

Witch IV
More Woman Than Witch



Philippa Peters



An "Adult Tv" Novel



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MORE WOMAN THAN WITCH

by Philippa Peters

Continuing Another Fine Witch, A Plague of Men, and All at Sea.

There were several carriages pulling into the courtyard around us as we entered the grounds of an elegant castle, as I would have called it. Peveret held his trembling maiden to him, kissing and kissing me, as I began to shake at all the people coming about our carriage. They finally opened the doors for us, to my astonishment, calling to the man who was kissing my cheek and neck to stop arousing my passions as he had. I had several grinning men there to assist me from the carriage, acclaiming me as a Lady of the Clan and admiring my splendid necklace and what lay beneath it.

“Pevol! You old sea dog!” a taller, thinner version of Peveret called to us. “You’re away for a year and you

return with a lovely wife!” Oh, how, I shrieked inside at this man saying that so openly to a whole crowd of people staring and smiling at me.

Undercaptain Peveret had almost run around the carriage to open the small door to me. He elbowed several grinning men out of the way as he reached up to take me by my so thin waist. He pirouetted with me so that all the men could get a look at me, his wife, as the other man had called me.

I’m not his wife, on sea or on land, I wanted to squeal, knowing my voice would be female to anyone who heard me. But as I looked over the sea of Seafarer lords, just men as far as I could see, I wanted to run first and hide. I couldn’t. The only thing left for me was to hide in the open and pretend I was a woman.

I was flushing as Peveret put me down among a group of men who were all taller than me. “The loudmouth is my brother, Nessard,” said Peveret, hugging me, swirling my dress about my legs, such a familiar, feminine feeling rushing through me. “My wife is a Baract, Ness, and you will address her as Lady Arrathee or My Lady!”

They used different titles on the many Isles, Peveret had told me, but he insisted I tell others to call me Lady Arrathee. As his wife, which I wasn’t, I’d sworn at him, I was at least equal to a countess in rank, he told me. They would all call me a Lady or would know his fist, he’d said with a laugh. That had made me gulp as I had to re-evaluate all I’d thought about this man who’d been training me to be a witch, and a woman.

“Well, aren’t you going to carry your new bride across the threshold to the Clanhouse?” asked the ‘loudmouthed’ Nessard. “Make her feel welcome to the Komer Line, Pevo! Or are you too old and decrepit

that you can't lift a tiny, beautiful girl into her future home!"

Oh gods and goddesses, I was lifted up, squirming at where my 'husband' put his hands, and carried by that 'husband' through his friends, all male, and through lines of servants, who were all applauding me and calling out how beautiful a wife I was, the newest treasure of the Komer Line.

I wanted to ask where the women were but this was Cunya. I should have known that women were secluded from men. But finally, there was a smiling girl at the top of the stairs. She waited until Pevo carried me, blushing and overheated, to an opened door behind her where there was a long line of young, smiling girls waiting to welcome me. But I'm not a girl, I almost sobbed. I don't belong in here with true girls and nothing but girls together. I'm a man, aren't I? And you know that, Peveret, I wanted to plead with him. I know you do. You must after what we do together as 'husband' and 'wife'!

I'd known a Clanhouse had male and female quarters but now I was actually faced with the fact that I was a woman and going to be treated as a 'treasure'. I'd be locked away in the words of Gennee, when she'd talked to me once about seawives and landed wives, and the seclusion in which many wives of rich men were kept. I'd laughed at her and said how lucky I was, wasn't I, that it would never happen to me, that I was locked away as a woman.

"My Lady Arrathee," said the blonde woman, smiling and curtsying to me at the same time, so graceful in her long gown. I just wished I could be so feminine.

"My brother's wife," murmured Peveret, from behind me. "Clanwife Hetterey, may I present my wife, Lady Arrathee Komer and Baract. May I leave her in

your care while I attend my father and inform him of the treasure I have acquired after this last voyage into the unknown?”

“Of course, honored clanbrother,” said Hetterey with a charming smile. I wanted to protest. I was shivering through and through. I wanted to protest that I wasn’t any kind of wife. I hadn’t been through any kind of ceremony that would make me a wife. All Peveret had done was to give me this beautiful necklace and tell me that only a wife could wear it.

Surely, there must be some ritual in front of a Chanter or a Crier as there was all over Malesia. So now you want to be a bride, I sneered at myself. You couldn’t be a virginal bride, I thought savagely. Oh goddesses, please help me, I prayed. Don’t let this happen to me that I really become a woman!

But I was a woman, married or not. The moment I stepped through the open door, I was in women’s territory, flowers and lace everywhere. I was bombarded with golden specks of some kind of paper that floated and sparkled in the air after they’d first fallen all over me.

“Oh, you really are a Baract!” laughed Hetterey, shooing away all the tiny girls in party dresses who were giggling and bombarding me with whatever sparkling decoration they had. “We always do this to a new bride when she comes into her house for the first time. And all the girls had to stay up and join in. No more!” she called as little blonde darlings were gathering up more handfuls of decoration and trying to throw it over me. Most of their handfuls seemed to land right on my neckline and I could feel lots of the itchy debris working its way over and between my breasts.

I was as tongue-tied as any of the giggly bunch of femininity as I had to greet each and every girl from

the eldest to the youngest. There were a dozen or more of them, cousins visiting, I gathered, because *Silvery Seas* had finally returned home. And I was the woman whom they all wanted to hug with all of their female attributes. I felt them against me and sensed the perfumes they all wore, shivering as they all treated me as if I was one of them, telling me all the time that I was.

“As you can see,” Hetterey laughed, picking up one persistent, little girl, Serray, whom she said was hers, “we are without any grands and dowagers in this house since Elder Wesset’s wife died three years ago. And two of your cousins are pregnant and lying in at the moment. Ah, here’s Dorrie, married to one of our Line, who shares with me the task of organizing this home for the Komer males! Soon it’s going to be your task, Lady Arrathee. You will be the Lady of the Clan! All of us will have to curtsy to you! I can barely wait!”

“I, I’m not displacing anyone!” I said, feeling so ashamed of myself as these women hugged and welcomed me as if I was going to be a mother to them, as they put it.

“But now, at least, we have help, Hettie,” laughed an older, plumper woman. “She may not want to be mother to us all but the girls will soon change your mind, Lady Arrathee. Putting my excited brood to bed can be your lot tomorrow, Lady Arrathee, and I do hope you’ve brought exotic potions with you. I think having a witch in the family is going to be such an advantage at bedtimes with the girls so excited to see a new woman in the house. I really do!”

“Dorrie!” said Nessard’s wife, as I wanted to shout as well. No, there was no new woman in the Komer Clanhouse, not if they meant me. “Can’t you see you’re terrifying the poor girl? She’s all the way from

the Foreshore. I'll bet she doesn't appreciate Cunian sense of humor at all!"

"I, I don't have potions for, for children," I said nervously at the smiling women.

"You don't have to put any children to bed but your own," said Hetterey firmly, shaking her hair at the other woman, who was indicating a small sitting room where a maid awaited us with a tray of tea and small cakes. I could have been at home in my mother's or stepmother's parlor as they received guests dressed as grandly as I was.

I had to swish my dress and lead the women in just as my stepmother had. I was reminded by Dorrie, of course, that all men were excluded from our all-girl company as they weren't interested in what we women wanted to talk about. We women? I gulped as they so easily included me in that status.

What these women, and there were more, as we were soon joined by Clansisters Nerrie and Moranne, who called me 'sister', too, wanted was to find out where I'd been in Greenhaven so soon to find the lovely clothes I was wearing. Just hearing the compliments for my beauty from a woman, a real woman, sent all kinds of weird sensations through me as I thought of myself becoming a 'sister' to other girls.

