

Warrior Or Woman



Rebecca Rafferty



An "Adult Tv" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

This story (including all images) 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. This material is intended for persons over the age of 18 only.



Copyright © 2017

Published by Reluctant Press
in association with Mags, Inc.
All Rights Reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotes contained within a critical review.

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

Call toll free (800) 359-2116

reluctantpress.com & magsinc.com

New Authors Wanted!

Mags, Inc and Reluctant Press are looking for new authors who want to write exciting TG, crossdressing or sissy TV fiction.

Stories should be in Word or Rich Text format, and around 24,000 to 30,000 words in length. Reluctant Press also prints some shorter stories in the 19,000 to 24,000 word range.

If you think you have what it takes, this could be your opportunity to see your name in print on a real book, commercially published, and get paid for it.

Contact

magsinc@pacbell.net, reluctantpress@gmail.com - or call 800-359-2116 to get started.

YOU CAN BE PART OF OUR FAMILY

If you aren't part of the Reluctant Press family, then you aren't receiving our Newsletter every month. The Newsletter includes previews of the latest books, news, make-up tips, columnists — and more!

Joining our family is easy -- just make a purchase of any size directly from us, and you'll receive our newsletter absolutely free for up to one year. Or, you can have a trial subscription for a limited time by sending your name and address to Reluctant Press, P.O. Box 5829, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413 ...be sure to ask for a free trial subscription.

WARRIOR OR WOMAN

by **Rebecca Rafferty**

“I’d get my hair cut if I was you,” my father told me gruffly from the balcony of our clanhouse. “When you walked down with that blanket about your shoulders, Maran, I thought you were a girl.”

Naturally, my cousin Batera snickered at me. She’d draped her sleeping blanket about my shoulders as my arms were already laden with her basket of knick-knacks, the sort that women always carry with them.

“Or grow a beard,” my father growled at me. His hair was almost as long as mine, but no one would have confused him for a woman with his stocky, muscular build and his hairy, covered face.

That was a sore point. I’d love to have a beard. Younger men than me had straggly growths the girls always teased them over but I was still beardless at eighteen years. My mother only laughed at me and tended to the needs of my latest brother when I complained.

“You do have hair on your face,” she laughed, touching me, “only it’s fine and golden, just like your hair. You take after your uncle, Maran. He married before he had whiskers and look at him now!” Grevel had a beard almost to his belly. “Your aunt wishes he’d shave, like Southerners do. Most women would like that. Beards are awfully smelly, itchy things! Your girlfriends don’t know what they’ll be missing when you finally cover those soft, enticing cheeks with hair!”

What girlfriends? I wanted to ask my mother. I wasn’t tall and dark-haired like Tessen. I didn’t have thick, muscular arms like Firres. He used an axe all day long to cut and shape logs “because,” as he’d once whispered to me through his thin whiskers, “the girls are watching!” He’d flexed his biceps and I’d been awed. They were enormous!

“I need someone to carry my perfumes and washing needs,” whimpered Batera, batting her dark, painted eyelashes at me. “You can do that for me, Marana, can’t you, darling girl?”

“You know,” I said to her, forcing a smile as I was seething inside. “Some day, cousin, a man is going to grip that nasty tongue of yours and slide his knife across it. You’ll be just like Notran.” He was a man who had told lies once too often. The clan conclave had ordered that punishment on him. “Wouldn’t he make the perfect spouse for you? I wonder how the two of you would kiss.”

“A man might do that to me,” said Batera sweetly. “But dearest Marana wouldn’t, would she? Because she’s a girl!”

I didn’t speak to her again as I knew she wouldn’t give it up. Batera was like that. I ignored her, my father, my brothers, my uncles and their families, and got on with the other tasks the trading party needed done. I loaded trade goods, watered the mules and

brought the horses down from the paddocks, hitching them to the right wagons and carriages.

I saw the Clan Chief coming down to the walkway on which we were assembled, leading a white horse, a battle horse, which he attached to the back of the women's carriage.

"Kun is too old to fight again," I heard him say to Plever, leader of this trading party, of which I was part, a groom no less. "One of the girls can ride him, which is why I included the woman's saddle in the tack. Batera thinks she can be another Asara." Asara was a legendary woman warrior who'd once ruled over all the clans. We'd called her 'queen,' that foreign word for an unheard-of thing, a woman ruler. "You've got enough young lads along to act as grooms," the Clan Chief nodded to me as he said that, "and Kun might be of use if you run into trouble."

"We always do lately," said Plever darkly. "Maybe we should leave the lasses ..."

"You'll meet up with the Dareth party at the Black Forest," snapped the Clan Chief. "They expect you and will have more warriors than you. It couldn't be a safer trip in days like this!"

For the meeting with the Dareth, I saddled Kun with the pink harness and high lady's saddle, placing Batera's thin, woman's sword in the saddle scabbard. "One of us, sweet Marana," she'd said to me, still teasing me unmercifully in front of older, women traders, "can look like a warrior when we meet with the Dareths!"

We met with them all right. I was sure I heard the calls exchanged between our forward scouts and theirs. Later, I'd find out I was wrong. The Dareth for-

ward scouts weren't Dareths, something Plever should have known. I did hear the call to stand down arms from Plever, riding up on his hack. Batera flung her lace-edged coverlet at me as she stalked on foot from the trade wagons halted in a favoured, shady spot. She smiled as she admired the female tack on the white horse.

"He needs a run," I shouted to her just as this enormous battle-horse and warrior bounded into the clearing. A huge arrow pierced Firres, his arms full of kindling, and pinned him by his neck to a tree. The screaming was awful, from the attackers, the defenders and the women.

Tessen's head separated from his shoulders, a big man on a brown warhorse careering among the wagons and slashing at anything moving. I shoved Batera beneath the nearest wagon. The huge horse bellowed as his rider turned him like a festival dancer, slashing at the line of grooms standing still in shock. Kun reared, striking out with his hooves, hurling a challenge of his own. Only the fact that I'd secured the pink reins around the wheel of the women's wagon prevented him from lunging immediately at the oncoming horse and rider.

I did the only thing possible in all the confusion. I released the reins holding Kun and instinctively drew the woman's sword from its sheath, the only weapon within reach. The huge, black-bearded rider bore down on us, his yellow teeth snarling, fighting to control his horse as Kun lunged and the big brown reared. A warhorse needs a rider to control him but Batera had scrambled away, screaming. I vaulted onto Kun's back, cursing at the woman's saddle I'd put on him.

I saw the smile on the other rider's face. "Asara!" he sneered. My spirits sank as I recognized he was a Rur, just like me. No, not like me, a renegade. I had no shield. There was nothing I could do. I had to get inside the other's defence. I urged Kun forward. He

leapt, as he'd been trained to do, at the other horse's neck, biting, grasping, not letting go, as he pulled the other warhorse to one side. The brown screamed as it began to fall.

The rider's eyes showed his horror but still he swung his sword at me. If it had connected, it would have taken off my head like Tessen's. I've always hated the short, springy, thin women's blades, toy blades we called them on the practice fields, laughing silently at the patient men who tried to make fighters out of useless girls.

The brown, sliding horse, rearing to avoid Kun's teeth, pushed the renegade's blade so high into the air that it passed over my head. Kun let go suddenly and his hooves drove into his enemy's chest. The warrior sprang up, lifting his sword back to chop at me again. I threw the woman's sword in desperation. It went right into the big man's eye.

Kun bucked me off as he did what any battlehorse would do. He smashed his enemy and its rider into dog meat I ran about him, wanting to pick up the man's sword but Kun was trampling what was left of a human body into mush, the sword beneath him. The woman's sword stood up from his eye for a moment. I grabbed it and finally caught a trailing rein, using it to help me jump onto Kun's back, fighting him for control, urging him into the melee that Kun knew well how to fight in, if he was guided by a proper rider.

I slashed at the men in furs, slashing faces, arms, hands, screams of anguish all about me. I saw men I'd known for an age falling under axe blows as I ran the butchers down with the agile Kun. Too old to fight and me too young to be a wagon guard? We were both eager to prove the words wrong.

I saw Batera scuttle from beneath a wagon, this huge bear-skinned warrior charging after her. Kun was aiming at the enemy fighting those in the clan

colours he knew. I did the only thing that came to mind. I leaped from Kun's woman's saddle right onto the bearskin chasing Batera.

The bearman laughed as he threw me from him, picking up his huge axe. The woman's sword was good for something more than throwing. I could whip it much faster than a huge man's broadsword. I slashed the bearskin's face as I rose into a crouch, and back across his eyes before he even got his axe all the way back. I drove the blade into the armpit exposed to me as he groped at the blood that was blinding him.

His foot came up and struck me with numbing force in my throat. I went down, gasping for air, hanging on to the bloody sword that slid out from the bearskin's body. I stood, looking across a battlefield. There were bearskins all about me, staring at me. Several suddenly screamed and went down under arrows released by charging, mounted warriors. The Dareths had arrived on the battlefield.

Kun rose up at another bearskin about to crush me. The man fell forward right onto the woman's sword I still held. Frantically, I tried to work it free as the man threshed and died.

"Let it go, woman!" someone on horseback called to me, the rider slashing out on all sides. "That horse is your weapon! Control it!"

Kun was making bloody pancakes out of dead warriors and horses. Again, I caught his reins. He turned his head, not biting me for once as I climbed onto the pink saddle once more. Yes, Kun was a weapon and he answered to me trustingly. I don't know how many of the enemy we rode down but I did become aware that there were men on either side of me protecting Kun's flanks as we rode down an enemy that was by then trying to run from us.

“Gods, woman!” yelled one of the men, pushing his horse in front of me. “You’re not even armoured!”

Another mounted warrior grabbed Kun’s head. The old horse was too tired, I think, to resist. He stopped, breathing really hard, about to keel over, I thought. I dismounted the only way I could, by jumping over his head. The Dareth rider gasped as I reached back and stroked under Kun’s chin, reassuring him that I was leading him to food and water.

“Guard her!” yelled the Dareth. I had two mounted men following me as I led Kun to the dead mount of a fallen warrior, picking out his water bottle. I let the old horse take it all, chucking and caressing him as his shuddering and heavy breathing lessened.

The man who’d yelled at others to stay with me returned with other men guarding him. “My lady,” he said to me, lifting the face guard of his helmet. I stared in shock at someone as beardless as me. He smiled dryly at me as if he understood I was gaping at a beardless man. “If you will accompany me, my brother wishes to thank Queen Asara for her invaluable assistance in destroying his enemy, Cadan the Rur, and the tribal leader, Gelesh Bearskin. You and your white battlehorse were an inspiration to us in the way you fought, my lady. It isn’t often that one learns that the old legends are true!”

“I’m not ...” I began. My voice came out in the softest of whispers. I clutched at my burning throat. The man standing in front of me leapt from his horse and lifted my hand to look at my throat.

“Scath!” he called to someone. “The lady has been hit! Ride for a healer to look to her when we join my brother.”

I was sitting in a padded chair by a sturdy carriage, all kinds of recovery and salvage going on, when I saw a dirt-streaked Baretta stumbling across the clearing towards me.

“Baretta!” I called, standing, but was immediately drawn back by the old, white-haired man, the healer, Ollosanth.

“She cannot hear you, my lady,” said the old man, smiling at me. I’d heard the strange whisper that emanated from my mouth, not disturbing any of the guards just feet away from me.

“I’m not a lady,” I croak-whispered to him, trying to signal Baretta to come to me. She’d be able to tell these fools what was going on. Beside me, the old battlehorse, Kun, was snuffling away in a feedbag at the oats brought for him. He was still breathing very heavily which I didn’t like. He should have recovered more quickly from exercise as all horses did. I think I’d really overextended the old lad. When I looked at him again, he actually seemed as if he was sleeping on his feet.

“Your maid servant is being brought, my lady,” said the irritating Ollosanth, who must be deaf as he didn’t respond to anything I said.

Baretta eyed me in her surcoat that I’d pushed away; it had been constantly replaced about me by Prince Alloth, his brother Baleth, or this irritating healer. “My, don’t we look pretty,” she sneered at me, going down in a wide curtsy to me.

“Don’t you start!” I screamed at her.

Baretta stared at me, coming right up close to me. “What’s the matter with your voice?” she asked with a

frown, studying the tight bandages about my neck which were helping to restrict my voice, I was sure.

She had to lean right against me, her earring bouncing occasionally on my lips as she finally grasped what I was trying to tell her. The Dareth warriors had seen a beardless me, my fair hair streaming out behind me, on a white horse, with pink saddle and tack, a woman's saddle. With a pink and gold surcoat hanging from my shoulder, using a woman's sword on the attackers, I was, to the Dareth princes, a woman.

And they kept trying to make me more womanly! They draped the surcoat about me as Baretta would have worn it. They were setting up a private woman's tent where I could bathe! Some men were gathering women's clothing, perfumes, toiletries and jewellery, earrings, brooches and hair pins, all for me, the incarnation of Queen Asara.

I could barely understand what they said. They couldn't understand me and the name I gave myself. So I was 'Queen Asara' to their grinning faces. The smiling princes, Alloth, with light brown hair and a neatly combed and shaped beard, and Baleth, his beardless brother, insisted on calling me that, bowing to me, having their men do the same. It was a relief when they went off, "dispensing justice" to various captives in the attack in the Black Forest.

"You want me to tell them who you really are?" asked Baretta, flouncing her dress skirts at me. She watched in surprise as several warriors carried women's clothing into the tent they were preparing for 'Queen Asara.' I'd been asked constantly, of course, who I was. I'd told them I was Maran, son of Melland, but they didn't seem to understand.

"You're the only other Rur woman left alive," Ollosanth said sadly to Baretta. He'd already called her my maidservant as if he expected to find out I was a highborn woman. Was he ever going to look like a

fool when Bareta explained who I was. “You can tell us who this woman is.”

“Of course,” said Bareta with a smile. Ollosanth whistled and, within seconds, Baleth came loping up, smiling.

“Another woman alive?” he asked incredulously. “We thought everyone from where Queen Asara launched her attack was dead!”

Bareta listened, her mouth open in amazement, as mine had been when I heard it the first time! Baleth had explained with a laugh and a gleam in his dark eyes to his brother, Alloth, the leader of the Dareths, that I was the incarnation of ‘Queen Asara.’ I’d risen like the golden woman of legend to smite the mightiest of warriors who’d ever raided and destroyed towns in the lands of the Dareths.

I’d used my white battlehorse to save scores of men from death in the unannounced attack. I’d rallied the Rur forces and killed the great leader of the Bearskin tribe. I’d driven them from the battle, leading the Dareth riders with such spirit that the Bearskins had given up and turned tail, a most wondrous thing to the Dareths, many never having seen such a thing before. It was the stuff of legends, men led to victory by a golden-haired woman who must have had all the goddesses smiling on her.

“Now we do know,” admitted the wryly smiling, beardless Prince to me as he begged me to whisper my name to him, “that you’re not the real Queen Asara, one of the heroines of the Rur, who we learn about as children, but who are you, really? We hadn’t heard of any princess riding with the trading party, not one with such a weapon as that white battlehorse!”

“Tell him who I am!” I whispered to Bareta. Yes, I’d have to withstand sneering looks, gibes and jests of the Dareth princes, and their warriors, about me, a

mere groom, to atone for how they'd mistaken me for a girl. Yes, my father was right. Until my beard grew in, I must cut my hair, the way that it curled being praised many times by the men who talked about me, saying I'd led them with unbound, woman's hair. They'd felt compelled to follow such a queen, they said laughingly, even to the death she seemed intent on but she, they'd meant me, had led them all through unscathed, showing how she, they meant me again, was favoured by the true gods and goddesses!

"We have no princesses, or queens, my lord," said Baretta prettily with a curtsy to Baleth and the assembly of men that pressed in to hear her. "Not in the land of the Rur. That is not our way. Marana is the daughter of a clan warrior, as I am the daughter of the clan chief and her cousin."

"Baretta!" I gasped. "What are you doing? Tell them who I am!"

"Marana," went on Baretta, smiling at me, "has been trained by her father as he has no sons. You know our ways. Each family of the clan, to partake of any fruits of trading, must send a member of the family to assist in the trade. Marana represents her family in Plever's trading company as a wagon guard, that is all. She guards us women at night from molestations."

"A warrior woman, then," said Baleth quickly. "We knew it. And we acclaim Marana as a heroine. Our harpers will immortalize her in ballads of the fight that went on here today!"

"You can't!" I gasped out, taking Baretta's hands and urging her to tell these people the truth about me.

"We all knew that Marana," said Baretta, curtsying to me again, pronouncing my name in feminine form as she and the Dareths had said it, "would one

day be a great heroine! If we can retire, my lord, for just a short time, she will be able to return dressed in a way a woman of her distinction should be dressed!”

“Bareta!” I screamed silently, trying to explain but Bareta got Ollosanth to help her. That old man had a fierce, wiry strength. In no time at all, I was led most unwillingly into the tents set up for Marana, whom Baleth said should be called Lady Marana and be accorded the privileges of a princess, whatever those were among the Dareths.

“I told you that you should be a girl!” laughed Bareta at me, lying back on the soft-cushioned, luxurious bed. “If you play your cards right, cousin Marana, you can be trysting here with any of that mob out there. Did you see their faces, Maran? How does it feel to have a hundred men in love with you, willing to die for you, for a single kiss from a lovely princess?”

“Bareta!” I screamed again. And still my voice didn’t reach her.

“Ooo, look, Marana,” said Bareta, bouncing to her feet. She lifted a long dress that would have suited her wonderfully. “Look what these poor idiots have given you! Have you ever seen such beautiful dresses? And such jewels! Oh, Marana, you’re going to be the prettiest girl in the world after I’ve finished with you.”

