you. You are so adorable."

A girlish boy hugged me and called me adorable. I should have been pleased. But I wasn't. Gresso hugged me and quite deliberately, I thought, pressed on my budding breasts.

"G-Gresso," I stuttered at him. "You are my maid, aren't you?" He looked at me, fear in his manner. "I will want to attend the Captain at times, but I cannot do it alone. I need the attendance of a maid."

"Yes, milady," said Gresso, packing away the cosmetics I had used.

“But I need a female maid,” I told Gresso. “I want to see you dressed like me.”

“Oh, milady, may I?” asked a thrilled Gresso. I waited while he went to the servant cabin and got the clothes he needed.

Gresso had no shame about stripping off in front of me and dressing himself in female undergarments. I was the one who was nervous watching this young boy change into girl’s clothes. It was like watching myself, I thought as I watched him don panties and a garter belt and smile with joy at the touch of stockings on his legs.

Sitting in front of me, half male, half female, thoroughly indecent to every belief of my upbringing, Gresso painted his face heavily, using rouge and facial creams to make his face appear girlish and fresh. He pulled his hair on top of his head and into a tie. Then, almost reverently, he brought a wig of blonde hair out of his pack and put it on his head.

A padded Gresso in a dress was a woman that could have served in the special shops adjacent to the dock front. His long gown complemented mine as it was green with a high neck and frills, showing off his padded attributes. He smiled at me coyly. I hadn’t the heart to tell him right away about his boyish manners but I figured that I could train him as my aunt and her maids had trained me. Gresso was certainly much more willing than me to be a girl.

A short walk on the deck brought us attention we didn’t need. Gresso preened like a little kitten at the attention and calls from members of the crew. I was mortified as the crew included me in their calls. Gresso greatly exaggerated everything I tried to teach him. He walked with a more pronounced swing than I would or could do.

After a few days while we sailed out of the Mouth and into the Black Sea, I finally realized the only way I could really feminize Gresso was to use the same methods my aunt had used on me. I needed to control Gresso. I needed to make some honeybane.

XIII. A WITCH'S HUSBAND

After few days aboard ship, the Captain himself came on deck with a small party of colorful individuals as I was trying to show my perky maid how to hold a fan and use it to flirt with a man.

The officers stared at me as I curtsyed to the Captain.

"Ah, Lady Sherrene," said Anjaro, smiling at me. "Lady Sherrene, may I present Lord Assonder to you. He was preparing to meet with King Tatheren in Hillaire but the King preferred your company to his, and so would I."

Lord Assonder was a dry, old stick. I curtsyed to him, as did Gresso, doing not so badly after I had insisted that he learn to be a lady or I would ask the Captain for another maid. That seemed to terrify him; he was trying to walk more like a girl now, even if he couldn't help smiling at every man we saw along the passageways or in the riggings.

"You'll be that witch, mi-, milady," said the Seafarer Lord. Clan Elder was what he really was in Seafarer parlance, I gathered, but since they had been visiting the 'Foreshore' for so long, our titles had crept into their usage. Certainly, Clan Elder Assonder behaved in a more lordly fashion than most of the Baract Counts that I had met.

"I am that witch, milord," I admitted with a smile at the Lord. "And I am a witch with a problem," I told him, batting my eyelids as the Queen did whenever she wanted to entice a man into doing something for her. I took His Lordship's arm and lead him about the deck while men whistled at me from above, safe from retribution as most were concealed by the flapping canvas.

"To be a witch, I need a workshop," I told him sweetly, amazed at myself for flirting with a man the way I was doing. "I also need a supply of potions, powders and the like as well as a distillery and mortar and pestle among other equipment. Maybe then I can be a witch, a true witch for this ship."

Assonder turned to Sea Captain Anjaro walking a pace behind us. "What say you, Captain?" asked the Seafarer Lord. Lord Assonder gulped nervously and I was surprised to see beads of sweat on his forehead.

"Can we control you?" Captain Anjaro asked me, his face wrinkles deepening as he smiled at me.

"Oh, yes," I told him. It was affectionate as he took my other arm and put it easily around his, treating me so naturally as a woman that I found my skirts swinging much more seductively about me. The stiff Lord beside me stared at me as if I was a rare fruit that he had just seen for the first time. He really didn't know how to treat a man in a dress; it occurred to me that he must not have travelled on ships much, as the gallant and charming sea Captain had.

"Come see me tomorrow and I will let you know what we will do about that," said the Captain, looking up at the sails and the sky. "But, now, my lady, you must go in. I must order all your admirers in the cross-bars to take in sails as it looks like we are going to get another blow."

I curtsayed again to the Captain. Anjaro smiled once more at me and kissed my hand. Lord Assonder didn't quite know what to do with me. He obviously knew that I was a boy in a dress. He should have bowed to me to acknowledge my nobility. A Baract would have done that but I wasn't doing what a male would do. I curtsayed again to him before I took my grinning maid and retreated with her to my cabin.

The following day, our sixth at sea, my maid and I left the cabin, me in the fine red dress, and she in her green. Together, we took the short walk to the Captain's work cabin. Several Seafarers were about, working or just lurking about to see us, knowing the time when I liked to go for a walk about the deck. Gresso, I couldn't call his feminine self that so I named 'her' Grace, raised his voice and babbled on like a screechy little girl, posing for the men who grinned at her and stared at me. I really needed to control her.

I looked at the gaping Undercaptain, Wesset, as I swept up the stairs and came out briefly on deck before the Captain's cabin. "You may introduce us, sire," I told Wesset. I heard gasps and excited murmurs all about me. Grace was waving to the men hanging off the riggings to get a better look at us. The familiar feeling of nausea was back in the pit of my stomach as I acted the part of a Lady of the Land. "Lady Sherrene Perisord and her maid, Grace, beg audience with your esteemed."

I didn't need my aunt's compulsive concoction to be obeyed. Wesset swept open the doors of the wide room and announced my maid and me. The Captain was stunned as he looked at me. Yes, I thought, I am a lot more woman than you can handle, Sea Captain Anjaro, but the man surprised me.

Anjaro rose as I curtsayed to him. He bowed to me while the young man with him sat and stared at me, stupefied. "My Lady Sherrene," said Captain Anjaro, his keen, blue eyes sparkling, "you know Prince Tathally, do you not? He has been aboard for a five-day before you, claiming sanctuary with us. I fear that he is right and King Merellen is in very great danger. But that young man will not hear a bad word about the Queen Larussa. He acts as if he has been bespelled."

"He has," said the Prince hotly. "And there is the Perisord witch who did it. I saw her at the ball they named for her. She had something on her fan and her handkerchief. It drove all the men wild, even old Osgard and the Count of Torthard, when she used it on them. She's aboard, I tell you, to kill me as she killed my father."

"That I would like to see," said the Sea Captain, raising my hand to his mouth and kissing it. I curtsayed again, knowing how feminine I looked as I had practised so often in the looking glass.

"You don't understand," said a trembling Prince Tathally. "She is a Perisord and the greatest witches are Perisords. Her grandmother destroyed the great ships in the last war between our peoples. When she died, if she did, she laid a hex on the county of Perisord so cruel that it draws in the unwary and drives them mad!"

"Is that true?" asked Anjaro, staring at me, Wesset was reaching for his knives, I could see.

"I'm not my grandmother," I told him, pirouetting so that he could admire my figure in my dress. "I know nothing about what she did. I can barely concoct cleansing agents!"

The Captain held me apart from him then, looking me up and down, with admiration for my dress or my figure, I couldn't be sure. I felt hot at the way he looked at me, at the smile of pleasure on his face, and at the way he put his arm about me, cuddling me, like a girl to him. If I hadn't known better, I would have thought that he was putting a spell on me, this Sea Captain.

"If she kills you as she killed your father, Prince Tathally," said Captain Anjaro, "it would be in the throes of passion in your bed, she beneath you."

Tathally went almost purple in rage as he looked at the Captain. The Captain held me as he would have a woman of his acquaintance.

"Yes," said the Captain holding my hand and not letting go. "Wesset, escort Nikki to Lord Assonder's cabin and move her things in there with him. She will get what she has been nagging me for and he will get what he doesn't know he desires out here on the gods' forsaken sea."

"Right away, Captain," said Wesset his eyes gleaming with suppressed amusement, departing swiftly.

"Lady Sherrene," said Captain Anjaro. I felt my temperature rising. All the things I wanted to ask him, about my father and mother, about what I could do on the ship for him, the workshop I must have, and so on, went out of my mind as his hand caressed my waist.

"My lady, there is a new post on the ship that you are the most qualified person to fill. It has just become vacant and I urge you to fill it," said the Captain, squeezing my other hand and drawing me even closer to him. Prince Tathally might not have been in the room at all with the way Captain Anjaro was smiling at

me. He was smiling at me just as Cory had so long ago when we lay down in the hay together.

My heart seemed to be jumping about in my chest. I was quivering as I looked up at him, knowing that he was going to say something to me, that I would acquiesce and that I was going to be his.

“What would you like me to do for you?” I asked him softly, thinking that he would ask me to be his witch, which I would do.

“The position of ‘s seawife just became vacant,” said Captain Anjaro, leaning towards me. “I want you to fill it.”

I heard gasps behind me, excited and thrilled sounds by Grace, my maid, disbelieving and annoyed ones coming from Prince Tathally.

“I, I can’t,” I breathed. Anjaro smiled and drew me to him, kissing me so thrillingly that I felt it down to the tips of my high heels.

I hung onto his lips with mine as his hands went about my narrow waist. My tiny buds of breasts became so aroused that I was almost thrusting into him. I heard the Prince and my maid making distinct noises of approval and dismay as the Captain caressed me. I didn’t care at all about them. I felt so wonderfully alive and feminine.

The Captain excused us from the company and Tathally stamped away from us. Anjaro, however, clung to my hand while I shook with excitement. He waved to my maid to leave us, then he led me into the cabin behind his workroom, which was more than a cabin. It was a huge, palatial bedroom. Wesset was just leaving by a side door, with bundles under his arm. But that didn’t matter to me, not when Anjaro put his

arm about me and hugged me to him. I didn't seem to have the will to resist him at all.

"My seawife," Anjaro whispered, running his hands down me. "You know what that is, what is expected of you." He lowered his head and kissed me full on the lips once more and I felt incredibly womanly. I felt my little breasts rise in my chest as my dress swirled about us. His hands caressed me as I clung nervously to him.

"My lord, I, I'm not," I whispered back, falling onto the bed, thinking of Cory and knowing that this time there would be no mother to intervene and save me. But I didn't want to be saved. Days with Grace, talking about men on the ship and how they regarded us girls as their playthings had prepared me for this, I thought, as this man, a real man, kissed and kissed me and neither of us was drugged.

His mouth covered mine and that I wasn't a woman didn't seem to matter. He lay beside me on the bed and opened my dress gently. I put my trembling hand on his to stop him as his mouth made love to mine. He touched my dress so gently, then guided my hand inside where his was going. For the first time in my life, I felt a man's caress on my breasts.

Reason fled from me as his kisses went down my neck, onto my chest, and to my tiny breast. As he kissed me, I almost had a seizure from the wild, passionate feelings overwhelming me. I hugged him close to me as he slipped my dress away from me. Then, at the moment I knew that I would have to face since I boarded the ship, I cowered away from him, clutching at my female underclothing.

Anjaro took my arms away from trying to defend my breasts and put them about his neck. His body

rolled on top of mine as he separated my legs and I felt his manhood pressing into me where I had no female organ to receive him. But it didn't seem to bother him as his kisses became more ardent. I found myself pressing to him as closely as I could, loving the way he was making me feel.

I felt that someone loved me for whom I was. I hadn't felt like that since I had left Doxford. I know I whispered "Cory" in Anjaro's ear but he only smiled down on me. He kissed me and put his tongue in my mouth. I felt such desire for him, this wonderful strong man who whispered "Sherrene" to me and told me what a lovely girl I was. Oh, how I wanted to be. I felt his hands on my rear, caressing me, lifting my underclothing and sending spasms of enjoyment through me.

"Undress me," Anjaro ordered me. I did as he continued caressing me and removing my panties. He knew all about the extra tight panties I wore and removed them easily. He moved me into a position to receive his manhood in a manner I had never thought a girl like me could do for a man. I felt his wetness on my bare rear and clung to him about his neck, crying as he entered me. I learned at last just what it was like to be a woman with a rutting male.

"You've not had a man before," whispered my seahusband. I clung to him, my arms about his neck, his hands stroking my stockings and my bare legs above my stocking tops. He was lifting my hips and driving my frenzied emotions into ecstasy as he possessed me and made me into a woman.

"I will be gentle, my darling, I promise," my seahusband murmured.

I hugged him and kissed him and surrendered to him eagerly in everything he wanted to do to me. He

stroked my little man thing as I wriggled and squirmed beneath him, every thrust of his making me want him to do it more and more even though I was spurting all over him as well. "Make me a woman," I sobbed and pleaded with him.

And my wonderful seahusband did just that. So well did he make love to me that I didn't even notice that the ship was moving out of the sight of land and into the ocean proper. I was leaving Hillaire, the Kingdom of the Baracts, the Black Sea and my aunt behind, at least for a while.

I cried and sobbed at the exultation I felt as I was filled, not once, but many times by my seahusband in a bed in which he pressed me down firmly. My bare legs ached until I learned to cross them over his muscled back.

"You haven't taken anything, have you?" Anjaro asked me as he held and kissed my face lovingly and squeezed my little 'nubbins' delightfully.

"No," I whispered as he raised my leg and kissed my thighs and stockings. Oh, how I loved him doing that!

"My darling," said my seahusband, smiling at me with his blue, blue eyes, "you will have to make one of your witch's potions for me in the workshop Wesset is building for you. We will put in to Liss Isle very soon and purchase every herb for you that they have, my little witch. If you make love to me like this every time, however, I am going to need some help to keep up with you. You must make that your first concern. Either that or you must find yourself two seahusbands. Which I wouldn't like." He kissed me ardently then, stroking my little man. "I want your sweetness all to myself."

I kissed and kissed Anjaro then and thought of the love potions my mother had made. Yes, I could make him the 'blue stuff' with the fragrance of violets and lovebane. Yes, I could see in my mind the various fragrances that made it up. If I could get access to a decent herbalist, I could make him a potion that would encourage him to do this to me every morning, every noon and every night.

I shuddered as the ship's Captain attacked my mouth again with tender kisses. His hands lifted my hips up high again to accommodate him in another bout of lovemaking. He lifted me so that my legs were about his neck and in reach of his wonderful mouth and tongue. A little voice began to tell me that I was still a boy and that boys couldn't be witches. I shouldn't promise anything yet that I hadn't delivered all by myself.

But, I argued with myself that it must all be true. I felt that I was a witch and, if I was, that must mean that I was Lady Sherrene, and therefore a girl, no, a woman, after all.

As my husband suckled my little breasts, and penetrated me yet again, I certainly felt like a woman. I squealed like one as well as I urged my husband to take me fiercely. I went into the throes of ecstasy as I pressed my body against his, letting his hands caress me where he would, trying to be the perfect female mate for my sea husband.



XIV. A WITCH'S WORKSHOP

Undercaptain Wesset became my constant companion as soon as we put into Liss Isle. There were two herbalists in the port and a chandler's where we found

the household artifacts, like mortar and pestle, an oil burner and supply of oil I needed so that I could produce some of the more complicated potions I wanted. I didn't have to purchase a still as there were a dozen aboard. Wesset brought me one that he said had been confiscated on the run into the Foreshore.

Of course, I didn't tell Wesset all that I was up to. He lied to me as well about why he was observing me. It was easy to tell, however, that he must have been an alchemist of some sort as I caught him making notes about what I was doing. Luckily, he was copying the recipe for masheen. Well, at least all his future ship-mates should have nice hair.

My aunt had said to me that the first thing a witch did was to use her knowledge to improve herself and I found myself doing that. Yes, I made masheen which fascinated Grace when I did her hair in ringlets, then had her do mine. She couldn't believe how the potion I made enabled us to wear our hair any way we wanted in just minutes.

I made some of the throat clasper as I called it. I had to compose the ingredients myself and it took me three attempts to get it right. When it was right, and felt right, I called in Grace to try it on her, but first she was amazed at my voice.

I hadn't realized how it had fallen into a boyish range. "Why didn't you tell me that I sounded like a boy?" I asked my maid who was staring at me as if she couldn't believe her ears.

"But we all do," Grace-Grosso said in the drawl she had affected ever since she first put on her dresses. "You can make me sound like you do?" she exclaimed, clapping her hands together in excitement. "Oh, will you, milady?" And so I did. I gave her the cordial;

within a day, she was going about our rooms, singing like a little nightingale in her joy at being female.

Yes, I made the controlling essences based on honeybane that I could have put in her bathwater. I insisted that she bathe in scented water each day. I could have put the honeybane in the cordial and controlled her that way. But I didn't because then I would have been like my aunt; besides, Grace was trying very hard to be a woman like me. Now, in her walk, in her dressing, in her hair styles and voice, she was like me.

My husband loved my new voice. He was startled by Grace when she arrived with new shoes for me. The four-inch heels meant that Anjaro could kiss me much more easily than when I was in flat slippers or bare feet. And he did so like to kiss me. I made some lovebane but didn't use it, storing it away as my mother had in a dark glass bottle. As far as Wesset knew, I was making collane and some of its derivatives to make the ship a healthier place to live.

I struggled to make myself an apron so Grace introduced me to her friend, a very nervous, thin cabin boy with a shy smile. Racho was a seamstress, if I could use such a word. He made me a pretty apron with frills about the pockets and sleeves. He shuddered at the gowns in my closet as if imagining himself in every one but he measured me as expertly as any of the seamstresses my aunt had used in Birchwood. He altered my dresses quickly and accurately, adding bows and flounces and gathers that made my clothing prettier and more feminine.

I was able then to wear the black, low-cut dress after Racho inserted lace about my bosom. He had also drawn in the waist and lifted the hem so that it wasn't dragging along the deck. Anjaro admired me in the

dress and kissed me as we stood by the rail, as the great ship seemed sped across the Ocean of Clouds towards the Inner Isles.

My seahusband held me in the kiss and looked down at me with my ringlets blowing in the wind, my skirts drafty in the sea breeze. "Cold, my love?" Anjaro asked me. "Would you like to go below?"