No, I couldn't let them make me into a treasure, I thought wildly. I was going to have to get away from Cunya just as soon as I could. Or I would soon become a woman. I could sense that in the way they all wanted to hold me and teach me how to be a proper Cunian wife and mother.

"We are to call Peveret's wife, Lady Arrathee ..." said Clansister Hetterey to the younger women who joined us, Moranne clearly pregnant.

“N-No,” I gasped nervously, feeling goose bumps rising all over me as they all looked at me in amusement.

“We have to do what the men tell us to do,” said Dorrie, a playful smile on her lower lip. All of the women began to laugh then, mystifying me as to the joke and how much of joke it was to women to be submissive to men. All of us cabin boys were submissive to our men on the great ships, I knew, totally submissive, but this whole situation that Peveret had put me in was just as ludicrous. I should have gone into the Deviants’ Quarter with Panella, Gennee, Rosee and all the other ‘girls’ I knew. These women didn’t think about men the way it had been drilled into me as a cabbie.

“No man can tell us women what we must and mustn’t do, Arrathee, in our own quarters,” said Hettie most definitely. “We shall call you Lady Arrathee, as an Elder like Pevo decrees that we do. We’ll do that when we are with the men since he has decreed it. We’ll sneer at any man who makes a slip and doesn’t accord you the title Peveret has bestowed upon you as his marriage gift.”

“But woe betide Pevo the first time he calls you by a pet name,” said Dorrie with a wicked smile that sent chills up and down my back. “We will have to make him pay a most horrendous forfeit for such a breach of protocol. He really must be taken down a notch or two, ordering us around!”

I hadn’t thought Peveret, Pevo, had done such a thing but the other women, ‘other’, I trembled at the thought, the other women insisted they were going to put my husband into his place, beneath me, his loving wife. They presumed I’d love being called that as they used it all the time for me.

“Did your mother call you Reenie or something like that?” asked Hettie as she admired my dress. She had me stand and swirl in it, telling me how well it moved about me and how she must get a femmy dress, her words, just like it for some ball that was coming soon. “We all have pet names like Reenie which we use for one another in here! Hetterey is a worse mouthful than Arrathee, isn’t it?”

I had to explain that my mother was dead and that my stepmother had rarely called me anything at all. I couldn’t tell that them that I’d been called ‘Rat’ by my brothers for the longest time until my father stopped them. That my mother was dead elicited sympathy all around from the older women who then wanted to ask me about my silvery dress and my jewels. Their admiration, for the carabet and its arrangement of pearls, illuminated the world I was being drawn into so much.

“You have dressmakers of real taste and elegance in the Foreshore,” said Dorrie, touching the neckline of the dress that Marea, on *Zephyr*, had made for me. Dorrie’s soft fingers ran around the neck, disturbing my breasts and the bra that held them so securely in place. I shuddered involuntarily and Dorrie looked at me in surprise, as she was in the act of praising my lovely bra and asking me if I wore panties that matched. She wanted to see them, she said with a wink at Hettie, who was shaking her head.

“Th-this d-dress,” I stammered at her, so glad I’d doused my vocal cords with throat clasp cordial before leaving *Silvery Seas*. “This dress w-was actually made for me on one of the great ships ...”

“Oh, not by one of the cabin boys they have on those terrible ships!” Nerrie exclaimed. “You do know what they have them for on the great ships, don’t you, milady? You didn’t let one of those freakish things actually touch you, did you! I couldn’t bear

that! I couldn't even talk to such a deviate! How could you talk to someone like that, a man, about how a dress is supposed to fit you?"

"Nerrie," said Hettie as I colored and wondered if I should let Nerrie know just who she was talking to and whose lovely dress and high-heeled slippers she was admiring! "If you were the only woman on a ship of over five hundred men ..."

"What a wonderful thought!" cut in Dorrie, pouring a new glassful of tea for me, her hand and mine looking almost exactly the same as I took it shakily from her.

"You might appreciate a little woman's talk from anyone, sister Nerrie," said Hettie, smiling at me. "And Lady Arrathee, you were delayed at sea as well by that mutiny and plague on *Zephyr of Serenity*, weren't you?"

I didn't get to answer that as Dorrie joined in. I found out that the women of Cunya might be secluded but that didn't mean they didn't know what was going on in the ships that came into Greenhaven.

"It took you four months instead of the usual one and a half to journey from the Foreshore," said Dorrie, with a shake of her long, blonde hair. "It's no wonder Pevo fell in love with you. I bet he wasn't the only one!"

"Dorrie!" said all of the other three women together but they were laughing as well.

"Well, no-one's said why a woman like you," Dorrie went on, "was on a great ship in the first place!"

"Pevo's in charge of all our spies in the Foreshore!" exclaimed Hettie. "Oh come on," she added as the other woman gaped at her and glanced at me. "She

must be a spy that they had to save, doesn't she? Why else would Peveret bring her back and marry her? She's going to be our sister forever so why shouldn't we talk about what we all know is true? It isn't as if she's going to have anyone to tell about what she learns anyway."

"What was it that drew you to him?" asked the irrepressible Dorrie, sounding so much like Rosee, my maid on *Zephyr*, I thought. I think she was trying to change the subject, from what Peveret was, to Cunya. I'd guessed that Pev was just what Hettie had said he was, anyway. "Is it true about the size of his manhood?"

"Dorrie!" screamed Hettie as the others stared at Dorrie as well, mouths open.

"Well, it is the talk of women's quarters from Bridgewater to Fairhaven," said Dorrie, trying to look all innocent. "Even the girls along the Red Shore have banned him, you ought to know, Reenie!"

"That's because they like him too much!" put in Moranne, her eyes gleaming at me as she rubbed her hands over her huge, pregnant abdomen. "That's the rumor, Reenie, but you shouldn't believe it. We all know who paid the girls to spread that scandal about him on his last birthday. Someone brotherly who didn't want him marrying that sly bitch from Bastro!"

"And she was so rich!" groaned Nerrie.

There was a little silence then. "I think, darling Nerrie," said Hettie, "that you haven't quite understood who Peveret has married. Reenie isn't like the, the bitch from Bastro, but she is indeed a witch from the Baract Kingdom. I think, Reenie, that the first potion you should make for the family is one that makes foolish women hold their tongues and not speak when they haven't informed themselves on what they're speaking about. We'll make a fortune

selling it to families who have women like our clansisters in their women's quarters."

I saw the look of horror on Nerrie's face and felt so sorry for her. She wasn't as old as the other woman. She was only a few years older than me.

"I, I wouldn't do that," I whispered into the silence. "I, I'm not that kind of witch."

"A witch powerful enough to conquer a plague on a ship at sea," said Hettie as Nerrie's eyes became huge but the others seemed to know that story.

"It wasn't a true plague," I began.

"Which you were able to recognize," said Hettie. "Is it true that you do it all by your sense of smell?"

The others were studying me avidly as I crossed my legs in a rustle of silk stockings just like what we'd heard from Dorrie when she'd sat again after serving tea to all of us.

"What do you smell about us?" asked Dorrie with a laugh. "And please don't tell us all the noxious fragrances you scent and none of us can!"

"Stars of the evening, upland violets," I had to say. "That's the base of your perfume, isn't it, Dorrie? I love apple blossom with a hint of musk as well, Hettie, while both of you, Nerrie and Moranne, are wearing what you call water roses which aren't really roses at all, isn't that right?"

"Very polite," said Hettie, sitting so femininely that there was no doubt at all that she was a woman. She bent her wrists so naturally without the self-doubt cabbies felt whenever they made gestures like hers. I wished I could be as relaxed and natural as she was, a real woman. I felt such a nervousness on me as I sat and tried to smile and pretend I was a woman just like her.