I shook my head violently at my cousin since she refused to hear what little voice I had. No, there was no way I was going along with whatever jest she wanted to play on the Dareths. Didn’t she have any feelings for all our friends who’d just died here in the Black Forest? I hadn’t seen anyone alive, save her, from Plever’s trading company.

“You can’t do this,” I whispered to her. Baretta understood my mouth movements, I think.

“We have to,” my cousin blazed at me. “While you were playing at being Asara, what do you think Plever was doing? He abandoned all our trade goods and took off, like the coward he is, back to Rivenford! We’re the only survivors of this massacre. The only way we can claim our clan rights, to what is sold in the Dareth market at Blethfell, is for us to be there! The princes will see their heroine isn’t cheated. Me, they don’t care about at all.”

“I can’t do this!” I screamed at Baretta. A croak did come from my throat.

“Rest that throat,” ordered Baretta with a frown. “You got hit by the edge of a shield, Baleth says.” That wasn’t true. I’d only been kicked. “He couldn’t believe how you got up and carried on fighting. He’s in awe of you! He and his brother want to marry you.”

“Marry me?” I screamed, a rasp coming from my throat.

“Allows them to make an alliance with a Rur clan, steal our goods and profits, and make love to the golden-haired woman every man in their war party is lusting after,” said Baretta, her nose flaring. “We can’t let him steal from us, Maran! You have to be Marana and stop him!”

There was a calling at the door, high-pitched, womanly voices announcing they were coming in with hot water for the princess’s bath.

“They mean you,” snapped Baretta. “Now do exactly as I say!”

Doing exactly as Baretta said meant to flee into the darkened part of the tent, hide behind a sheet, take off my clothing and go into an enclosure, which only

she was allowed to enter, where a sweet-smelling bathtub steamed in front of me.

“Men don’t bathe in warm water,” I whispered to Baretta but she didn’t hear me, or refused to listen to me. She tugged me into the unexpectedly hot water, pushing me down and cleaning me, covering my hair in sweet-smelling salves, as women do.

Several times, girlish voices asked if we needed help. Baretta declined for me each time. She did go and receive dry towels which she wound about my head as I’d seen women do. She smothered me in lotions, while I protested. She had me stand, ignoring the fact that I was a young, unmarried male and naked before a maiden like her.

Baretta wiped me thoroughly with coarse rags. It was only when she began severely on my male parts and my legs did I notice that the fine, golden hair was being stripped from me.

“It grows back, darker,” laughed Baretta at my protests. “All girls know the lotions I used on you as thickly as I did, Princess.” The last was said so sarcastically that I moved towards her, my fist raised.

Baretta looked scared for the first time. “Don’t,” she whispered. “We’ll be exposed and left behind here with nothing!”

“I don’t care,” I told her hotly, no sound coming from my mouth, now that the bandaging was removed.

Baretta was worried about that. She had me sit, naked, on a padded chair, while she re-bandaged me. The tighter she made the bandages, the more sound, a whispering croak, came from my mouth.

“I’m not dressing in women’s clothes,” I told her.

“Then you’ll go naked,” Baretta told me. “The Dareth women have taken off with your heroine clothing. There are only women’s clothes left for you. The Prince, I didn’t hear which one, wants you to wear the silvercloth gown. Worth three clanhouses in Blethfell. If we get it back to Rivenford, we can pack it on Bray’s next sea trading, east or west. It’ll be worth a king’s ransom.” She used the foreign word for a male ruler of a group of clans and their lands. “Besides, you’re going to look gorgeous and womanly in it, anyway.”

“I can’t wear that!” I screamed as she brought in this long, flowing gown.

“Not yet,” said Baretta, bustling about, undoing packs and setting up an apothecary’s table to work at. “First, we have to make you ready to wear such a dress!”

I objected all the way, all the time. But Baretta didn’t stop. I had to do it, she kept saying to me. I had to save the clan from ruin after what the cowardly Plever had done. I’d be honoured when the whole truth of my tale came out. I’d be the richest man in Rivenford. I’d be Clan Chief. I’d have my pick of the girls. Every girl would want to wed me after the wonderful trick I’d played on the Dareths. Wasn’t the god of trickery also the god of traders?

But did I have to wear women’s undergarments? For now, said Baretta. She’d get me male things later. It would be fine for me to wear men’s pants later when I rode Kun again. Everyone would understand that. I just needed a few ‘little things’ to help keep the deception going.

Little things! I had my hair braided and tied high on the top of my head, a titillating ribbon floating down my back over my neck. I tried but she wouldn’t let me remove it. She put breast bands about my thin chest and padded them with soft cloths before tight-

ening them. I had to have something of a girlish figure, Baretta told me, over the protests I made.

The garments about my nether regions were very soft and womanly against my skin. I couldn't help being aroused. Only cold water and tight bandaging made that part of me stay under control as I was adorned with silken panties, knickers and long, silken stockings as rich women of the Dareth wore all the time, Baretta assured me. They caressed my legs and were pinned to the knickers, padded as well to stay in place about my waist. I gasped at how tightly she pulled the belt thing about my waist.

Then I had to don the dress. It flowed over my head and swept airily, femininely, around me. I was trying to say I couldn't wear it at all, when Baretta opened a curtain and several women flooded in, staring at me, surely noticing the mounds on my chest that I hadn't had before.

"Oh, my lady," gasped one, immediately curtsying to me as the women behind her did as well. "You are so beautiful in the dress Alloth bought in Ferenth Market for his bride-to-be!"

"I cannot wear his bride's gown!" I whispered to Baretta.

"Lady Marana is delighted and proud to wear this wonderful gown," said Baretta, smiling at me. "She takes it as a gift from Prince Alloth and his betrothed, whoever she is, with real thanks as Lady Marana's trousseau seems to have been destroyed by the skinned barbarians who attacked us!"

The girls all whimpered in fear at the thought of the Bearskins.

"And, my lady, you killed the Rur warrior!" said a dark-haired girl with shining eyes. If she'd been a boy, I'd have said that she had a bad case of hero

worship, just as little boys had for those returning from ships and wagons with tales of heroic fights.

“Lady Marana has bested many a man on the training grounds,” said Baretta haughtily. “I would wish she paid as much attention to her hair, her face and ladylike ways.”

How the girls giggled at that. “Which is why we are here, Lady Marana,” said the taller, older first woman, Shallas. “Oh, this gown is so beautiful, is it not? And a girl’s lips should be like Ennas’s here for colour”

Ennas blushed with pleasure at being singled out. She had blood red lips that I hadn’t realized were not natural. All the girls painted their lips. I had to as well. All the girls painted their eyes and eyelashes, and I had to as well. I had to be powdered, perfumed, and manicured just like the girls about me. I had to have my eyebrows thinned and shaped girlishly.

I had to be adorned with jewellery, the girls stunned that I only had one ear pierced like a warrior. Baretta said it was fine to do the other. Soon, I had a string of red stones dangling from each ear, matching the necklace that lay around my bandages and the bangles and rings put on my wrists and fingers.

My hair was re-done, brushed and combed, parted and pinned in Dareth fashion, more ribbons put about me. I was trembling in distress as the girls begged me forward, pulling on my hands and my freshly painted fingernails. I was led into an outer chamber, feeling so strange as a woman’s light gown swirled about my legs. Ennas scrambled on her knees to have me put on women’s slippers, with high heels no less, over my stockinged feet. And wobbling in those made the gown shiver all around me even more. Oh, how I shook inside.

Two men swept into the outer part of the tent, one dark and bearded and the other beardless. I knew they would recognize me right away and know what a silly trick was being played on them. But both stared at me and then bowed deeply.

“Curtsey!” ordered Baretta as all the other women did so easily and gracefully.

I saw how she held the outside hems of her dress and tried to do the same. She seemed to step and bend her legs. I wobbled in the heels I was wearing as I tried to do it, the strangest of feelings sweeping through me as I felt the swish of the skirts about me and the pull of the knickers on the stockings I wore.

I flushed as I stood up, the men bounding forward to help me.

“I swear, my lady,” said Prince Alloth gallantly, taking my hand in his and lifting it to his moustache and lips to kiss, while my stomach churned. “You are prettier by far than the gorgeous heroine who served us so well in the fighting of this day. My brother teased me that your looks were only tolerable. I think he aimed to keep you for himself, did my brother Baleth!”

The beardless prince, Baleth, took my hand from his brother while I flushed and squirmed with the way he was also looking at me. “My lady Marana,” Baleth said, his face stunned. “I had not thought, after the exertions of battle ...”

“The ladies of your party,” cut in Baretta on my behalf, “have worked this miracle for your highnesses. Lady Marana would say so if she had a voice. I am bidden to speak for her. She welcomes your compliments and is grateful for the chance to appear as a woman should, at her graceful and lovely best, for your highnesses.”



“I do believe our men would love to meet the woman who led them to such success in the Battle of the Black Forest!” exclaimed Prince Alloth, taking my hand from his brother’s, leading me, pulling me, shivering in distress, to a huge gathering of men roaring at me, smiling as they saw me in a glittering woman’s dress. All the men cheering, making comments on my loveliness, was so much worse than Baretta’s words, since the men were sincere in telling me what a lovely ‘princess’ I was.

I was paraded like an honoured soldier, towards the reflection of this lovely young girl. She advanced on me as I approached a gleaming row of shield-armed foot soldiers. She wasn’t alone. There were many images of her. Red ribbons streamed from her high crown of braided, golden hair, her figure so girlish, her waist so narrow beneath small, high breasts! Her silver dress, billowing and shifting like mine, swept away from her wide hips. A rider moved his enormous, polished shield. I could see Baleth and Baretta behind the lovely girl, the ribbons about her blonde hair blowing in the warm breeze, her dangling strings of red earrings so alike the colour of her lips.

I stiffened and stopped in fright as I realized that ‘she’ was me! I looked like a real girl! The shield moved back and there I was, a princess beside her tall, handsome, moustached prince. Alloth looked down on me, a foolish smile on his face.

“I can’t do this!” I cried as the men began to give organized cheers for me, Lady Marana. It was so awful. I trembled, the dress shimmering all about me, causing Prince Alloth to put his arm about my shoulder and hug me.

“When the Lady Marana is able to speak,” the Prince roared, “we’ll have so much more to say to all the men who survived this epic battle today. We’ll have our real celebration in Blethfell. I doubt that the Bearskins who ran from the Rur queen will return tonight.”

“But we shall keep a sharp watch!” exclaimed Baleth in his turn, his eyes looking me over, roving up and down the fake paddings and ribbons that proclaimed me to be a woman I was not. “Let no harm befall the lovely Lady Marana through the fault of Dareth warriors!”

“You will be well guarded tonight,” smiled Bareta when we were shivering and alone again. “If you were thinking of slipping out and away, with guards doubled, I doubt even the redoubtable Queen of the Rurs could manage it.”

I flushed as that toast had been drunk, everywhere I was paraded by Prince Alloth, anxious, it seemed, to present the womanly heroine, me, on his arm, the lady of the moment. At first, I didn’t understand what the soldiers were calling out as they called me their queen.

Orators sprang up to recite my marvellous, womanly deeds. Worse, they praised

me for my beautiful womanly appearance, one going so far as to praise my breasts, the fount of all womanhood. It was amazing, too, how the story of the battle had already grown in the telling.

I’d fought through a hail of arrows, lopping off heads, left and right, to get at the great renegade, who seemed to have been feared by everyone as a warrior. Until I, a picture of loveliness, a mere slip of a girl, had out-fenced him, a man three times my weight, years beyond me in experience! I’d killed him with a strike through the his eye, the only place the mighty Cadan had not protected.

“Steal some clothing for me,” I whispered, with quivers of fear at the way I was being applauded, to Bareta. “And for yourself. We’ll slip away tomorrow.”

“As you say, my lady,” said Bareta straightfacedly as she helped me wiggle back to my tent in the shim-

mering, rustling dress I'd worn through an afternoon and evening. I took it off thankfully, only to find that I had to go to bed in frilly, woman's bed clothing. I had to be re-dressed in a woman's soft, frilly nightdress, it appeared, and retain my padded undergarments, in case, Bareta whispered in my jewelled ear, someone other than her came in to wake me.

Needless to say, Bareta did not get me any manly clothing. If anything, I was even more femininely dressed the next day after I was bathed in scented water that seemed to cling to me. My undergarments were frillier and silkier than those I'd worn before. I spent the whole day as a silent, painted, humiliated 'woman,' being complimented, curtsyed and bowed to, to which I had to respond in dainty feminine fashion, as my maidservant told me, even in front of other giggling girls. I had to walk in feminine fashion as Bareta showed me, the short steps she insisted I take making my dress skirts swirl all around me, embarrassing me to excess.

The healer who looked at my "lovely, feminine throat," his words, told me that my voice would return, if his experience with injuries to women was anything to go by, but I wouldn't sound as I had before, whatever that was, for a very long time. I shouldn't talk. I should let my maidservant do that for me as she was doing such an excellent job, wasn't she, in organizing my life as a princess of the Dareths.

Oh yes, an excellent job. My hair was re-braided and wound around my head. My eyebrows had vanished, almost. I had guck, face paint, kohl about my eyes, a glossy, red substance on my lips, and thin, arched, female eyebrows. I exuded feminine fragrance every time I moved. I wanted to get back to being a groom but I couldn't go anywhere without a retinue of Dareth maids, who all wanted to show me how

to put on feminine, Dareth airs. A smug Baretta laughed at me whenever I looked in her direction.

It wasn't that anything hurt me, although the breast bands and the bandage Baretta insisted I wear between my legs gripped me tightly enough to pinch, but my female clothing was so exotic and so wrong. I wasn't supposed to have legs encased in silk hose, attached to women's undergarments. I wasn't supposed to swish and rustle when I moved. I wasn't supposed to wear long, dangling earrings that everyone admired. I wasn't supposed to take short steps and swish my dress about my stockings, as the girls called them, teaching me how to lift my skirts just so.

Only later was it explained to me that I was doing what any flirting girl would do in the way I showed off my high heels, stockings and ankles to the men. They made me blush in shame and fury as they praised my girlish attributes and performance.

Then there were my princely admirers. Alloth wanted to hold my hand and display me as if I was a doll to his troops. Baleth just watched me struggle to be a pretty woman and told me I was doing well in being a girl. I flushed as I stared at him, certain he was trying to tell me he knew all about me; all Baleth wanted to do was to tell me about his 'tomboy' cousin, as we'd have called her, and all her troubles, like mine, on having to learn how to be a princess, and the soldier she'd wanted to be.

"Tomorrow," Prince Alloth announced to me as I sat beside him, my dress having made such a noise as I sat properly as Baretta insisted a woman should. I was served only woman's portions to eat; it was lucky that I hadn't done all the work I did normally as a groom. Even after eating five skimpy 'courses,' my share was a mere thimbleful compared to what the princes put away.

"Tomorrow, we shall ride to Blethfell," Prince Alloth announced to me. "A herald has gone before

us. My father will be anxious to meet Lady Marana herself.” He smiled wickedly at me. “He’s talked about taking a new Queen for many years, since our mother died.”

Alloth only broke into a laugh when Baleth chided him for scaring me as he most certainly did. “Our father,” said Baleth reaching out and taking my hand, embarrassing me totally as he lifted it to his mouth to kiss it, admiring my painted, shaped, feminine fingernails, Baret’s doing. “Our father is no lecherous old man, my Lady. Though your beauty would now enchant any man and lead him to declare for your hand in marriage, our father will not rob the cradle.

“No, he has his eyes on a dynastic marriage with the widow, Queen Senya, who has a small kingdom in the mountains south of the Dareth Plain. I believe my father would encourage his sons, however, to see that such a jewel as yourself, a beautiful warrior woman, remain forever in The Dareths.”

“As my queen, of course,” put in Alloth which sent shivers through me. Then I saw Baleth’s face and his fury. I wanted to show mine but didn’t dare, not with what I’d now have to admit to as I curtsied girlishly to the princes and let my maidservant beg my leave from them.

“Can my lady not join us in a pair of dances?” Alloth wanted to know as I stared at him, aghast, as Baret considered it. I had to grab her hand and propel her out of the princes’ refectory tent, not caring about her protests that this was not ladylike behaviour.

In the privacy of the women’s quarters, a fragrant bath was ready for me again and a long, sleeping gown, new ribbons for my hair, brushes, cleaning and softening lotions, hours of humiliating work just to get me ready for bed as a soft, fragrant woman, all the time listening to women prattle on about the vir-

tues, as men, of the princes. I was sure they'd been instructed to do that by one of them.

I wasn't to ride into Blethfell, save in a carriage with women, in clothing and makeup like me. Baretta told me, as I shuddered in my long night gown, that I must learn to dance like a woman. Undoubtedly, that was going to be one of my chief entertainments in Blethfell. I must attend balls as a woman, dance with men, be held and caressed by them and learn how to appear as if I enjoyed touches and cavorting as a female. She was going to make sure I, Marana, was the loveliest girl in the land.

I splashed violently in my bath, creams again ensuring my whole body was devoid of any semblance of hair, never mind a beard. I soaked Baretta and she deserved it!

"My lady," sneered Baretta at me. "I have a good mind to leave you to your fate! Look how you've drenched me, you stupid girl. Now, I have to change and leave you in all your loveliness to the other maids, who have doubtless been paid to allow a Prince or lordling into your bed to show you how to make love to a man!"

I was glad that Baretta warned me. I entered my sleeping tent, fragrant with a girl's scent, a lovely, shivering, blonde girl as the mirrors showed me, hair braided and wearing a silky sleeping gown. I heard the girls giggling as they sang to me to 'sleep well.' Prince Alloth arose from the bed I was to sleep in. He wore nothing at all, not even some kind of breech cloth.