Our cabins weren't truly below, not like those of the crew. Grace had told me that they were so stifling and crowded below; she had become so popular because she had a spacious cabin to entertain her friends.

I looked up to Anjaro as he held me against the rail. Even in my high heels, I was smaller than he. Anjaro drew me close with a sigh. "But I don't know how much good I can be to you, darling," he whispered with a crooked grin that I loved so much. "Not after the way you enticed me into bed on my noon rest."

"I enticed you?" I asked him indignantly. I had just been standing at the workshop table when he sneaked up behind me, put his hands over my breasts and pulled me back into him. His enormous erection pressed into me. I hardly had a chance to kiss and welcome him before I was laid across the table, my skirts raised, my panties pulled down. I squealed and moaned as I was impaled by his desire.

"Here, my lord and master," I whispered to him and presented him with the lovebane potion I had made him. It was pale blue in color with the essence of sea violets in it, and yellow wortbane which was a key ingredient of mandane. That was made to inhibit a man's pleasures but, when it was combined with salty sea violets, it had the opposite effect. I recall my mother smiling affectionately once while making it.

“This is how I met your father,” I remember her saying. “He brought me a special package of sea violets. They work so much better than anemones or dune buds,” a flowering plant of the sea shore, common in Doxford. “He knew what I was using them for but we never had use for them between ourselves. He and I only had to give each other a look; then we’d have to be alone for a while, often a long while.” She used to smile and look out the window, looking far, far away, remembering my father. I sometimes watched her for long minutes on end just smiling and remembering. Often, I thought she was bespelled.

Anjaro hugged me and laughed. I blushed and explained to him that it would take a little time to work on him so he should know when he was going to engage with his, his lover, I flushed as I said it, well beforehand.

“My lover,” Anjaro whispered in my jewelled ear, swallowing the dose I gave him right away, “and my wife.”

We were clasped firmly in a kiss when we heard a scream, then the thud of a body hitting the deck. Men seemed to flood up from hatches everywhere. We ran as well, Anjaro’s arm possessively about my waist.

A man with a blue armband stood in front of us. “It’s Baro, Captain,” he said sourly. His eyes widened as he looked at me. Suddenly, I was aware of many men around me, all staring at me. Their eyes followed me as Anjaro pushed through the crowd to where Wesset was kneeling beside the man who had spoken to me in a tavern long ago in the dock market in Hillaire.

I remembered that he had been kind, seeing me as a girl in need of protection against the men at arms who

were assaulting women, disrobing them in their frenzied desire to find me. I'm sure that my aunt had ensorcelled the soldiers in some way.

Wesset looked up and saw me clinging to the Captain's arm. "What do I do, witch?" he barked at me. "What can stop blood spurting from the body like this?"

Baro had smashed a railing in falling, splintered wood had opened up his neck. At the rate that blood was pouring from him, he would bleed out in a very short time.

I lifted my dress and pulled off one of my petticoats while several men sniggered about me. "Plug the wound," I told Wesset, having seen my mother do that out in the fields at branding and shearing times. "And wait while I get some collane and fessere."

I tried to go back through the men. There was a sea of leering faces in front of me and it took a roar from Anjaro and the batons of the bluebands to clear a path for me to my workshop.

My heart raced as I thought of facing that gauntlet of men again. "Think they'd never seen a pretty woman before," growled Anjaro as I took a basket and brought everything I thought I might need to treat the injured man.

My petticoat was ruined in Wesset's bloody hands as I concocted a thick paste of collane and fessere. I remembered how my mother had told me that fessere closed inside the body. A pale, pink foam appeared as I applied it, just like the foam that appeared when my mother had done this. It gelled then appeared to firm as I used a cloth I had brought to wipe away blood from the wound.

“Don’t move him yet,” I cautioned Wesset. Another odor had caught my attention; it came from Baro’s leg. It was far too tightly bound to be comfortable. “What’s this?” I asked the youth holding his head. The boy looked at me with worried eyes. It was the boy who had stood in the window at the tavern and had run out to join in the fight to defend women against men attacking them.

“He, he has a sore on his leg,” said the youth slowly. “He was cut in the market fight and it went a little bad. Baro said it was getting better.”

“Better?” I asked him incredulously. “Flesh rot doesn’t get better. Can’t you smell it?”

All about me, the words ‘flesh rot’ spread like a flame. Suddenly, the space about me was clear.

Wesset was staring at me. The Undercaptain frowned. “Flesh rot?” he asked. “You’re sure, milady?”

I shivered. Here I was on the deck of a great ship, surrounded by hundreds of men and an officer had made a point of acknowledging me as a woman. “We may have saved him from dying,” I said, my voice an anxious, rising soprano to my own ears, “but we might as well not have bothered if his leg is infected.”

I put out my hand and, reluctantly, Wesset laid one of his throwing daggers in it. I opened the bandaged leg, gagging as I did so. Before I had finished, both the young lad and Wesset were gagging as well. I pulled off the pus-laden, bloody bandage and looked at the horrible leg.

“Baro won’t survive an amputation,” Wesset said in horror, “and he cannot live long with that.”

“No,” I agreed, looking down at the man who had fought for me on the docks at Hillaire. He had fought

to defend the honor of women and in so doing had allowed me to escape. What could I do to help him?

I looked up at my husband who was smiling in sympathy at me. "You did all you could, my love," he said loudly. I knew that praise was to defend me to the crew who might blame a woman, if they saw me as that, or blame a witch for the death of their friend.

"Wesset," I said to him. "Do this for me and ask me no questions. Cut away all that diseased flesh and put it in this bucket. The flesh behind will bleed but the major blood flow is in the back of his leg, behind the bone. Do as I ask."

I could see that Wesset wanted to argue. The red streaks on the leg meant that the flesh rot was spreading in the body, but I couldn't do nothing, not for someone who had thought me a woman and tried to protect me.

A bubble of merenthe and Baro was sleeping as Wesset scraped the new wound clear of rotting, black-smelling flesh. Behind me, I heard men gulping; one or two ran for the rails. I had more air and space then to work on a fortifier. The collane poultice would hold the wound and prevent further decay but I needed something to fortify the man and fight such an insidious infection.

I was working with collane and honeybane to cleanse and control Baro's reactions to being so badly wounded when I recalled teragol and how my aunt had fortified me with it. I blended the three. A harsh, metallic fragrance rose to my nose and I almost cried in relief. It was the same odor that enveloped my aunt and the alchemist Bredden. They must have been using it or some variant as a fortifier as well.

I was in tears as I made the potion. I took Baro's nose and poured the liquid I had concocted down his throat. He gulped and I wept.

"What did you do?" gasped Undercaptain Wesset as I wiped my hands, then dried my eyes.

"Did you send him on to the Grey Fields in peace?" asked the young boy holding his head.

"No," I cried. "I think that I might have saved him."

Wesset stared at me, a stunned look on his face. "Muslin salt poultices on the wounds," I said to Wesset. Captain Anjaro waved at Wesset to bring forward a stretcher crew that had been hovering by for some time.

"My love, my love," Anjaro said as he led me back to the Captain's deck through ranks of now respectful, quiet men. One even doffed his rigger's cap to me.

I fell into my husband's arms as I thought about how easily I could have killed Baro in my attempt to save him. Teragol? Why hadn't I thought of that before as a preservative, as a strengthener of human blood and tissue? I had lived with my aunt for long enough. I should have been a much better witch than I was. I had nearly lost a man I should have saved earlier. He must have fallen because of his leg wound. How could I claim I was a witch and not have noticed how far gone a member of this crew was?

"It doesn't matter if Baro lives or not," Anjaro whispered to me. "We all saw how you tried so desperately to save him. Do you know how long you sat there working on those potions? When you squealed and said, 'That's how they did it,' and made that last potion for Baro, it made hairs stand up on my neck. You worked a spell then, didn't you?"

I don't know why I didn't tell him the truth. I wasn't crying for poor Baro as he must have thought. I was crying because I had made a breakthrough in witchery because of my own frustration. I had created something no one had showed me. And it would work. Baro was not going to die. I had smelled him as he breathed out when the potion took hold and it had all been good. He would sleep till morning and I would fortify him again.

"And speaking of working spells, my darling," said Anjaro. I looked up at him in alarm as I heard the discomfort in his voice. "Do you recall that earlier tonight I took one of your potions? Would you like to know, my lovely Sherrene, that it works? Oh, how it works! I can testify that your potions, my darling, *do* work upon men."

I had to laugh through my tears then. Anjaro kissed me thoroughly and I felt him strongly through his clothes. He had to have me. I wouldn't have minded cuddling and holding him but he was right. My potion was spectacularly successful on him. Since I was one of the few femininely dressed people aboard and willing to accommodate him, I had to take him into me in different ways until it was me who was exhausted and spent from making love to my wonderful husband.

"I must do some of that blue syrup for myself," I told him when I awoke sleepily. He wanted to have me even more and didn't care if I bathed or not.

"No," said Anjaro firmly. "As your lord and master, I absolutely forbid it. But you can make more for me, my darling."

XV. A WITCH'S ACCEPTANCE

Baro recovered slowly. A steady stream of his fellows came by to see him in my work room which served as a hospital space for a while. He was a popular man on the ship. Later, he joshed me that his friends didn't come to see him. They came to look at me. I was the pretty one.

Baro had been going to call me a pretty boy, I knew, but he caught himself just in time and told me I was the prettiest seawife he had ever seen. That sent shivers through me as I was reminded of what I was. I curtsied to the men as they came in anyway and they bowed to me. Often they stood there staring at me as if they hadn't seen a seawife before.

Several sailors had things wrong with them. Most didn't say anything at all about what was ailing them. Strangely, my sense of smell seemed to improve, even increase since I had to create the fortifier. Wesset begged me for the recipe and I had given it to him, cautioning him on its use.

I guessed now that Wesset was the ship's alchemist. I didn't doubt that, when we finally landed in the Inner Isles, all the things he had learned from me were going to be shared with other ships of this clan and line.

A casual chat with Grace and Racho, both in grey dresses and blonde ringlets like me, told me a great deal about the society I was heading to. Why, I wanted to know, was it that the crew's names all seemed to end in 'o,' while the officers' names were so different, save for Anjaro.

"Oh, the won't ever change his name," said Grace in her high, lilting voice. Looking at her, listening to her, it was amazing how much like a girl she was now.

“We’re all Rats,” said Racho, in his quiet, serious way, busy with a needle as always, sewing images of seaflowers on different panties of mine. He was always happy to be in a corner of the room, quietly working away with me. He stayed close to me, his eyes down all the time as the hoots of the men rained down on us. He almost scuttled back into our rooms in his pretty dress after the stroll I insisted my maids make with me. “That’s what the mass of us sailors are. But I’d rather be a Rat than a Blueband.”

From them, I learned that all the land on the Many Isles was owned by the great clans. Lesser clans leased land; those without land were the laborers, workers, beggars, the populace or ‘backbone of the islands,’ in the Great Elder Maronder’s words. The Rats, in Racho’s words.

Bluebands were Rats who kept order. Often they worked for lesser clans; some would make their way in the world by marrying in. A sea Captain like Anjaro would be a prime candidate for marrying in at which time he would marry, change his name and only go out on the oceans again on a clan vessel.

Anjaro was actually a rarity, one who had worked up to command through the ranks. Lord Assonder was supposed to be in control of the ship but he left it all to Anjaro. My seahusband was popular with the crew, I gathered, which is why they left me alone and treated me as if I was a Lady. I was the Captain’s Lady, his seawife and his authority was also mine.

Anjaro had been the only Captain in the last ten years to brave the Mouth of the Desseny, I learned, to load us with grain from the inner Lowlands, sailing bravely right up to Hillaire, which many thought foolhardy. But now he had me, Grace explained, and that

made the voyage more than profitable. I meant to ask her why but I got distracted by my husband's arrival and his demand for all my attention. No one, it seemed, ever wanted to disturb us when we were engaged in seahusband-seawife behavior.

Then, I learned about the sea battle in the Mouth and the destruction of ten and more great ships by special bewitched flaming shells that blew ships half apart. "They had these little ships in the Narrows that opened fire on Clan Elder Varry's fleet. Only two ships got back to the Isles after that," bemoaned Grace.

"But we must have the grain," said Racho, eyeing me nervously, tossing his hair in a feminine manner. "That's why we always have to go back to the Fore-shore and pay the prices your King decrees."

"Not my King any more," I said with a shudder as I recalled how I had killed him. Certainly Queen Larussa had said that I had killed him. But when I escaped, she was in bed, sleeping with my aunt, and I knew that she had some witch's power as well.

"Are you going to make any of the stuff that gives you your little breasts?" Grace asked me then in her girlish voice.

Racho tried to hush her, looking most embarrassed.

"Ganasate," I said, naming the compound my aunt had fed to me. It had led to the little mounds on my chest and to the rounded buttocks, rounded thighs and hips that my lover, Anjaro, loved to stroke so much. I loved him stroking me there as well.

"If you make it, I will take it," said Grace earnestly. Racho just stared at her. "Choni will as well." I looked at Racho and raised an eyebrow and the boy in one of Grace's dresses nodded nervously again.

“You know what it will do to you?” I asked them. “It will make you sick for a while.” I could make sure the potions I made did that. I had Abris’s potion that I could use as a template to make an illness-seeming drug.

“I was as sick as a dog when I first went to sea,” said Grace, smiling.

“It takes a long time to work,” I told them. “You could go months and see no change at all, then it works slowly. And it changes other parts of you.” I patted my rear and ran my hands over my hips. “At least, I think that it does.”

“It would give me a womanly figure like you, milady,” gasped Racho. “That’s why so many of the men think that you are a woman for sure and not like us.” He glanced anxiously at Grace who grinned at him, her lipglossed mouth and kohled eyes making her appear very feminine. When she spoke now, she sounded like a little girl, preferring to keep her voice in the highest range.

“Oh, we would love that, milady,” said Grace then. “Really, we would. And so would a lot of others, we know.”

I asked Grace why the cabin boys allowed themselves to be treated as they were. I found out that they knew what they were getting into when they were ‘crewed in,’ as they called it.

“My cousin came home from sea when I was a little boy,” Grace explained to me, not seeing the incongruity of what she was saying as she tightened a body shaper about her at the time, with stockings on her legs and her hair in pretty ringlets. “He was just playing with me, then he kissed me on my head for helping

him solve a puzzle. I didn't think it was wrong to kiss him back. But my family said that I was to go to sea but I had to wait for my eighteenth until they sent me off on *The Tempest*."

Seafarer boys did mature late, my aunt had said. It was either that or they counted the years differently in the Many Isles.

On the ship, crossing an imaginary line where the Inner Sea joined the Ocean, Grace had been 'crewed in,' put into a dress and a wig, his face painted, while the men of the crew danced with him, kissed him and plied him with liquor that they made themselves in huge stills deep in the bowels of the ship. If the bluebands caught them making it, they always confiscated the still but they never really searched hard, getting a quantity of the liquor for themselves.

Grace slept with her first man that night, a toptrigger, she told me earnestly, which I gathered was a great honor. From then on she had been anybody's 'girl.' Even in her sailor's clothing, the men now called her 'she' as they did all the cabin boys. If one wanted to satisfy his male urges, he would just come and take her back to her cabin and take her.

And Grace loved the attention. She loved Celebrations when all the cabin boys got dressed up. On the Night of the Gods, all the cabin boys were goddesses, dancing and making love all night with any man who sought the favors of goddesses. "Niccuro," she said spitefully, "has this costume that makes her Arumya, the goddess of love, and the tops usually have her at their table and won't let her go with any of the lower ranks. She was Baro's girl first. But now she's a seawife, I get Baro first. I'm so glad that you saved him."

Racho stood unsteadily in the shoes Grace had loaned him and began to take off the dress he'd put on to work on altering my clothes. I insisted on it. I wanted my maids to look like maids and I knew how it pleased Racho, Choni, to do that. He always seemed regretful when he had to leave and go back into the crew's quarters. But once he had to leave, he went quietly back to wherever he had to go.

"No, Choni," I told him. "Keep on your dress." I looked at Grace. "Let her," I deliberately used the female pronoun, "stay in your cabin with you. Obviously," I pointed to the dress that Choni was altering, "I need a second maid and it will be handy to have Choni here if I succeed with the ganasate and we can start experimenting."

"Oh milady!" said an enraptured Choni, wobbling on her high heels as she curtsied to me as I had taught her.

I asked Grace why Choni was so nervous around the crew. Grace was a little embarrassed to tell me. "Dusso did that to her," Grace said, flushed and angry. "He's from Barell and he and his friends are really rough with us. You should have seen what he did to Appano. She was such a pretty girl when she dressed like you and me. She wouldn't come on this voyage because of him. No one among us girls mourned when Dusso was killed in the fight on the docks at Hillaire. But his Barellan crewmates are still on board."

"Will Choni mind if I make her my second maid?" I asked Grace who went ecstatic with pleasure.

"Can you, milady?" she asked.

"Of course I can," I told her airily, feeling a little like my mother. "I'm a witch, aren't I? I can do any-

thing!" We both giggled over that. Then Grace went swishing off to her room to arrange for Choni to share with her.

"She won't get in my way," Grace assured me with a smile. "We have the cabin that stores just your clothes for you to disappear into if either of us is, well, entertaining."

I smiled as well, thinking how much entertainment I was enjoying with my handsome seahusband.

Undercaptain Wesset was angry with me when he learned that I had 'promoted' Choni and that she was in dress like Grace and me, full time. "You are not an officer on this ship," he growled as he visited me in my workroom.

"Oh, but I am," I told him sweetly, tossing back my lovely ringlets. His eyes glazed over as he looked at me. "I am the ship's witch, am I not? I'm certain that that outranks a mere alchemist."

That made Wesset start. "Who?" he began, then stopped he realized what he had admitted by starting to ask who had told me.

"No one told me," I smiled at him, taking his rough hand in mine and squeezing it. "It's so obvious by the way that you have been writing everything down, trying to get the quantities right. Half the time, I don't know if I'm right or wrong. I just know if the end product is right."

Wesset removed his hand from mine as if I had touched him with a red-hot brand.