“So polite,” Hettie went on. “But we can all recognize perfumes most of the time though I couldn’t tell what yours is, Lady Arrathee. It’s something of mountain flowers, isn’t it? What is it that you sense or smell about us all and our land? Why can’t we be witches just like you?”

“I don’t know why you can’t,” I said to her with a smile. Hettie frowned while the others seemed to perk up and look at me with more interest.

“But there is something,” said Hettie, looking intently at me.

“I do smell salt everywhere,” I had to confess. “It wafts into the ship on the winds and I smelled it in the air as we came through the streets of Greenhaven. Even the rooms of this lovely castle ...”

“Clanhouse,” Dorrie corrected me with a laugh.

“Reeks of old salts and new dustings with the wind,” I had to admit.

“Will that make you less of a witch than you were in the Foreshore or on the sea?” asked Hetterey most perceptively.

“It could,” I had to say with a shudder, thinking of the excuses I could use then for not being able to make potions that the Clan Elders would want from me. I shouldn’t ever have made those shells on *Zephyr* explode as I had. Peveret had warned me to be offhand about that when I spoke to someone. I should only speak to him, he’d said, about any potions I made once I was landed.

“But the truth is,” I had to confess, “I don’t know. And really, I’m not a great witch. I can’t make all the fantastic potions Lady Sherrene created. Peveret knows that. He knows I’m really only good at making cleaning potions and stuff like that.”

“That won’t do, Reenie,” murmured Hettie, her eyes sparkling. “We’ve all been hearing so many stories about you and the wonders you performed on the two great ships you had under your control.”

“I never had *Silvery Seas*...” I said with a shudder, having to uncross my legs and sit up straighter as I had a case to plead. I couldn’t tell them about what I’d done with the crew on *Zephyr*, how I’d controlled them and brought them back to Peveret’s ship where they’d been hanged from the mid-spars on *Silvery Seas*.

A young girl came and tapped on the outer door as I was about to tell them the very little that I did on a great ship as a witch. “The Clan Elder would like an interview with My Lady Arrathee,” the girl said, her voice so natural.

“When the man commands, we women must obey,” said Hetterey, standing and putting her arm through mine to walk me out of the women’s quarters to the same landing at the top of the first flight of stairs. Peveret stood there, waiting for me.

“So the great Wesset wishes to meet the new addition to our line’s treasures,” Hettie said with a laugh.

“You knew it would be so, sister,” said Peveret easily, taking my trembling arm from Hettie and putting it under his. It felt so much more natural for me to let a man hold me and walk me than it did a woman. Peveret walked me along the hallway towards great double doors.

Hettie and the maid were still watching as he stopped, lowered his face to mine and kissed me before we went through the closed doors. I felt such passion and desire start to run through me as I pressed my body against his, feeling the bounce of my breasts against his chest. I was lost for a thrilling moment that seemed to stretch out forever. Thank

goodness for the residue of lovebane still about me, I thought in relief.

Peveret had to unclench my arms from his neck as I had to pretend really well, didn't I? I saw the real women, whom I'd just left with such delicate embraces, down the long hallway, smiling at me. Hetterey, Nessard's wife, made a movement of her closed hand that seemed to indicate that I'd done well in kissing my 'husband'. Oh, how I shivered against him as he kissed me gently again, my lips trembling so violently with the feminine emotions I felt after being in the company of real women for such a short time.

"Let us go and meet my father," whispered my so-called husband, kissing my ears and making my earrings sway against my neck and long hair as he loved to do.

Wesset was old, weathered and thin. He sat in a chair with a shawl draped around him and studied me. I crossed my legs nervously, knowing that he recognized what the sounds meant as to how I was dressed. I sat beside Peveret femininely, my soft hand clinging to his. Wesset smiled knowingly at the girlish movement, his smile making me shiver all over.

"Did you let him read all of my book?" Wesset asked his son. He gave me another thin smile as I shuddered at his use of the male pronoun for me.

"Not all of it," said Peveret grimly from beside me. He squeezed my hand and that made Wesset grimace some more.

"She was just like you," Wesset said, staring into my made-up face and then at my heaving chest, the



low neckline showing clearly that my breasts were real.

“Lady Sherrene,” he went on. He nodded to a familiar, black-bound volume in front of me. “Let him read all of it.”

Peveret picked up Wesset’s book. “He wants you to read one passage in particular,” my husband said, opening the book close to the front.

It was all about how Lady Sherrene had run to the great ship in the harbor of Hillaire and had asked for help as there were men trying to disrobe and kill her. Then, there was a description of the conversation she’d had with *Tempest’s* captain, Anjaro, and his undercaptain, Wesset.

I blanched as I read what it said. “This, this isn’t right!” I said, hastily re-reading the passage again. “She wasn’t a man! That was all an invention of the queen to discredit Lady Sherrene. Everyone knows that!”

“What everyone knows is the lie!” snapped Wesset. “The truth is right there in those words. Your precious Lady Sherrene is no woman and so she’s really no witch!”

“But she’s a mother and has four children, twin girls!” I said, all my emotions reeling in fright and disbelief. I quaked in shock as I looked at the grim-faced Peveret beside me. “She’s been married to Count Torthard for twenty years! He’s as much in love with her as he was when she rescued him from the wiles of her aunt, Orissiana! My father has met them, and Robady. Ask him! He said he’d never seen a more loving couple when they came to visit his father in Rob’s estate house! Lady Sherrene’s applauded wherever she goes by adoring crowds!”

“How would such crowds behave if they knew that they were adoring a man in a pretty dress, pretending and acting as if he was a woman?” sneered the older man. “Do you think anyone would believe us if we told them the truth? The former queen had to recant calling Sherrene that, didn’t she, when Orissiana wanted her to. Ever think why Larussa did that?”

“Because it wasn’t true,” I whispered fearfully to Peveret, who leaned back and put a comforting arm about my thin shoulders. His leg touched against my dress and stockinged leg.

“I’m afraid it is,” Peveret said gently. “I talked to Sea Captain Anjaro after I read the sections in my father’s book. He confirmed to me that Lady Sherrene was his seawife for about three months on *Tempest of Distant Shores*. She was a cabbie, just like you, Arrathee, my darling.

“Anjaro betrayed her with Nikki, another cabbie, who’d been his seawife before Sherrene. Because of Sherrene’s acute sense of smell, like yours, my darling,” Peveret put in as an aside, “Anjaro believes she was aware of Nikki’s perfume upon him. Anjaro thinks it was that which gave him away and led to her deciding to leave him and to sink *Tempest* in Bridgewater’s harbor as she did. Sherrene was a really powerful witch!”

“Only she wasn’t a she. She was just like you,” snorted Wesset at me. “She was a warlock, as you are.”

“She was a witch, as Arrathee is,” said Peveret quickly, interrupting his father before he could inflict further humiliation on me. “Anjaro swears she loved him, for a time, at least. She even made that ganasate, the sex-changing powders, and took it for him when he told her he’d love her more if she had larger breasts.”

“And what is it that all witches do?” asked Wesset rhetorically, though he was indicating me, my body and my breasts as well. “The witch’s first improvements are always made to herself; isn’t that what everyone on the Foreshore says about witches? But being a glamorous witch, as your seawife is, Peveret, is no proof she’s a woman, now is it?”

“I don’t believe this at all!” I gasped. “This is all some kind of trick you’re playing on me. You want something from me ...”

“Not as much as you think we do,” said Wesset with a sneer. He looked at Peveret in some kind of private satisfaction. “The black powder experiments have gone well. We’re now able to fire the powder and propel an iron ball a quarter of a sea mile. Imagine the destruction such a missile causes in ship-to-ship battles! The West Fleet has destroyed the Sun Empire’s fleets and we are masters of the western oceans and ports. Imagine what it will do to a witch’s ship when we next invade the Foreshore!”