"My lady," he smiled at me, alcohol fumes reaching me all the way across the bed. "You are young and pure, I know, but I must have you as a wife, my lovely lady."

His eyes glittered with amused desire even as I lifted the nail file, all I could find for a weapon. I tried

to talk, to tell him to leave, even telling him he was an idiot not to see that I was a long-haired youth, my hair plaited like a woman's.

"You think to scare me, Lady Marana?" the Prince laughed at me. He vaulted across the bed just as he might have done on to mount one of his horses, seizing the lovely gown in which I had been encased. "Ow!" he screamed as I raked the metal file down the arm that tried to hold me. But he'd pulled up my nightdress, his other hand seizing and caressing my leg.

What could I do but kick him? I tried to yell at him but no sound came from my creamy, girlish neck. He wasn't screaming or making a sound, either. I suppose he couldn't with where I'd connected. He fell back, gurgling. I stood there in fright as, for a moment, I thought I'd killed the commander of the Dareth forces that had saved Bareta and me.

There was a huge commotion outside my tent. I grabbed the robe I would wear in the morning and put it about me, tying it just as Baleth burst in, sword in hand. Poor man! He went down flat on the ground as I smashed the chamberpot over his head while Alloth's eyes grew even bigger as he stared up at me, as I was seeking something else I could break over his head as well.

Bareta and more people flooded through the tent-flap. She laughed as she saw the two groaning princes on the floor before me, the naked Alloth holding himself most absurdly.

"You thought to make love to a poor, defenceless woman, who killed your arch-enemy, Cadan the Rur," Bareta said with a giggle, "and that fearsome leader of the Bearskins! Brave men!" she sneered as Ennas advanced, knife in hand, looked shocked and surprised. Then, I saw that others were smiling.

“We’d better call a healer to attend to the lovers,” said a stone-faced Shallas, older than the others. She spoke very clearly to Ennas, staring at me, making me shudder as I thought what use she might make of the knife she sheathed. “These men at least have learned that a woman like Lady Marana is never unarmed and defenceless unless she wishes to be.”

Oh, the girls hugged me and apologized to me for obeying the orders of their prince, Alloth. “He said you had assented to his trysting with you,” a teary-eyed Ennas whispered to me. “He said you’d told him to surprise you.”

I loved holding Ennas, so soft and womanly, against me, hugging her as I whispered that I understood but it wasn’t true.

“So my Lady Marana is still a virgin,” proclaimed Baretta to princes’ attendants. “In our country, it is a highly prized state. A virgin’s price is infinitely higher than Blethfell’s, I’ve learned. Lady Marana intends to maintain her bridal price. The man she marries will know she is his first and only love.”

Idiots, I thought, as I looked around the shocked men’s and women’s faces. It wasn’t like that at all with the Rur. We didn’t even get married in the way the Dareths did, with religious rites and calling on the gods to bless the marriage. No, we just asked a girl if she’d move into our dwelling. She said ‘Yes’ if she wanted to. And, if she didn’t like living with you, she just moved out. It happened all the time with us. Baretta had lived with two guys already, I could have told the Dareths.

“I’ve heard of that,” said one of the young men who’d followed the women into my tent, now bursting at the seams. “But Prince Baleth wasn’t coming in to ravage you, my lady! We heard from the girl who warmed Alloth’s bed last night why she was serving us and wasn’t with her favoured prince. Baleth just ran over here, my lady, to save you!”

My knight, I thought with a shiver. I had a man wanting to rape me and one who wanted to keep me virginal! I wished I could kick Baretta so that she'd be hurting as Prince Alloth clearly was.

I spent a night with Baretta in the same bed as me, pushing me off whenever I tried to move close and whisper to her. She caressed my nightdress about me as well as my bare arms and soft, hairless face. "No, my lady," she said to me. "As the advances of a Prince mean nothing to you, so do the advances of a stable groom to me! Ah, but when you're married to a Prince and he showers you with jewels and silks too much for you to wear, then I'll let my lady behave as the ladies of the harem behave when their husbands do not call for them."

Of course, I didn't want to talk to the teasing, leering Baretta about anything like that. I wanted to talk to her about the princes, about escaping, and finding some male clothing for me to wear.

The following day brought Alloth on his knees to me as I had to wear a silly, woman's hat, all veils and feathers, to sit in a carriage, with, as usual, a tight, shaped woman's dress about me. My female figure was created by a boned body shaper that Baretta loved inflicting on me.

Alloth swore he'd never drink again. He swore he loved me, stroking his moustache and whiskers which I envied so much. I was trembling inside as he spoke to me. I sat with women all about me, suffering the curse of hairlessness, having to cross my legs as Baretta reached about my dress for them and positioned them properly if I forgot.

"She rode a horse for too long," groused Baretta. All the Dareth girls thought that so funny.

"I want to ride a horse now," I managed to murmur to Baretta who just smiled at me.

“Yes, my lady,” she said. “You’ll ride on a horse into Blethfell. Shallas told me so while you were making yourself pretty this morning. Marana, after being a tomboy for so long, is insisting, girls, that she learn how to do her makeup for herself. Wants to be an independent woman, does this pretty girl.”

Oh, how the girls laughed at me. But I was a heroine, wasn’t I? They believed all the rot Baretta told them about me, how I was raised as a ‘tomboy’ by my father.

“He could not see what an angel of a girl he was raising?” asked Shallas, studying my face intently. I thought she must have detected I wasn’t what Baretta said I was.

“Men!” sneered Baretta. “It’s nice not to have them around all the time, isn’t it, Lady Marana? I did hear her father telling her that if she wanted to ride on this trading party, she should cut her hair. I think he didn’t want her to be attractive to men, to find someone in my lady’s bed, someone he’d have hurt very severely.”

“By doing what?” Shallas had wanted to know.

“Let’s just say,” said Baretta sweetly to the shuddering girls, “that Prince Alloth would never have produced another child if Lord Melland had found him naked in his daughter’s bed. He wouldn’t have thought it a compliment to her beauty as several people have tried to tell my Lady to think of the prince’s behaviour.”

Blethfell looked beautiful in the late afternoon, on the shore of a wide river that seemed to be more like a lake so wide was it, gentle, rolling hills in the background. As soon as we were stopped, we women were allowed out to walk arm-in-arm, Ollosanth the healer coming to check on me.

“You may certainly ride on a horse into Blethfell, my lady,” he said with a smile to me. “That pink dress is so becoming on you, my lady. The pink silk is such a compliment to your pretty eyes and lovely mouth.”

I was able to ignore him as I thought about riding once more at least. And then Kun, sparkling white, was brought for me to ride. I’d thought be able to wear pants of some kind to be astride Kun but then saw the saddle I’d have to sit in. It was a lady’s saddle, all pink, like the beribboned harness about Kun, his mane and tail plaited in pink as well.

No, I didn’t have to change my dress at all. I stamped my high heel in frustration as I stood beside Kun. The princes rode up, a wary Prince Baleth approaching me.

“I’m not afraid of you,” he said, nostrils flaring in anger, most likely. I should have found out what he’d intended to do to my lovely, feminized body, shouldn’t I, before I’d hit him so hard with a chamberpot, of all things. Baleth proceeded to put his arms around my shaped, firmly held, girlish waist and lifted me up onto Kun and into the saddle I was objecting to.

Bareta loudly told me to cross my legs and not to sit like a tavern wench. She draped my dress all about my legs, caressing them, making me squirm. She caressed me all the time, actually, while saying she wasn’t, accusing me when I objected, of day-dreaming and wanting to be more of a woman than I actually was.

“You can control this horse when you ride him properly as a woman should?” asked Baleth with concern, probably finally figuring out why I was objecting to being perched in such a saddle.

I could ride anything, in any way. I hesitated, shook my head at Baleth and tried to look all weak and womanly as if I was scared of the steed I had to

ride. My hesitation was fatal. Baleth's look was scathing.

"Learn," he said and flipped the reins to me, riding off. I was so annoyed I urged Kun into a little run to follow him. Baleth turned and grinned at me. I wanted to kick myself with one of the flimsy high heels I had to wear. I tried to pretend Kun had run away with me, that it was all the horse's doing, but I could see by Baleth's expression that he wasn't buying it at all.

I was at least able to ride for a while, Baleth beside me, telling me when to hold back to let the other riders and wagons catch up. I wished I hadn't had to wear such absurd earrings. They bounced against my neck each time we moved ahead until we finally came to the crowd at the Northern Gate into the huge, capital city of the Dareths.

I'd had different riders all about me as we rode along, but suddenly, they all wanted to be behind me, including a grinning Prince Baleth. All along the roadways, there was a crush of people, cheering, cheering me, making me flush and feel so ill, as they called my name, 'Marana,' only they added words like 'princess,' 'lady' and 'queen' in front of it.

Prince Baleth rode quickly in front of me as we entered a wide square, one of the Dareth temples on one side of the square, a high palace on the other. An older man, white-haired, a golden circle about his head, stood at the top of a flight of steps. Baleth vaulted off his horse as a groom came forward to take it.

"Not quite as fanciful as my lady dismounts," said Baleth, making me shiver as I recalled how I'd leapt over Kun's head, showing off really, after the battle had come to an end. Prince Baleth put his hands up about my waist and lifted me from Kun, who was tossing his head as another groom tried to hold him. I

quieted him with a stroke of my hand and heard applause from those lining the square.

“This is much more the way a woman should descend into a man’s arms,” said Prince Baleth, squeezing me, I shivered as he took my hand to lead me, my gown flowing all around me, up the steps to present me to the ruler of the Dareth kingdom.

“I see you still have a battle scar, son,” said King Solloth to his son, his face betraying nothing of his thoughts. So, whether he knew how Baleth had received the bruise and scraping from the chamberpot I’d hit him with, I couldn’t tell.

“Received from a most worthy opponent, your majesty,” said Prince Baleth, the squeeze on my hand reminding me I was a woman and must curtsy to the King.

“The same opponent as the one who inflicted an injury to your brother that has prevented him from riding a horse into Blethfell?” asked the King mildly as Baleth helped me to rise from the cringe-inducing, female gesture, my dress swishing and rustling about me.

“I do believe that it was the same one,” Prince Baleth answered his father without the batting of an eyelid. I shivered again, sure they must be laughing inside at me.

“Thank you, Lady Marana,” said the King, his face quite serious. “The reincarnation of Queen Asara has, I hope, taught a lasting lesson to the young men of Alloth’s adventurous war party, and not just how to kill renegades and savages.”

“I hope so, your majesty,” I tried to say, but still nothing came from my mouth but he seemed to read what I said anyway.

Lady Shallas, I hadn't known she was a Lady of the Court, was ordered to take me to my quarters where the King's Healer would attend me. I hated Baretta but, at that moment, I wanted her with me. I didn't want any Healer examining me and scurrying off with exciting, demeaning news to the King. How he'd laugh at his sons, after he'd finished laughing at me. The best I could hope for was that he might just throw me out of the city and leave me to find my own way in the world.

Baretta arrived just as the female healer had finished working on my throat. The burning liquids she'd forced me to swallow lined my throat, I could taste their foulness, but a voice came from me as I said, "That is absolutely awful."

"So it is, my lady," said Nesenas. "But you can be heard again if you paint your throat with it as I've shown you. Ah, your maidservant." She waited while Baretta, unsure of who she was, curtsied to her.

"You must help your lady regain her voice," Nesenas instructed a glowering Baretta. "She will attend lessons in the Maids' Quarters where we instruct comely country girls the nobles are always kidnapping from their estates and then abandoning to their fate. We, Lady Shallas and I, have a school for maidens where we teach farm girls how to be elegant serving girls. Many marry well after our instructions.

"One of our classes is on how to speak. I'm sorry to say, Lady Marana, that the blow you took has crushed part of your voice box, which is why your voice is so deep. But we know how to conquer that. We shall teach you, along with the maidens released from the Bearskin camp, how to speak like an elegant woman. It will mean learning a new way to speak but we do it here all the time. And, since no one here has heard a different voice out of you, you'll soon be accepted as a Lady of the Court. Your father will be proud that you are."

“Oh, he will, My Lady,” said Baretta earnestly, bobbing into a curtsy to the Healer while I wanted to kill her all over again.

Thanks to Baretta, my existence changed. I didn't see the princes, or my horse, Kun. No, I was confined to women and women's quarters all the time, for over a month. The main topic was my voice and how to speak. Some cordials helped me 'find' my appropriate female voice, as I also learned how to walk, dress and make up like a woman.

I was taught fashion! Women's fashion! Just like the other girls, awed by the elegant women teaching them, I had to be able to describe accurately every fashion that the ladies wore. “The maids must report accurately to their mistresses,” Lady Shallas told me. “And you, as a mistress, must understand what they mean.”

I deserved the reprimand as I'd confused a sequinned, vee-necked Gemanyi gown with a boned bodice that any woman must have been emaciated or mad to wear. The shift, as Lady Shallas called it, the neckline frilled and seductive, the bodice draped around the woman and sweeping along with her, was open at the front to show off her womanly calves as she strutted on her high heels. I had to wear it, of course.

“And this isn't pink, Lady Marana,” said Lady Shallas to me. “You must distinguish between shades of pink, the darker ones suiting a girl as fair as you so much better than the light pinks older women find soothing.”

I must know my colours so I didn't clash with the men I'd soon meet at a ball. I was promised that but it moved further and further away, the longer I stayed there, going quietly insane. Instead, I became the ele-

gant, femininely stylish Lady Marana, her hair in a long, golden braid down her back, bared often in the dresses that I, she, wore.

I discovered all kinds of strange women's underwear, all of which I wore repeatedly as Lady Shallas had us girls dress as Errestians, Gemanyi, even Rurs and Dareths, as well as tribal maidens of the plains. Our hair then was all loose and teased to float around our bare shoulders enticingly.

I learned to dance as a woman. The Ladies of the Court and older female servants served as partners, controlling us and making us dance backwards from the start. I wasn't the worst in any of these classes, to my trembling disgust. At times, I had to show some milkmaid how to wiggle and swish her gown about the woman she was dancing with. Yes, the poor milkmaid had to imitate me.

"Tell me who you are," said Lady Shallas curtly to me one day, as I think six tendays had passed.

I curtsied to her, all the wobbles gone from my carriage. My feet stood tall in my high-heeled shoes. The aching had subsided from my legs with all the drills, worse than sword drilling and spear use I'd endured as a man. I knew how to walk, stand and move as a woman now. I also knew how to speak in a light, lilting woman's voice. I knew womanly words I must say, that men expected of me, though I hadn't seen one in all the time I was confined in 'Women's Quarters.'

"Oh, thank you for asking me to do that, my lady," I lilted softly. I was never to speak loudly; Neseñas the Healer expressly forbade me to do that. "My wonderful parents, Lord Melland and Lady Camena, have called me Marana since I was born. Of course, we never use titles like Lord and Lady in Rur lands where I was born. So I really am Clandaughter Marana, which is such a mouthful for anyone, isn't it? I don't mind that I am introduced to everyone as

Lady Maranas. I find it quite delightful to be so accepted as a Dareth lady ...”

I could have babbled on for much longer, talking about nothing consequential at all, even asking Lady Shallas if I had done my makeup perfectly. Yes, each day I had to paint my own face, maintain the feminine curve of my lovely eyebrows, blot the extra paint from my lips and apply kohl and henna to my eyes. I had to make sure that my earrings, always outrageous as Dareth girls liked them, matched my dress and my rings, bracelets and necklaces.

I could have talked about my dress, or the new dresses ordered for me. I could talk about my new hair style but never about the changes under my dresses, the tighter panties and body shapers I wore, just like young, noble girls, according to my teachers. They weren't disturbed at my lack of breasts as a girl. They had ways to conceal my lack, by taping and pushing, padding and tightening dresses about my chest. I always appeared to have cleavage when a dress called for it.

“Very well, Lady Marana,” said Lady Shallas, giving me her highest accolade. She smiled at me. “You've probably wondered when you'd get out of this stifling woman's environment we've inflicted upon you, the heroine of the Black Forest.”

Shallas waited for me to agree with flowery adjectives that I was so grateful for all she'd taught me. I really, truly felt like a woman now, thanks to her.

“Tonight,” Lady Shallas told me. “There is a belated Victory Ball in the main Palace ballroom. The King and the Princes have requested you be there, now that the Bearskin tribe has agreed to the border our armed patrols are enforcing on them. A trading party set out for the Land of the Rurs just this morning.

“If all goes as planned, you may expect very soon, my lady, communication with those Clan Chiefs with whom you are associated. Your former maidservant, Bareta, left with the party to act as a go-between with our traders and yours, I do believe.”

Bareta had deserted me! I flared at that, feeling so alone for a moment. But I could never be alone, not for a second, with all the girls about me. My special friend, Ennas, happily re-did feminine lessons with me that she'd taken when she'd first arrived in the palace. She found my desires for privacy at times to be quaint. Well, Rur prized virginity, didn't they? My weird requests for personal privacy when I bathed or used the ablutions were laughed off. I was just a Rur woman behaving as Rur women did. No one knew differently.

Ennas had procured two timid maidservants for me who knew not to ever visit me in my bathroom unless I invited them in. I never received them without tight panties, two pairs about me, or without some sort of padded or taped breast band. I resisted their aid at first, they thinking there was something wrong with them. Ennas interceded and persuaded me to let Lametas do my hair, while Teenas dressed me, as each had been trained to do.

So now I had two talkative, giddy maids who did everything they could to make me as feminine as it was possible for me to be. I know Teenas must have been concerned for my body shape because she produced a bewildering addition of boned body shapers that she dressed me in each day. I felt it was sort of normal to be wearing them now.