"Be careful of Wesset," my husband told me as we made love in a storm that night. The boat was rolling most unpredictably, which added much fun to our lovemaking. "Please don't tease him, my darling. He's

a Cunian and has been a spy in your old country for many years. He's a surgeon as you saw with Baro but he can use those knives of his for many more things than surgery."

"But I need Choni to work on my dresses," I murmured to my husband. "And she made this nightie which you like so much for me." There'd only been a small swath of the dark blue silk but Choni had fashioned a small nightie, thigh-length, with thin straps over my shoulders.

Anjaro loved me in it, and with the panties Choni had stitched together with the final, leftover pieces. I had to parade and twirl for him. "Oh, goddess Arumya," said my husband, reaching out to caress my smooth, rounded legs before hauling me on to him as the boat swayed. "You are so much like a real girl, my darling Sherrene. In such a shift, no man could deny what you are. If only."

"If only?" I asked him as I wiggled my panties against his elevated manhood. I thought he was going to point out the obvious, that I too had a manhood.

"I like a woman with, with bigger," Anjaro went on sheepishly as he stroked my breasts. I curled up against him, my arms about my lover, my hair over his face as he inhaled my perfume and smiled as he kissed me.

We made love and with the rolling of the ship, I ended up on top of him, giggling as he exhausted himself in pleasing me. He was done. No more wiggling or rocking could arouse my spent husband.

"You would like me to have bigger breasts," I murmured, leaning over him, my hair stroking his face. His

eyes opened wide and I felt a twitch in his manhood beneath me.

“You can do that?” Anjaro asked in surprise.

I kissed him again. “I think I can. I’ll try if you want me to,” I whispered to him.

“I would love it,” Anjaro told me. He rose to the occasion again. I floated into bliss as my husband held me to him, caressing and caressing me until he came again. This time, even I was sated for a while.

And so I made *ganasate*. I made a pot of it and *Wesset* came sniffing by, knowing I was doing something new. “What is that?” he asked me suspiciously.

I lifted a ladleful of the liquid I had made and offered it to him to taste. “It won’t kill you or control you,” I told him sweetly. I don’t know why but I always had the urge to flirt and be girlish with *Wesset* around. Perhaps it was because he seemed the man most impervious to my feminine charms.

Even the most scarred riggers doffed their caps or nodded to me and called me ‘My Lady’ which made me flutter all over with pleasure. *Baro’s* recovery had made me a favorite of the crew, my husband told me. Since that time, I had treated several illnesses that might have run through the crew just as my mother had treated those who called on her.

I had also made a trip into the bowels of the ship which is a most accurate description of the filth many of the men were living in. “It’s the bilges, milady,” an inhabitant of the lowest level said to me, staring at my golden hair and my silvery, shapely dress. “We can’t keep them clean.” I could see now why *Baro’s* cut had become so infected.

I was surrounded by bluebands, watching me rather than the men they were supposed to protect me from. "Hazel, wortbane, tellene, collane," I murmured to the older man, thinking how much would be needed on a ship of that size. I looked at the chief of the bluebands who had tried to prevent me going into the depths of the ship with my maid. Grace looked like she was about to faint into the arms of a husky, muscled blueband at any moment. By the way he was looking at her, he would welcome the opportunity to get his hands on her, I thought.

"I'm going to need two new stills," I told the chief blueband and he looked at me stiffly. "Buy them if you must. I know it will send the price of scrumpy," one of the men's favorite home-made drinks, "soaring but I need to make a lot of collane. When I do, I want the bilges and the decks flushed with the solutions I send you. There should be no need," I said pointing at several pasty-faced men swaying in their hammocks, "to have men in this condition."

I pointed to the husky blueband who was supporting Grace. "You," I said. "I will give you fortifiers for these men and you will come back and administer them." My mother would always do that. She made a point of enlisting men she recognized as being of good will. I felt a strange feeling of pleasure going through me as I recognized how much like my mother I was becoming.

A message arrived and I had to be escorted to the Captain's office where my seahusband sat behind his desk. Undercaptain Wesset was in his usual guarding position.

"You've been below decks," said my husband, his blue eyes twinkling in mirth, the lines on his face more

pronounced than ever. "Without permission," he added. Wesset stood behind him, glaring at my husband as if he knew he was being mocked.

"I am the ship's witch, aren't I?" I asked my husband as the chief blueband stood stiffly to one side of the door as if expecting to be chastised at any moment.

"Yes, Lady Sherrene, and you are my seawife," my husband said. "You are a witch, we've all seen that, but there are tasks I want to set for you. I don't want all this rummaging about below decks and promoting cabin boys to being maids. You're upsetting the crew."

"How?" I asked him.

"Well, they see you floating about dressed as you are," said my husband with a smile, "and it raises thoughts in them."

"Thoughts?" I asked him. "Unwholesome thoughts, my lord and master?"

Anjaro was the only one to smile at me. But then, he was getting to know me and my sense of humor. It wasn't only sex between us now. We did talk and I liked as well as loved my amorous husband.

"It makes men envy me," said my husband. "And wish that they were in my place. Each time we stroll about the deck, the number of men on duty increases threefold. Each of the extra men wishes he could be of service to you and win your favor in some way."

"Oh my," I said, fluttering my eyelids at Anjaro. "What *is* a girl to do?"

My husband had the grace to laugh at me. Wesset glowered; he didn't know what to do and so he just looked uneasy.

I told my husband I had just been following up on Baro, wanting to know why, with saltwater all around him, he was so infected so quickly. "It wasn't witchery, my lord," I told my husband. "Just uncleanliness." Then I told him what I had ordered and what I wanted from the bluebands.

Anjaro spread his hands. "My darling Sherrene. You are so right, everything that you want will be carried out." He turned and nodded to Wesset, then to the chief blueband who relaxed. "But, my darling, you cannot give orders to any man on this ship. No woman can, my love. It isn't allowed. You are not living among the Baracts any more."

"I know that, darling," I murmured and frowned. "Just what is the position of women and women like me in your society?"

Anjaro dismissed the two men with us before he answered me. "In the Many Isles, women are treasures," he said.

"And women like me are not allowed to walk on the land," I said.

Anjaro shook his head. "Not in dresses, with your hair so pretty, nor with earrings and anklets and striking necklaces, or any article of women's clothing about you," he told me. Then he came about the table to lift me up and begin to kiss me. "Worse, if you were truly a woman, I could not touch you like this. I would have to put my treasure away in a treasure box, a great mansion, along with my many other treasures, though none is as beautiful as you. And I would only see you on the rare occasion that I returned from sea."

I clung to my wonderful husband and we kissed, arousing passion in both of us that could only be requited by going to our bedroom.

“In a ten-day, we pass the smoking mountain, Lassa, where the fire god, Haruva, is supposed to live,” murmured my husband. “We have a celebration as we pass by on such a peaceful sea. As part of the festivities, we allow our cabin boys to attend us in a ball in which, I, as Captain, will be the fire god. You will be my consort. Do you know who she is?”

I didn’t know any of the lore of the Many Isles. “Arumya?” I guessed. My husband squeezed my buttocks in his hands, pressing himself even more deeply into me.

“The goddess of love,” Anjaro said thickly. He rolled over and had me wriggle and shake on his manhood while his hands played with my nubbins. “Um,” he murmured. “These are growing, my dear, are they not?”

I felt myself and it was true. It wasn’t the tight padding in my breast bands that was making my chest so markedly feminine. I had larger mounds on my chest than ever before. And I had only just started taking ganasate again.

Anjaro ripped away my breast bands and fondled my little breasts. My nipples seemed to have grown as well and Anjaro’s suckling filled me with new and different pleasures.

“Oh, my lord,” I screamed at him as he raised me to fever pitch and I felt my little manhood jerking and alive as I hadn’t felt it in an age. I lifted my legs about Anjaro even as I came against him. He took me roughly

as he sometimes did, squeezing my nipples so hard I thought he would twist them off.

“Your seamstress, now that you have her,” my husband told me, “must make you an appropriate costume for the Feast of Haruva. “You must only wear a brief top here,” he put one hand on my breast, “and here.”. His other hand settled on my other breast. “Your skirt must be parted to show off your lovely legs and your hair must be down your back to here.” He touched my back, below my shoulder blades. “I will adorn you with pearls and jewels.”

“With seven kinds of pearls?” I asked, shuddering at what he was doing to me with his hands, arousing me into a deep passionate urge for him to love me again.

Anjaro laughed. “Yes, I’ll adorn you with one of the fabled necklaces of the Cunian Islands. You shall wear a carabet and Lord Assonder will be beside himself.”

I didn’t ask him then, I couldn’t with what he was doing to me and with how I was kissing him but, if I had, he might have told me that a carabet was only given to a woman of the Isles whom you intended to marry in a sealed arrangement, for life.

XVI. A WITCH’S ASCENDANCE

“You said that we would have to wait for months, milady,” said an excited Grace, as she and Choni scented my bathwater for me. I entered in my panties as I always did, taking them off beneath the foam. “And, milady,” she was in awe. “You are growing as well. And, and.” She stopped there, embarrassed, and I knew why she was.

Anjaro's attentions to my breasts were very obvious. They tingled and itched did the mounds on me. I couldn't tell if it was because of Anjaro's lovemaking or because I had overdone the ganasate in my eagerness to produce a potion I had never made before.

My aunt had used it in small doses, adulterated. That must have been it. She knew that I would have sensed a strong potion; she had introduced it to my skin, through my bath water, or so I supposed. Later, she had introduced it to me through the throat cordial I used to keep my voice so sweetly feminine.

"There's nothing wrong, is there, milady?" asked Choni, in her new, lilting tones, letting me know how effective my medicines were. With her eyebrows thinned and her eyelashes thickened, she was quite a girl, her natural shyness and timidity making her seem feminine even in comparison to Grace. What I liked most about her was how prettily she smiled now. The way she looked into the looking glass and smiled with confidence at seeing herself so pretty and girlish, was a wonderful thing.

"No, there's nothing wrong," I told Choni with a smile, thinking about the ganasate I had made. "I forgot how lightly I was dosed. I wasn't supposed to know I was being changed so thoroughly. You girls are so eager and I can give us all a fuller potion than I ever received before. I don't know how long it will take but I expect by voyage's end, I shall no longer be needing padding in my breast bands while you girls..."

I didn't get to finish that as they both began giggling and jumping up and down, unable to contain their excitement. "We're going to be girls, true girls, Choni," sang Grace, my first maid.

"I can't do that," I told her as soon as I could get a word in.

I tried to explain that the physical changes would only go so far. Grace listened and smiled at me while Choni got my towels ready to dry me when I emerged from the bath.

"Oh, milady," Grace said with a smile. "You can do this and make us have such figures as yours. You will find a way to do the last thing, we know it, don't we, Choni? And you can experiment on us, milady. We know you won't harm us. I would love to be the first boy you ever charmed into being a girl."

They wouldn't listen to what I had to say. I stood in my panties as Choni checked my measurements for the costume she was making. "Have I changed since the first time you measured me?" I asked her. Blushing, my feminine new maid nodded her head.

"How?" I asked. I expected that my chest had expanded. And it had, by two small measures. My waist was thinner as well but my hips had grown. My thighs were wider. I could see that as I looked at myself in the looking glass. In my panties, I had a woman's figure. I turned to look at my back, and was struck by how womanly I looked with my rounded rump and shapely legs. Beside me, I saw Choni looking at my body, envy obvious on her face.

"Don't worry, Choni," I told her. "Some day, when you look in the glass, this is what you will see as well."

"Oh, my lady," said Choni fervently. "If I could only be half as beautiful as you, I would die happy."

I set up the still and made several solutions that I could experiment with to make a weaker, or stronger, solution of the gasasate. I had been under the influence

of honeybane when I took the ganasate and I know that my aunt had been disappointed at how slowly the womanly changes in my body had come to me. I had taken teragol as well, to drive away fatigue, and mandane to cool off my male urges.

I tried to imagine what compounds of them would do to the ganasate. But I couldn't. I would have to join them together and see if I could, by my acute sense of smell, determine what would work best together. I left Choni to work on my costume as the goddess Arumya and went to tell Grace that I would delay our walk about the deck until Choni fitted me again.

In the future I will always knock before entering her room. I can imagine that Grace looked like I did when making love to Anjaro. Her bare legs were in the air and she was bouncing on her bed as the young blueband I had noticed her admiring before was thrusting into her. Her body was raised in a mound of cushions and she was clinging to the young man's head, flinging her body up and down, her skirts spread out beneath him, her panties caught on one of her stockinged feet. She was kissing the young man as fiercely as I kissed Anjaro, her face ecstatic, even though her painted eyes were closed.

I shut the door quickly, too quickly. I heard a muffled oath and a girlish giggle. I waited but no one came to the door to get my apology. Then the silky noise of a dress in motion arose again, along with another giggle followed by someone saying something tender in a deep, male voice. I crept away and left them to it.

I wouldn't have been working on the ganasate then, trying to dilute its potency, if it hadn't been for the conversation we had had and having to wait while Choni finished the lovely split skirt I was to wear. The pearl

buttons Choni was working with on for a different dress for me were laying on the table while she worked quietly in a corner of the room, refusing to look me in the eyes.

I started work on several compounds that I would need on this long trip, such as ganasate and mandane. I absentmindedly splashed some of the mandane into a compound of honeybane, the controller, and teragol, the fortifier, I was working on. The pearl buttons Choni had left out were covered in the mixture of potions.

I didn't have time to wipe it up as the still began to produce ganasate at its fullest strength just then. Choni got up from her corner, whipped her buttons away and apologized to me, taking all the clothing with her. She said she would work in the dress room, the walk-in closet where all of our new dresses, made or altered by Choni were filling up the space.

I thought I heard a buzz a little while later as I decanted the solution of ganasate but there were no insects aboard the ship. Then I heard it again. It was coming from a pearl button that Choni must have missed. It was lying under a flat dish of teragol, droplets of honeybane clear in the ruined solution. The buzzing was so strange that, for a moment, I was scared, thinking that I had created something that could explode in my workshop.

I ducked behind the table but nothing happened. I finally swished over to the button and picked it up. I fell into a chair right away as I heard Choni's voice in the buzzing say clearly, "Well, I hope he was worth it."

"Sherrene didn't, didn't come looking for me," I heard Grace reply, the distress in her little girl voice very clear. "Oh goddesses, we thought someone opened the door and looked in on us."

“Milady wouldn’t mind a few kisses,” said Choni, in a calm, but amused tone.

“It was more than that,” said Grace.

“You had your legs open and up in the air,” said Choni with disapproval.

“It’s the way Roddo likes it,” wailed Grace. “Oh, what am I going to say to milady now when she talks to me.”

“Just tell her the truth,” said Choni reasonably. “Now, move over, Grace. I have to get this sewn together for milady.”

I stared at the button in my hand as I heard Choni singing softly to herself in her new, girlish voice. How could I be hearing her? That was when I saw the sheen over the pearl. It was the solution I had splashed; it had formed into a thin shell over the surface of the pearl. I stared at it and as Choni began to sing more loudly, I could hear Grace in the background, joining in. I could sense that the surface of the pearl was moving. It was vibrating like a harp string.

I sat back in my chair and thought about it. Orissiana, my aunt, had known so much about me, had known about the caging of my mother’s murderer before I did. Was this how she had known? I thought of the metallic taint, possibly teragol, I had sensed within her. It had been so much stronger than the faint scent the alchemist, Bredden, had given off.

Was this how my aunt communicated with other witches just like her? How much range did this communication device have? I didn’t recall my aunt wearing any pearls or pearl buttons like the one I was holding in my hand and the one Choni was working with.



I wondered if I had discovered something entirely new. I was clasping the pearl in my hand when Anjaro came in and I almost panicked as the girls reached the chorus of *The Boy Who Knew Me Well*, giggling together over the last lines. They were so loud and screechy, enjoying themselves.

“Still working, my lovely?” said my seahusband, stretching out his hands to me. I responded to my handsome man as any girl would. I put my arms about his head and pressed my body against his and kissed him as passionately as I could while the girls giggled and tried to sing the last chorus again, in tune this time.

“What were you doing?” asked Anjaro, with a smile, seeing all the solutions, including the ‘ruined’ one I had already capped and placed in a neat row on the worktable.

“I was just listening to the singing,” I said, as I felt his hands on my rear, pressing my feminine skirts and underskirts against him.

Anjaro frowned. “What singing?” he asked, although it was very loud to me. He couldn’t hear it at all, I realized. He couldn’t hear it at all! I wondered if Wesset would be able to. I must test him. The girlish conversation died away. Choni must have put the buttoned dress into the closet, I realized. I put the one I held on the worktable and went meekly with my husband to bed. I wondered if I should tell him about what I had found out.

My breasts attracted him so much that I never really answered that question. “They are definitely growing,” said Anjaro, drawing me over him and pushing my breast bands down so that they pushed the flesh gathering on my chest up into a semblance of a bosom. He liked me to come to bed in my breast bands of late. His kissing of my cleavage and chest and his tongue on my nipples certainly aroused him. And I loved it as well, feeling girlish as he kissed my chest, then the rest of my body and legs.

Anjaro liked me to do it to him as well, particularly when I was in my breast bands and panties or in one of

the short, silky nighties that Choni had made for me. I found that kissing his manhood awakened it. Anjaro showed me how I could enlarge him even more by taking it into my mouth and using my tongue on him.

“This is how the girls take so many men in one evening,” Anjaro told me as I made love to him this new way. He caressed my hair feverishly and messed it so completely that I had to keep a supply of masheen on hand so that the girls wouldn’t know right away what we had been doing in bed, my lover and me.

The day after my discovery was exciting. For the first time, I met all the cabin boys on the ship, and their ‘mothers.’ The mothers were older men, very effeminate, who had once been cabin boys and now supervised whatever work it was that the cabin boys did.

I had prepared the throat clasp cordial for all the boys and the mothers as well. While that went to work on them, I forbade them to talk until it took effect, Grace, Choni and I helped them into the dresses they had shyly brought into the workshop. It was soon like a girls’ bedroom, as the cabin boys were not reluctant at all to slip out of their boy clothes into panties and stockings and Choni’s dresses.

We helped them all with their makeup and used masheen liberally to curl and wave the hair of those with long tresses. The mothers had long hair when they undid their braids. They were beginning to talk, excited at the transformations taking place as eyebrows were thinned, lips and faces painted, eyelashes thickened and eyes made vividly feminine.