“Father!” yelled Peveret very angrily as I sat there, stunned, and listened to this old man crowing about the war he was planning to unleash on my family and friends. “There is no way that you are ever going to get Lady Arrathee, my wife and your clandaughter,” he stressed all of the feminine words clearly while I sat against him and quivered. Oh, goddesses, there was no way that I was in any way a daughter; I almost threw up just contemplating the word! “... to co-operate with us in any way if you go on like that! We are not going to war with the Foreshore nations, not now, not ever!”

“You took so long swishing your way across the ocean, son,” said Wesset, staring at me once more as if he read my mind and agreed with me about me never being his daughter, ever. He seemed to be implying by his look, as well, that it was all my fault that

the great ships had taken so long to reach Greenhaven.

“You didn’t see *Paragon* in its dock,” the old man went on forcefully. “It was driven away from Terraire in the Kingdom, by a Baract witch, very likely Sherrene, by a shot or two from the enchanted harquebusses they use. They didn’t try to sink *Paragon*, of course, but they did send a message by cutter to Captain Setero, and so to us, all about you sinking one of their ships in Liss Isle roads.”

“That was Clan Elder Brisard,” snapped the son to his father. “I couldn’t believe he’d done it. He wouldn’t even let us put into Liss and drop off the ones we rescued like Lady Arrathee. I’d be furious if I was a ruler on the Foreshore and found out what one of our great ships did to one of their patrollers. What did they ask for in compensation? If they want Brisard’s head, we ought to send it.”

Wesset’s laugh was not forced. “I agree,” he said. “But the other clan elders do not. In my opinion, Brisard should never sail again. But I should thank him for giving us the excuse we need to make war on the Foreshore, shouldn’t I? I hear that Brisard’s taken up an investment along the Red Shore now with a very tantalizing, often red-haired lady, named Mirrie. Ah, no, what am I thinking of? A lady cannot be allowed to frequent such establishments in that quarter of Greenhaven, can she?”

Wesset smiled slyly at me, watching that I was still trembling at all that I was hearing, and learning. My mind was in such consternation, in such terrible turmoil. I didn’t know how I could remain there and try to be so girlish in front of him. And all of the time, as well, I was learning just how powerful a man my husband was in the society that ruled Cunya, the most populous of the Many Isles.

“He’s smiling, Arrathee,” said Peveret sourly, “because my father knows I have made an investment in a Red Shore establishment like Brisard. Mine is for Panella, but she is no rival to you, my darling wife.” Pev stroked me again quite deliberately, goading his father, I was certain, although he was looking into my eyes and completely ignoring the old man, rocking angrily in his chair.

“I thought,” Pev went on persuasively, “she deserved some compensation for all the work in training cabbies she’s done over the years. She didn’t want to go on to Omason as a seawife any more. She’ll make an excellent hostess. Pretty ship girls, aided by Arrathee’s potions, will make sure her inn is always heavily populated and frequented with girls like them and their, their paramours.”

“What would they call that on the Foreshore?” Wesset asked me, a gleam in his eyes. “A bordello? My son is a madam, is he now, in the Deviant Quarter?”

I shook as Pev turned back to his father and glared at him until the older man shrugged and looked away.

“Anyway, *Silvery Seas* isn’t going to Omason for timbers, as planned,” said Wesset, leering at me as I adjusted how I was sitting, crossing my legs femininely again. “It’s heading back to Liss Isle and a meeting under a parley flag with the Baracts. We’re going to give them a great ship in compensation for what your ship did, my son, and ask them to lift the embargo they’ve placed on all of our ships. Currently, we can’t buy grain at any price along the Foreshore!”

I don’t know why but I was really pleased at that. Oh, I did know why. I was a Baract. I was a cadet, training to be an officer in its naval force. I was proud of the way Torthard, the High Council Chancellor,

and his Countess, Lady Sherrene, who were really the rulers of the Kingdom for King Tathally, had acted so promptly. The king was probably dallying with his favorite red-haired mistress, a Lady Nikki, I think she was - shivering as I thought of what Wesset had had read to me, from his book, about a Nikki - on her country estate where King Tathally seemed to spend almost all his time.

“We can’t be giving *Silvery Seas* to the Baracts!” protested Peveret, sitting up, taking his arm from around me in his agitation.

“We aren’t,” said Wesset. “We’re going to give them *Zephyr!*”

“But that’s from Faroy!” said Peveret. Then he frowned. “Oh,” he added.

“Yes, they don’t want it back now it’s been profaned by all the Turlings aboard it,” said Wesset with a grin of amusement. “You know how stiff-necked they are about race, pure blood, and all that rot. Never seemed to bother them if they signed up a pretty cabin boy, I noticed.

“But this plague’s bothered them. Faroyans are supposed to show the superiority of their blood but they lost their ship, and their lives, to a bunch of Turling deckhands and mutineers. In their words, it’s proved that mixing crews doesn’t work. They still want the ship off-loaded onto one of their own, however. They want compensation from the Clanmeet, too, for giving the ship to the Baracts as part of Council’s plan, as well as the first grain shipments if we manage to get them re-started.”

“I’m not sailing back to Liss,” said Peveret as soon as he could get a word in. “Not now. And it’s not Council’s plan, is it? I bet it is all yours, most scheming of all the Clan Elders of Cunya.”

Wesset smiled in acknowledgement as he looked from his son to me. I felt a quaking rising all over me at that look. "I didn't tell you and I didn't put it in the book," said Wesset gruffly then to his son. "But Sherrene did bespell me once with that honey controller she used. She said it smelled of honey though none of us have ever been able to smell it; but we do know that what she called lovebane works as she made it. It's why we use so much of it in the long ocean ships. Saves a lot of fights inside the ships, doesn't it?"

"Arrathee," began Peveret and I got a chilling thought what might happen if he kept leaving the title off my name. Oh, the ladies of the women's quarters were going to have quite a time with him if 'Pevo' insisted that they call me a Lady, every time, and he didn't. "Arrathee doesn't bespell me if that's what you think, father. There's no trickery in our bed, just a man and a woman."

Oh, did that ever make me shiver. Peveret sounded as if he really believed that as he took my hand while his other rested lightly on my leg, scalding me through my dress and stockings, nevertheless. I could feel my breasts becoming so aroused. There must be lovebane or the subtle honey-mind controller about me. There must be as I wanted to fold myself into my lover's arms and coax him to make love to me. I couldn't feel the way that I did without it being subject to a concoction, could I?

"Sherrene just brushed a cloth over me and I was in love with her," Wesset went on, as his eyes bored into me. The shakes came over me. I didn't want a man to look at me the way that he did. I felt as if I was something abominable.

"I've never felt like that ever in my life," Wesset said most surprisingly as if he really had liked the way that he'd felt when Sherrene had done that to him. "I

wanted her so much. I kissed and mauled her. It was her maids, cabbies dressed as girls like her, who had to haul me off. Then she used some antidote on me. I was never as depressed or felt so awful in all my life as I was then.”

“You never told me that before,” said Peveret, a stunned look on his face. “You always told me that you hated the whole idea of ...” He stopped for a moment and didn’t look at me but he could have. I knew what he meant, that his father hated the idea of boys like me pretending to be girls on board ship and doing, well, what it was that we did with men, including Wesset’s son, obviously. I could have told him that I didn’t think much of it, either, not with what we were forced to do, expected to love doing, to the crew on a great ship.

“What else could I say when your mother was alive?” asked Wesset. “I couldn’t tell her that I grabbed another woman,” that was Lady Sherrene whom he’d just told me was a man like me, “and that I’d liked it because she made me feel love for the first time ever in my life, Peveret. Your mother would and wouldn’t have believed me.”