I felt so idiotically female as I sat to chat to Ennas while Lametas brushed and curled my hair, choosing dangling earrings every time for me to wear. Then, Teenas would have a new perfume for me to try. Ennas would have to try it and get the maids to try it as well.

Oh, yes, sixty days and I was a woman, with only a little left of the scared streak inside me that I would be exposed and ridiculed. There were even times I forgot I needed to find a way out of this cosseted, fragrant existence, accepting every day the delicate dresses swirling about the stockings I had to wear. I learned to love putting them on as I was a lady. Ladies always wore silk stockings and silk undergarments which must have cost enormously. I hoped the King of the Dareths was footing the bill for my becoming a woman.

And now I was to go to a ball. How excited my maids were for me as was Ennas, who'd become the person who chose my clothing for me, the makeup I wore, even my perfume and hair style.

Even I could recognize that the dark purple dress prepared for me was something special. Lametas made my hair curl about my face as well as swirl in thick braids down my back, glittering as if it was gold where she'd brushed it. Teenas curled my thick eyelashes and covered them in smoky makeup, enhancing the dark lines about my eyes. My face was whitened as were my shoulders as I sat at my dressing table and let my maids create my breasts for me which they could do so well.

My panties and stockings matched my dress as did the body-shaper. I actually thrilled to see the lovely girl in her exquisite underwear before the tightly bodiced dress was fitted to me. I really did look as if I had breasts! The folds across my chest didn't conceal anything of my womanliness.

"No dancing with women tonight, my Lady," whispered Teenas to me as she fastened the purple laces so tightly across my back. My waist was so narrow, emphasizing the way the dress hugged my hips, padded just a little but women of the court did that, making their feminine charms more evident to the men who attended them.



In my spiky high-heeled shoes, I shimmied down the passageways of the palace with Ennas and my maids, in the same manner I'd attended so many lessons. I knew how to walk girlishly, my lovely dress shivering all about me, my bracelets jangling on my wrist like the earrings at my ear.

But when I walked through the great curtains, it was just Ennas holding my arm. A great crowd of men and women all turned to look at me. Then they began to applaud as I felt so overheated despite my bare arms, upper chest and back.

Lady Shallas took my arm and brought me to the King. I had to curtsy gracefully. Shallas had made sure I could do that. "My Lady Marana, you are beautiful!" exclaimed the King, his eyes wide in surprise. He nodded to Lady Shallas. I began the Victory Ball in the arms of the King, being swirled femininely about the dance floor while the aristocracy of Blethfell looked on and smiled at me.

I felt a shiver as did what I'd been trained to do, fury at Baretta rising in me. This was all her fault! The shudder turned into a girlish, excited movement, as I twirled on the King's arm, displaying my stockings and lovely shoes to everyone as my dress swirled about me.

I'm a girl, I said to myself, shivering and twirling again, smiling and smiling in my deep embarrassment. My red lips so full, I could see in the mirrors set all about the hall, even angled near to the ceiling so that I could see hundreds of me, from front, back and side, my silhouette as female and girlish as any other in the great hall.

"I would love to monopolize the loveliest girl in Blethfell at this Ball tonight," said Solloth with a wry smile on his old, lined face, "but my sons are already glowering at me for having held onto you for so long, Marana. You must choose between them soon, my

dear, even though it means I'll have a broken-hearted son I'll have to send on a long trip to try to forget you."

"Your majesty," I managed to say at last. "I'll stay and dance with you all night if you wish. Then you won't have to send either of your sons away on my account."

"What a splendid idea!" laughed the King, "And so delightful to hear your lovely girlish voice, Lady Marana. I should keep you, shouldn't I, and declare I could make you a husband far superior to either of those callow boys!"

Flirt, Lady Shallas had insisted, each time she or one of the other girls in training ever said anything complimentary to me. Without thinking, I smiled demurely and dropped my eyes, swishing my dress against the King who held onto my hands. "Oh, your majesty," I lilted. "I'm a simple girl and will always do what a wonderful man commands her."

I'd had to say that many times in the dancing with other girls I'd done. I'd thought such words so silly but when I said them to the King, he put his arm about my waist and danced with me again, motioning to his guests to join us on the floor.

"There," the white-haired man laughed at me as I swirled and swirled in shame and humiliation, letting him direct me as a girl, smiling prettily as Lady Shallas said I should, my silly attention just on him. "The first scandal of the Victory Ball. The King dances twice with the most beautiful girl. You shall sit beside me at supper, another fine scandal. I do so like a girl with manners like yours, Marana. Lady Shallas can teach any pretty girl to be a flirt, can't she? I heartily approve!"

I had to curtsy to the King as I shakily left him, Prince Alloth moving uncertainly beside me. "My Lady," the Prince said. There was awe in his voice as I swirled femininely away with him as I just had with

the King. I trembled as I held onto the skirt of my lovely dress, the white lace trim of my petticoats visible as I clung to the prince's arm and danced another swirly, girlish dance with him.

"I've waited so long to see you," said Prince Alloth. "But you are a young woman! Not the boyish girl who defeated the most terrible warriors to oppose our Kingdom for a long time."

"You thought me a boyish girl?" I asked him, shudders coming all over me as Alloth squeezed my waist with his controlling hand.

"Long ago, my lady," said Alloth earnestly. "But that is so untrue today. You will never be a heroine again, will you, my lady? Now you are what every young woman should be. Your hair is so beautiful, your figure is enticing and I demand, before the night is out, that I take you for a walk in the flower gardens where a young girl may receive a kiss from her future husband!"

"Oh, your highness," I gasped, the strangeness of what I was doing overcoming me. "You do me too much honour when you tease me." I batted my eyelashes at him and did quiver as his fingers traced a pattern over my back, pulling on my breast bands as if he knew exactly what I was wearing beneath my lovely dress.

"She speaks!" exulted Alloth. "We'd heard the rumour and it is all true. Oh, gods, here comes that irritating brother of mine. Say you'll dance with me again, lovely Lady Marana. I shall burn with desire until I can hold and touch you again."

Prince Baleth lifted his brother's hand from me and put his own about my waist. I felt another tremble coming on as his hand stroked mine. We went twirling too about the dance floor. I expected him to be just like his father and his brother. I expected flowery compliments and demands for me to marry

him as a woman. Well, why shouldn't he do that? I looked like a woman, I danced like a woman and now I talked like a woman.

"My Prince has nothing to say to me?" I said to him with a nervous smile as I glided backwards about the slippery floor, couples parting to give us enough room to swish and swirl about them girlishly.

"I liked the girl on the white horse who could only mime her talk," said Baleth, squinting down at me. "This simpering, wiggling courtesan I could have bought in any tavern about Palace Square."

"I don't simmer," I said hotly, shivering as I said it. "And I don't wiggle!"

"I like it sometimes," Prince Baleth went on as if I hadn't said anything. "When a girl is doing it just for me, not for my father and my brother, and every other man in the room."

"I don't know what you are talking about," I said coquettishly, doing exactly what Baleth had accused me of doing. It seemed to have been engrained in me in my training to be a woman. I flicked my hair back and wiggled in his arms as we moved in among other dancers. His arms grasped me tightly as he lifted me as all girls were being lifted. I squirmed as I remembered him putting me on and off my horse.

"How is my horse doing?" I asked him, trying to conquer the womanly feelings my dress seemed to imbue me with. I expected a surly answer.

"Getting fat," said Baleth, a gleam in his dark blue eyes.

"The grooms don't exercise him?" I asked as I was twirled like a girl so quickly. My hair swished about me like my heavy, slitted skirts about my ankles and calves, showing off what men expected to see at a dance, a smooth, hairless, girlish leg.

“No one can ride him but you, my lady,” said Prince Baleth. I didn’t know if he was teasing me or not. I wouldn’t have put it past him.

“You just want me to go riding with you,” I said to him.

“Of course,” said Baleth with a grin. “And you want to ride with me as well, don’t you, Lady Marana?”

Well, of course I did. Then I could get away. I shivered as I had to think why it was important I get away from Blethfell. Why oh why was it becoming so difficult to remember I was a man, not this simpering, flirty girl I’d been taught to be?

“Tomorrow morning, at sunrise, beautiful girl,” said Baleth, cutting off the flirty smile I tried to give him and the girly wiggle that came so naturally now to me when people said nice things about me. “Meet me in the stables without a bevy of girls to protect you. I don’t want to meet this girl whom Lady Shallas has taught you to be, either. I’ll be in no mood for squiring anyone else but the girl who fought back so brilliantly against her attackers in the Black Forest.”

The shivers and tremors really came over me then as, just for a moment, I shed all the girlish lessons I’d taken part in for so long. I stared at the tall prince, my dress shaking about me, knowing for the first time in a long time that I wasn’t a girl. I was a man just like him; and yet, when he moved, there I was in the mirrors, with my golden, braided hair, with my red lips and vivid, painted eyes, jewels at my neck, dangling from my ears and on my arms.

My dress swirled as I moved. How could I possibly have let things go so far with me? I asked myself in disgust. How had I made myself think it right to dress so femininely as a woman, to act like one in how I spoke, even how I stood? And here was another man, bearded, smiling at me, taking my hand with its

manicured, feminine, red nails. I curtsyed to him as I'd been taught.

I didn't need the rush of womanly feelings that swept over me as a strange man admired my fragrance, my lovely dress and told me how pretty I was. I knew that I shouldn't be flushed with some sort of pride at such a compliment. Oh, goddesses, where was Batera and why wasn't she helping me out of this mess I was mired in? But such a thought didn't last as I knew I had to smile at the man holding me, giggle at his silly jokes, curtsy and thank him for giving me so many lovely compliments that I really adored.

I danced with so many court nobles of Blethfell that I couldn't remember their names though all tried to impress their titles on me. I was hugged as if I was a girl, cuddled and my dress swished against so many men. I was complimented so many times on being a woman.

I found refuge in falling back on all the lessons I'd been taught in my womanly classes. I was supposed to find it thrilling to smile up at a man and let him lead me in a dance. I felt actual guilty pleasure at being the most desired of all the women at the ball as a dance partner. And always Lady Shallas was there, or Ennas, to tell me how wonderfully I was succeeding in dazzling the leaders of Dareth society.

A weird thought intruded on my delight in myself. Lady Marana, as everyone called me, was proud of herself for fooling all the men and women at the ball into believing she, I, was a Lady like all of the women there. I couldn't believe what I'd done with my 'breasts,' the way I'd pulled and twisted my muscles into taped mounds, why I'd done that so furiously with my maids to assist me.

The thought shamed me so when I looked down. There they were, my 'breasts,' attracting the attention of so many men, marking me as a girl who wished to appear attractive to men. And men flocked

around me. I felt their hands about my slim waist and on my hips, my dress now feeling so thin and revealing.

But most of all, I felt awful, delightful, delicate feelings as my chest touched against so many men, and a few women, as they hugged me. It took me a while to think why I was so pleased by the feeling. I must be feeling just the way a woman does when a man touches her there, on her breasts.

After such thoughts possessed me, I quivered in dismay and wished I could run for it but I couldn't. I was to be honoured, as a woman, a beautiful warrior woman, by the King for my part in the Victory. I had to be a demure, pretty girl, shivering through and through, which wasn't hard at all, as my dress parted in each curtsey I had to make.

The King placed a tiara in my hair as I was made into a Dareth 'countess,' whatever that was, and a Lady of the Royal Court. Not bad for a male, Rur groom and soldier, I thought, shame and humiliation almost making me ill. I curtseyed to the whole hall as they applauded and cheered me. All the women pressed around me to congratulate me. I've never had so many soft breasts touch my own false mounds, nor kisses on my cheeks, nor female fragrances, assault me.

"Now you are a woman of the Kingdom," Lady Shallas told me in delight as I shook in her arms. "Tomorrow, every eligible nobleman will be sending you his congratulations and the offer of his hand in marriage. But I think you can aim at the very highest, Countess, as the King has noticed you, has he not?"

I was still shivering at the kiss that the King had given me on the cheek when I quivered in my high heels, wondering why Lady Shallas hadn't told me a kiss would be part of the ceremony I should prepare myself for. I glanced at the smiling King, applauding me, looking so much younger like that, while beside

him, Alloth was grinning, and Baleth frowning, at me. I'd thought the kiss a usual part of the ceremony of honouring someone like me, a heroine. I realized in horror that it wasn't at all. The King was claiming me as a woman as his sons were!

"I, I must go riding with Baleth tomorrow," I gasped, the first thought in my silly brain leaping to my girlish lips. "He, he asked me."

"And so it begins," laughed Lady Shallas, taking my hand. "Ennas will go with you. You mustn't ride alone as a woman." She hugged me to her as she led me forward, casually stroking my dress so that my legs showed once more to amuse the men watching me avidly. Lady Shallas led me right across the dance floor and placed my trembling, feminized hand in the King's so that I could dance with him once again.

"Choose your lover, Countess," she whispered as her soft lips kissed my earlobes and earrings. "You must choose the King or one of his sons!"

"Of course, we shall ride with you, Countess," laughed Lady Ennas as she tugged the female, shaping jacket about me, swished my long 'riding' skirts about my legs. They flared as they should. Ennas kissed my cheek, fragrant and as rouged as hers. "Oh, you look so darling in that lovely riding hat your maids pinned in your hair, Countess Marana. When he sees you, Prince Baleth is going to fall at your feet and beg you to marry him as his brother did last night."

My cheeks flamed beneath all the paint on me. I didn't want that to happen again! I didn't want to think about what had happened to disgrace me at the ball the night before. I didn't want to think about the scandal Prince Alloth had caused by going down on one knee in front of me and proposing marriage to

me, in front of his enraged father and disgusted brother, telling me I was the loveliest woman in the land. He must have me in his bed once again.

The King, his father, had been so aggrieved with Alloth, he'd had him physically removed from the Ball. Solloth had publicly apologized to me for his boorish son. He'd commanded a slow dance then in which he'd held my quaking body to him, tears brightening my made-up eyes in the frustration I felt as the King was "making his desires known," according to my maids. They'd prepared me finally, still aghast at what was happening to me, for my frilled, feminine bed in a new, nightgown that seemed to be the dress I'd worn all night to the ball.

My maids thought I was going to be their next Queen, it seemed, while I stammered and told them fearfully, as I told everyone who spoke to me, that I was not going to be anyone's bride, on the morrow or any other day, not the King's or anyone else's. I couldn't be, I thought wildly, as I was whisked around the ballroom floor in my lovely high-heeled slippers, my dress swirling and open.

I'm a man, I thought of screaming out loud, but I was actually afraid of anyone knowing the truth about me. I was certain I'd be attacked if I ever declared such a thing.

"Oh my lady!" Teenas had exclaimed as she'd helped me remove my makeup and be ready for bed. "If the king should call, how could your refuse to be his loving wife? He's the King!"

"I don't want to be a Queen!" I told her hysterically as Lametas undid my hair and began to brush it out before re-braiding it tightly in two plaits at my shoulders. "I need Baretal!"

"But, my lady," said Teenas in distress. "She's gone, is she not, with the trade party she organized? Prince Baleth just returned after escorting that party

through the Black Forest. We heard he was very angry at leaving you here at the mercy of his brother for the ten days it took to traverse the forest and five more to return. I thought Lady Shallas had told you.”

She had. My own cousin had abandoned me to this womanhood I was quivering at! A pain spread all through me as I thought what she was saying to my parents about me. They’d be appalled that I was now a woman, a Lady of the Court, with men desiring to marry me.

Yes, I was so feminine that men wished to lie with me as a man lies with a woman. Several had whispered in my ear that they wished to tryst with me. I was so young and so pretty! They promised me I’d never enjoy another man as I’d enjoy them if we could meet in secret.

I’d shivered all night long in my soft, silky night-dress. I panicked at thoughts of the words said to me as a girl. I begged the gods, if they existed, to give me the chance to escape from this female prison in which I was locked. I couldn’t imagine what it would be like to capitulate to a man as a woman, letting him find out I wasn’t any kind of wife to him. I dreamed of the King having me burned as I’d heard was the punishment for witches and great criminals in the Land of the Dareths.

It was something of a relief to leave the Women’s Quarters even if it was to ride, as a woman, with Prince Baleth. My maids thought it a most peculiar way of wooing a woman, taking her out riding. I’d still have to ride side-saddle as a woman rides on a horse.

My maids finally led me out of the relative safety of my room. Every part of me was constrained, save for padded chest. Many a soldier stared at my prominent breasts as I swished so nervously through the palace in my high-heeled boots. My outer coat held my petticoats and tight dress to me as I minced, swaying like

a woman, past all the grinning servants' eyes, into the square where a pink-draped Kun awaited me.

I don't think that the horse recognized me. I wouldn't have recognized myself, either, I thought, feeling the tug of stockings about my legs and on my panties. I know I wouldn't smell like the person who'd ridden Kun before. I didn't blame the old warhorse for edging away from me, refusing to allow me to mount him, in any fashion.

Prince Baleth appeared beside me, turning me to face him, not giving me any space to curtsy as he picked me up and almost ran at my white horse, depositing me firmly in the saddle. I wriggled and kicked out with my heeled boots, catching him. He was so much stronger than I was, a supposed Rur warrior! I felt so feeble, so girlishly weak. I was so frightened as I felt the pressure of his hands on my stockings and panties.

"Nice way to start the day, My Lady Countess," said the frowning Prince, around him, several of his men were grinning. I wanted to kick him again where it hurts for making fun of me as a woman, even though he didn't know better. "Now if you'd be so kind, my lady, and take hold of your horse. You can show the world how a pretty heroine rides her horse this fine morning."