Jewellery appeared from pockets and adorned the women who filled my workshop. In one corner, a girl was hitching up her dress to put on stockings and garter belt while in another, a mother, in a shaping corset

and stockings was showing her youngest charges how to secure padding so it would appear that all of the girls in the room had feminine curves.

Grace and Choni moved through the room like the young ladies they were and coached the new girls who were almost ready for the Feast of Haruva. They were hugged exuberantly by blonde-haired young ladies who chattered at them excitedly. Perfume circulated in the room, the smell of all the blossoms reminding me of a flower shop on the dock at Terraire I had once entered.

My mother never liked dead flowers, she said. She could have used live ones, she told me, explaining how I should harvest a plant to make interesting aromas. I had been taught so gently that I hadn't realized it at the time. I thought how my mother, my real one, must have intended me to be a witch. My aunt must have been right about that, I thought bleakly.

The mothers lined up all the girls and they curtsied to me as they left the workshop. Many squeaked their thanks to me and to my maids for all the help we were giving them.

"Oh, this will be such a night!" said one of the mothers, in a beautiful, controlled contralto voice. Gold earrings dangled from her ears, her dress was made of some shiny substance, not silk, but a fabric I had only seen on Counts' ladies and the Queen in Hillaire.

The mother touched her throat, her attractive, feminized face wreathed in a wide smile. "Every man on the ship is going to want a turn with a girl tonight," she said confidentially to me. "Even those Barellans who always sit there and jeer at us. We'll make them foam at the mouth when they see us dancing with all the handsomest men. They'll be lined up outside the

trysting cabins until morning." She waved to me, the little purse on her arm being tossed about.

Each girl had a purse, courtesy of Choni, with lip gloss, scented face powder, and perfume. The girls were wearing wigs had them attached with an adhesive I had formulated which had worked well for Grace. They had all adopted feminine names for the evening.

As they left, Grace and Choni took me to the room I shared with my husband and I became the goddess, Arumya, for the evening. Arumya must have been a harlot for I was dressed like one. It was fortunate that I had such a feminine figure because parts of my costume left nothing to the eye of the beholder. My breast bands were an artifice in themselves. When I looked in the mirror, I couldn't tell that what I bore were not full and true women's breasts.

Just a veil of tassels hung from the little black skirt about my thin waist and wide hips, a silvery sash holding it to me. My hair was long and waved, falling down my back. My face was perfectly painted, a vision of female loveliness if I do say so myself. A high crown sparkled on my head as the Queen of the Sea should wear.

The shoes I had to wear with the black stockings and garter belt were impossibly high. If I hadn't spent so much time in high heels over the last six months, on and off the sea, I could never have managed them.

Anjaro came in as my maids finished with me. I curtsied to him and he just stood there stock-still, looking at me. "My goddess!" he said simply as he took my proffered hand, kissing my newly manicured fingers and painted, shaped fingernails.

Anjaro brought out the jewels I was to wear and my maids gasped as he put the carabet necklace about my neck. It was cold and I shivered as I looked at the seven differently colored pearls, even a black one held by a thin golden chain. It must have been worth everything the King of the Baracts had owned. My sea husband had pearl earrings for me as well, bracelets and a ring with a true rosy pink pearl.

He put them on me. Anjaro wanted to kiss me and I wanted to kiss him as well. Actually, I wanted much more than that. He put his arms on my heated skin and I shuddered, feeling his arousal against me, where if I hadn't been so tightly bound, he would have felt me.

"We must go and attend your subjects, my lovely goddess," Anjaro whispered to me. I was shaking so much that he had to put his arm about me to steady me. My maids ushered me then into the passageway leading to the deck. We went into my workshop where Anjaro's costume awaited him.

Wesset was there, looking at all the vials, containing all the new substances I had been creating.

"What is this?" Wesset asked, holding up the ruined solution I had made.

"A cleaning solvent," I said blithely, lying to the Undercaptain. "See." I dipped my ring and took off an earring and dipped it in the solution as well. "See how the metals now sparkle so well."

As I expected, there was a buzzing from the earring as I put it back on my lobe.

"Let it rest for tonight, Undercaptain," said Anjaro, putting on the great headpiece to signify that he was Haruva, the fire god. The ring and the earring seemed to be resonating together; I was hearing Anjaro's am-

plified voice as well as the real thing. It was most disconcerting.

The strangest thing was that Wesset appeared to hear nothing at all. I gleefully held that knowledge to myself as Choni moved in on me then to re-do my lips which Anjaro had mused. She and Grace were dressed much like me.

“Let’s join the Feast,” said my husband, taking my arm. We stepped out into the passageway and onto the walkway above the main deck. The noise was deafening, not the least because of the orchestra of fiddles that playing some kind of shanty that only the men on the floor were dancing to.

A blast on a horn from behind us was suddenly answered by another across the deck, and the music died away. More horn blasts sounded from the horns of sea creatures shaped and hollowed by sailors. The fiddles then played a stately march as Haruva led Arumya, the goddess, down the steps covered with a dark green carpet and down to the thrones which were canopied and dominated the dance floor.

But first Haruva took me into the middle of the deck and nodded to the band leader. The fiddles played a stately waltz, and I was twirled and whirled about the floor, my skirts parting to show all the men that I was wearing a black garter belt and tight black panties. I curtsyed to my husband after several rounds and he led me to the Lord Assonder, whom I curtsyed to. He, in all his noble finery, had to rise and dance with me. I noticed Anjaro dancing with a sulky-mouthed, red-haired woman whom I had never met.

“My Lady,” stammered Lord Assonder, staring so at my nearly bare, shapely body that I almost laughed at him.

I steered him to Grace while several men in the great throng looked at me and smiled. I had Prince Tathally in mind, so, in perfect imitation of the great balls in Hillaire, save that every woman was a girl like me, I chose the one man who didn’t want to touch the Perisord witch. I turned and wiggled my posterior to him as Grace was doing so seductively to the Clan Elder.

Tathally was green but the music chimed and we had new partners to select and he took the red-haired woman I didn’t know but who must be Niccuro, Nikki. We dancers filled up the dance floor, me ending in the arms of the blueband who held me as if I was a phial of swamp gas about to explode. I curtsayed to him as the fiddle orchestra paused.

All of the mothers and the girls were on the floor then, curtsaying to the men they had chosen or been chosen by for the last dance. A drum beat a rhythm and all the men, save for Haruva, who came for me with a twinkle in his eye, exited the floor. At the first note of a fiddle, every one of the front rank of waiting men almost ran onto the floor to take one of the girls in his arms and swing her into the rhythm of the new dance the fiddles were playing.

I could hear girlish voices as well as the deeper tones of the men as Anjaro-Haruva whirled me through the throng. My hips gyrated as I was told Seafarer women did in their dances. My skirt tassels swirled out and back against me; the men watching were able to see my shapely legs, even as I wiggled and moved my hips rapidly. This time when the dance

ended, Anjaro bent me over. I would have fallen save that he was holding me as he kissed me, my long hair almost sweeping the floor.

I could have sunk to the floor as I heard the men calling out encouragement. Then I realized that every girl was being kissed just as I was. As the drum beat, Anjaro led me to the throne for the Queen of the Sea while more sailors came forward to take eager girls and mothers in their arms for a lively, hip-shaking dance that had the men throwing the girls in the air and spinning them. Their dresses flared out and those close to the dance area, many sitting cross-legged in the front three ranks on the floor, were able to see all the pretty undergarments the girls were wearing.

The feedback from the pearl ring was deafening in my ear so I slipped the ring from my finger and rolled it in one of the silken covers on the throne.

Anjaro noticed right away. "Problem?" he asked, leaning over to whisper and kiss my ear.

"I don't want to lose your lovely pearl," I told him with a smile, as his hand touched and caressed my back. "It was a little loose on my finger."

Anjaro smiled at me and kissed me again. I was glad that my legs were crossed, as I felt myself tense everywhere, my little breasts thrusting forward. He reached over and took the ring from me, a waft of echoing noise reaching my ear. It was muffled as he put my ring into a pocket on his costume.

"Here, my darling," Anjaro motioned to Lord Assonder mounting the steps and gazing at me. "Here is your next reluctant suitor. After every dance you take, my darling, all the girls get kissed again."

“Oh no,” I gasped as I rose and curtsayed to Lord Assonder.

His Lordship held me very stiffly. “Anjaro gave you the carabet?” he asked me after we had waltzed a circuit of the floor. “You understand the significance of the gift?”

“I think that I do,” I said.

“He claims you as his true wife,” said Assonder, turning a very deep shade of red. “You must be a woman to wear such a precious gift of the clan.”

“I am deeply honored to wear it, my Lord,” I told him. I sensed his hostility. I swallowed and decided to test him out. “I will be a true wife to my wonderful husband.”

“And bear him children?” said Assonder, almost sneering at me.

“Witches can bear children, my Lord,” I told him, lowering my eyelids and being as sweet and demure as I could be. I was not telling him any lie. My mother had been a witch and she had birthed me.

Assonder was stunned. He held me stiffly. He would have just pecked at me and left the floor but I didn’t let him. I thought that he would do that and so I threw my arms about him and I kissed him hard and long and on his lips. I felt them trembling beneath me when I finally let him go.

I curtsayed to him. “Thank you, milord,” I told him. “That is a kiss I will remember for a long time.”

Tathally intercepted me on the way back to the throne. “I must talk to you,” he said as I curtsayed to him.

“Oh, yes, your highness,” I said to him, cuddling into his arms. His eyes almost popped as he looked down at my breasts. “If you aren’t so sure I will hex you as my grandmother did Perisord.” I would have liked him to tell me more about that.

“You-You’re a woman!” the Prince gasped. “You’re not...”

“Our enemies say terrible things about us, don’t they, your highness?” I said as femininely as I could.

“This is going all wrong,” said the Prince, as he stared at me, wide-eyed. “I was supposed to be let off at Terraire but they said it was too dangerous to put in.”

“Who said that?” I asked him.

“Your man, that Sea Captain Anjaro, and Lord Assonder,” said the Prince. “Then they said I could leave on Liss Isle but they confined me to my cabin when we stopped there. Now Nikki says she overheard Wesset telling Lord Assonder that the ship isn’t allowing any passengers off in Bridgewater. We’re sailing on to Cunia where I’m to be examined! They torture people there when they examine them!”

“Nikki?” I asked him. “She,” I emphasized the word, thinking of his former attitude. “She told you that? How reliable do you think she is?”

“She hates Lord Assonder,” said the Prince who had offered to marry me at Lady Sherrene’s Ball. He looked at me defiantly as we circled the floor. Grace passed us and winked to me as she and the young blueband, Roddo, went floating by us. “I-I know it’s, it’s a shipboard romance but she’s really very nice. She smells so nice. The Captain was so horrible to her, kicking her out of his bed and installing you. But Nikki

doesn't hold it against you. She'd like to get to know you but Assonder keeps her locked up and Anjaro won't let her back to the 's deck end of the ship."

You young idiot, I thought. And now I promise to help you and you carry the message back to Nikki, whose pillow talk almost certainly includes Lord Assonder. But I don't have to think of you, princeling, I thought smugly. I'm not a Baract any more. Thanks to my father, I was a Seafarer in looks and soon, as Anjaro's wife, I would go ashore and be his wife and witch, enriching his clan in every way I could.

I kissed the Prince and he was staggered. He tried to back away a little. "You like kissing boys more than girls?" I asked him, smiling as I said it.

He left me, looking angrily at me. I didn't want for partners. The seamen, like Baro, were eager to kiss me. Baro kissed me to show the world how he had recovered. He was cheered from the floor as I tottered back to my throne.

Anjaro was gone. The dancing stopped as several of the cooking crew arrived with whole spitted pigs, partly roasted. They were set over controlled fires in the center of the floor. It was Anjaro, as Haruva, who appeared to light those flames and to start other fires where great pots were set. A rack of cloths was nearby to prevent hands from being burned when the ladles were grabbed.

Eating spread rapidly with short lines appearing at all the stations. It was the blueband who brought me a heaped plate of stews and spiced goulashes and a hunk of pork I couldn't have eaten in a ten-day.

I was laughing about what he had brought, insisting he share it with me. I hadn't realized that such a tough-looking man could blush so much.

"You'll have to get back to her soon or she's going to miss you," said a voice through the buzz at my ear.

"Back to the charcoal pits," muttered someone else.

"I don't know how you can do it for so long," said another voice that from its rise and fall was that of Wesset. "He wants to be made love to every night, doesn't he?"

"Make him a sleep potion," one of the other voices said sympathetically. "You need your rest, Anjaro."

I smiled at the blueband as he shared my plate. I noticed that the number of female-dressed persons on the dance floor had been halved in number. Those that remained seemed to be sharing supper from several men's plates as they were being crowded by several suitors for their affections.

"Did you find out what that solution was that he made yesterday?" my seahusband asked. It was then I realized that they were talking about me.

"No," said Wesset. "But it's definitely not a household cleaning compound. He's been doing a lot of stuff that's beyond me. All this stuff with our cabin boys, for instance."

"They certainly look good tonight," said one voice enthusiastically. It belonged to Hedward. "Well, they do," he went on as several jeered at him. "And their voices. They sound like girls. And have you seen Choni lately, or Grace?"

"I think he's gonna get his wick lit up tonight," said one man crudely. I felt as if a jolt had gone through me.

It was hard to be demure and smile at the man trying to impress me while I heard myself derided over the communication device I had activated.

“Lay off Hedward,” snapped the voice of my seahusband. “Our boy-girl is besotted with me as we planned. He’s figured out part of it, that we are in desperate need of a witch. You know why I’m doing this, to find out just what the old Perisord witch did to us the last time we tried to take over the Foreshore. And it was you, Wesset, who told me that witches can make potions that control others. We need to find out what that is, then we can use it on him.”

“He doesn’t have personal weapons yet, does he?” asked another voice.

“No,” said Wesset. “Anjaro has been doing quite a job on him. He’s just like any other pretty, love-struck, sixteen-year-old girl, Harret. He’s in love. As long as Anjaro is sexing him, he thinks it proves what a wonderful girl he is.”

“Sure looks like one,” muttered Hedward.

“Look, I don’t mind the job,” said Anjaro then as if he was talking to a council of equals. “He’s actually very sweet at times. He just wants so much to be a girl. And I tell you, he’s changing his body into a woman’s and has started on the cabin boys who are loving being bespelled. Don’t you worry about my darling seawife. I’ll start to move on him now we’re in home waters and get him to give me the recipes for the potions we really need. We’ll be in port soon and he can stay on board. I have to go ashore anyway and find myself a real woman before I get out of practice.”

My whole world shattered as I heard Anjaro talking about me, referring to me as ‘he’ and ‘him’ all of the

time. I could hear men in the background responding to what he had just said about getting out of practice with a real woman. Anjaro sighed as he was teased again about getting back to his goddess.

"How can you make love to a man like that?" someone asked him in disgust.

"He's made me a potion and it helps," said Anjaro. "Wesset thinks he can replicate it. Besides, you've seen how pretty he's made himself. With the potions we already have, the ladies of the Inner Isles are going to be so pleased."

"Speaking of ladies," Wesset growled as I heard the sound of people moving away. "You gave your little sweetling a carabet tonight. How could you?"

"Easy," said Anjaro. "He thinks he's going to be my true wife. So, tonight, later on, I'll mention the pirates of the Inner Sea."

There was laughter from several voices at that. "He'll fortify, that's the word he uses, our arbalests and bombards, you'll see," said the man I had thought loved me. "And then, Wesset, you'll have to get the recipe. We'll be the equal of the witched ships in the Black Sea. I hope this will make me Clan Elder when we make the Foreshore ours again."

That was a toast they drank to while I sat in my silly costume, pretending to be a shapely, feminine girl and a goddess, with revelry all about me. But in the midst of it, I listened, with a pain in my chest, to the man I loved revealing how much of an empty-headed know-nothing I was. Just as my aunt had told me that I was.

XVII. A WITCH'S BETRAYAL

I don't know how I got through that night. Tathally and I were the only ones new to passing the island of the fire god so we had to perform rituals, such as jumping the hot fire pits while the crew cheered. My husband, returned to me, waited to kiss me when I succeeded at each task.

I hadn't realized how sardonic and cynical his smile was. It was there when he looked at me in my short skirt and tassels, my feminine figure so exposed by the padded, revealing top. I shuddered when Anjaro put his arm affectionately about me after I had drunk the 'fire god's curse', a concoction of fermented juices and distilled alcohol I was sure would rip out my stomach.

At that moment, I hated Anjaro and his conniving crew so much that I didn't care about my physical well-being. Tathally took a draught and threw up while the crew jeered. I took the cup, containing a yellowish liquid with rotting fibers inside, and I tipped it up, commanding myself not to care. I got it all down in one continuous swallow.

The denizen of the underworld, one of the top riggers, in black wig and beard, his face painted like some king ape, came forward expectantly. I've been poisoned enough times in my life, I thought, as I felt rumbles in my stomach. I wouldn't give him the satisfaction. I held out the cup to the man and his surprise was palpable.

The man stared into the cup. He turned it over to show those near to us that it was empty. I looked at all the sniggering, grinning men as I thought of the 'curse' they intended to lay on me as they had on Prince Tathally for 'refusing' the fire god's drink.

I laughed as I realized that they didn't know what to do. That was when Anjaro suavely stepped forward and saved the ceremony. "How could I curse my consort?" he asked in a loud shout. "Hail, Arumya, the true goddess and Queen of the Sea."

The crewmen nearest to us were stunned at first, then a few started chanting and soon it was picked up by others. I looked up and the word of my feat was being passed even to the few who sat up in the riggings. The chanting was picked up by the musicians, supplemented by wild brayings from the horns on all sides.

Anjaro swung me out in a wild dance, hurling me this way and that. I think he must have been trying to make me sick. I commanded my stomach to be still and it worked. It worked just as it had when my aunt had commanded me before. I grabbed the disguised crewman and twirled him as well, my hips and posterior shaking like a gale at sea against his aroused male member. I pulled seaman after seaman into the wild dance I had started.