“Sherrene was using lovebane on you?” asked Peveret, his voice clouded with emotion.

“Didn’t quite know what it was then,” said Wesset, leaning back and smiling at some memory that clearly didn’t disturb him. “Sherrene said that she was making a love philtre for the other girls on the ship. I objected to that and she doused me with it. Luckily the antidote worked pretty well or I’d have probably had her or one of her pretty maids right there and then. I was trying hard to do that to her.

“Sherrene said the controller was something that Anjaro wanted made and she was testing it on me. Took me the devil of a time to figure out what she’d

used for the lovebane. Good job I kept a tally on all the powders and concoctions she had left each day. Got to figure what was gone and had a pretty good guess what she was using to make the lovebane, as she called it. Didn't really get it right until we had the girls who survived *Tempest's* destruction searched. They were concealing all kinds of potions that Lady Sherrene made for them. And lovebane was one of them."

"I'm not going back to the Foreshore," Peveret repeated again.

Wesset sighed. "Have to get myself a new spymaster, do I?" he asked. "Yes," he said to me. "You can see why we have to keep a pretty treasure like you locked up in the treasure box, so to speak, Lady Arrathee. Can't have you talking about what you've learned about us already, can we? Have you asked her yet, son, how witches on the Foreshore are able to send messages over such long distances? Have you tried it yet, the two of you?"

"We haven't talked about it," said Peveret sharply, standing up. "And we're not going to. Arrathee didn't become my landed wife, father, to answer all your questions about the abilities of great witches."

"She will," predicted Wesset with a smile. "She will."

"Why did he say that?" I had to ask my husband as he walked me to the most luxurious bedroom I'd ever seen. I began to shiver again as Pev drew me to him and kissed me so passionately, his hands working swiftly to undo my dress, letting it slide from me onto the lushly carpeted floor.

“Because he thinks you love me,” said Peveret quietly, undoing my body shaper and bra, caressing my heated skin affectionately as he slipped my underclothing from me. He directed my hands to undo his shirt and pants as his lips closed on mine. I was shivering all over as he smiled in pleasure even as he kissed me. Oh, how I’d missed his loving so much over the last tenday that we’d sailed into Greenhaven. Kissing him felt so right, so wonderful. I felt that I was a woman again as I was whenever we slid together in bed.

“You, you know, you know that it’s the honeymind lovebane that, that ...” I whispered nervously to him as his hands slid so softly over my breasts, making my nipples harden and grow by the second.

“Not tonight,” my land husband said to me as he opened the deep, dark-red, silk-sheeted bed and slid me beneath him, forcing my legs apart even as he started to undo my stockings with such enervating caresses as he always did. He let them fall airily down my legs, quivers running through me as his hands caressed my tush.

I had to slip off my lace-edged panties and let them fall beside my stockings and high heels in the mess of my clothing on the floor. But with the way Peveret was so gently caressing my tush, I didn’t care at all what would happen to them, if Dorrie would ever see me in them or not. I clung to the gentle man stroking and kissing me.

“My makeup,” I protested once, lightly, but he was on top of me, kissing me, fondling me, his hands everywhere, arousing me. If he didn’t care, why then should I? He loosed the ribbons and pins in my hair which blossomed all about me as I shivered and wriggled beneath him, loving his assistance in getting me out of my silky, womanly clothes.

“And I have to have some honey, my darling, I must,” I whispered to my land husband. I always had something from him to make me feel womanly, to make me accept him as a man. I couldn’t make love to him without it. I felt just too awkward, a boy like me, and a man like him, making love as if we were husband and wife, without the lovebane to lift me past my inhibitions. I couldn’t accept all the compliments he showered on me unless my emotions were changed to feminine ones.

“I did tell my father we didn’t use any controlling potions,” Peveret whispered to me as he kissed my ears and neck, my earrings catching my long, flowing hair; he allowed me then to take them off before I scratched him.

“Please,” I begged him, feeling so weird as he kissed my breasts, making me arch under him in the pleasure I felt at such attention to my womanliness. I tugged at the inner panties that were still about me. His manhood was huge and rampant against me. “I, I need, I need it, m-my d-darling.” I had become such a wimp, I know, but I’d learned how to whimper like a woman as I begged a man for what I needed.

There, my using such a word as ‘darling’ for another man helped. Peveret reached over and placed a glass of water to my lips from which rose a definite aroma of honey. I sipped just a little as his penis touched my thighs. He stretched to put the water back away from me. Ah, I sighed as I felt womanly feelings surging all through me as I reacted to the potion in the water.

I know that I sighed as I lay back in the pillows, my hair like another cushion as it floated over my shoulders. “Wiggle,” whispered my husband. I giggled girlishly as I did that for him. He even assisted me in applying the salve I used. It did more than prevent hurts to my tush. It made his penetration of me into



something wonderful and pleasurable for me in my role as a woman. Once it was in place, I would be begging him again, to his great amusement, to be penetrated and made into a woman for his exclusive use, my loving, wonderful husband.

I wanted to convulse with him from the outset, that's how fast the potions worked on me. Oh, it was so delightful to be Peveret's woman at times like this. I would pay for it in the guilt I'd feel later on but, for now, I could feel the lovebane flooding over me, overwhelming all the masculinity I should feel.

"Oh, yes!" I exclaimed as I felt his hands between my legs caressing me. I eased myself into position, stretching my legs about his waist, so that he could enter me deeply as I knew he would want to.

"You like that, my darling," murmured my husband between passionate kisses. I gurgled that I did. I squealed as his mouth found my breasts and the desire and pleasure in me rose to infinitesimal heights. This was going to be a wonderful night together, I knew, in this frilly, silk-curtained bed. I was so glad that I'd asked him for the lovebane. I was so glad ... I came quickly, too quickly, but that was all right as he was able to drive even more pleurably, more passionately into me; I spasmed, out of control in my love for the man inside me.

"Is my father right?" asked my husband as we gyrated and wrestled together. "I love you, my darling. I really do. Can you say that you love me as well?"

"Oh, I do, my darling husband," I managed at last to say to him, knowing that a woman in my position would say something like that to her husband.

"Say it," my husband insisted as he bounced me up and down in rhythm with him, making me squeal and beg him not to stop loving me. I wanted more and more.

“I love you, Pevo,” I giggled at him and then said it again, properly and seriously, abandoning myself to the absolute ecstasy of the moment of being a woman and having a man master me entirely. It had been so long for me, over ten days without a man in me! I wanted so much to make him love me so that such a dearth would never happen again to a woman like me. I needed my man making love to me. I shrieked as I felt him so deep inside me. Ooo-ooo-ooo, he was coming and coming, calling me lovely names like his darling woman and goddess and mistress of his bed.

We did it again and again, me coming convulsively again which Peveret loved to feel before we finally just relaxed for a moment, holding each other’s trembling bodies.

“Would you like some more honey, my darling?” whispered my loving husband to his wife.

I took just a sip as I was so thirsty at that moment and then it hit me. “That’s honey,” I said, sitting up, soft hands caressing me so gently, making me feel so womanly as my husband rolled me back to one side as I undid my legs from his waist.

“That’s what I said,” said my husband, acting like a man who was innocent of any wrongdoing. He was driving me down, his manhood working into my tush again even as I arched and wanted to resist though the pleasure of taking him was so intense, and so wonderfully feminine for me.

“It’s just honey, bees’ honey,” I gasped at my husband as he lovingly kissed my neck again, arousing me, making me want him to make me be a woman all over again.. “There’s no lovebane, no controller, in that drink!”

“Of course not, my darling,” my husband whispered to me, dropping another kiss on my exposed breast. “I told you and my father in his study, didn’t I,

that there weren't going to be any potions in use between us, a man and a woman, who say they love one another, didn't I?"