I swayed in the woman's saddle and petulantly wanted to ask him to try controlling Kun with as little space on the horse as I had to sit and without my legs to help me control the old fellow. But Kun suddenly stopped side-stepping as I flicked his reins into a 'move forward' gesture. We left Prince Baleth and his grinning friends standing as Kun butted the walking horse in front of us, making it begin to trot, the rider looking indignantly over his shoulder until he saw me in all my womanly finery. Then, he smiled back at me.

The streets were lined with people even though the sun was just up. I felt the sting of the cold on my face but the rest of me was well clothed, in female style, even my hair was tucked into the femininely-styled hat, against the morning air. There was a cheer raised as I eased past on Kun's back. As Lady Shallas had commanded, I smiled and waved to the audience, even though it was there to see me humiliated as a woman. I was able to get Kun to settle but I sensed that he felt where my weight was, at the side, on his back, to be very strange.

Prince Baleth caught up to us as the 'parade' I was leading swept under an arched gate. We headed out past cultivated fields on a roadway around the lake, villages in the distance. "Why such a hurry, my lady?" he asked me, smiling as he turned in the saddle easily and looked back down the procession. "We've left many of the ladies accompanying you far behind, Lady Marana. I see only the Lady Ennas with us. Why did you not wear the divided skirts as she does to ride? I think this old warhorse objects to carrying a woman in skirts side-saddle, no matter how pretty she looks!"

"This is the only dress and coat laid out for me," I grimly told his grinning face, hearing that I was liltng in every way like a girl.

"To match the saddle, no doubt," said Baleth. "I'd hoped to gallop this paddock but with you in your prissy dress ..."

He didn't finish what he was saying as I flicked at Kun and urged him on though he needed very little compulsion from me. Kun bolted past the vanguard, putting empty space between me and many shouting men. I glanced over my shoulder, my earrings dancing against my cheek, seeing them whipping up their horses to come after me. I laughed as I could see riders fanning out and impeding Prince Baleth. That will teach you to tease a woman like me, I thought angrily to myself. Now, if I could just get away from you all ...

It was marvellous to ride, even if it was as a woman. I let Kun gallop, giving his lungs a good blow, along the flat, pressed dirt road that circled the lake, easing him only when I saw a bridge ahead that would take us across the wide river, which led away from the lake.

I was looking back at Prince Baleth, wondering how I'd ever get away from so many riders when the first volley of arrows, from men kneeling along the side of the bridge, took down the few vanguard riders almost with me. Stunned, I tried to drive Kun on but he suddenly stumbled. There was a huge arrow billowing from his chest. He did try to go forward but a second arrow joined the first. I was jerked from the falling horse's back as my white warhorse died beneath me.

I was squealing like a girl as I was partly caught by my long dress under the dying horse, the hooves of other wounded, screaming horses flailing around me. One rider landed with a sickening thud and lay there under his horse, neither one moving.

Men in animal skins, like those who'd attacked the Rur trading party, swarmed around me, loosing arrows at those struggling to live. I could barely get to my feet, tugging free my skirts from my horse, covering my exposed stockings and legs in a panic, so fearful of exposing myself and being thought not a girl by anyone. Why should that worry me? the stupid thought entered my brain as, all about me, there was a wave of fighters falling on the vanguard supposed to protect a Countess like me.

I had no weapon and readied myself to die as a huge man appeared in front of me, a huge sword in his hands. I quivered as I just stood there, having forgotten everything Maran had been taught to do in a crisis like this. The black-bearded man grinned and reached for me. I slapped at his hand, raking him, mostly by accident, with my long, pointed, womanly fingernails. He snarled, picked me up as if I was



nothing, and threw me over his evil-smelling shoulder.

Someone just as big came running back with someone else over their shoulder. It was another woman, Lady Ennas, screaming and kicking in her high-heeled boots as I was. She looked as panicked as I was, feeling helpless and feminine, I'm sure. Our attackers raced through a little wood, hurling me head down, on my stomach, over the saddle of a waiting horse. I was led on a nightmare ride through woodlands I couldn't see well as my hands were bound to my feet beneath the horse.

When we stopped at last, I felt someone cutting my bonds loose and tipping me in a pile of petticoats onto my rear. I had to wriggle and roll to cover up the awful view all of them were getting at what a Lady like me wore underneath her dress. I shook with fear as the first man got off his horse as well and pulled me up onto my booted, high-heeled feet, my hair all a mess as well against my face, my hat torn off me in the gallop.

I must look like a washerwoman, I thought in distress, as I looked up at a circle of grinning men, my fright growing even more as one said, "She's a real pretty girlie. We do get to have our turn with her, don't we?"

I shuddered fearfully at all the male leering as I struggled against the man holding me, laughing like the others, my skirts swishing all about me as I heard someone saying I had lovely legs. He'd been watching them, he added, all the way on our ride so far. Prettiest he'd seen in an age, he said to loud guffaws.

"I was the one patting your tush," another said, leering at me, his teeth all black and rotting. I shuddered in fright, drawing back and turning my head as he tried to kiss me. "You were much nicer, girl, when I touched your panties!"

All his friends were laughing and jeering. I didn't have to pretend to any emotion. I was scared out of my mind at all these men who could see it. I'd thought there'd been more than one man stroking my legs and flipping my petticoats about my back as I bounced along.

Ennas, my friend, captured with me, forced her way through the circle of sneering men. "Ennas!" I screamed, trying to break free and hug her, someone familiar. Ennas astounded me by pushing me away, back into the strong arms of the man who'd captured me.

"Well, she's alive," Ennas sneered at me, thumping the big man, who was fondling me most familiarly. I'd seen men do that to serving wenches many times. "No thanks to you, Gerost, the way you carried her! And you missed the prince, you blind, sucking sheepherder!"

"I got his horse!" growled the big man who'd grabbed me first and was still hanging on to me, a massive paw about my shoulders. "But he wiggled off its back like a snake. His men were throwing their bodies in front of him. I ran out of arrows and riders to kill before I took your girlie here, Denne, and got us away with something!"

I looked up at Ennas in consternation but she only sneered at me as I was flung on the ground again. She moved forward, seizing my mouth, pouring this rank water into my mouth, laughing as she told me to be a good little girl and drink it all up.

All around me, I felt men's feet poking my hips, my legs, and especially my tush as if they were waiting for someone to be the first to start treating me as if I was a woman, at the mercy of a pack of men. I stared in horror at Ennas but her sneer only turned to a smile as she looked at the men and back at me. At any moment, I thought she was going to tell them to

get me. I was past fright. It was terror that gripped me.

“She’s tougher than she looks,” grinned the bearded man who’d carried me away from Kun. “Didn’t you see how she rolled free of that white horse? Thought we were going to lose her too which is why I went after her. You sure you want to keep her alive, Denne? The boys sure appreciate a live one ...”

Ennas leaned over me, spat right in my eyes, her own face livid, a mask of rage. “You killed Gelesh, my husband,” she screamed at me as I cowered in fear from a woman. “A girl like you! You’ll wish we killed you as quickly as you impaled him after my folk get through impaling you, Countess, on a hundred masculine poles! And we’ll keep you alive long enough to collect a ransom. I’ve got her jewels, everything the King and princes gave her,” she jeered at me as the other men grinned as evilly as she did.

“So you be really sweet to my brothers, pretty Marana!” Ennas went on, as I felt a surge coming over me, my stomach heaving at whatever I’d drunk. But I couldn’t seem to throw up. I felt so horribly sensitive to everything touching me, the touch of my swishing skirts against me nerve-tingling.

“We’ve enough here,” I heard Ennas declaring in a screeching woman’s voice that all would have been able to hear. “I don’t care if we collect a ransom on her, the lovely Countess. Imagine, a Rur like you being made a Lady. I had to marry and kill a husband to get myself taken into the capital. But you’re the heroine, aren’t you? And nothing’s too good for our warrior Queen, is it?”

“What will the Dareths think when we send them a present? One of your pretty ears, a finger, a foot, should get a softie like King Solloth or his foolish get to pay up! Then we’ll leave you staked over a fire-ant nest. I brought a flagon of refined sugar they make in

Blethfell with me. What a meal you'll provide for them before you meet Gelesh on the Grey Shores!"

"We have to have our fun first, Denne!" complained one of the men. My head was reeling, my insides on fire but not from the horrible words he was saying. "Let's have her now!"

"We press on!" yelled Ennas, Denne as they called her. "The Prince will rally his men and come after her for sure. He's sweet on this one. But you'll have her before him," how they laughed at that as I shivered inside as frightened as I'd always imagined pretty maidens to be, "now I've stoked her full of marshwort powder and paste!"

I screamed and tried to break free. That was what Ennas had done to me! She'd filled me with her filthy potion. It possessed me, making my scream become that of a frightened, little girl which was how I felt as my captors looked me over in anticipation.

My squealing as Gerost held me, his hand on my padded breasts, kneading them like bread, caused almost every man to burst out laughing. Terror swept over me. I hadn't a clue what Ennas meant by most of what she'd said. Ransoms, rapes and revenge, I understood. My father had called them the last desperate fling of the losing side in any war. It should let me know my side was winning. I didn't feel like a winner; not as the men about me were positively drooling over the fearful girl they thought I was.

"You tried marshwort on her in the rich palace?" Gerost, the man who had grabbed me, asked. "It's going to work, not just poison her and leave us with nothing but a corpse to sate ourselves with?" Oh yes, I thought, as I tried to dry heave over Gerost but couldn't do anything as he lifted me severely with his arms. "These lads have used Dareth women before. It isn't much fun unless she's a live one."

“She’s a Rur, not a weakling grass-eater,” snapped Ennas as several of the men stopped mounting to listen to her and Gerost bandy words. “It works slowly on her, that’s all. That’s why I poured a skin of powdered water into her.”

“This isn’t working slowly on her,” Gerost said soberly, turning me so that I had to look him in the eye, feeling so weak as he lifted me easily to a man’s saddle on a skittish horse. My skirts divided just as Ennas’s had when I’d seen her mounted on her horse.

“I put a little in all her food,” sneered Ennas, running her foot up between my legs, actually punching me where my numbed manhood lurked behind the double pair of tight panties. I gasped in fright. She kept talking about me as if I was a girl. I had such weird feelings coming over me in waves. But the way she hit me seemed to indicate she knew exactly what I was. “But she eats so little, this one. Trying to keep her girlish figure she is.” That brought on another guffaw from the leering, bearded men. “But it had a marked effect on her, I could tell. What I’ve just given her should please all you men and her as well.

“She started really getting girlie and flirty when I got the first doses into her! She was even coming on to me and her maids! Guess what she’ll be like for my brothers after a whole skinful of marshwort! I think she won’t be satisfied until she’s had every one of you lousy jokers twice at least, under her skirts, starting with Eresh!”

I stared in terror at Eresh, the one with the rotting teeth, smiling awfully at me. I shuddered uncontrollably as I looked at him and realized why I’d been acting in the girlish way I had in the palace, why I’d been feeling sometimes as womanly as I had. And I understood, too, why, starved all day before the Victory Ball, I’d begun to have other not-so-feminine thoughts questioning what I was doing, trying to be a pretty woman all day. The stuff must have worn off

pretty quickly, I thought, clutching at straws as I shivered, not knowing how I was going to survive the degradation to come.

But I'd been drugged! Ennas, Denne, whoever she was, had been drugging me with something to heighten a woman's sexual prowess. And it had worked on me! Yes, I'd believed I wanted to do what Lady Shallas urged me to do. I hated to admit it to myself with so many rutting men about me but Ennas was right about one thing. She was right that I'd loved the soft, feminine way she and my maids touched me.

When some of the younger men I'd danced with touched me gently, they'd stirred something inside me as well. I shuddered as I thought how much I'd liked Baleth's handsome face, so soft and gentle on mine on the rare occasions when we'd met. He'd said he loved to hug me as I smelled so sweetly of womanly fragrances. His hugs let his unbearded face touch mine as well.

I felt a stirring each time Prince Baleth had done that but nothing when his father or brother had done the same thing. I shivered as more waves of nerve-tingling emotions flooded over me. I so wished Prince Baleth was me. I could have caressed his handsome face as I'd found myself longing to do when I'd been in Lady Shallas's classes. She'd had us imagine the handsome men we longed to dance with, even as we practiced with one another.

And, yes, I'd have made love to a girl as pretty as Ennas, as soft-skinned as Baleth, if I could have. I'd have revealed my terrible predicament to her if she'd given me an iota of encouragement. But Ennas, the obvious recipient of my advances, knew what she was doing to me and so hadn't responded.

Ennas must have warned the maids, Teenas and Lametas, about me. My maids had never responded to the soft touches and compliments I'd given them in

the past five days. That was when I'd started to really notice I was changing into a girl. It must have been then I was dosed the heaviest, before falling into the grip of the potent drug Ennas had poured into me from her full, overflowing waterskin.

"Pull your dress down, you slutty whore!" Ennas sneered at me as the men laughed and backed away to catch up their horses, their eyes on me. I was frightened beyond belief, scrambling in my high-heeled boots, so wobbly in the grass, feeling so flirty and feminine, trying to deny to myself all Ennas was saying. But I knew I was loving the girly feel of my dress swirling and rustling about me.

What was coming over me? the thought struck me. What was this Gerost doing with his hands on me, lifting me aboard a horse, caressing my legs as he tied me to the long saddle? I wasn't a woman to be treated like this! I was Maran, son of Melland. I was a warrior and not frightened of anything.

But Gerost ran a hand over my face and leaned over from his horse to kiss me, as if I was a woman, a trollop, a strumpet, a slut, who'd love a man she didn't know doing that to her. And my lips seemed to stick to his. They left a pink mark on him. I'd 'branded' him as if he was mine. Gerost held me as men around us cheered. I swung my puny fists at him. He caught and held me, laughing at me, a mere woman, I supposed.

"Tie her hands to the saddle, Eresh," came Ennas's, hateful, woman's voice, going on and on, "and lead her. Watch her as well. She can ride like a man, even loaded to the gills with marshwort. No one knew she was dosed this morning, but still she rode so well. She's a pretty seat on a horse, even side-saddle."

The riders around me were laughing horribly, several leaning over to squeeze my tush as I was astride a horse, my skirts swirling all about me.

“Hold her,” Ennas went on as my mind reeled at all she’d done to me. All these womanly feelings that surged over me. They weren’t mine! It was her fault I felt as I did, so fearful and womanly as the horse leapt away with me at a gallop. “Don’t let her get away!” yelled Ennas, leering at me from her horse that she rode as ably as I ever had. “Not before we bed down on the Black River tonight! You’ll all have the chance to make her writhe on your pole. By then, she’s going to be so willing to do it with anyone, even Eresh, with the marshwort we’ll stuff in her, on this ride for Gelesh’s revenge!”

“And ransom,” added Gerost, the rider on my right, taking the reins from Eresh. “Let’s not forget what this is really all about, Ennas!”

We burst into the abandoned farmhouse with Denne, Ennas, in the lead. “You said it was just going to be small riding party. The Prince and the slut,” Gerost meant me as he bellowed at a frightened Ennas. “That looks like the whole pig-effing, Dareth army out there!”

Several of the men riding with us had not re-joined when we crashed out of the woods; but there was a column of Dareth mounted archers and warriors charging to meet and cut us off from the Black River. Somehow, the arrows flying all around me didn’t scare me at all, not as much as the lust of the men I rode with. They’d kept telling me all the horrible things I was going to be doing for them as soon as we stopped.

But we didn’t stop. I couldn’t help doing things, like adjusting a bra strap, that Ennas slapped me for. “You see how the wort’s working on her,” she’d said to Gerost, just before we’d trotted out of the woods, right into a trap! “Lady Marana, Countess of the Dareths, is going to be your slut, Gerost, just as soon

as we clear this forest and there are grasslands for you to lay her down and have her!”

I was still imagining what that would be like, catching Gerost’s eyes on me all the time, even after the trap. We’d galloped back into ‘woods,’ farmhouses hiding in tree breaks, where we’d finally re-grouped, the survivors of the long chase. Gerost actually was a handsome man in a barbaric kind of way. I bet he could show a pretty girl a really interesting time, lying in the grass with her.

“What happened to Eresh?” another man, quieter, staring wide-eyed at me, demanded. Gerost took my hand and led me through the deserted farmhouse to the main bedroom where Ennas followed, staring at me avidly, others coming as well.

“Took an arrow in the throat,” said a third man, holding the bedroom door for two more men, who’d arrived from the barn where we’d hidden the horses. They joined us, Gerost putting me down on the bed in a rustle of skirts, lifting pillows behind me to support me as the men looked me over hungrily.

I pushed Gerost’s hand away from where he was lifting my skirt, giggling and wiggling at him. “That stuff you used,” said the doorholder in disgust. “It’s scattered her wits!”

“You won’t think that after you’ve had your turn on her,” laughed Ennas. “She’ll be begging you to stick your pecker into her again and again, you’ll see!”

Oh what a joke that would be, I told myself, as more giggles took over me. I stroked Gerost’s arm, pulling it around my waist. Ooo, his kiss was so sweet on his girl’s lips. She kissed him back furiously, wanting more, her dress rustling as he caressed her legs through the thin material.

“Left Frelesh and Kint in the barn with the horses,” said one of the men who’d trailed in last. “If Dareths

come over the ridge, we're not going to get out of here. Anyone in that bed with her is going to be trapped for sure. We have to go on, Ennas, Gerost. This raid is totally fucked up."

"We still have her," said Gerost quietly, his eyes gleaming at me. He kissed me again as I sort of wiggled femininely on the bed beneath him. Oh, it was she doing that, wasn't it, even though I tried to order 'her' to do nothing to excite him. Just looking at me seemed to impel Gerost into action, however. He grabbed and undid my girlish, riding coat, snapping ties as he tore it from me while another man circled the bed to hold my arms.