I swirled across the raised deck for the dancers and some of the men followed me, loving me to shake my feminized body against their own moving hips. I mimicked their male sea shanty dancing. There was a roar as many jumped up at that; suddenly I was in a seething mass of bodies, with men leaping all about me, all trying to impress me, Lady Sherrere, the ship's witch and their fantasy woman.

I don't know how long the wild revelry lasted. I hurtled about, hands on my hips, my breasts thrust forward. It was amazing how the men allowed me to gyrate against them. I jumped into the arms of one man after another, bestowing quick kisses and hugging them all. I spied one man and jumped in to dance with

him, letting my scented hair fall all about his ecstatic face. I kissed him. He tried to hold me but I pushed him into his friends and did the same with another and another and another as the musicians caught my wild mood and played even wilder and wilder tunes.

The god, Haruva, seized me then and held me in his arms and I let him kiss me. He hugged me to him, then deftly swept me into his arms. He carried me through cheering men up the steps and along the outer walkway to the Captain's deck and the passageway. Grace and Choni, men draped about them, smiled and ushered me into the Captain's bedroom where the god coupled with me, releasing only enough of my breast so that he could get his mouth onto my nipple.

I let him. The noise in my ear had died down in the quiet of the room. I took off my earrings. I could hear only the lies my seahusband was telling me about what a woman I was and how he was going to make me his wife. He must have had a lot of the 'bluestar' I had made for him. Anjaro wouldn't let me rise as he made love to me, stripping me out of my clothing little by little until at last I was completely naked. He took me half a dozen times.

Of all the performances Anjaro had treated me to, this was the best. He came and so did I. Even when I had no essence left in me, I still went into spasm as he held me, caressed me and told me how wonderful a goddess I was and that he worshipped me. I smiled and he thought I loved him. He told me he loved me and I lied and told him that the Queen of the Sea loved him as well.

Why shouldn't I enjoy myself? I thought bitterly, as I snuggled into him again for another turn at being treated as a female. I made him stroke my manhood,

my 'woman's thing,' I called it, asking him how he liked it that I, the goddess, had made it grow so much for him.

I made him please me. I let him take me from behind, taking his hand and placing it on my woman's thing, making him make me come. My head was turned and my lips sealed to his as I stroked him rhythmically to increase his pleasure in having me.

"Oh, Sherrene," Anjaro whispered at last. "Never have I ever had such pleasure in my life. Never. You must give Wesset the recipe for this potion that has so changed both you and me tonight."

"Of course I will, my Lord," I told him sweetly as he lay beside me. We were still kissing tenderly and gently even after such an intense romp in bed. "I love you so much, I will do anything for you, my Lord and Master."

"I knew you would," he said smugly, releasing my newly-fastened bra and cupping my breasts in his loving hands. I deserved such spine-tingling affection. I had been seduced for so long by a man who didn't love me at all and who still thought it was a boy he was taking out his perverted desires upon.

After Anjaro had made love to me in the morning, I put on a long, flowing dress, my breasts throbbing again, and went into the workshop. With my hair tied back in ribbons, I felt feminine as I could feel Anjaro as if he was still on me, assaulting my breasts.

I had put the pearl ring into Anjaro's pocket and I was wearing the pearl earring. I needn't have bothered. The distant talk was muffled and what I could hear was all about how the ship was running. Various

Undercaptains talked about the sea, the winds and how the men were sluggish in making the ship move.

"Let them sleep today," I heard Anjaro say once. "I need to go to my day cabin as well."

"Hard night, Captain?" I heard someone josh him. It was a young voice, like Hedward's.

"Harder than yours, young man," Anjaro retorted. "And how was the delectable Choni?"

"She is quite incredibly womanly," said the young man's voice.

"She?" someone else asked.

"Yes, she," said the youth I was sure was Hedward. He went on arguing and defending Choni, his voice fading away as Anjaro left the room and retreated to quietness. Soon, I heard him snoring.

I experimented with the 'ruined' liquid that had allowed me to listen in to others' conversations. I 'cleaned' Choni's needles and Grace's lip gloss. I put some on barrettes and buttons. I went back into the room I shared with my sea husband. I saw his dagger in its sheath, hanging behind a doorway. The handle was some kind of bone. I coated it as well as the buttons on one of his fanciest jackets.

I coated all of my earrings, then set out to make the weapons I would need to defend myself. I was absorbed in making honeybane when I turned and found Wesset standing inside the doorway of my workshop, watching me.

"What is that?" Wesset asked me.

Wesset still terrified me. But I had heard what he had said about me to Anjaro. I held the solution out to him, encouraging him to sniff gingerly at it. "Can you

not smell the honey, my love?" I asked him sweetly. Wesset stiffened immediately, his eyes narrowing as he looked at me. "And what does the honey signify to you, dear Undercaptain? Well, you're right," I told him, cringing inside as I flirted with him. "It's a love philtre. All the girls have asked me for one and this is special for them. They'll each soon have a man besotted with them as my lover, Anjaro, is with me."

"You cannot curse men like that!" fumed Wesset immediately. I could almost sense him reaching for his knives.

"Why not?" I said lightly. "Each love-struck man would have a girl willing to satisfy him in every way he ever thought to be satisfied by a woman."

"But they're not women," said Wesset savagely at last, revealing what I already knew was his opinion. "It would be a curse to have a man made to fall in love with his dog or, or this chair. Or a painted, pretty boy."

"Like Sea Captain Anjaro?" I asked him. "Do you think I have ensorcelled dear Anjaro?"

The look Wesset gave me was scary. I must make something more frightening to defend myself with. It came to me that I could make noxious odors. Abris's potion came to my mind. But only witches or sensitives like the Queen and Lady Renneth had sensed that after I heated the ingredients. But there was always swamp gas.

My pulse started beating faster as I thought of Bretten, the alchemist to the King of the Baracts, referring to it as 'collasolane.' I wondered if he still had the vials I had 'borrowed' from my aunt on the night on which I had been betrayed. I thought about that. On

the night that I had been betrayed for the first time, I thought bitterly.

“You must not make any more potions,” Wesset said to me firmly, his eyes narrowing again to slits, “without the Captain’s or my permission. You are not a free passenger even if you do look so much like a woman.”

“Oh but Anjaro wants me to do this,” I said to Wesset with a sweet smile. “We had quite a giggle picking out the perfect partner for you, my dear Undercaptain. But Nikki has always had such a soft spot for officers.”

Wesset pounced on me and shook my arm, hurting me. I looked up into his stormy, sea-blue eyes and trembled in fear.

“Please,” I gasped, raising my thin arm to protect my painted face and long, woman-like hair. “I, I don’t mean to tease you, milord. I, I just can’t seem to help behaving like a girl.”

Wesset paused. “Of course you can’t,” he finally growled. He let me go, harrumphed a time or two, then said. “Did Anjaro tell you all about the Inner Sea pirates last night?”

“Pirates?” I asked, opening my eyes wide as if I was the frightened little girl Wesset thought I was. I was convincing enough that I didn’t give away what I had heard the night before.

I pretended to be scared, clutching my apron and swishing my skirts, as Wesset told me a pack of lies about how dangerous the pirates were with their fire ships and how we’d need something to blast our way past them if we ran into them. The harquebusses and arbalests just didn’t deliver enough power to hurt the

pirate ships. How long, he asked me candidly, would it take for me to bespell the slugs and ballasts the ship's bombards fired? It would have to be quick or we would be demasted and stalled while a swarm of smaller watercraft brought boarders that would destroy us.

"I know that this is one of the most precious secrets you witches have," said Wesset as he smiled and tried to charm me. "I don't expect you to tell us how to do that. But if you could just have something ready, you know, to defend the ship. You are the ship's witch, after all."

I smiled, batted my eyelashes at him, and he actually squeezed my hand. I could imagine the battle going on inside him as he did that. I thought of the things I'd overheard him say as well as what he'd just said to me. "Oh, Wesset," I murmured to him. "Thank you so much for calling me a witch. I would like to be your witch forever." I leaned in so that he could smell my perfume. I'd added only a touch of lovebane to it that morning, intending it for my so-called husband.

Wesset kissed me on the lips, mauling me and hugging me as if he hadn't had a woman in months. Of course, it was true.

It was two sleepy-eyed maids who came yawning and smiling into the workshop who broke us up but not before my swain, Wesset, allowed me to clean his knives with the new cleaning potion I was trying out.

The girls stared at Wesset kissing me, oblivious to them watching. I stroked his neck with my handkerchief. At first, I thought I had used the wrong antidote as it took several minutes before the glazed look in his eyes left him. Then he became quite confused as I had my arms about him, my breasts pushed tightly to his

chest, one of his legs between mine, as he kissed me ardently.

Wesset released me and staggered back, staring open-eyed at me.

"Oh, goodie," I smiled, keeping my arms about him. "It does work and the antidote as well."

Wesset swore at me. He made a jerk towards his dagger but I had all of his weapons 'cleaned' on my worktable. "There, darling," I said, arching myself most femininely as I released him and picked up his daggers. "And I will do that thing you want for the arbalests as soon as I can. I think we have things in here I can use to make a big explosion for you."

Wesset took his daggers, looking for all the world as if he would like nothing better than to stick them in me. I got rid of him by the simple expedient of asking him to kiss me once more before he left. He left hurriedly without his kiss.

I sighed to my gaping maids. "Well, a girl can't win them all," I told them. I heard Wesset swearing at crewmen who got in his way. I heard the yells of the top and mid-arm riggers changing sails in a cadence beat to them from the helm.

I was so proud of myself. I gave the girls tasks to do after they bathed me and I listened to Wesset berate my husband for my actions with him that day.

"Sherrene kissed you?" Anjaro asked Wesset in surprise.

"She was trying out some love philtre for her maids," stormed Wesset. "She's going to give it to all of the girls. We'll have half the crew walking around besotted by some giggly little boys if we let her go on."

She's made an antidote as well. You have to get it from her, Anjaro."

"How did Sherrene feel when you kissed him?" asked my husband with a laugh. He must have noticed that Wesset had shifted his genders and was now calling me 'she' and 'her.' I loved it when a man acknowledged me as a girl.

"Hedward stayed with you a long time," said Grace.

"I hated it when the antidote wore off," said Wesset.

"He's so nice, isn't he?" said Choni, with her usual nervousness.

My husband laughed.

"Not as nice as Roddo," said Grace. "You know what he said to me?"

"Can you remember how it was before that?" asked Anjaro.

"I love you," said Choni.

"I hated it," said Wesset.

"Besides that," said Grace.

"Hah," said my husband as Choni giggled, "He wants to marry you."

"Hedward..."

"Sherrene..."

"Roddo..."

"Your wife..."

Four voices all spoke at once, two of them upraised. I had to pull off my earring and wrap it in a cloth; all about me, I heard a buzzing as if the workshop was in-

fested by bees. Then Choni began to sing about *The Boy I Knew* and Grace joined in with new, ribald lyrics. There was squealing and excited, high-pitched, giggling as more girlish voices joined in. I gathered that Grace and Choni were being visited by some of the other girls who had enjoyed the party the night before.

"I went to sleep with Lendo inside me," a girl was saying in a higher pitch than the others. "Lendo! He's always been so rude to me! But now he says that I have such a nice, you know. Yes, just like yours, Choni!"

There were so many girls talking that Wesset and Anjaro were quite drowned out. If they said anything I might have wanted to hear, it was impossible to distinguish it. How had my aunt ever organized her listening-in, if, indeed, she ever had?

I had to have peace. I put my pearl earrings and buttons and jewellery in a drawer beneath the lovely panties Choni made for me.

That gave me time to explore what I knew about swamp gas, not actually a gas but a powder. Could it be related to terromal, which could be confined in an iron shell and would explode if shaken? My aunt had laughed and told me that whenever I saw a one-armed woman, I would know that I had met a witch who had mistaken terromal for terrathen, a harmless plant fertilizer.

I set about doing what Wesset wanted. I recalled the vials of swamp gas powder. It must have gotten its name from the odor it gave off when it exploded? I had to be very, very careful. I didn't want to be a one-armed or one-eyed witch. But how could I test out what I was doing? I could hardly serve them to Grace and duck while she exploded.

Anjaro noticed right away that I wasn't wearing earrings when he came 'creeping' into the workshop to surprise me. I wondered if I should tell him how dangerous that would be now. I could blow us both to pieces if I wasn't careful.

"I like you in earrings," my husband said, hugging me and kissing my ear before turning me and kissing me thoroughly. Working with possibly killing materials had heightened my senses and I smelled the faint fragrance of a musky substance. It took me a while to place it; it intrigued me as my husband kissed me and worked me out of my dress, exposing my little breasts for his hungry mouth.

Then, it came to me. Prince Tathally and Lord Assonder. Each had been suffused with the same aroma. And each was a lover of Niccuro, Nikki, my husband's former seawife. I should have listened in to him all day, I thought, as Anjaro lifted me gently and took me into his bed. A fragrance made from some animal, musk, I thought, cursing my husband in my head.

Was there any other way you could betray me? I thought as he was making love to me. If it wasn't for the stiffener I had made for him, he wouldn't even have been able to do it. The musk was on his skin as well. He must have made love with Nikki earlier in the day. And all the time, I had been working on a potion that might save his life and his precious ship.

"You get lovelier each day," my seahusband told me. "I can't wait until we get to land so I can take you ashore and make you my wife."

I called on Arumya, Queen of the Sea, to join me in my curse of my lying, cheating husband. I shivered as he held me and whispered how he loved me and did things to me that made me thrill to be a woman.

But I cursed him just the same. Me, Lady Sherrene, the witch of the great ship, *The Tempest of Distant Shores*, I cursed its Captain and the ship for everything that they had done to deceive me.

XVIII. A WITCH'S CURSE

Three days out of Bridgewater, I saw a number of men watching the horizon ahead. "Why is everyone doing that?" I asked the pretty girl beside me, my maid, Grace.

She moved as elegantly as her name implied. She was wearing a corset she implored Choni to make tighter each day while the other girl worried about its effect on her fellow maid. "You aren't as thin as Lady Sherrene," I heard Choni say over the single device I had in the maid's quarters, a sheen I had placed over Grace's jewellery box which sat so proudly on the small table beside her bed.

"But I want to wear this red dress she gave me," wailed Grace. And she got into it without the alterations Choni promised to do for her right away. No wonder men looked at her and her pretty figure just as much as they looked at me.

"It's smoke," said Grace, twirling one of the little parasols Choni and her man, Hedward, had made for all of us girls so that we could stroll the decks in the sun.

"A fire mountain?" I asked

"No, milady," said Grace, her little-girl voice very serious. "We're head on to Bridgewater. And if that's from Bridgewater itself, it's an enormous fire."

"Pirates?" I asked her, not telling her how I knew such stories would be false.

“Oh, no, milady,” said Grace in very worried tones. “Much worse. It might be Cunians.”

“Cunians?” I gasped. “But aren’t Undercaptain Wesset and Hedward...” I let my voice trail off.

“Yes,” said Grace unhappily. “They must be getting really worried now. Let’s hope it’s a clan raid but it looks too big to be just that.”

It was too big, too prolonged and too intense to be anything but a war. A day out and we could see redness on the horizon. Anjaro made love to me as usual and told me not to worry my pretty little head about what I saw. We would ride at sea anchor through the night before moving in the next day to see what was going on.

I had heard him saying the same thing to Nikki, her sultry voice begging him to stay just a little longer, he was such a big, strong man, everything she wanted. Prince Tathally and Lord Assonder she had called ‘so boring’ earlier. She had made Anjaro laugh and protest that he ‘couldn’t do that’, whatever it was, with her. But he had, wrestling with her for minutes or so it seemed before he started grunting as he did with me when he was about to come.

“That was great,” Anjaro had murmured then. “You always have been the sexiest woman I know, Nikki.”

“Now, don’t you do that with your witchy girl,” Nikki had said in her low whisper. “This is just for us, my love.”

“Of course, my love, just for us,” my seahusband told his former seawife in an amused voice, while I fumed in the workshop, as I finally managed to produce several grains in the dark chamber I had cor-

done off. I hid them well. I couldn't be sure they would work, but I thought that they would. I hadn't dared to even try to spark the smallest grain I made. But if anyone attacked me, I would be ready from now on.

Wesset came for Anjaro in the night. Sleepily, I managed to get my husband to take his dagger with him. "We're not going to be fighting," Anjaro laughed at me, running his hands over my hair and then down my partly naked body. I saw Wesset's eyes staring at my chest. My breast was large enough to be exposed when the little strap of my nightie rolled down my thin arm.

From my earring, I heard Wesset saying in a worried tone, "The lookouts say there are flames on the tops of the hills. The beacons have been lit."

"Then Parant is dead," muttered Anjaro.

"That's the way Orlo and I see it," said Wesset quietly. "And here we sit, a prize for whoever is besieging Bridgewater."

"It must be Allomas," said Anjaro. "Which means your clan, the Cunians and the Eronssi, probably the Bastro."

"We could go on to the Shoals and Fairhaven," suggested Wesset.

"The men would never stand for it," said Anjaro. "Two thirds of the riggers are off Bridgewater."

"The gods help us all then," said Wesset gloomily. "There's only one thing in our favor and you know what it is."

There was silence for a little while. "She is up to something," Wesset said. "She's thinner and looks

more harried. But I can never get past her maids to see what it is she is doing. Hasn't she told you?"

"She says she's preparing concoctions for the cabin boys," said Anjaro gloomily. "She seems to be preoccupied with her appearance of late as well. She's changed her hair color every day in the last three."

So now you both refer to me in the feminine, I thought bitterly to myself, pulling my nightie about me as I strained to hear. Putting on my other heavy earring and a necklace helped me to hear them as they talked in very low voices.

"So, having a Baract witch who isn't under our control and a Baract prince to ransom will do us no good when we meet my clan," Wesset said gloomily. "Since Cupayat died in Tatheren's bed, we Cunians have wanted the Isles united to defeat the witches."

"We can't beat them unless we can control our men like the witches do," said Anjaro. "I don't want to push Sherrene into doing that to us but I'm sure she knows how, by what she's said about her aunt controlling her. My father told me how awful it was to fight men who had arms hacked off and were bleeding to death but kept on coming at him. Even those left for dead rose from behind to stab our men. We must have that if we fight for the Foreshore again."

"And their arbalests," said Wesset.

"They're the same as ours," Anjaro said forcefully. "You know that. It's what those witches do to the bombs and grenades that destroyed so many of our ships. Fifteen great ships burned together in the Mouth on the day my father lost his ship."