"Oh, you, you bastard!" I said to him as he made love to me again. I was his woman all over again, loving everything he was doing to me and realizing only too late that it was me, it was me, Arrat, enjoying being a woman for this man to whom I was married; Ooo, I desperately wanted to please him, and wanted him to be pleased with me, his panicking, hysterical, loving wife.

"You're going to watch me all the time that I work?" I had to ask the old man who sat in yet another rocking chair, a large notebook open beside him.

"I think so," said Wesset. "But it's probably a wasted session today, isn't it?"

I could barely open an eyelid to look at him. I nodded miserably to him.

"My son must be on the blue stuff as Anjaro called it," said Wesset, with a movement of his lips. I suppose it was more a smile than it was a sneer. "The blue star potion, is that what it is? Blue stars, I didn't think it could be so obvious. Or are you making something else for him, Lady Arrathee? He must have been inside you all night long."

That woke me a little. I glared at his insult but it didn't seem to faze him at all. "You made love all night long," he finally amended what he'd said that had been accurate but offensive to the woman that I now was. I'd admitted that I was a woman finally to myself and my husband several times in the wonderful night, our first in our new home, Pev said, where I would really be a lady.

“That’s why you’re so worn out,” my husband’s father went on blithely. “Would I be remiss to point out that I am an alchemist, Lady Arrathee? I can produce an excellent tonic for you, a fortifier made by Lady Sherrene herself that will arouse you and make you think that the world is golden again.”

“I’m trying not to get by on potions any more,” I said to the older man, shivering in my short dress that showed off my shapely legs. I liked looking at myself in the mirror in my dark blue, slitted dress. I did look so feminine with my hair in matching ribbons and braids over my shoulders and down to my obvious breasts. Hettie and Dorrie had come into my bedroom and made me walk in my nightgown back to the women’s quarters where a huge bunch of giggling girls had assisted me in getting dressed, small fingers having braided my long hair for me.

I had been in agonies of fear as I was disrobed in front of the girls but I didn’t have to take my panties off in front of them. My bra, yes, and parade for Dorrie in my garter belt and stockings. I had to do a fashion show for all the girls and their mothers in my new short dresses that they all thought were just marvelous.

“But you can see her legs,” protested one girl, Sereesha, I think she was.

“And her panties,” said Dorrie’s Laretta who was laying on the floor and looking up my dress and describing them and the petticoats and panties I also wore.

“Only if you’re rude enough to lie on the floor and look up her dress,” snorted Dorrie, “and who would do that?”

“Uncle Pevo will,” one girl giggled and then they all began.

It was a riot that I was the center of. I had to change my dress and model others, short, long, with my hair and makeup changed and admired. I wore perhaps fifty perfumes on me somewhere by the time I staggered out of being dressed as a woman by so many other women and girls. The reaction to all that was most of the reason why I was so stunned going in to face Clan Elder Wesset again.

“It was at a time like this that Sherrene ensorcelled me,” murmured Wesset and I could hear the amusement in his voice. “If you wanted to do that to me, my lady, I would not object at all. I am not so old that kisses from someone I would think was just a slip of a girl do not arouse me.”

I think I gaped at him in shock. With all the insults he’d given to me, and to girls like me, surely he couldn’t think that I, his son’s wife, was ever going to be a woman for him.

“How many men was it that had you on *Zephyr*?” asked my husband’s father. “Don’t tell me that now you’re a one-man woman!” That was definitely a sneer at me but, for the first time, the arrow he fired missed. Maybe I was more tired than I thought that I was.

“Only one man on *Zephyr* had me on the last night I was on that ship,” I said without even thinking that in telling the father, the news would soon get back to the son. “When I realized what the officers, if you could call them that, had in their plans for me, I bespelled each one as he came to kiss me and dance with me. I made them all think that they’d made love to me and that I was a real woman.

“The easiest thing of all was to make them ejaculate all over themselves and their clothing. That ugly mess made other crewmen really believe I was a woman true, a witch. I did that to stay alive. Your son

never told me what his plans were, before or after his Celebration invasion of *Zephyr*. And he never told me that being his wife means that I'm wife to his father as well."

Wesset actually laughed. I shivered and had the distinct impression that he'd expected such an answer. No, not expected, hoped for such an answer. I was being tested, I thought with a shudder, as Peveret had tested me all night long. Well, I'd passed Peveret's tests. I'd pass Wesset's, I promised myself.

"You didn't know my son was going to string up every man who'd ever touched you," said Wesset with a smile.

That wasn't really true. Only those in *Zephyr's* crew who thought they'd had me were executed and it wasn't for making love to me. Richo had had me and some other men in *Silvery Seas* crew. Darris, the cook, and Garrin, and others whom I forgot, had sort of made love to me. They thought they had, anyway.

But it was Robady and Peveret who'd made me feel the most womanly. And Peveret was doing it to me now while I wasn't even controlled or influenced in any way at all. Oh, goddesses, how I loved it, being so free and realizing it was me whom Peveret was thrilled by as I adored every one of his touches.

Pev had made me say I was his woman, his wife. I'd known what he was doing. We were doing part of the Baract marriage ceremony as I declared I was the woman and he declared that he was my man. I promised to love him with my body. He promised me the same, as he rocked me in my long nightdress, making it swirl around me in such feminine fashion.

I could scarcely say the promises and vows as the whispered words rolled from his mouth for me to repeat but I had to go on as I felt that Peveret meant them as much as I did. I vowed by Arumnis, the god-

dess of love, now my patron goddess, that I accepted him, another man, freely as my 'husband', while Pev swore as an avatar of Haruva that he'd love and protect me for the rest of my life as his wife.

Oh, it was such a wonderful and such an awful feeling to realize what I'd vowed, to know that I'd promised, to be a woman all of my life. I'd promised to be a wife. Oh, the thought of it brought such absurd feelings into my brain. But Peveret's kissing and whispered compliments soon had me acting like a wife beneath him. Sooner still, I was telling my husband that his wife, me, loved him and wished only to please him as a woman, as he pleased her, that was me, by being the man he was.

It was all my own fault that I was rolling and moaning like a woman about the long, soft bed, begging my husband to take me this way and that way, arching my back and letting him ride me and ride me as I felt a rush of lightning all through my body, such an ecstatic feeling. I knew I was a woman and that my man wanted and loved me so. He told me time and again. I couldn't help rewarding him with kisses and caresses of my legs and breasts on his fevered skin that made him convulse almost as much as his darling wife, as he called me now.

And I wanted to be his darling wife. That was the terrible thing that was haunting me. I wanted to be a woman. I wanted to be a wife. I wanted my husband to make love to me. If he'd come into the workroom and slid up to me and put his hands about me, I'd have let him lift me up onto the table. I'd have wrapped my legs about his neck or his waist and made love to him on the spot. Oh yes, the old man had been so right about me. I really did love my wonderful husband. I'd do anything for him.

“Daydreaming about making love to a man?” asked Wesset then, making me break out of the stiff pose I’d been holding.

“Oh, yes,” I murmured to him and smiled. Well, it was no use not admitting it to the old alchemist, was it? I did love to make love to my husband. I was his woman. And if Lady Sherrene had been a man and now was a woman, well, I’d follow in her high-heeled shoes as much as I could. I’d decided that. Oh, Peveret, I begged him silently, please come home as quickly as you can. Your wife really needs you in her bed, right now!

“You women are all alike,” said Wesset, closing his notebook as I’d made no move to take down anything or start to make anything in the fantastically equipped workroom. I really had no idea what I was in there to do. I needed Peveret to be there with his suggestions on what was needed for the ship.