I squirmed, squealing like a little girl, kicking at last at Gerost, as he fondled me. He caught my foot and pushed me sideways. The other man was laughing, drooling, stroking my arm and the front of my dress, not seeming to realize how I was padded. I don't know why I did what I did, driving my hard, high heel down on his foot. It broke as he swore and backhanded me, screaming and grimacing. I knew that I didn't like him at all!

"I'm going to split her in half!" the man, whose foot I'd pierced, screamed ferociously.

"Get more in her!" the woman I'd called Lady Ennas cried. The men held me as I wriggled and tried to keep my mouth closed as she poured another skinful of the evil-tasting liquid into my mouth. In such fright, I spat it out of me but Gerost held my nose. I couldn't help swallowing the second huge draught that Ennas poured into me, she laughing all the while she did it.

"Tie her on the bed, Gerost," she urged the big man caressing my silk-stockinged legs, lifting my dress to expose my panties. "She won't kick or refuse anyone in a moment. She's really coming on to you, Gerost, isn't she? Oh, what delicate little fists she has, doesn't she?"

I fought against her and the insults to my femininity. I finally knew I must kick and wriggle as I was stretched out on the bed as Ennas, Denne, wanted me to be. The men found pieces of rope to tie my hands and feet. Ennas knelt between my legs as she pushed up my skirts and dress more, exposing my panties as I shivered, heat almost immediately overcoming me. I jerked as I tried to hide the legs that Ennas caressed so softly, so enticingly, free from the bonds put on me.

“Go on,” sneered Ennas. “Keep fighting, my lovely Countess. It only makes the wort spread more quickly and take you faster. We hunters use it all the time to aid the capture of delectable prey! Ready to take her, Vensesh?”

That must have been the man who'd been crippled by me, the one I didn't like. I didn't want him to seduce me, not when Gerost was standing there, stroking and lusting after me. But Vensesh was taking off his trews and padded soldiers' vest as he bent over me and kissed my mouth. I did the only thing that I could do to a man I didn't like at all. I bit him as hard as I could. Blood flew out from his lacerated lip all over me as I tugged and tugged but still couldn't get free.

“I was only going to kiss her!” I heard Vensesh screaming as Ennas was laughing like a wild witch.

“They're coming!” someone else yelled as doors were banging as some of the men went charging out.

Ennas was off the bed. I heard her voice scream, “We're going to kill her ...!” The scream turned to the high-pitched whistling of a kettle, stopping as there was a volley of sharp thuds against the wall and door.

“You bitch!” grinned a bloody-faced Vensesh, struggling to his feet and mounting me with difficulty as a man would a woman. I felt my first pair of panties being pulled down my legs as I squealed for him to

stop. His hand touched roughly beneath my second panties as I bucked and tried to get him off me.

Vensesh stared down at me, blood dripping from his mouth on my breast bands where he'd torn the top of my dress away. "You're not ..." he snarled, twisting to yell to the other men who he must have thought were lining up to take turns having me as a woman.

Vensesh's words were cut short by an arrow that buried itself right into his neck. He pitched forward, more blood flooding over me. His eyes stared wildly at me as he died, the killing arrow only inches from cutting the skin of my face.

Amid curses and screams, someone hauled the dead body off me. I was quivering beneath the someone trying to help me, looking up at a grim-faced Prince Baleth. He slashed at my hands and my bonds parted. I was whimpering and crying as I sat up, my legs free, the stockings I'd been wearing in tatters.

Baleth pulled my ripped, now revealing, dress down over me, lifting me tenderly off the bed as he'd once gently lifted me off a horse, embarrassing me to be treated as a woman. Now I didn't mind his gentleness at all. In fact, I welcomed it as I cuddled against him, holding my dress over my panties and chest.

"You're cut somewhere! You're bleeding!" Baleth said, putting his arm around me as if to comfort me. "Ollosanth! Where are you? We need a healer here!"

"No," I gasped. "It's all right, Your Highness." There, I remembered for once to use his proper title. "This is blood from the man who was mounting me when your archer killed him. I must commend him on the shot!" The last rattled out of me as I felt a huge dizziness overcoming me.

"Thank you for your commendation, my lady," whispered Prince Baleth as I shivered more in his

arms from the rush of feelings the drugged water was inducing in me. Oh, my Prince had been the one to rescue me from being raped.

Ollosanth, the healer, loomed over me. I gabbled at him, somehow managing to tell him the blood all over me was not mine. “The local scouts say that there are more farmhouses over in the river valley, Your Highness, my lady,” said Ollosanth. “May I suggest, Prince Baleth, that we get the Countess to a proper residence and let her bathe and rest before we head back to the city?”

“Yes,” said Baleth, stroking my arm. I felt an almost unstoppable urge coming over me to kiss him and cuddle tightly against him. But the Prince lifted me up again and took me out of that darkening farmhouse, through the door to where a troop of soldiers began to cheer and cheer. I gathered that they hadn’t expected to find me alive nor unravaged, or so Ollosanth whispered in my ear.

My dress was so torn I could sit a horse properly but Baleth wouldn’t let me. He mounted his horse and had me lifted into his arms where he held me, my head under his chin, me clinging so girlishly to him as his men formed up around me. We went to find lodgings against the night and cold that was coming on so fast.

I think it must have been a female healer who had a bath ready for me. She was kind enough to give me privacy as I frantically got out of my panties and female underwear, my ruined dress gone. Nallas, the healer, wanted to help me dress in a night gown but I couldn’t let her. I was shaking all over and feeling so hot and awful. That potion that Ennas had forced into me was having its effect. I knew I should be alone while the effect was on me but I couldn’t get anyone to leave.

I was brought food and drink but I threw that up immediately which concerned Nallas. She couldn’t

believe how hot I was and went off to find Ollosanth as Prince Baleth, clean and tidy himself, came to sit with me.

“You’re sick, my lady,” said Baleth, sitting on the side of the bed where I’d pulled the bedsheets high about me, my hair long and loose about my clean, unpainted face. I knew I was staring at him with agnized eyes. He had to get away from me, he had to, I told myself.

“You must get away,” I managed to whisper, “or you’ll be sick as well, Your, Your Highness.” I felt a need to curtsy but I was lying in a bed in a woman’s nightie and I couldn’t.

“None of those men,” began Baleth uncertainly, “used you, did they?”

“No,” I whimpered again as Ollosanth appeared, the bottle Ennas had forced me to drink from, in his hands.

“Marshwort powder,” Ollosanth said angrily to Baleth, who jumped in surprise at the healer’s words. “They’ve forced a massive dose on her. Probably to make her responsive to all the men who were going to have her as soon as they went to camp for the night. She might expire ...”

“They gave her a potion to make her submit willingly to them?” asked Baleth, furious at what had been done to me, I could hear. He was looking down on me, I saw through veiled eyes, as I writhed in agony beneath the bedsheet, the worst of the potion taking me over again.

I wriggled about fervently in the bed, just wishing Baleth would go before I did something terrible, like leaping up and kissing him, feminine urges swarming all through me as if I was infected by a swarm of butterflies.

“They gave her far too much,” Ollosanth said grimly, sounding so far away. “Her temperature is so high.”

“Help her!” gasped Baleth.

“That, I think, is your task, Your Highness,” the healer said, as I lifted my legs up to my stomach, turning to see the healer leaning forward and whispering for a little while into the prince’s ear. Baleth’s handsome face went from concern to stunned shock.

Ollosanth left as Prince Baleth sat beside me. I thrashed away in agony as I felt the poison in every part of my body. My breast nipples were so hard and thrusting forward in the bra part of the pretty nightie that Nallas had found for me. I slid girlishly away from Baleth in the bed where I’d been laid. “Get away from me,” I said thickly. But I didn’t want him to do that at all.

“You know why you were given the marshwort?” asked Baleth.

“Ennas told me,” I cried at him. “It, it’s working on me. So, get away from me or ...”

“Or you’ll fall into my arms and make passionate love to me,” said Baleth with a grin, “the thing that I’ve been trying to get you to do for an age.”

“I’m barely in control of myself,” I had to tell him. Maran, son of Melland, I repeated to myself but couldn’t remember why I was doing that. I felt so inflamed. I reached out and took his strong hand in my so feminized one. I said the opposite of what I really wanted.

“I, I want you to leave, my prince!” I croaked at him.

“And, if I do, darling Marana, then some time later, with what you’ve ingested, Ollosanth says, you’ll be



out in the compound seizing any man you can get your lovely hands on, my darling,” said Prince Baleth, his voice soft, gentle and so loving. A girl like me couldn’t deny a man who spoke that way to her, not at all. “I could wait out there till the climax overcomes you, Marana, try to stand in your way, to protect my men, of course, or I could stay here, confine you to this bed and protect both you and them in a more civilized fashion.”

“H-how?” I gasped, thinking he was reaching for his sword or for a club of some kind but he wasn’t. Baleth took off his swordbelt, easing onto the bed, lying beside me.

“What are you doing?” I asked him in a panic, forgetting all the honorifics as a man stretched his body out beside me, taking my hands gently as if he was really touching a woman. That was when Prince Baleth kissed me for the first time. I’d thought I was shaking before but the touch of his lips on mine made me feel as if he’d kissed me everywhere. Ooo, I had to kiss such a wonderful man back. I had to. I had to let him under the bedsheet and put his hands on my waist and pull me against him.

I was quivering as if I’d explode as I tried to fixate on the fact that I was a man but such a surge or femininity swept over me. I put my arms about Baleth’s neck and kissed him passionately on his wonderful, firm, masculine lips. I was shuddering everywhere as his clothed body touched my nightgown. Oh, how I quivered as he stroked my arms and hair.

I kissed Baleth so hard that I lost all awareness of what I was doing and who I was doing it with. I think I assisted Baleth out of his clothes. I know I stroked his manhood, and that he liked me doing that for him. But that was the last peep of outrage and resistance that went through me. I let Baleth, as I desired him to, kiss my breasts, such as they wear, my nipples so hard and stinging as he found them and caressed and kissed them. I writhed and squirmed be-

neath the man that a woman like me had to have make love to her.

I couldn't stop kissing and stroking my lover as he discovered what was wrong with me. I think Baleth tried to leave me but I couldn't let him go. I threshed against his cool skin and drew his manhood between my legs. I don't know why but it all seemed so natural that he should penetrate me as he did, me squealing with desire and delight as he made me, the way my overheated mind was thinking, into a woman.

I had to have him do that to me again and again. I was an unsatisfied and insatiable woman. I should have had more than one man to satisfy me but whenever I released my valiant lover, the more I wanted him, the more I had to hold onto his lips with mine and the more he had to drive into me.

I know I begged him to penetrate me more deeply. Baleth pushed my legs high in the air. Ooo, I could bounce away in delirium as he penetrated my tush. I climaxed in delight just as much as he did, seemingly unable to stop. Poor Prince Baleth! He didn't have what I had in me to aid in us becoming lovers.

Sometimes, I snuggled and cuddled to him but it was never for long as the urge came over me again. I had to grip him so tightly, my legs about him. I threshed without ceasing until he finally grew enough, his penetrating manhood inside me, possessing me fully as a woman.

Yes, I possessed his wonderful lips as well, almost permanently, until my body ignited as it did so often. I felt him come inside me as he should with a woman like me. I was a woman. I knew it and knew what it was that I had to have from a man. And my man was so wonderful. I knew I was totally out of control.

Yes, I was aroused enough to have a whole army take me. But I wasn't in love with a whole army. I was only in love with Baleth, my gentle and not-so-gentle

lover, who assisted me in spending all the excess that the horrible drug ignites in a woman.

In time, as Baleth flagged, I kissed parts of a man I'd never kissed before. He seemed to like that but always he had to have me, filling me, as I needed to have him that way to be fulfilled. I needed my man to be penetrating me. A woman like me had needs and he, poor male that he was, had to accommodate me in every way.

I lost my panties very early but I managed to keep my nightie between us for almost the whole night, each stretch and twist of my skirts making me feel so much a desired, passionate, loving woman. But that only lasted half the night, me in bliss, blind and absolute.

I had to wake Baleth, murmuring to him I should go out and find some man still awake; but he wouldn't hear of that. He insisted that waking and reviving him was perfectly all right. I giggled with him as I didn't want anyone else to possess me but my loving Baleth. I had to have him take me again and again.

I remember that once I was kissing his penetrator when I was rousing it as it lay snugly between my little breasts. I remember how he had tasted so cinnamonly and sweetly of honey as well as I licked him. Ooo, his manhood burst onto my lips before he withdrew. I remember giggling with him over doing me that way and telling him that I loved it. He could do me again, if he could manage, just like that.

I sat on his pole and bounced on him before collapsing in ecstasy, feeling so wonderfully female as my Prince rose to all the challenges. Somehow, I drifted to sleep in his arms, some time after morning had broken. I think I slept the day away, Baleth as well in my arms, my legs entwined about him, before Ollosanth decided that I must be over the worst of the 'infection.'

My lover wakened me. For a moment, I almost had a fit as I saw a naked Prince Baleth beside me. I gasped as I felt him caressing my thighs, his manhood resting and flickering against mine! He did it against my tush, as I wriggled girlishly against him, wondering what the heck I was doing with another man in bed with me. He pushed up my legs and penetrated me. It took just that second for sanity and reason to return.

But all I could do was squeal like a girl in distress, push the man from on top of me, pull a sheet about me, and rush from that frightening bed where what I'd done all night long flooded into my mind. I stayed, tears not far away, for an hour in the women's latrine, throwing up again and again.

"Let's talk about what happened last night, Lady Marana," the man I was mortified to see said to me, a smile on his lips that made me shiver in distress.

I flicked the reins of the mount beneath me. The gelding began to move forward quickly until Prince Baleth reached past me and took the gelding's head, making my horse match his. Our vanguard riders were quite away ahead of us across the meadow while the rear were fanned out as we crossed a meadow, giving us plenty of space as they had been ordered to, I expected.

"You can stop calling me by that hideous name," I muttered furiously to the prince. "You know exactly what I am. You know that I'm no Lady, no Countess, as you've named me."

"If you were, you'd be curtsying to me," murmured the man beside me, "staying on your knee, pretty maiden, until I'm well past, or until I recognize you. You should call me by my title, even if you refuse yours."

“I am a Rur warrior ...” I began, meaning to tell him, this man whom I’d awakened to find having me as a woman as he had apparently had all night long. Ollosanth had tried to explain about the massive amount of some marshwort stuff inside me, making me behave like a wanton woman of the streets. I’d have been flinging myself on any and every man I met, or so Ollosanth said, but the Prince had intercepted me, keeping me in his bed. So, I’d only made love to one man all night long.

“We Dareth do not count maidenly virginity in the same way you Rur have been known to do,” the healer told me, as I squirmed woefully before him. The female healer, Nallas, acted as my maid and brushed and braided my hair for me. Ooo, I looked again like the woman I was supposed to be.

Nallas would have done my makeup as well but I’d learned too well how to do that. I’d learned how to apply perfume to myself and where, and not to object to all the objects of women’s finery, from panties to stockings, earrings and a bra, that I had to wear. My dress was a long, divided skirt like the one Lady Ennas, Denne to the men who’d attacked us, had worn. It enabled me to ride astride my new mount, my blonde curls wafting across my face in the breeze. I sat on a soft cushion after Prince Baleth noted how I hurt as I tried to spread my legs and sit, ladylike, on my new steed.

Each time I moved my hand to keep hair from my eyes, I had to shiver as I saw how lovely and red were my shaped, female-looking, fingernails. I struggled to regain control of my horse but Prince Baleth clicked at him as Dareth riders do. I was forced to ride quietly, with no chance of fleeing beside this man whom I had apparently attacked in a frenzy the night before, determined to be his female lover.

I was hot and flushing just thinking about it. Ollosanth might think he’d been consoling me by telling me all about the marriage customs of the Dareth,

how men did not care that a woman was pregnant, they went that far, when he married her. Many young women being married brought their children by other men to be their attendants at their weddings.

I couldn't help it but I thought the custom quite barbaric. If I ever got back among the Rur, if I had any of the proceeds that my cousin Baretta had fled with, I'd buy myself a virgin from a well-known family and start my own family trading company. Not that I could do it if my cousin had told everyone about me, how I had been mistaken for a woman, clothed and treated as one. The only saving factor was that Baretta hadn't been around to see my utter humiliation in the farmhouse out here on the Plains.

I could almost hear her laughter when Baretta was told all about me, how many times I'd made love to the man who'd sacrificed himself to keep his own company of warriors from being scandalized and abused by a person like me.

"I don't think you're a Rur warrior any more," said the man whose leg pressed against my dress, caressing me as the horses rose and fell as they cantered along.

"Now you know about me," I whispered to him, glancing nervously back at the guards who were keeping the same distance from us as before. "You must treat me as the Rur warrior I am," I insisted. "You must help me into male clothing and assist me in slipping away from your warriors. You can leave me anywhere. I'll get back to my own people as I can."

"You'd be raped, Lady Marana," said the calm man riding beside me, "before you were gone a day. It would be known then you'd disguised yourself as a boy, no matter what I said to help you. There'd be parties out scouting for you, parties working for my brother, or even for my father. This troop is riddled with spies as is your maidenly household, my lady. What you are asking is akin to asking for suicide. We

cannot allow that as it affronts the gods. You would never reach the Grey Fields or the Heavens Beyond if you were to do that.”

“I cannot go on like this,” I blurted out angrily to the man beside me. “I am not a woman! I can’t be one!”