"I expected them to do the same to us when we left Hillaire," said Wesset. "I would have done it, fired *The*

Tempest. I would. I can't think why they didn't and let us get away with her."

"Because she isn't a true witch?" asked Anjaro.
"Boys can't be witches. They let us have her?"

"She's a witch," said Wesset with conviction. "You saw Baro clambering about the topsail like he was never hurt. No, she's a witch. She controlled me and made me kiss her. I told you about that. I was so in love with her. I would have done anything for her, then she turned me off with that antidote, as she called it."

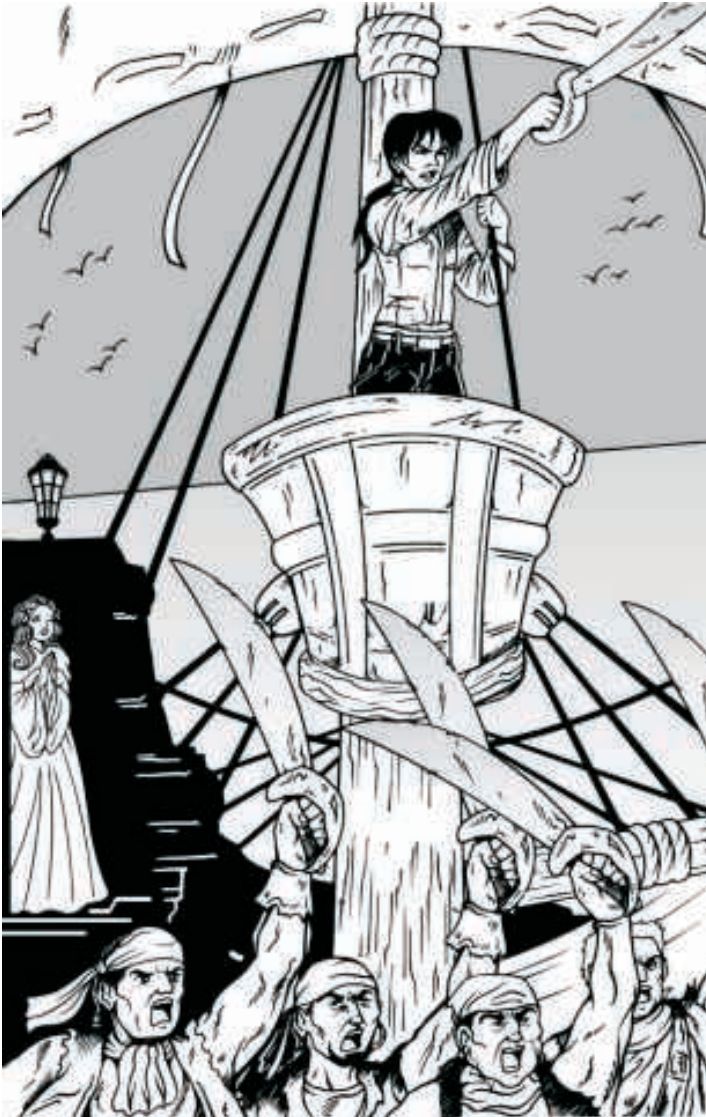
"Imagine if we could just have that and fling it on the Malesians when they move against us in battle," mused my husband. "Then we'd see them flee, not keep coming, even when their clothing was all in flames and their faces were melting away."

Their gruesome words made me feel very sick. There was more as they relived the last war with King Tatheren and his witches that had led to the Seafarers being routed entirely and accepting the trading fees on grain that galled so much. But the Seafarers had to have the grain to feed their islands, teeming with people.

I washed myself completely as I listened to Anjaro and Wesset speaking of the battles of yesteryear as if they had happened just days before. I dressed in my lovely clothes, kept so spotless and fragrant by my maids. I swirled my thin skirts about my stockings, my panties and high heels. My breasts pressed forward in the tight bodice of the dress Choni had made for me. Everything about it was frilled and feminine, filling me with intense desire that I had to fight to master.

I put on the carabet necklace Anjaro had given me from which I heard all that my husband was saying. I

wore a light, pink cloak around my white and silver dress, matching the ribbons in my hair, and went in search of Anjaro, my loving, masculine husband. I could hear that he was counselling his officers to get ready to fight.



I reached the foredeck; seamen were rushing to help me get over lines of heavy cable and boxes of ammunition that being run out beside the few men who were armed with the bulky harquebusses. I lifted my skirts and stepped daintily over the last lines to mount the deck behind my husband. He turned and smiled at my outrageously female figure. He seemed honestly hungry for my kisses as he took me in his arms.

Ahead of us, I could see an island. Up the side of a wide mountain slope, everything was burning. Hedward gave me his spyglass and so I was able to look at the scene. Houses, trees, and wooden artifacts like carriages were stacked and on fire, above blackened slopes that looked like they had been fired before.

Two small ships were coming out to us, arbalests in the front of the low decks while men with harquebusses and what looked like pikes were packed on the ships.

"There's a chain as well," said Hedward, pointing it out. I heard my husband giving orders to arm men in the rigging. "That's the best sea passage into Bridgewater we could have."

"Eronssi," I heard Wesset snarl. "And ready for a fight."

"It will be boarding then," said Anjaro. "They must need our wheat as much as the town does."

Then Wesset turned and saw me twisting my little parasol in my hands as the morning breezes blew my hair back across my face. "What did you come up here for, witch?" Wesset sneered at me. "You want to be raped by those savages? When they see you on our deck, they'll fight even harder to be the first to have you, right here, spread-eagled on the deck."

A breeze made me shiver a little. That made my breasts jiggle on my chest and I saw Wesset's eyes almost pop out of his head. "Give me your shell and your harquebuss," I told Hedward; he looked to Wesset who was frowning at me.

"What you want from me," I told him as I used a puffball to spray the controlling lotion onto Hedward's weapon and ammunition. "What you and Anjaro have always wanted from me." Then I put out my hand and Wesset gave me his knife without a second thought. I smiled at him and he looked at me in horror; he clearly thought that I was still bespelling him. I didn't let him know that I wasn't.

I used a drop of decollane on the shell and it burned a hole in the casing right away. Wesset's eyes grew large. I put a darkglass vial with just a few grains of swamp gas in it inside the shell. "Choni loves you very much," I told the startled young man who blushed at my words. "Would you want to see her raped by the men out there?"

"Oh, gods and goddesses, no!" said Hedward.

Some of the harquebusses wear firing at each other now. The shots of the men in our riggings fell on the ships coming to attack us, but most of their shots fell in the sea. A catapult was being pulled back on one ship I noticed. Many of the men there were hauling back on the springs that would release a great rock at us. They were so close and our ship was so huge that they couldn't miss.

Then the Eronssi ships parted and we saw that each ship had been hiding another riding behind it in its wake. Sails on both ships were being furled. I put my hand on Hedward's shoulder as he set the 'buss on its stand. I raised the arc on which he was going to fire. I

touched the thick, shiny tube and looked at Hedward's anxious face. Behind him, Wesset was staring at me as if he couldn't believe his eyes.

"Release," I told Hedward and he did. He wasn't a good shot. He jerked as he let it go. I extended my senses and my will. I don't know if it was that, or maybe Hedward's skill was greater than I thought but the missile looped high and fell onto the middle of the leading boat.

I hadn't expected such a blinding flash nor the heat wave that swept over us all. I didn't expect the sudden explosion of odors and stench that reached me. I smelled rancid meat burning and wood smoke and vile smells. Where before, a streamlined, fast, beautiful ship had been bearing down on us, now there was nothing but bits of wood, bits of colorful clothing, and fused materials I did not wish to contemplate falling into a great hole in the sea.

Hedward stared at what he had done. I had to stand on tiptoe in my high heels and hold my skirts down as they blew violently against me, rustling noisily, in the sudden, swirling winds.

"Another," I told Hedward, following the same procedure. Clearly, I didn't need all the grains I had put in each vial but I couldn't expose them and let them loose in the light on *The Tempest*. Almost everyone on the deck followed the path of the shell Hedward fired into the air with their eyes. It almost fell in the water even though I commanded it to the center of the ship.

I had to lift my long sleeve to my eyes; this explosion was worst than the first and the two ships on the right, so close together, disappeared and became flot-

sam and jetsam as the shell I had coated and impregnated with swamp gas ignited.

I seemed to be making all of my potions stronger than Aunt Rissa's, I thought miserably, as the odor from the deaths of hundreds of men overwhelmed me. It wasn't just the swamp gas.

Anjaro came bursting through the men lining the deck, staring in awe at the sea. The fourth ship suddenly began to hoist sail to turn and run off. Several of its men fell from a round of arrows hurled at it from one of the front arbalests.

"Oh, my darling," my husband said, taking me in his arms and kissing him. All about us the men were cheering us on.

I had visions of myself on stage in a great drama where a heroine saves the prince and becomes his loving princess. How the crowd had cheered when the actress who played Mereseen in *The Fractured Kingdom* had come down the steps in a wedding dress and danced with men in the audience, letting them kiss her, as if she was a bride and it was her wedding day.

"I bet she has a bedding night to remember," a man near to me had said and all around us people laughed at his wit. I, such a young man, had laughed as well though I hadn't understood the joke at all.

The decollane worked on the chains at the entrance to Bridgewater Harbor like it had worked on the manacles in my cell. Afterwards, my husband took me to his day cabin and I had him make love to me. All the time, the dagger he had left in Nikki's room told me how jealous she was of me as she threw a temper tantrum with poor Tathally getting the brunt of her rage.

“That whore!” I heard Nikki scream. “She only raises her little finger and he goes running to her. I hate her! I hate her! I hate her!”

Prince Tathally only made things worse by laughing at her.

“How is she different from me?” Nikki screamed at him.

“Isn’t it obvious? She has a lovely, girlish figure,” said the Prince. “She has real breasts. I think I was wrong about her. I think she really is a girl. She looks like one too, but you, Nikki, well, you look like my brother, Melleren!”

Tathally deserved the high-heeled shoe with which a furious Nikki attacked him. She even pulled Anjaro’s knife on him and went for him. Bluebands came into her cabin and took it away from her.

I tensed and shivered as I listened to the fight and Anjaro thought it was something he was doing. “You like that, darling?” he asked, squeezing my legs tightly together between his, his manhood trapped between my thighs. I clenched him to me, my panties disguising my maleness from him. He lay on me and we rocked together until he came in a flood.

“I like that,” my seahusband murmured, pulling down my panties, releasing my garter belt. But he didn’t get to have me again because there was an excited tapping on the door. Hedward was there to gasp out that the chain had parted and sunk into the sea and we were moving into the port.

My seahusband left me and I separated the grains of swamp gas into smaller vials. With several of them, I put in only one grain. It occurred to me that the vials I had stolen from my aunt in Hillaire might have been

all the swamp gas she had. I thought of how much was in each vial Bredden had taken from me before I went to be bedded by the King.

So much I had promised I would never do in girl's clothing. I had broken every vow about that. I had done everything I had sworn I would not do with a man since I was one as well. But I had loved Anjaro so much. I still did. Well, I loved him making love to me. He loved my body. No, he *said* that he loved my body. I had never heard him say that to anyone else, though. He never defended me the way that Hedward defended Choni.

I went out in a low-cut dress without any breast pads and felt strange, particularly when I brushed by people. I was aroused all the time; if anyone had seized me and pulled me into a dark corner to make love to me, I would have gone with such an adventurous man without hesitation.

But I was the Captain's woman, his seawife, so I was treated with great respect, particularly after I armed two of the harquebusiers. With the one-grain bomblets, the men wiped out strongpoints, a troop of men-at-arms, and several catapult-equipped ships. Talk flags were flying all over the port area and up the hill to the castle, or clan house, as the Seafarers called it.

I heard my seahusband welcomed effusively by some lord or clan elder who called Anjaro 'brother' and offered him the hand of any of his daughters, one of whom was just fifteen, likely to bloom even more voluptuously than her sisters. I heard the lies and excuses Anjaro made up. Poor Hedward was sent to placate me while I listened to Anjaro plot with his new 'brother' with Wesset, and with some Cunian 'brother' of

Wesset's who had abandoned those who had attacked Bridgewater and was now an active ally in plotting with the others how to make me a willing dupe in their scheme to dominate the Many Isles starting with the 'Carabet'.

That led me to question and so I found out that the necklace I wore contained a pearl from each of the major islands, Cunya, Arumel, Rassince, Assaram, Bastro, Eronse, and Traybo. Owning such a necklace was like proclaiming one's desire to rule all the islands as one clan, or as my people would say, one kingdom.

It didn't take long for almost all of the sailors of *The Tempest* to set ashore. The grain that the ship had brought would see the island through a whole year before it needed to be resupplied. No wonder Captain Anjaro was so popular and had so many women who went willingly to his bed, where he whispered to all of them the things he had whispered to me.

So, it was very easy to decide to escape from the Isles. When the time came, it was almost ridiculously easy to get away. I hardly had to use any of my puff-balls of merenthe, to make men sleep, or the annovare, to love the world so much that no evil in what was happening could be suspected.

XIX. A WITCH'S ESCAPE

The old, white-haired of the Bastro vessel was intrigued when I sent Hedward to him with an invitation to have a supper with the witch of *The Tempest of Distant Shores*, that same witch whom everyone held to be responsible for the destruction of two ships from the Bastro Line but crewed by different clans.

I dressed in one of my most revealing dresses, one that really should only have been worn by a real woman. My breasts were on view as only a real woman's breasts should be. Each movement I made gave off a delicious rustling and the lightest touch of annovare. Again, I think my powder was more concentrated than that used by my aunt Orissiana because the Captain and his men did not just feel happy to see me, they adored me.

The antidote was something I had worked out myself. It had worked on Roddo and Grace to Choni's great consternation.

"You are right," I told the pensive, fearful ponytailed girl whose pink nails distracted me as I put on my makeup. "I should not ensorcel my friends. And I do count Grace and you, Choni, as my friends."

"And Hedward," Choni said lightly.

"But Anjaro and Wesset have betrayed me," I told her. Her eyes widened in shock and fearful surprise. "They hold me in silken bonds," I told her and saw in her intelligent eyes that she understood. "But right now, they are selling me to the Cunians, who intend for me to use my skills to make themselves rulers of the Carabet, indeed of all the Inner and Many Isles, before they will have me lead them back to the Kingdom of the Baracts. In my vengeance, I will destroy the power of Orissiana the Terrible, the greatest of the Baract witches."

Only the last part was a speculation on my part.

"It cannot be, milady," protested my lovely maid weakly, a stray curl on her face catching her attention. She absently played with it as she stared at me.

“Which is greater, the witch or the warlock?” I asked her.

“The warlock,” Choni said.

“And warlocks must not be allowed to live, must they?” I asked her, wondering how far Baract lore and custom would have reached. It was a common thread in Baract stories. Warlocks were always mad and couldn’t be trusted. Saintry witches, often at the cost of their own lives, must kill them.

“M-Milady,” whispered Choni, staring at me as I stood in my black, red-frilled corset in front of her. I pointed to my black dress, frilled and ribboned, and she went to get it. The rustly petticoats were attached as part of this dress she had altered for me.

“I can hear what they say,” I told Choni, whose eyes widened even more. “I can hear what Grace says to you as well. You really shouldn’t have let her think it was all right to wear my pearl earrings to impress Roddo. You and I know that she only has to flash a stockinged ankle at that boy and he wants into her panties.”

“But you, you were,” Choni said in great agitation.

“In the Captain’s forecabin, yes,” I told her. “And yes, he was doing to me exactly what Hedward was whispering he wanted to do to you on my worktable after you left Grace with Roddo and checked that I was still foeship.”

I put on my dress, not mussing my makeup. Choni shivered and shook as she helped me. “I intend to charm Sea Captain Loccoso when they come to see me,” I told her. “I will use on them what I used with Grace and Roddo. What I had to test with Grace was the antidote to the love drug I gave them. I need to im-

press Loccoso and his officers that I am indeed a witch.”

I had Choni put my hair in black ribbons. I had heavy black earrings at my ears but I wore the carabet necklace at my throat, the black pearl of Bastro at the vertex of the seven stones. I had given it pride of place, with white shining pearls from Cunya on either side, two sets of five pearls on either side in a configuration that would tantalize the Bastros, I was certain. The pearls from my earrings and finger ring had come in handy after all.

“I must look the part,” I told Choni, trying out my most seductive voice, using my fan in the manner my aunt had said a woman of high rank should. “I must both entice and terrify them to safely carry me out of here and to Cunya or Bastro where I can search for my Seafarer father.”

I actually had no intention of doing that. If Choni was put to hard questioning later by Wesset, that was what she would tell them, not my real destination which I had resolved to tell no one.

“Am, am I?” began Choni, a sob catching in her throat. “Am I under a compelling potion now like Grace?”

“No,” I told her. “I wouldn’t have told you about Grace and Roddo but you noticed how strangely they were acting. Now you know that you were right. It was my fault. But now I can go ahead with the Bastros. I want them to take me out of this port by sundown tomorrow. That’s when Wesset and his clan friends intend to betray Anjaro as well and seize me and carry me off.”

“Oh, milady,” said Choni in dismay. “Tomorrow sundown. We can hardly pack all your lovely clothes and your potions and devices by then.”

“I’ll be going off alone,” I said to Choni.

“Among all those pirates!” Choni almost screamed in alarm. “Oh, milady, you cannot go without Grace and me. You will need your maids even, even if the Bastros know we are but cabin boys.” She shuddered. “They will treat us properly in time.”

Choni flushed as she tied the bows that laced me into my lovely dress. She positioned the second looking glass so that I could see the curls down my back. I could also admire my girlish figure and the pretty bows of my dress.

The scents and sounds of my dress actually sent thrilling waves of emotion through me. My perfume was a delicate fragrance of water roses with a touch of musk. Nikki had used it to snare Lord Assonder and my husband, with no help from witchery. I hoped to do the same with Captain Locco.

“You should stay with your ship,” I told my lovely maid. I intended to make a flowery speech of thanks she and Grace could cling to after I was gone. I would leave them many of my dresses and jewels and a supply of clasper to keep their girlish voices and a supply of ganasate. When their breasts grew as large as mine, I hoped the men on *The Tempest* would appreciate the changes in them.