“I’m supposed to go shopping for new ball dresses with my clan-sisters,” I said to Wesset dreamily, as he wasn’t saying anything. My thoughts kept returning to the new person I was and what I’d promised the women I’d do. “But I suppose I should learn the layout of this wonderful workroom, shouldn’t I?”

Wesset snorted but got up from his chair. He led me about the workroom, showing me how everything was categorized neatly from his point of view. I shivered when I came across powders, such as heronswing, in all kinds of different coverings, from bracken to greybirch leaf, none of which really suited it. Its potency was really affected by the way it was stored.

Polwer had known that and had pointed it out to me several times. I could smell right away that heronswing was ten times more powerful stored in

greenleaf than in this unknowing way in such an extensive workroom.

“What’s wrong with that?” asked Wesset sharply. Oh, in spite of his age, the old man was very alert and had caught on quickly that I’d found something wrong in the workroom. Should I tell him or should I lie to him? Should I make some parasane, the truth-teller, that I’d read about, in the black book, that Sherrene could make so easily? Should I make it for Wesset as he’d asked? But then I might find him using it on me.

I wouldn’t want that to happen as I would admit surely, under the influence of parasane. I’d also admit that I’d been having nightmare thoughts of great ships blown to pieces. I was smiling, too, in my dream, at the smoking harquebuss from which I’d fired the exploding pellets that had made such huge holes in the sides of sinking ships.

Wesset might guess then I’d actually thought of ways of making swamp gas pellets. I’d listened to Peveret’s description of how it must smell. I’d conjectured many times about what, after all, could make an odor of a swamp and still remain a powder. If only I dared to test, I was sure I could soon make a weapon like the one that had sunk so many great ships in the sea battles of the past.

“What are these vials for on this shelf?” I asked as one shelf seemed to be out of order and Wesset was a very orderly man. There were dark glass bottles and vials as well as colored solutions all jumbled together.

“Don’t really know,” said Wesset. I could feel and see the tenseness in him. “Sherrene left those. Probably things that didn’t work. Got them from the sunken hull.” I glanced at him. By his tenseness, I figured that he wasn’t telling me the truth, either.

“I’ve no idea what she was even attempting to do.” I didn’t need parasane to grasp that that wasn’t true, either. I didn’t feel so bad at lying to him any more.

“I think that one was a cleaner,” Wesset said, relaxing a little at the vial I picked up. I didn’t open it. Polwer had drilled it into me never to do that. There were tests I should do with drops in other glass vials. Heat should be used with caution to bring out the essences that were mixed together. General essences should be introduced in a flask and mixed easily; those that were active agents that reacted with whatever was in a vial would tell me what I had and what it might be used for.

“Sherrene cleaned a ring in that once as she had some in a saucer on her worktable,” Wesset said as I frowned at the swirling solution. I suppose it could have been a cleanser, by why have such a small amount and stored in dark glass? Wesset was trying to interest me in something else that was also in black glass. That clearly contained terogal, the metallic aroma coming through the poor seal over the top of the vial.

“Didn’t see it was any better than collane or tellare, that stuff, but she put all her jewellery in it,” Wesset went on about the first liquid I’d picked up. “That’s just one of Lady Sherrene’s little mysteries. Some of these others are really tangy or sweet but I don’t know what they’re for or what they were meant for. When you taste the aromas of them, you won’t call them what I do, will you? I’ve heated a few and tried to break them down. Might have ruined them. Now that we have a witch here, we’ll soon find out, however, won’t we?”

“This is what you want a Baract witch for?” I asked him.

“These and the secret of swamp gas powder,” said Wesset, startling me with his frankness. “Give us that and I’ll crown you as our queen, something we’ve never had in the Isles. Yes, I’ll worship you as a goddess if you give us that. At least, we’d have a fighting chance against insane witches like Orissiana the Terrible!”

“She’s dead,” I said with a shudder.

“Yes,” agreed Wesset, “and it took a warlock like Lady Sherrere Perisord to do it, didn’t it? Kind of turns all the old tales on their head, doesn’t it? Tells you why I’m willing to let my son have his way with you and with me in this matter. I only hope it isn’t some potion you’ve ensnared him with. If he’s willing to give up his heritage for a, a woman like you,” his face was as bleak as his words, “you must make it worth his sacrifice, woman.”

Wesset got up then and stalked out of the workroom. I followed him, the cleansing vial still in my hand.

Hettie was waiting for me on the women’s landing. “Come on, Lady Arrathee,” she called to me. “We’ve a carriage and Nessard for an escort! We just have to go shopping and have Lurisa make us all fabulous new dresses and lingerie like yours. Oh, come on, Reenie, and be prepared, our new bride! You’re going to be in and out of that dress and your undies today a hundred times! But it will only be us girls together! It isn’t as if you’re a maiden any more with all that Peveret’s seen of you. He has been inside you a hundred times, hasn’t he!”

Did everyone think of a woman that way on this island, I thought, shivers of distress running through my altered, feminine body?

“It isn’t like this all over the island,” said Hettie as we entered the ‘women only’ section of what she called a tea shop where we were served by women. All about us were women, old and young, little girls sitting stiffly and politely beside the old. “It’s only in the last ten years that we women have been allowed to shop alone and that there’ve been shops and tea-shops like this for us.”

“What’s it like in the Kingdom of the Baracts?” Moranne wanted to know.

“It’s a lot more r-relaxed,” I said as a younger girl was staring at me in my short dress and crossed legs. “Girls and boys go just about anywhere they want.”

“Men scream after them, I bet,” sniffed Moranne.

I thought about the girls I’d seen on the docks. “There, there are r-rough p-places,” I muttered as the girl who’d stared interrupted an older woman talking and pointed at me. By the astounded look on the woman’s face, I had a sinking feeling I was going to be challenged as a woman at any moment. “But n-nice girls, richer girls, d-don’t go there. Isn’t it the same in the dock areas here in Greenhaven?”

“Young lady,” said the older woman, standing over me. “What is a girl like you doing in a shop like this?” The women with me looked up at her in consternation.

“Clan dowager Hanee,” said Hettie, rising to her feet with a swish. “May I introduce to you my clan-sister, Lady Arrathee, wife to my clan-brother, Peveret? You know our Line well, I do believe. Lady Arrathee is dressed in the latest of Baract fashions which we prevailed upon her to wear today as we visited the best seamstresses in town. They’ve promised

us that by high summer, such dresses will be available to all of us, with such pretty necklines, and so light and short. Every girl will be singing her praises by summer's end for such light and airy dresses. That was what you had noticed about her, was it not?"

"A Baract?" said the woman in disgust, staring at my legs. "Exposing her legs like that! It's indecent. Unless she's a woman from the docks!" The last was said with such a sneer.

"Watch your tongue, Dowager Hanee," snapped Dorrie, without rising, as I flushed and shivered all over as every eye in the place was on me. I'd realized how every woman that I saw was in a long dress; but Hettie had said that new fashions always came in with every new ship. Greenhaven was used to changes in womanly dresses happening all the time. "The woman that you are choosing to insult is a woman of decided status and reputation."

A thin woman seemed to pop her head about the dowager then and murmured, "The witch."

The dowager paled as she stared at me. "My Lady Arrathee," she said as if each word was being forced through her lips. "My apologies if any insult was taken. I meant none. Yes, 'tis a pretty dress, 'tis it! Come, Elindee. Maybe you will be wearing such, such a dress in high summer. It should suit a little girl like you."

The dowager swept out of the tearoom as I sat, shaking with embarrassment and fright.

"Lady Arrathee of the Komer Line," said a woman sitting at the table beside us. "I really do love your dress style and so practical even now in mid-summer. Welcome to Greenhaven, my lady, and which seamstresses have you visited today about making more of such lovely summer dresses?"