“You have done remarkably well at being a woman up until now,” said Prince Baleth. “I have no doubt, my lady, that you can continue in Blethfell, as one of our Countesses. You’ll never be questioned. You might even aspire to be a princess or a queen. You could be either of those, or both in time.”

“How can you say that to me?” I hissed at him in my distress, the breeze making my dress swirl about my stockings, reminding me that I did look exactly like a woman. My voice as well was light and feminine as I’d trained it to be. “You, you know me, Prince Baleth!”

“That I do,” said the prince, an emotion in his voice that made me scared to look at him. But I had to, flushing and quivering, my earrings swirling across my soft, feminine cheek. He was frowning at me. Oh, I could guess why, my body shaking in distress. “It was an unbelievable shock when I finally freed your lovely body from your pretty panties,” the man beside me said softly to me.

“I, I understand your revulsion,” I whispered back to him, having to look anywhere but at a man whom I’d forced myself on as a wanton woman. “It’s the way I feel now, too. I can’t believe I was so overcome by whatever Ennas gave me as I was.”

“Did you know what you were doing?” asked Prince Baleth, a strange expression on his face as I gave him a swift glance, my earrings and long hair swirling about me.

“I think so,” I told him with a shudder. “I knew what I’d done all night with you. It was just you, wasn’t it, all those times, inside me?”

I almost sobbed as I said that. Prince Baleth nodded grimly to me that it was he alone who’d penetrated me, whom I’d kissed and loved with complete abandon, as a woman.

“I, I’m still having all kinds of waking dreams,” I went on, my golden braid of hair swinging across my shoulders. My bra really pressed on me tightly, pinching my nipples but I didn’t know how, “about, about what I was having you do to me, a-about how horrible it all was. I, I couldn’t seem to stop even when I knew it was all so terrible for you. I’m so sorry, Your Highness, this ever got so far. Those Bearskins, is that what you call them, did this to me because they thought, like you, I was the embodiment of Queen Asara!”

“Just like a woman,” said Prince Baleth, his eyes squinting at me again. “You rattle on about things that are of no consequence to me.”

I stared back at him. “If you would just help me get out of here ...”

“No,” Baleth said, stunning me into silence. We rode over a small rise to the river and road that led into Blethfell. There were soldiers, mounted and foot, with the sturdy pikes that they used against riders well, or so I’d heard but not seen yet.

“My father’s men,” said Prince Baleth with a grimace. “So, Lady Marana, this is how it will be. You will return to Blethfell. If you are asked about what happened to you, you will say how I rescued you, how you’ve chosen me and how you and I will soon be joined at the altar of the goddess in oath to one another as husband and wife.”

“I can’t do that!” I screamed at him, trying to break my horse free from the control he had. “I’m not ...”

“Then, I’ll get you away from me,” snapped the Prince, “if you’ll only stop behaving like the crazy woman you say you aren’t.”

“I’m not staying in women’s clothing for one minute longer ...” I began to tell him as my fight to control my horse brought us much closer to the vanguard who were turning to look at us.

“You will, you stupid Rur groom,” snarled Prince Baleth, jerking me almost to a stop. “You will if you want to get out of here alive. Otherwise, I’ll have no compunction in having Ollosanth serve you that awful potion again. I’ll leave you screaming in desire for any man for a five-day. I’ll let you beg me to fuck you. But of course you’ll never be able to actually say that as I’ll have you silenced, even if I have to cut out your pretty tongue myself.”

I was so astonished by the tone of his vicious words that I was silent.

“After all,” said Prince Baleth as his men met and greeted his father’s. “Aren’t I the one who should be aggrieved, Lady Marana? I was the one whom you flung yourself at so lovingly. I was the one who expected to have the experience of a lifetime, making love to the woman who’s entranced me since I first saw her struggling to fight back in the death throes of her trading party.

“And what did I find after the first wonderful kisses and caresses. I find that the woman I was in love with was nothing more than a deceitful boy in his sister’s clothing. So, I am the aggrieved party in this affair, my lady.”

The last two words were said so scornfully that I felt ashamed through and through at what I’d done.

I'd known, I should never have listened to Baretta, that I'd be found out at some date in the future.

"I was the one," Baleth hissed at me in scorn, "who's had to sacrifice himself for the well-being of my men. All through that awful night, I couldn't let you go among them. I had to make love to you again and again as you used all the female tricks Lady Shallas has been teaching you. Oh, you learned your lessons very well!"

I flushed and didn't dare to look at him any more. All I could think as I rode forward to the cheering warriors and King's Pikemen was that Prince Baleth had at least said that he would set me free after he had married me as a woman.

Oh, how I shivered at that. Yes, I thought to myself, the cheering would have died by then. I just hoped that his idea of releasing me wasn't to slide a blade across my throat.

My maids were so delighted to see me, to draw warm baths for me and to douse me in fragrant feminine oils. The betrayal by Lady Ennas was the talk of the Women's Quarter, second only to the announcement by Prince Baleth that I'd agreed to be his consecrated woman, married and bound to him for life by the goddess. All should begin to prepare for a date in the very near future when I would become Princess Balethas, and he would be my most proud and fortunate husband.

I shivered all through that announcement on the steps of the Palace, my skirts wavering as I had to immediately curtsy to the King, to be kissed on both cheeks by him. Prince Alloth kissed my cheek, too, and whispered, "I only wish that it was me, my beautiful Marana."

I was trapped in the women's quarters again. My hair was set once more in waves, my makeup and nail polishes renewed, my eyebrows thinned, and my chest tortured once more by pushes and tugs. On the outside, at least, I was the beautiful Countess Marana again.

If only it had just been that, but it wasn't. I had to wear tight underclothing again, a glittering, revealing gown covered once more in jewels, and I had to dance in high-heeled slippers with Prince Baleth. He found it much easier than me to appear happy as he held me,

Baleth even held my hand and led me, swishing, into the women's quarters. He followed me right into my dressing room as Teenas ran off, giggling, leaving me all alone with the prince.

"What, what are you doing?" I asked the Prince nervously as he kicked his boots free and began to take off his shirt, his well-muscled chest revealed so quickly to me.

"Ah, the customs of the Dareth," said Prince Baleth. "Well, my fierce and masculine Rur warrior," I flushed at his insulting me. He knew it wasn't true as I stood before him, covered in gleaming, womanly jewels and swathed in a lovely, from a woman's point of view, girlish dancing gown, "it would be seriously remarked upon and to your detriment as a woman if you didn't have me in your bed tonight.

"Yes, my darling Marana, those horrible, terrible things that caused you as much revulsion as they did me, we shall have to repeat. Your maids will have our bedsheets pored over by my father's and brother's spies, searching for some reason why to protest our precipitated marriage."

"You can't expect," I said, backing away from him but his pants were open as he came after me and caught me by my dress, pulling me to him.

“Yes, we have to show them we are in love,” said Baleth, with a strange look on his face, his lip curling as he spoke. “Now, my lady, how can you do this, run from me, when all of last night you pursued me with an ardor beyond belief?”

“That was not me,” I retorted to my future husband. “That was someone under the influence of an irresistible drug.” I shivered. “And you know how, how disgusting it was when we ... when you ... and you don’t have to look at me like that. I shouldn’t have listened to Baretta. I shouldn’t have done what she wanted ... She’s gone with a fortune in trade goods, hasn’t she? Let me go and I promise I’ll find her and ... You don’t have to touch me at all ... It’s so awful, isn’t it? Oh, why am I talking like this? We don’t have to do anything like that again ... We only have to tell others we behaved as men and women do ... We don’t have to ...”

“We do when you chatter on like a girl,” said Prince Baleth. His arms drew me against him, his arms about my narrow waist, holding me as if I was a woman. “It makes me want that woman who urged me, pleaded with me to make love to her, all night long! I want her even more than I did last night.”

I felt the panic surging through me as his firm lips descended onto mine. His masculine grip tightened on me even more. I could feel my world beginning to spin weirdly as he swirled me in my long gown, his body touching mine, just as if I was a woman in his arms, being kissed by a man who wanted her.

Baleth spun me around and I danced with him, shivering as he made me twirl in my lovely gown. I had to hold him so that I wouldn’t fall. Then he was kissing me again, strongly, demandingly, on my lips, as the oddest of feelings ran through me. His hand caressed my tush. I shook, but didn’t want him to stop as I drew my legs together tightly at the eeriest of feelings running through me. I was trying to tell him to stop while at the same time I didn’t want him to at

all. I actually seemed to love the excited, degenerate feelings that tried to take over my mind and conscience.

“You are so beautiful, my lady,” whispered Baleth, kissing me then firmly as I clung to him, wondering how I could feel as girlish as I did. I couldn’t believe how I instantly kissed him back as if I wanted and enjoyed what he was doing to me, as if I was a woman.

I couldn’t believe what was coming over me as I felt such pleasure sweeping through me as I swayed in the prince’s arms. Any guilt I’d felt at a man holding me and kissing me evaporated as if it was a will-of-the-wisp thought. I wanted him to do what he was doing to me. I kissed him back as he seemed to delight in the way I was behaving.

“And you are so handsome, my lord,” I whispered to Baleth, not knowing where such words came from, only knowing they were true.

His arms ran all over my body, heightening what I began to recognize in panic, then in awe, as desire for him to do that to me. I wanted to assist his gentle caresses and his treatment of me as a woman. I couldn’t seem to help it. I kissed him, my Prince, as we sank to the bed. I was under him and thinking how right it was. I wanted him over and on me. I wanted his mouth on my chest where he was kissing the mounds that were being thrust up by the way I was taped.

The Prince slowly, gently, undid my lovely, silky, woman’s dress as I trembled against him, his hands stroking my long, brushed, female hair as well as he released my braid. My dress slid away from me as I opened my legs for the Prince. He kissed me so passionately that I had to put my arms about his head and wriggle my body femininely against him.

“You, you’ve drugged me with the marshwort,” I gasped, holding him stiffly as I felt his hand on my garter belt, caressing me, releasing all kinds of pleased, feminine feelings in me. No, I didn’t care at all what he’d done to me. So this was how I’d felt the evening before. This was how I’d enticed him into making love to me as if I was his woman. This was how I’d felt. I caressed his hands and didn’t stop his explorations of my womanliness at all. I wanted him to touch me gently and feel my mouth possessed by his.

We kissed passionately as I pushed against him so tightly, loving the way he fondled the phoney breasts I had. “It’s just a very light dose,” whispered Baleth, “just enough so that you won’t fail as a woman in what we have to do here in bed tonight. You will prove to your handmaids that you’ve enticed me to make you my woman. There’ll be no doubts, my lovely girl. You are my woman, Marana. Why shouldn’t you feel pleasure as a woman too in what we do here tonight, and for the next month, as we wait for the Goddess to accept us as man and wife?”

“I’ll be the man,” I managed to gulp before all reason left me. I gave myself up to unbridled passion with my lover, wiggling in joy beneath him as I felt his desire for me as a woman, growing and growing against my panties, as he used his rampant manhood to caress my thighs to female excitement.

“I don’t think so,” muttered Prince Baleth as he slid his pants from himself. I was aroused with incredible, girlish desire as I felt him in between my legs, pushing on my panties.

I didn’t quite know what Baleth was doing as he caressed my tush, his body crushing mine so wonderfully. My hair floated like a cloud over me as I closed my eyes as the pleasures only intensified as a wonderful man wanted me as a woman, making me shake with delight as I knew it was true. I felt my panties descend. My tape was taken away. Ooo, I was

so sore. I drew Baleth down on me as I kissed and kissed him ferociously. He showed me how I had to split my legs and caress his body with them as he lifted my tush high.

“Oh, I am a woman,” I think I murmured as I felt the prince’s manhood entering me. I wiggled and giggled, I know I did, and then it all gets blurry for a while. I only know I was pleased unbelievably. I know I was squealing and begging my lover never to stop what he was doing to me. I know I wanted him. I know that he was driving his maleness against my upturned tush which was so wonderful as I was going to be a woman for him. I was muttering some nonsense urging him to make me his woman. He was murmuring back that he wanted me as well, as much as I wanted him, even more.

And so I only had to wiggle my tush a little more, open my legs, he fondled them so gently, a little more and, Ooo-Ooo-Ooo, how wonderful it was for a woman, me, to feel a man inside her. I gloried in it, bouncing and threshing all around the bed as Baleth kissed and stroked my breasts in my bra, squeezing my nipples which I loved so much. My stockinged legs were unable to stay still about his waist as I twisted and gyrated my tush in ways I didn’t know that I could or should.

“Just as you learned to do it last night,” whispered the man entering me so delightfully, setting off waves of feminine emotion through me. I couldn’t believe it when the Prince hugged me even more tightly. My tush was moving constantly in a wiggle as his hands caressed my, well, the thing that I had like his, as then I realized he was coming inside me.

I wriggled and writhed as Baleth came even harder inside me as our lips locked together. He lifted me more. We began to bounce together, he leaving my little manhood to poke into him as he made love to me, and, Ooo, he was the man. He was grunting fiercely as he held me so firmly and filled me so masculinely.

I squealed in feminine joy, feeling I was the most loved woman ever in the world.

My Prince filled me as I shook and agitated my body against him, he saying he loved it as much as me, I was sure. There was a glow about me that must come from the insidious drug that took hold of me but I didn't care. I'd just experienced the most unbelievable feeling of my life. I'd become a woman!

I'd felt as a woman being made love to by her man must feel and had done more than feel it. I was that woman who'd been so enraptured and loved. I had to feel it again. I was insatiable. I had to have that feeling all over me, through me, dominating me again and again. Baleth told me I was a woman as I was having orgasms, squeaking in feminine delight beneath him, urging him to touch me and kiss me as he would any woman. Oh, it was such a fantastic feeling. I knew I was drugged but I was so thrilled that he'd done it, loving him for it. It was so wonderful to be a woman! Especially a woman like I was with my wonderful Prince making love to me again and again.

"Darling Marana," whispered the man I was rocking beneath, his hands at last freeing my stockings and easing them along my smooth legs, the touch of his hands making me want to kiss him more intensely, which I did.

"Marana," said the man over me. "Don't disappear into the drug and leave me alone to service you as I would a paid woman."

The harshness of his tone made me open my eyes. Baleth, darling Baleth, was only inches from my mouth. I lifted my head and kissed him, drawing him down on me. "My darling, my darling," he murmured, making me gyrate so wildly as he caressed and squeezed my nipples. "I want you to remember this. I want you to remember always that you are my woman."

"I am," I whispered to him, trying to find his lips again but he was holding my shoulders down and was looming over me. "Kiss me again, please, my darling!" I said to him as seductively as I could.

"That's the marshwort talking," said Prince Baleth. "It is, my darling Marana. An hour ago, you hated me and the very idea of me making love to you. Now, how do you feel?"

"I love you, my prince," I murmured to him. "Let me show you how much by letting me kiss your handsome face again."

Baleth pinched me, on my arms. I gasped in surprise at him. "It's the drug in you, my lovely darling," he said to me as I stretched like a cat beneath him and kissed his chest, the only part I could reach. "Ollosanth has given you too much. I wanted to talk to you about being my wife and what the ceremony of the goddess means to people of my faith."

"I will be your wife for all eternity," I laughed at him, wiggling as I felt him weakening inside me. I lifted and squeezed my leg about Baleth's head and he kissed my calves and stroked me, up my hips and down my thighs. I didn't mind that he was drawing me against his mouth, he sliding out of me to pleasure me in new and exciting ways I seemed to remember enjoying even more clearly than ever as he did such wonderful things to me again.

"That is right," whispered Baleth. "I, a man, will be linked to another man for all eternity, he fulfilling every function a wife must for her husband."

"I will be honoured to fulfill every wifely function you wish, my darling," I whispered to my lover, trying to get him to take more interest in my heavily beating heart and my womanly attributes draped around him.

“Oh, forget it,” said the man who would be my husband. His maleness returned to attention and male firmness. So, I had to be all womanly and soft and loving as we mated again, as man and woman, he lying back eventually and placing my soft, smooth, girlish legs beside him as he had me sit on his erect manhood.

Soon I was bouncing up and down in unfeigned delight on Baleth’s marvellous pole, gasping and squealing nearly as loudly as the springs on the bed, my handmaids surely hearing me making love to the man I loved so much. But I was a woman, wasn’t I? What I was doing was what all women did with their men. I wanted to make my husband-to-be so pleased and pleased by me. I wanted to do anything for him that he wanted me, his woman, to do for him.

“You, you want to talk to me,” I finally said reluctantly as I rocked gently on his almost flaccid pole. I knew a man wasn’t as strong as women were. Lady Shallas had taught that to me in her classes. I could go on and on but he was weakened by his emissions, Lady Shallas had taught me and the others in the class. He could not go on as long in loving embraces as me. I had to learn techniques for re-awakening flagging male interest and arousal. I shuddered, however, as I recalled how I’d blushed as all the ways of loving a man had been required learning.

Prince Baleth stared at me in surprise as he lowered me onto the pillow beside him. “I do,” he murmured, staring into my eyes. I had to flick my hair back then from my face and let him ease himself out of me as I lowered my legs from the wonderful position about him, pinning him to me as we made love. Ooo, the shakes that had gripped me as I wriggled against my lover! I still wanted to do it again, to make love to him so desperately. No, I wanted him to make love to me even more desperately. I had to feel that he loved me, loved and admired me physically. It was as if that knowledge was the only thing that could possibly make me content.

“I love you,” whispered the Prince to me, his woman, kissing me, his eyes open all the time, watching me, knowing how I was going to react to that, I’m sure. I fought the urges to throw myself upon him and ride his manhood again until I was sated in pleasure and ready to succumb to oblivion.