“What ship?” said Choni and her cheeks became streaked with kohl. “Oh, milady,” she wept. “You are our ship. If you listened to Grace and me, you must know that. I, I would leave Hedward behind, milady. I

would, though I love him and he says that he loves me.”

I was stunned at that. I had not listened in to her loveplay with Hedward. I'd felt that they deserved their privacy. I knew that they had slept together the last few nights after Hedward stepped down from his watch. I had thought it just the standard relationship between cabin boy and an older, superior boy a long way from home and his true girl friend.

“You haven't listened in on me?” Choni asked me, trembling in surprise. She pulled her shawl about her in the girlish gesture I'd made her do again and again. Now she did it naturally as if she was a girl.

“You deserved privacy,” I told her. She began to cry again and came to me with open arms, muttering, “milady, oh milady,” over and over again. She was packing and stowing my cosmetics even as I went up on deck to greet the men from the Bastro ship.

The Captain and his two Undercaptains couldn't see that I had ensorcelled Hedward and the rest of the guard crew on The Tempest. But they must have thought it terribly odd that the men looked through them and said not a word as they came aboard. I ensorcelled the Captain and his Undercaptains, not just with *annovare*, to feel gay and happy and light, but with *lovebane* as well. I was careful using the puffball antidote on them before they went too far under. As it was, the Captain was nearly in fisticuffs with his lieutenants over who would love me exclusively.

They struggled to regain their equilibrium as the antidote made them all shake and complain of the cold even.

"My father was from Cunya," I told the Captain, making conversation as the three men who had come aboard struggled to recover from the witchery I had inflicted on them.

Dadet, the first Undercaptain, asked me if I was truly a Seafarer. "I bred true to my father, not my mother," I said in the most feminine of voices. "You won't recall him. He was a Cunian spy." Hadn't one of the crew who had called me 'Turling,' unclean, said that about my father? "He was an Undercaptain to the brother of Cupayat, you must remember her, whom the Cunians sent to be Queen of the Baracts. King Tatheren found out about her spying and poisoned her and the baby boy she was carrying."

"She died in childbirth," said the Captain, his reddened eyes wide in horror. "I heard that tale in Terraire and in Fairhaven and it was told the same way. If what you just said was true, Geryat, her brother, would have stormed the Foreshore. We'd all have answered the call."

That was how I learned my father's name.

"I avenged that death," I told the man bleakly. "I would like Geryat to know how a Cunian daughter has stood for him."

"Geryat's dead, my love," said the old man. "Don't know who's Clan Elder over there any more. If you'll release Emmo and Dadet from the curse you laid on us, maybe one of them could tell you."

Seafarers called what the witches of the Foreshore did to them and to the Baracts as well, 'cursing.' I would never be able to cure them of that and I didn't really want to. I just wanted to intrigue them enough to

think that they could be rich, powerful men if they got me out from Anjaro's clutches.

From the three of them, however, I think I heard the truth as Dadet and Emmo strove to impress me and my demure, girlishly posed questions. I learned that my father had been a notorious Cunian spy who had tried to capture a Baract witch in the time after the skirmish against the Foreshore kingdoms.

"Heard the witches got him," Dadet mumbled when I got the chance to talk to him over the meal an assistant cook had prepared for us. "The Yatcho Line kept a place for him in the Elders for years after he didn't come back, I heard. They've gone right down now in the last years. Lost too many ships in running through the Black Sea, hoping Geryat was coming back to them, Alstass, our Clan Elder said. Yatcho wouldn't come to Bridgewater. That's going to be the right thing for them, after all. Not that Cunians lost any ships here. No," he was really disgusted. "Sold us all out when they got the chance and my line down two ships."

The Bastro sailors would love to leave early and help a witch to meet with the Cunian Clan Elders, they all told me. I didn't have to curse them to get them to do that. They had a feeling of being betrayed, they told me.

The only thing they feared was *The Tempest* and its terrible guns. They were very thoughtful when I explained how I had changed the guns on *The Tempest*. I was quite willing to change theirs so that they could outmatch the huge ship, riding high in the water now that she had been emptied. That brightened them up considerably.

"That's all very well," said Emmo, the quiet one, suddenly. "But what does Bastro see of profit in help-

ing a Baract witch escape from Bridgewater? We came here for plunder and we're going away with less."

"Do you want this ship?" I asked them. All three pairs of eyes lit up at that.

They would have loved to have taken *The Tempest* but they couldn't have sailed it anywhere in the Inner Isles, I gathered, nor to Omason for timber or in summer to the Land of the Baracts for grain. They'd be sure to meet a ship of the Komer Line. Bastro would be open for pillage itself if they took such a trophy as the great ship.

"Then I'll just have to give you trade goods," I told them. "Or have you forgotten what things a witch can do? With the weapons I provide you, there would be no one to stand against you." I laughed. "It's the salt you see. It kills all witchery within you. But I wasn't raised on the sea. I know how to keep salt at bay and be the witch Anjaro and Wesset want me to be. Anjaro has a plan to make the Many Isles into one with me, his witch, as the Queen of the Sea to his King."

"And what is Bastro's place in such a Kingdom?" asked Locco, the words spitting from his lips.

My antidote had a touch of annovare in it. I ran my finger across my throat and they stared at the necklace I wore. They wanted to believe what I told them. "I love my black pearl," I told them. "I think it rules all the others in my necklace, don't you wonderful men?"

The pearls I gave them as tokens meant they were contracted to me, and they could rely on me to make them rich. They would seize all the potions that I told them I had made and that my maids were busily organizing for to take with me.

It wouldn't be the Cunian Clan Elders I would meet, Emmo suggested craftily, but their friends on Bastro, posing as such. "We stand off at night and send a runner ashore," said Emmo in a whisper as if afraid I might be listening over his shoulder.

"If worse comes to worst," Dadet suggested to his Captain, "we could always sell her, a true witch, to the Cunians for the fortune she'd bring. Geryat wasn't the only one they sent to the Foreshore to snag a witch."

"But none of them ever came back," muttered Loccoso. "I don't know as we should have anything to do with witches and I've had my belly full of Cunians."

There was a brooding silence for a while which made me think that they must be conversing in some kind of sign language.

"How much do you think they'd pay?" asked Emmo at last.

"I'd ask for twenty thousand gold pieces," said Loccoso firmly.

"Gods and goddesses," breathed Dadet. "You could build four great ships for that ransom."

"Now you see what a great prize just came within our reach, Dace," said the Captain. "I think we can risk a witch on our ship for the riches she'll reward us with or for the ransom she'll bring."

"Or," whispered one of the Undercaptains. "We could let her shower us in riches, then sell her to the Cunians."

"Oh, yessss," muttered the Captain. "I do like that idea."

The only snag I met was that Grace and Choni insisted on coming with me. "We have to make her take

us with her," wailed Grace as Choni explained to her what I had done to her and what I was now planning to do.

"Lady Sherrene can spell us again," said a most perceptive Choni.

"I don't care," said Grace. "If she did what you say, I didn't feel it at all, and I'm sure Roddo didn't. But, Choni, are you growing like I am? Roddo says I'm getting meat on my haunches as well and he loves having a sheath to put his sword in."

"Grace!" said Choni. She sounded appalled at first but then began to laugh. "Is that all you ever think of?"

"Of course," said Grace. "And the same for you. I've seen you mooning after Hedward when he leaves you in the morning. But think, Choni. Don't you want curves like Lady Sherrene? You've seen her when she comes out of the bath. I saw my mother and sisters and the women at the Golden Perch. Lady Sherrene is much more of a shapely woman than any of them. Mallo swears the story is true. It was no warlock running to us on the dock in Hillaire but a woman they were spreading lies about, a woman who'd deceived them."

"But we know," whispered Choni.

"Hush," retorted Grace. "We only know that she is the most beautiful woman we've ever seen. If we want to be like her, we have to go with her, even if she takes the ship and journeys off to the Grey Fields themselves."

"Hush, Graze, hush," said Choni, using a slurring of Gresso, Grace's real name. "The goddesses might be listening."

Well, one was. They were skilful, mixing in their own packs with mine so that their clothing and possessions were aboard the *Snapping Shark* before I put the antidote to the sleeping drug, merenthe, in Mallo's hand. I commanded him to walk the ship ten times, then put the powder into a bucket of water and ladle it into every man's mouth. After the tenth, he could drink himself as he would be terribly thirsty.

I thought we were away clean until Hedward stepped out of the shadows of a warehouse and knocked the Bastro holding onto the mooring rope into the water. He pointed his harquebuss at me; I tried to recall in all the excitement if he had ever fired the third shell I had given him.

"Go back to *The Tempest*," Hedward said harshly. Curses came from the water as Bastro sailors tossed a line into the harbor's scummy water and hauled up a spluttering, cursing Undercaptain Dadet.

The evening winds were beginning to rise, now running out to sea. "Get aboard the *Shark*," I told the girls. They hesitated but they did as I told them, lifting their pretty, dark blue, outer dresses to show off their white, starched petticoats, black, shiny leather shoes and jewelled buckles.

"You've bespelled them!" Hedward said hoarsely, his finger itching back and forth on the weapon's striker.

"Oh, Heddo, no!" burst out Choni. One of the *Shark's* crewmen put his hands about her thin waist to help her onto the Bastro ship's deck. "Our minds are very clear. We aren't under any spell at all."

“You can’t be leaving me,” Hedward called to her thickly. “You’d never leave me if she didn’t make you.”

Choni burst into tears and clutched at Grace, who stroked Choni’s long, golden hair.

“Anjaro betrayed us,” I told Hedward. I pointed across the empty dock. “The Cunians here are of Wesset’s lineage, not yours and definitely not mine, the Yatcho. You know how they will treat a girl like Choni. You know what Wesset will do. He hates me because he thinks I made him kiss me.” I had, after all. “But he did that all on his own because he wanted to and now he’s afraid to be a man with me. Fire if you want but I’m leaving before he gets here.”

I either did the bravest thing I’ve ever done or the stupidest. I almost tripped on my high heels as I minced across the swaying planks. I took Emmo’s proffered hand to step down onto the deck, showing off my starched white petticoats, white stockings and black shoes. Two grinning deck hands put their hands about my waist to catch and steady me.

I didn’t look back but I did hear the sound of running feet and felt the slight sway of the boat as someone jumped and landed and was immediately swarmed by members of our new crew.

“Throw him overboard,” snarled Dadet.

“Wait,” I said as several men began to do just that to the struggling Hedward. “Let him see that I was speaking the truth.”

The slight evening breeze was taking us out into the channel I’d opened on the way in. There would be no chain to block us when we reached the outer lagoon wall. It only took a minute or so before there were

shouts and curses as a mob of armed men swarmed onto *The Tempest*. The shouts died away as they must found themselves ready to fight men who were fast asleep save for just one, marching his lonely circuit ceaselessly, ignoring every distraction about him.

“How’d you like to be bespelled like that?” Emmo asked one of the men with his arm about me. He went to move and I laid my cheek on his rough shoulder.

“Stay,” I murmured and he froze.

I could smell the fear on him. The second man who held me was taut as well. What stories had Emmo and Dadet been telling the crew of this ship? I wondered.

There was suddenly a yell from the great ship and yelling about “The Channel! The Channel!”

“We’ve been spotted,” muttered Emmo. “We’re never going to get away now with that thing after us.”

“Darling Hedward,” I said flirtatiously, letting the breeze blow my hair across Emmo’s face and mine. The divine aroma of water roses almost suffocated me. Both men holding me pricked up their noses as if they had smelt something bad. It wasn’t bad, of course, just a weakened aroma of honeybane, the controller drug. A girl can’t be too careful, can she?

“I don’t recall, Heddo,” I cooed. Choni looked at me and beseeched me in her look to help him against the men holding him. “Did I take back the shell I gave you when you were blowing up all those pirate ships as we thought? Why don’t you take your harquebuss and set it off? It might terrify our pursuers when we remind them what they face?”

Hedward looked at me angrily as several men still held him.

“Are you sure about this?” asked Dadet warily.

“Give him his horrible harquebuss, darling Dadet,” I cooed at the Undercaptain. Several of the men holding Hedward grinned.

Hedward took the proffered weapon and staggered to the railing. I knew he wouldn’t aim the gun and he didn’t. I didn’t know if the controller would still work to my suggestion after such a time but it did. The ’buss seemed to move on its own to the best angle for course and distance.

I clapped my hands. “Oh, goodie,” I giggled. Several men turned to look at me speculatively when there was a flash of light that lit everyone’s face in white, pallid light. Then, parts of *The Tempest* exploded. Flaming brands flew outwards. Those that fell in the water carried on burning. Sheets of flame swept the length of the ship. As fast as the men on *The Tempest* had attacked the ship, they left it just as fast. Many dove from the ship as the masts, probably the driest part of the ship, burst into flames. Each rolled set of sails exploded into flame before the next went up with a whoosh, followed by the next.

“Look,” said one of the men from the high foredeck. “There are women running from that ship. They had *women* aboard that ship.”

“Why are they all getting in that boat?” asked Emmo.

Because they know they mustn’t set foot ashore in a dress, I thought. Oh, smart, good-thinking ladies. I flicked open my small, dainty handkerchief. Honeybane powder spread like a mist over the crew near where I stood. It took only a little suggestion that every man thought was his own and we’d launched an

escape boat and the sea anchor was tossed. Captain Loccaso had a fit, screaming at everyone to obey his orders, but *The Tempest's* cabin boys were saved.

And not just the cabin boys. Somehow or other, Prince Tathally was hauled out of the boat by the curious seamen. Nikki was clinging to him as if he was the most precious thing in the world.

As the cabin boys came aboard, sleepy-eyed and nervous, order was restored. The sea anchor was hauled in. Several men told the Captain that they hadn't done it while he screamed at them that he'd seen them disobeying him with his own two eyes.

Loccoso turned and looked at me balefully. His eyes became slits and a quizzical expression came to his face.

"You?" he mouthed at me. I shook my long, golden tresses, as I rested in the arms of my gallant human leaning posts.

We got to see the end of *The Tempest of Distant Shores* as it rolled, showing its deep keel before it dipped beneath the waves, the fire seemingly still burning under the water.

"Ladies," I called out sweetly to my maids. "Please join Undercaptain Emmo and find suitable, private and secure deck space for the ladies of *The Tempest*. Do it quickly as we will be under full sail once we clear the rocks where the sea chain used to be. I am going to supper with our most wonderful Captain and host."

The reminder that they had a witch on board who could destroy great ships and huge sea chains had its effect.

"The goddess save us all," murmured Dadet beside me.

I laughed and he looked at me angrily. "I will, darling Dadet, I will," I told him.

Men were smiling, even my bodyguards, as the word spread about the darkening ship. One of the few who wasn't amused was a shocked and distraught Hedward who was being consoled and cosseted by one of my very pretty maids. Another was Prince Tathally, muttering to a clinging Nikki that he had just jumped out of the cooking pot and into the fire.

XX. A WITCH'S DESTINATION

I was fed up with sex with men. I hated Anjaro and Wesset. I hated what I had done. I hated being a woman and a witch. Although that's not true. I actually wished that I was a true woman and a true witch. I hated bespelling all the men I had. The *Snapping Shark* wasn't a large ship but I had to keep this crew, every one of them, under my control.

Thank goodness that annovare and honeybane are simple to make in large quantities. It was easy to prow the ship with merenthe at the ready. The ship's water barrels were soon under my command. I flitted about tirelessly in my little nightie and panties. My breasts were itchy which I knew meant they were growing again. I should never have taken another draught of ganasate. But all those cabin boys had been users. I could see that by just looking at the blushing Tess in her thin nightie with all the men looking at her with such interest. I tossed and turned in my cabin bed, unable to sleep as thoughts of Anjaro swept over me and what he might have been doing to my breasts if only. If only.

I tried half the night to sleep. But in the end, I gave in. I could stand it no longer. I slipped out of my room in my little nightie. I heard men talking outside the Captain's passageway. My antidote to merenthe had worked as I intended. No one was heading for my cabin, looking for me. I listened and heard the night watchmen discussing the merits of Tess and Bree, the latter's cute little upturned nose fascinating the man set to guard the Captain. I pushed my will against him as my aunt had taught me to do and the man suggested to the other patroller they move to the rail so as to not wake the Captain.

I entered Loccoso's cabin and slid into his bed, beside him, pushing my smooth, rounded, girlish tush into him. He grunted and put his arms about me. I let him kiss the lovebane perfume that I had used liberally on my neck. No point in taking chances. He was feverish as he kissed bare, scented, soft-skinned shoulders, then buried his head in my long hair.

I eased my panties down just enough for him to slide his rock hard manhood into me.

"I like the other entrance," Loccoso whispered to me, caressing my still forming breasts gently.

"A witch's form of birth control," I whispered back. Loccoso believed me. Well, he should with the drug compound I had assaulted him with.

I hated deceiving a man, even one who was thinking of selling me to the Cunians, into having sex with me to satisfy my womanly cravings. Oh, I knew that they couldn't really be womanly cravings, didn't I? But as Loccoso turned me to kiss me, to caress me and to love me, I felt that I was a woman. He whispered to me what a pretty woman I was, and I hadn't made him do

that. I lay in his arms with a tight pad over my little manhood and let him have his way with me.

The strong aversive potion that I had concocted, based upon the one Abriss had intended to use on my aunt and the Queen in Hillaire, worked well. Loccoso only tried once or twice to go there before withdrawing his hands as if he had been stung. He became the man a woman like me wanted him to be. I was just getting to be a witch and a woman more and more like my aunt; of all the women in the universe, she was the one I despised most.

Merenthe eventually made my lover sleep but I dared not use that on myself. The bout of sexual activity, however, was just what I needed and so I finally got some sleep that first night aboard the *Shark*. Having Loccoso so madly in love with me helped me greatly in all the tasks I had to do as well. I had him under such gentle but firm control that even the discovery that the girls the crew had rescued were all cabin boys didn't waken him from the pleasant fantasy life he was living.

Of course, I had to tell him who Prince Tathally was and about the ransom that would one day be paid for the young man. That information got Tathally locked up in a private cabin and out of my hair for a little while at least.

Five days out, with nothing but ocean about us, Dadet was almost foaming at the mouth about the abominations Loccoso had allowed aboard the *Snap-ping Shark*.