I couldn’t help running my tongue over his lips, touching my own lipstick that was stuck to him, so fiercely had we kissed to begin our lovemaking. I shuddered as my Prince tentatively put his hand on my arm and let me draw myself against him. He eased my panties again from my thighs and over my shivering lack of womanliness. He watched me as he kissed me so softly.

I don’t know how I didn’t just surrender to all the urgent emotions running through me. I had the strongest of desires to pull him on top of me, to make my legs cling to him and to make him fill me as a man should fill his woman. I wanted him to caress my breasts, fiercely, with manly passion. I wanted his mouth on all of my soft, scented skin. I wanted to hear and exult at his compliments for my femininity, wanting again the taste of his mouth and his tongue on me.

“You’re holding it in?” my lover whispered to me.

“Yes,” I whispered back.

“And you love me,” Prince Baleth whispered, a funny, downcast smile on his face.

“I love you,” I simpered, moving just a little against him, my painted toes caressing his legs and he stiffened. “Make me your woman again, I beg you,” I said to him, trembling all over then as he kissed me gently. No, I was not going to hold back the flood I sensed behind the barrier of my will.

“My brother has objected to me marrying a Rur woman,” said Prince Baleth with a lopsided grin. “My

father has asked for the advice of his Council. It could be, darling Marana, that you will be going home to your Rur household a lot sooner than either of us thought you would.”

“Or I might not,” I said so softly that I thought he hadn’t heard me at first. A spasm of pain went through me as his mouth remained a short distance from mine. Baleth wasn’t caressing me as he should. “You don’t want me to be your woman any longer.”

Baleth started up and stared down at me. “That isn’t what I said at all,” he muttered thickly. “I have another item of news for you. Your cousin is a day out of the city with a full Rur trading delegation, which probably means that some of your relatives will be with the party, now that my golden lady has driven back the Bear Totems from the trading route to the north.”

“Bareta is my relative,” I murmured to the handsome face that was kissing my hair, his shoulders touching against my nakedness, his hands touching me with such gentleness as I resisted grabbing him with all my strength.

“If you have closer relatives in the party,” whispered Baleth, “you may, Marana, be returning to your Rur family before the Council acts.”

I shuddered. “And that is all you had to tell me,” I murmured, my whole body on fire as I felt his legs against me, his hands on me, his mouth kissing my hair before he spoke.

“Yes,” Prince Baleth muttered and that was enough. I could stand the quivering emotions that had spread through me no longer. I moved against him. Ooo, Baleth welcomed what he knew I was going to do.

My lips clung to his. They caressed his as he sighed and joined in with my passionate lovemaking.

This time, he pushed me back and mounted me which was the most thrilling position of all. I was his woman, my tush raised and energized to take his manhood. He drove it in and out of me, penetrating me as I wiggled and writhed in jubilation and joy as I was treated once more as if I was the prince's woman. Baleth told me I was and how much he loved a woman like me.

I couldn't stop with just one, lengthy lovemaking session. I had to have him more and more which he seemed to know. Baleth didn't object at all as I had to have him almost all night long. I don't know when the drug was supposed to wear off. But even in the late afternoon of the following day, I was still demanding fond attention to me as a woman by the man who thrilled me so much by telling me he loved me.

I was in the throes of yet another bout of passion when Teenas finally coughed and entered our bedroom, blushing immediately as she looked at us, Baleth penetrating me beneath a bedsheet which wasn't always in place as it was then. He couldn't talk with his mouth full of breast and nipple; and I couldn't because of the squeaking I was doing as I rocked the bed so energetically to gain every inch of pleasure from my lover inside me, my bare legs so high against his and my face.

The King commanded our presence and so my wonderful, loving session had to end. I had to bathe with my Prince as I couldn't stop trembling at the way in which he cleansed me and made me his woman one more time. He tried to aid me to disguise myself from my handmaidens but he was such a softie. He winced when I finally showed him reluctantly how I had to be taped to disguise myself from prying eyes and to present myself as the loving woman I was for my wonderful Prince.

“I can’t do what you ask of me!” said a white-faced Baretta, barely able to look at me across the room, draped over one of the low, silk-covered divans that the Dareth favoured in their palaces.

“I don’t ask you to do this for me,” I said to her in the most lilting of womanly tones I could manage. I smiled to myself as I watched her squirm at my tones. She could barely look at me and the changes so subtly made to me by Lady Shallas, Ollosanth and Ennas. Each had encouraged my female figure to blossom, each had had a hand in training me to be the epitome of delicate Dareth womanhood. But it was Baretta and her practical jokes that she had loved to play on me that had really been the impetus for me becoming the future Princess that she was staring at surreptitiously.

“Of course you don’t,” said Baretta with a shudder as I let my dress part as it should. She could see my shapely legs in their so thin, silky stockings, my feet clad in soft, pink-strapped, high-heeled slippers.

“My father has been asking of me from other officials than those you know about,” I said to my old enemy sweetly, pouting and curling a stray strand of hair across my lovely, perfectly made-up face. “It is for his sake that you’ll inform him his son has joined a Dareth trading party into the Southern Range and thence to the trade routes to the Gem and Silk Kingdoms. When I return, I’ll have knowledge to share with all the Rur, knowledge of routes my father and our clan chief have been pursuing for their lifetimes, as you well know.”

“Maran,” said Baretta hotly, making me smile seductively and lean back into my frilled cushions femininely, re-crossing my silk-encased legs, flicking my dress skirt over them with red-painted fingernails. My manicured hand was smooth and be ringed and

braceleted with dark green jewels, worth a fortune back home.

“My Lady Marana, Countess Marana,” Baretta began, shuddering once more, staring at the stone in the necklace at my breasts. It was enormous, green and framed in gold, worth any king’s ransom just by itself. “That’s how you want me to address you, isn’t it?” she ended angrily again.

“Until tomorrow,” I murmured to her and was pleased to see her shuddering again and flushing despite her Dareth made-up face. Yes, I would insist on being called ‘Your Highness’ after I was married to Prince Baleth and became his eternal wife. The whole tribe of Dareths was in ecstasy when they talked about the ceremony and how deeply Baleth and his beautiful bride must be in love.

I gathered that there hadn’t been a celestial bride ceremony in a generation, since the last King didn’t favour such things as ‘eternal ties’. I hadn’t realized what Baleth was doing to me, making me go through a ceremony that only the most favoured, special women went through. Those who did usually did it after children were born.

Despite all the quiet endeavours of Lady Shallas and Ollosanth, I often wished now, at nighttime, when I took my doctored drink, that my breasts really were as spectacular as my maids made them seem to be in the low-cut dresses Dareth women favoured in summer. Ollosanth and his female healer assistant assured me I’d grown in that area although it was only my weakening in others and corseting that made my breasts appear to be like those of other women. Once I had children, Nallas whispered to me, I was certain to be well endowed. She and my maids would make sure I never returned to my present, disappointing, flat-chested state.

Not that my lover was disappointed. Baleth believed I was really advancing in that area and wasn’t

concerned about my lack since I was usually taped well. With my push-up bras in place, he had, or so he said he had, in most princely fashion, as much of me to love and arouse him as he saw on any other young maiden of his acquaintance.

I had been so loving with Baleth as his compliments thrilled me to my feminine core. His compliments made me the most girlish of nubile women in his arms, my kisses enticing him into penetrating me deeply which was how I loved to have him make love to me. He, of course, being the boorish man that he is, had a hundred ways that he loved to have me. If I co-operated with him in every one, it was because I had to reward him immensely for being so in love with me. And dosing me every day so that I was also hopelessly in love with my future husband.

“My Lady and My Countess,” said my flushing cousin. “How, how can you expect your father to believe such a story, not when he finally gets to see you, as he must when you’re paraded through the streets. There is already high speculation about the identity of the Rur princess in our camp ...”

“She must have been the companion of the renegade, whose name is never mentioned among us Rur,” I said to her with a sweet smile, so glad I’d insisted to my Prince that he provide me with a small dose of the marshwort powder or potion before I finally gave in and met with my cousin.

“But when my campmates see you ...” Baretta began.

I rose gracefully on my high heels then and sauntered across the wooden inlaid floor towards Baretta. My heels clicked and my skirts swished as I approached her and she possibly got a whiff of the extravagant perfume that Baleth loved me to wear every moment I was in his arms and was kissing him.

“What will they see?” I murmured to her. I pirouetted and my skirts parted, revealing my lovely underwear that young Dareth women like me loved to show off to prospective lovers – which meant just about every Dareth male above the age of fifteen years.

“Tell me, cousin,” I murmured to her again as sweetly as I could. “What is there about me that you are not pleased with and would force my father into saying, there is my son before me, being kissed and caressed by that Dareth boy as if he was a pretty woman?”

“Gods, Maran!” breathed Baretta. “What’s happened to you? Are you changed? Are you a woman now? How, how did the Dareths change you?”

“It wasn’t them who changed me, remember?” I asked her, raising one thin eyebrow as I leaned over her, my tightly bound and flaunted breasts making her eyes nearly pop out of her head. “You wanted me to be a woman for the Dareths to gain trade, didn’t you? And isn’t that what I’ve done for you?”

“You don’t have to mimic a woman and make love to a Princess everyone knows you are!” Baretta screamed at me. “How could I tell your father that? That you act like a woman and call yourself by a woman’s name? I was right about you back in Groth, wasn’t I? You wanted to be a girl all the time! You wanted to be in my clothes!”

I laughed at her. I’d known she’d say something like that. I’d practiced what I’d say and do. Only I couldn’t do it. Not without the marshwort inside me. Then it was easy. Because I was a woman. I was Prince Baleth’s woman. I lay beneath him and was his woman every night, the potions I consumed making me want to be nothing else.

“No,” I whispered to her with the girlish, red lipsticked smile I’d practiced so often in Lady Shallas’s femininity classes. Lady Shallas told me I

really didn't need to go to her any more even though me being there really did inspire the other girls. They worked harder at the exercises I did and learned to excel in. "You left me here to be discovered and shamed, did you not, my lovely cousin?"

Bareta stared at me, stunned, and suddenly appeared afraid to me. All my sweetness she seemed to sense was an act on my part, as it was. I was never as girlish and as flirty as I was then, lifting my dress so that my cousin could see my pretty panties and how I was tucked as severely as she had wanted me to be, once upon a time.

"But I survived," I said archly to my cousin, flicking back my long blonde braids, so unlike her dark, straight hair. I knew how much men of the southern lands loved us golden girls from the north, by which they meant the Land of the Dareths, few knowing of the Rur and the forests protecting them. Oops, I should have said 'us,' but I really had no clan now but Baeth.

"And I can charm any man I wish, cousin," I went on, coyly, pirouetting, my hands on my girly hips that whatever Ollosanth was giving me had altered into roundish, feminine, softness. "For just some of me, any man will ignore any little imperfections about me, and," I held her eyes on me in fascinated disgust, I would have said, "and, such a man will kill anyone who ever says anything about me that is degrading or demeaning to me as a woman. I always make them promise me that, first. It's why my Prince had his bowman execute Lady Ennas, you remember her."

"The traitor?" gasped Bareta, her eyes widening more.

"Traitor only to me," I whispered to her. "I hated seeing another woman die for such a crime. But rather her than me being whispered about, as I married my prince. You will speak well of me, Lady Bareta," I said that with a smile in which my heavily

made-up eyes were twinkling if I'd done what I'd practiced in the mirror. Yes, I was a laughing, very feminine, pretty girl, so different from the morose youth I'd once been. No, I'd been certain, no one would ever know me for what I was.

"You will tell Maran's father," I lilted on to my greatest 'enemy,' "of his great exploit and the rewards he intends to send back. Tell him that the Prince and his new bride have facilitated his adventure. Let him know I wish him to dance at my wedding, although all my dances there are promised to my husband and his envious relatives!"

Bareta sat there, stunned, shivering in some fear, I could see, as I posed so femininely in front of her. Her hand jerked as if she was going to touch me on my bare, womanly legs but I swished my dress skirts again and shivered myself in pleasure at her.

"I don't know how I never knew how lovely dresses were before I became a Countess of the Dareths," I said gently, feeling the sugary sweetness going out from me and putting a fear of the goddess into the woman who supposedly knew me so well. Now, Bareta looked as if she didn't know me at all.

"M-My Lady," Bareta said nervously. "I, I," she was shaking all over as she rose and curtsied to me, as she should have, as I outranked her. "I will d-do everything as you require, m-my lady."

"That is so good, Lady Bareta," I said, lifting her hand and hugging her in faked impulsiveness. "You are the only person other than my husband who knows any secrets about me. He would be so angry at anyone hurting me with words on such topics and would know immediately where the source of any unnamed rumours came from. That would be such a pity if he took unwise actions that a woman like me would beg him not to, of course."

“Of course,” said Baretta, shivering as I hugged her again, my fragrance filling her nostrils, I’m sure, my body, soft, silky and bouncy against her. It was her last cynical word as she was nothing but gentle and kind with me after this pre-wedding day meeting. In the years ahead, she always addressed me as ‘Your Highness’ or ‘Princess’ or ‘Your Loveliness’ which Baleth’s father decreed was one of the titles I should be known by. Many blushing maidens used that to me all the time.

My Prince came striding into my rooms, unannounced, before Baretta got a chance to flee. He immediately had to kiss me possessively, fiercely, in front of her, his arms all about me as he smiled at her, wished her well in her trading endeavours and sent her on her way. I played my part as well by clinging to him, swishing my dress about him, looking up adoringly into his face.

“That went well,” Baleth asked me as soon as we were alone, not releasing me, of course.

“I think so,” I told him.

“You didn’t want to jump on the poor woman, with all the marshwort inside you?” grinned Baleth then as I split my skirts again so that one of his hands at least had easy access for arousing my lower, feminine parts.

“You told me it was only a minimal dose,” I protested to him. It was truly amazing how I could talk to him, tease him, sway against him, even arouse myself in touching my dress or my legs to him, never mind kissing him, with a dose of the ‘woman’s medicine’ as we called it in front of the maids. They thought it was some kind of contraceptive, I think.

Oh, I was going to be a mother after I was married to Baleth. It was all arranged. I’d hated what my Prince had insisted that I do into a jar as he kissed and caressed me. He wouldn’t take me until I’d pro-

vided him with a sample of my male essence. He'd done the same to himself, he did tell me. What I had given, like his, was being impregnated into a willing young maiden who would carry the 'royal' essence to term for us.

Baleth told me solemnly that it was often done that way in high Dareth circles. We princesses did not need to lose our girlish figures or fail to inspire major balls and events. No, our surrogates were impregnated; our children brought to us at the appropriate time. It made me feel so weird, even though I was heavily dosed to think of the fact that I was going to be declared a mother when it was most likely that, if Ollosanth's 'royal' procedures worked, I would really have become a father.

But Baleth's loving advances, he kept me flat on my back through several intense lovemaking sessions, meant that I couldn't dwell on it, especially why he made me as well as himself impregnate the girls so willing to be secret, royal mothers.

The real advantage to all that came, of course, when I was four months pregnant. That's what was said about me, though I still went to dances as a princess on my husband's arm. I went dancing but Nallas, the female healer, started me taking another drug, one she said they gave to nursing mares and large animals to improve the lactation of the nursing mothers.

I didn't have to nurse my child, of course. We had wet nurses for that, some, I am sure, the 'real' mothers of the children we acknowledged as ours, we royals and nobility. But I would be able to suckle the child, Nallas told me, which would prove me its mother. That made me again feel so weird and so unsettled. It took me a whole three day of loving from my husband to make me resigned to what was happening to me.

And what did happen to me, of course, was that my breasts really grew, much to my husband's delight and pleasure. All his words about not caring were clearly untrue as he made a meal of me, just as much as our daughter, Saras, did of me, refusing to suckle from anyone but me once my flow had begun, to Nallas' delight and Ollosanth's disbelief.

I think I was ten years then in breastfeeding, not all of our children being as obstinate as Saras in feeding from me. And the wonderful thing, of course, as far as my husband was concerned, was that my breasts didn't shrink again. Just a little dose from Nallas and my husband had a young woman's breasts to arouse his ardor again. His enjoyment came from other things he loved to do with my breasts besides kiss and caress them, things that would make me blush to have to relate to anyone, even my maids, who know I am a woman in every respect.

I teased Baleth about his not knowing what he was dosing me with after Baleta went on her troubled way out of the palace, my prince's spies reporting on how downcast and nervous she was.

Baleth, however, got me back for all the girlish teasing I did of him. I knew that it was all the potion inside me. Only when we had lain together under the stone statue of the goddess and consummated our love the ritual three times did my laughing husband let me know that I had no drugs inside me. I hadn't had any inside me for a five-day, through all the talk with Baleta and through all the intense, adorable lovemaking we had made, well, that I had succumbed to, that night, knowing that all my intense, loving feelings for the male penetrating deeply inside me was due to a drug.

But my loving feelings weren't caused by the drug at all. They all came from me! I shivered and writhed and told him he was such a liar and it wasn't true. I only let a man into me because I was drugged. But I

wasn't. I had to have my husband love me because I'd really changed.

I've changed so much that I cried when Saras called me 'Mummy' for the first time. Baleth came over and told her what a good girl she was as I held her eldest brother to my chest so that he could milk me and make me feel so weirdly womanly, as Mareth went to sleep so firmly attached that we had to get a nurse to remove him from me, his mother.

That was such a memorable night Baleth and I had together. I'm sure he doctored my water as he had the first times we'd been together. But my loving husband assured me that he hadn't. I was bouncing on him like a randy woman because that is what I was, my husband declared to me smugly. I was a randy woman who just couldn't get enough sex from her husband.

It was one time, I think, that he didn't lie to me at all.

*****END*****