"We should throw them all overboard," Dadet almost screamed at his Captain as Loccoso and I ate a leisurely breakfast.

Poor Tess. Dadet was holding her arm forcefully. He had brought her the length of the ship, through all the men who smiled and whistled at her unbound hair, her feminized face and figure. Her breasts kept on being revealed as the strap of her nightie fell down her shoulder.

Dadet, it seems, was more than a little resistant to the potions with which I had inundated the ship. Luckily, Loccozo was entirely under my suasion.

"Oh, Dace, my man," said Loccozo, running his hand over my soft, shapely leg, exposed by the thinness of my nightie. "Don't take on so. Wasn't this young woman," he indicated Tess, who was so startled by his words that she involuntarily glanced at me and almost gave the whole game away, "as affectionate as you wished her to be?"

Dadet snorted angrily, his eyes on his Captain in amazement. "She's affectionate enough all right," frothed the Undercaptain "Too affectionate. But she ain't no woman. She's a man, for Haruva's sake!"

Loccozo laughed. "She came off a great ship, didn't she?" he asked thoughtfully. "Now, we know how the great Captains keep their men from going insane on the long sea voyage to Omason and back. Funny, I always thought a seawife was a brat they picked up off the docks. I didn't know they would be such pretty little things."

"Captain!" roared Dadet. "It ain't right. We got to get rid of them all. They're corrupting the crew! Work ain't being done. All the men are doing is mooning after these, these *boys* and sneaking off with them."

Loccozo laughed again. "Well, good for the lads," he said equably, stroking my perfumed legs. I felt de-

sire rising in me. I could tell he felt it as well by the twinkle in his eye. When we'd got rid of this little problem, we could retire to the Captain's bed and he could pleasure both me and himself for a while. That was one of the things about lovebane. It cut both ways. I wanted the loving attention of this man as much as he wanted mine.

"Is that all?" Loccoso said then to the seething Undercaptain. The sentry at the door was looking down at Tess, winking at her as she smiled up at him, adjusting her nightie strap over her breast. She was clearly one of those who reacted very well to the ganasate Grace and Choni had shared with her and the other cabin boys.

"Captain," said Dadet. A knife appeared in his hand. "No boy's gonna do that to me and live to brag about it."

"Break him!" I snapped at the sentry, who leaped forward as Dadet aimed his knife at the cowering Tess. The marlin spike that the sentry carried whirled down on Dadet's hand with a satisfying crack.

Dadet screamed, dropping the knife. The sentry hit him again and again and the two went down in a scuffle. The door to the Captain's cabin burst open and Emmo hurtled in with others of the crew.

"Put Dadet in the bilge brig," snarled Loccoso to the other Undercaptain. Loccoso had stood gallantly in front of me to protect me, his woman, from harm. I saw several men give appreciative glances to my frilly nightgown. It was too hot to wear a robe in the privacy of the Captain's cabin. I glanced at Tess. She had a hand in front of her ample breasts as if her heart had been shocked. She looked at me, then at the Captain and smiled.

“Dadet?” gasped Emmo.

“After the insult he gave this young lady,” Loccoso snarled, “pulling a knife on her as well, he can stay there till this voyage ends. You,” he pointed at the sentry who had used the spike on the dazed former Undercaptain, “Terent, isn’t it? You’ll serve as Undercaptain the rest of this trip. The first thing you can do is get this young woman back to her quarters. I don’t want to hear one more word from anyone about cabin boys from great ships. I don’t want the ladies on board to be upset by ribald talk. You can crack a few heads if you have to, Terent and Emmo but make it so.”

I smiled demurely up into my Captain’s face and let him hug me and kiss me as Dadet was hauled away. Grace appeared at the doorway then, her face a mask of concern. I had her get a robe for Tess for her walk about the deck of the ship along with some slippers. All the time, Loccoso held me and nuzzled me. Tess smiled up at Terent and thanked him in a little girlish voice for rescuing her.

My maids had shared the throat clasp cordial, I noticed. I thought of the quantity of drugs I had given them, what they must be sharing, and wondered how such would last the voyage. When I spoke to Choni later, she blushed and confessed right away that they didn’t need as much as I had said they should use to have the desired effect.

Choni and Grace had been experimenting with how much to use. The girls had all been willing participants in the scheme to share feminizing products and processes. Even the former cabin boys who had become cabin ‘mothers’ on *The Tempest* as they aged had wanted to be in the group and were behaving not like

'mothers' any more but like giddy cabin boys themselves, revelling in the way men seemed to find them attractive again.

Loccoso and I retreated to his cabin; it took a long while for him to be sated. Yes, I was giving him the 'blue stuff' I had given Anjaro. I taught him a number of the tricks I had been taught by Anjaro and Nikki, after listening in on what had been going on between her and my first seahusband. A light dose of heartsease at the end of our lovemaking and any doubts Loccoso might have had about me were simply erased. I thought idly of making this voyage last forever, circling the oceans and making the men on the *Snapping Shark* worship me as the Queen of the Sea.

On a fine day, it was wonderful to stroll about the deck with the other ladies who all talked like me, or more like Grace actually.

Choni had made new breast bands for us all, of soft materials, frilled, some lightly padded. She shaped our dresses as well so that they showed off our growing attributes well. Tess, Choni confided to me, needed no padding at all. The voluptuous figure more men than Terent were mooning over was all her.

"I'm so slow to grow," I told Choni as she told me about Tess and Fee, another girl who was blooming very well.

"You're probably like your mother," said Choni. "I'll bet she wasn't big-breasted either."

"How perceptive of you," I smiled at Choni, who smiled herself and flushed as she always did when praised. My mother had been very slim and I had hardly ever noticed her breasts. I loved the way that Choni and the other girls never referred to our previ-

ous lives using anything but feminine nouns. The girls were daughters and sisters of people they referred to while travelling in the company of the two older aunts,



Esha and Hope, who had been their 'mothers' on *The Tempest*.

Choni wasn't the only perceptive one. I had my hair braided and piled on top of my head, one of Grace's fancies that I had let her indulge.

Hope, the older of the aunts, asked to walk with me. I could see that something was on her mind. "How, how long have we been on this ship, milady?" she asked me. Worry showed in her elegantly made-up face. She had dangling earrings like mine at her pierced ears. It was a fashion on our little ship.

"Why would you like to know?" I asked her with as sweet a smile as I could muster.

"I, I know we've been at sea over a month," blurted out Hope. "But when I asked Oler, the helmsman, who was with me last night," she blushed a little as she admitted that, "he told me we were only six days out. I said it was longer. He laughed and said it couldn't be. Bastro is only a ten-day from Bridgewater, nine with good winds like we've been having."

"He doesn't seem very bright, does he?" I asked her gently. Emmo was talking to Grace, I noted, at the bow of the ship. His arm casually went about Grace's waist and she didn't object, smiling as he moved closer to her and touched her skirts with his long, strong legs.

"Emmo says we're just six days out," Hope went on in a low voice. "And so do all the sailors I talk to. The girls all know we've been out for over two ten-days, even though it's longer than that, but they don't care if this voyage lasts forever, not even Nikki."

"And you think it will?" I asked Hope.

"I don't think that we are headed to Bastro," said Hope slowly. "I think, Lady Sherrere, that you have

bespelled the crew so that they think that they are sailing us to Bastro but you are sailing us some place else.”

“What a terrible thing to accuse me of, darling Hope,” I smiled at her. I was now going to have to bespell her as well as Oler, the helmsman and Emmo, whom she had talked to.

It occurred to me gloomily then that my aunt had the nickname Orissiana the Terrible. That quality must run in families, I thought.

“There’s nowhere in the Isles that girls like us can land,” said Hope, not looking at me as she said it. “Our only life as women is on board a ship like this with a witch like you who aids us to be women. You’re not from the Isles and you might not know all our customs. We would all be killed, our parts cut off first, burned for offences to the goddesses, even though no one believes in the old pantheon these days.”

Hope shuddered and looked up at me then. She probably didn’t know how much her tears, made her look like a true woman.

“If you could take us out of the Isles to a place where we could land, I wouldn’t mind going into a nunnery with other women myself,” Hope said, shocking me at hearing an idea I’d never thought of. “If you could let us off in some other land where there are quarters for women like us, that would suit these girls well.

“We know what we are. But after what we’ve been through, none of us want to be going back to another great ship, locked up below, waiting for some drunken crewman with a hard-on he wants taken care of while he curses you for doing what he wants you to do for him. It’s not like that here. This crew, well, look at

them, they bow to us and we curtsy to them and they treat us like, like ladies.

“That’s your doing, milady, and we would thank you for it. It’s, it’s been such a wonderful experience for us all to know what a true woman is treated like. We know you can’t take us with you wherever you’re bound, my lady. If we could all go with you into a foreign port, we’d all love if you could do that.”

“You’ve been talking to other girls,” I said as pleasantly as I could.

Hope hesitated. “I have,” she said at last. “If I said I hadn’t, you’d spell me and get it out of me, wouldn’t you?” She sighed. “I have sailed all over,” she said, “and I’ve seen the stars countless times at night. I’ve a fair idea where you’re headed, my lady. I wish you to know that I, and some of the other girls who’ve guessed, we’ll do anything we can to help you. We’ll keep these crewmen as confused as the Captain is with you until it is too late for them to do anything but land.

“And, milady, though we love our dresses and pretty things, and our hair and new voices, please remember,” Hope sounded very choked, “that, what we once were, means that every one of us can handle a small boat when needed if milady has need of us to get her off this ship.”

We had to have a woman-to-woman hug at that point which brought smiles to several of the men who stopped what they were doing and looked at us. Hope was right, of course. I had probably gone far too far in bespelling the crew. They were as unlike a crew of raiders as could possibly be.

“Nikki,” said Hope then. “She could be the biggest problem. She’s moping after the Prince. She seems to

think that he's going to make her a Princess when he comes into his kingdom. I tried to tell her that we were headed to Bastro, a long way away. She laughed at me and said she's seen enough stars while on her back, not to know where we're really headed."

A rigger dropped down in front of us, smiling and bowing to us. Naturally, we ladies had to curtsy. With the low necklines that Choni liked to see in our dresses, the rigger was able to see our cleavages and the rounded mounds forming on our chests.

"You ladies should go in before the blow comes," said the smiling older man, looking at Hope invitingly.

I stepped away with a smile. "I'll take care of the other problem," I smiled at Hope.

I think it was because I was the Captain's lady that the rigger didn't look so much at me. Hope smiled up at the man, slipping her arm through his. She continued her stroll with him; he earnestly talked to her and she looked as if she was interested in what he had to say about the play of wind on the water. They disappeared below decks with him having to put his arm about her waist to steady her in her high heels as she walked down the steep steps to the crew quarters.

At my suggestion, the Prince was allowed company like the rest of the crew. Nikki's walk down to the Prince's cabin was as womanly as any other of the cabin boys' though she had only recently been started on throat clasper and ganasate, much to her delight, according to Grace.

It took several more ten-days before we sighted land. "At last," enthused Locco as he tugged on his pants quickly and I put my breast band back about my

chest. I was bigger than my mother, I thought, as I placed each breast into the soft, halter-type clothing.

“Come, my lady,” the Captain urged me, holding up a silk-lined robe for me to put about myself.

“Lokey!” I protested. “I only have my panties and breast band on.”

“You didn’t even need to wear them!” exclaimed my enraptured lover. He swirled the robe about me and I let him do it, as I flicked my long hair over the collar and down my back.

“I should braid my hair,” I told him as he lifted my arms about his neck so that he could press my whole body against him. The silk caressing my naked legs and most of my body made me want to purr like a cat.

We went out on to the deck. It was lined with men and girls with long, flowing blonde hair like mine.

“Eight days out, Captain,” said Emmo, his arm about Grace who wore a flowered, lined robe like mine, I noticed. Grace turned and smiled at me; her soft hand gently caressed the face of the Undercaptain even as she looked up at him demurely. “I think that’s Soroster, Captain. We’re a little bit further to the west than we should be but it will be Bastro tomorrow after a little run to the east.”

“And that’s where your wife lives, sir,” murmured Grace. Emmo looked down at her, confused.

“My wife?” Emmo asked, shaking his head as if he had cobwebs in it.

Grace winked at me over his shoulder. “I’m right here, my love,” she said, lifting her mouth to him. Emmo enthusiastically began to kiss her.

“You two need to go inside,” said Loccoso genially. He put his arm at me and we looked to Liss Isle sliding past us on the horizon.

“Well, if the Captain orders me,” said Emmo, taking Grace and going back inside in almost indecent haste. Grace’s giggle let me know how much she was enjoying her tryst with the ship’s senior Undercaptain.

We still had a run of nearly two ten-days before we passed the Mouth of Desseny. Emmo proclaimed that we were making great time each day, just eight days on this run from Bridgewater. The girls had picked up on it. Eight days, I heard them saying to various sailors. We were going so quickly because the crew was made up of such wonderful men.

The crew was going about like rutting roosters in their pride on a job so well done, talking of all the sights of Bastro they hoped to show the girls of their choice.

I managed to maneuver Hope into walking with me again.

“Milady,” Hope said uncertainly to me, her earrings bobbing nervously at her neck.

“Tonight,” I said to her. “We will anchor in the shipping lane off Terraire.”

Hope nodded. “I had thought that we would sail through the Mouth.”

“And how would Emmo have explained that?” I asked her and she gave me a quick smile. It had been somewhat amusing to hear Emmo ‘recognize’ different features of the landscapes we passed. We had passed seven of the Carabet Islands with only Bastro and Cunya still to be spotted by our eager, knowledgeable Undercaptain

“So few ships on the Black Sea,” Hope said. “In the Isles, we would be seeing a hundred sails about us, not the two or three we see this morning.”

“It’s the growing season,” I told her. “The fruit and grain ships will flock here after midsummer and we’d find anchorage a problem. But tonight, all the crew will sleep once we are anchored. I’ll have need of your help with the boats then if you still wish to go ashore with me into the Foreshore, which I’ve always known as the Kingdom of the Baracts.”

“Every girl will go with you, milady,” said Hope. “We’ll pack for landing on Bastro this afternoon. I’m sure we’ll have lots of help to get our packs ready and on deck in time.”

“I’m sure you will,” I murmured. Hope smiled at me.

“Thank you, milady,” she said. Her eyes glittered as she and I hugged each other again. “Thank you for not leaving us behind on this pirate ship.”

That was a great insult, I had discovered; all of the men bristled when anyone made a joke about them being pirates.

It wasn’t easy. The merenthe puffballs I had prepared worked well, too well as several of the girls got caught in the blowback. Esha and Hope organized the girls efficiently, so all the casualties were brought on deck and put onto the longboat. Its single sail was raised by Hedward with the help of several willing female-shaped figures, much to his surprise. Tathally was a dead loss with Nikki clinging to his arm, demanding the best seating in the tiny, enclosed cabin for the Prince.

“Why bring the Captain and them?” Hedward, asked me with a disgusted look at Tathally and Nikki. It took me a moment to figure out who he was referring to. I would use my antidote on the Captain and the sailors once we got into dock as well as on the girls who looked so pretty as they smiled in the sleep and dreams of merenthe.

“They must come back to the ship and wake the others, even Dadet,” I told Hedward. Several of the girls, listening, shuddered at that. Dadet’s screams and rants from the bilge brig were unnerving, I had learned of late, though none of the girls had complained to me about it.

My head was pounding as I went onto the ship. The last girls came over the side and Esha counted and called the roll carefully so that everyone was with us. Then we cast off.

“I can’t leave the *Shark* unprotected,” I told Hedward. We had propped several men in positions that sea sentries would take. Despite what Hope thought, there were a lot of ships about, but many were small fishers without sails. They would find the sleeping ship sooner rather than later. I doubted the night would go by without the ship being found and likely ransacked.

“I’m so glad we’re leaving,” I heard one girl say. “I was getting so fed up with hard tack,” the biscuits we all ate on long voyages, “and having some man asking me how I liked my chicken soup.”

My head pounded as the ship ghosted in. Hedward tacked the boat expertly into the familiar harbor of Terraire. We avoided the fishers and tied up at the warehouse pier. A yawning customs sentry came out of his hut, telling us to stay aboard till morning. A puff-

ball of merenthe and he was back in his hut, sleeping off the night.

I had worked too many controlling spells. I stood unsteadily on the dock and realized that my dizzy spell was coming from that work.

Loccozo was glaring at me from the deck of the boat as Grace brought the last of our packs ashore.

"If you hadn't agreed to sell me to the Cunians after you took all that I gave you, this might not have happened," I told him. But I knew that it would have. "Get back to the *Shark* before you think of raising the alarm about us," I added. "Or you'll have no ship to go back to." I pointed to the fishers leaving from a distant dock.

Loccozo's face turned white. He cursed and ordered the two groggy men with him to hurry.

"In our bed," I told him, "you'll find a selection of all the things that you said you could sell for a profit." His face showed its normal craftiness. "No weapons, of course. Those I keep to myself. And if there is no cry about the town for us," I nodded to the line of girls slipping along the warehouse wall and stopping at the open market divide away from all the lights of Terraire's least savory quarter, "I won't send Hedward to the point to launch a spelled shell in your direction. Believe me, I have the odor of your ship in my mind and I can find you wherever you try to hide on this sea."

That shocked him. It shocked Hedward who stood beside me as well. It wasn't true.

I went to the front of line. "Milady," said Choni, looking up at my bodyguard, the man we called her husband to his face.

I was home, in the place where my mother had been a witch. My aunt would oppose me, the Queen would oppose me, and Count Osgard would oppose me. If they ever found that I was returning with Prince Tathally, I'd certainly be accused of being a rebel. But I was a witch, a powerful witch. Anyone who called me a warlock and told me I was mad, I could take care of, in any of a hundred ways.

"Follow me," I told the line of girls. They shouldered packs and followed me, the swish of our dresses and the scent of annovare making all of the watchers on the streets of the Free Quarter smile and bow to us as we passed. I led them to the only place I knew would accept so many women at night, the nunnery of Lady Arnessa.

On the morrow, I would start my battle with my aunt and find places for my girls, a prince and my one male guard. I only hoped that the best witch, the best woman, would win the contest that I was sure to be engaged in. And that best woman would have to be me.

##