It seemed then that every woman in the shop wanted to speak to me, to tell me how lovely I was, what a lucky man Peveret was, and would I mind, if the next time I saw them, they would be dressed just like me?

What could I say but that I didn't mind but maybe I should be dressed like them if I was going to become a woman of Greenhaven. "A Lady of the Clan," Dorrie laughed to more astonished faces. "Wesset has accepted Peveret's choice for the mother of our Line. We'll be having a ball soon to make the proper announcement!"

"Dorrie!" said our sister, Hettie. "The men are still the ones to make that announcement, not us women!"

"Oh, you still think you're living on Faroy or Sorester," laughed Dorrie. "This is Cunya, my sister. Here, the men may reign but it is we women who rule, isn't it?"

There were squeals of laughter all around the shop then and nods of agreement. Several women, before leaving through the line of bewildered guards outside, the armed men waiting for us ladies to finish our tea, had to hug me and remark upon my delicate perfume and girlish figure. I think that my breasts bounced off many just as soft and female as mine must appear to be.

"The women of Cunya approve of you," laughed Hettie as she saw the blush on my face as I stepped away from the very pretty girl who'd hugged me shyly at the urging of her mother as we were the last to leave the teashop.

"And so do the men," said Nessard, looming over us and putting an arm about Hettie. "And do we ever approve of the dress, My Lady Arrathee. Now a man

can see all that he is buying and not have huger thighs than mine camouflaged in a long dress!”

“You didn’t complain about my thighs around your neck on our betrothal night,” said Hettie sharply, causing Nessard to almost choke in his laughter.

“Well, Pevo has much less to complain about than his brother,” laughed Dorrie as she clasped me around my waist. “Have you ever seen such a shapely woman, brother Nessard, and don’t tell me that you did along the Red Shore. You know that none of those girls are real women, as your wife and the beautiful Lady Arrathee are!”

Peveret wasn’t in the Clanhouse when we returned. I was taken into the women’s quarters, easily and naturally, by the other women. He wasn’t at supper which I had again with just women. Then, I had to play with the little girls and their dolls. They all wanted to know about the dollies I’d had on the Foreshore, when I’d first been allowed to put kohl about my eyes and when I could brighten my lips. And when did I first curl my hair, which was so beautiful with the waves and ringlets I had?

“Girls must be like this the world over,” Hettie laughed. I gratefully agreed as she removed her daughter from me, my breast aching where she’d used me as a pillow. They all had to kiss me good-night of course. For a little while, I was left on my own.

The vial that Wesset hadn’t identified was in the little purse that contained my perfume and lip gloss. I looked at it, shook it. It didn’t seem to be dangerous, as it was quite fluid. I wasn’t in the workroom where I could have done careful, controlled tests to find out what was in the liquid, apothecary tests I’d learned from Polwer.

Irritated, I unsealed the vial and was almost assaulted with the aroma of terogal, the fortifier. I closed it hastily, wondering what in the world it was strengthening, what combination of agents as the terogal seemed to be so dominant. A cleansing agent? Well, it would be the most powerful astringent that I'd ever smelled if the terogal was any indication. And there was no need to use such a powerful agent for just cleansing, not with collane and fessare so easy to make. Apothecaries used those all the time.

What had Wesset said? Sherrene had cleaned her ring in the solution. Gently, I poured some into a glass that had been left out in the room I was using as a 'waiting' room. My lord and master, Peveret, had still not appeared back at the castle, I mean, the clanhouse, even yet.

Sherrene had been wearing a pearl ring, I think Wesset had said. Well, I had a pearl necklace. I hoped I wasn't about to find something that would dissolve the wonderful carabet necklace that Peveret had given me to proclaim that I was his wife. I took it off and gently lowered one section of the necklace into the glass.

I didn't see anything happen. The pearl didn't seem to be any more luminous than it had been before. I coated each pearl in the solution and nothing seemed to happen. I took off my earring and coated just an ordinary, creamy pearl with the solution. I did the same to the ring with a blue stone in it that the girls had dug out of a communal jewellery box for me to wear. Not only did the solution not clean the jewels, it actually seemed to coat them with the liquid which fought to remain in place even when I tried to swill the solution away with water.

I couldn't get the stuff off. I was thinking I must take this to the workroom and find some collane, I was sure that would do the trick, when a maid

tapped on the door of my 'waiting room' to tell me my husband wished for me.

What a quaint way of putting it, I thought, smiling as I followed the maid out of the women's quarters. I was immediately smothered in his arms, lifted from my feet and swirled around as the maid giggled as she retreated and closed the door to the women's rooms.

"Have you missed me, my darling, as I have missed you all day, doing all this work for my father?" my husband asked me.

"I, I think so," I murmured, all shy at what I was thinking, what I was doing, snuggling up to this so handsome, older man, kissing him just as much as he was kissing me, pressing my body to him as much as he was pressing his against me.

"Tell me again," Peveret murmured as he led me to the same bedroom where we had spent a glorious night. There was a fresh nightdress that was almost transparent and would show off every inch of my body to my husband if I stripped off all my clothing. And I didn't have much choice in that as my husband was doing that to me and urging me to tell him again what I'd said the night before.

"I, I'm your wife," I murmured to him as his hands eagerly caressed all parts of my body, his mouth devouring mine for a time as I wilted before him and let him strip the dress from me. He had to rip away my bra, his hands and mouth finding what he really wanted to pleasure about me.

"Tell me that you're a woman," my husband commanded me.

"I, I am a woman," I whispered as his tongue firmed my breasts and nipples. I felt so aroused as he slipped my dress over my panties; he caressed my

tush, his manhood alive and flickering between my thighs.

“You’re my woman,” said my husband.

“I am your woman,” I told my husband. I couldn’t say anything more as I wriggled beneath him, lifted my legs as he wanted me to, and we were united as husband and wife, my body moving in a frenzy beneath him. I accommodated my tush to his manhood, allowing this man I loved, as a woman like me should, feel that every bit of me was female as we made love again and again, me unable to rise from being completely subservient to my loving, aroused, rampant husband.

I lay in my loving man’s arms as the words bubbled up inside me and I knew it wasn’t anything that I was being forced to say. “I, I, I-love you, my d-darling,” I said to a man. He didn’t laugh at me. He didn’t sneer at me and tell me I was crazy. He kissed me, his warm hands caressing all over my naked body, setting my breasts and hips on fire as he lingered there.

Then Pev’s legs parted mine again. I was, in a wonderful time of being joined to him at his mouth, as well joined to him as a woman should be, elsewhere, he pumping into me and telling me how he loved me and how beautiful a woman I was. And I believed him as I wiggled in excitement beneath him, and then over him, as he laughingly moved me atop after he had been fulfilled one way. I was soon fulfilled wriggling about on my husband, as I couldn’t control the convulsions that overcame me.

“You women,” my husband said as I snuggled against him. “It does take you a long time sometimes to have your orgasm, doesn’t it? But it’s well worth waiting for. Do you have one more in you tonight? I missed you so, all day today. I’ve so much loving to

catch up on after the drought I had to suffer on the last days of our sea voyage.”

Peveret told me all about Brisard and those who supported him on *Silvery Seas*. There were arguments over the men whom Brisard had had executed and the others, like Maresey and Robady, whom he'd wanted to hang as well.

“And me, I bet,” I murmured to him.

“And you,” Pev agreed. “Did you know that I took turns sleeping in the hatch alcove outside your door with Robady, Gennee and Panella? The girls took turns armed with foghorn whistles to wake you and the whole ship if anyone had come by. I played knuckles with a night squad that I made sure were all loyal to me and my line.

“Mogen did come up one night with orders from the captain which he wouldn't show when he saw me there. I was so glad to see Brisard was off the boat so quickly. I should have left the bodies swinging, shouldn't I? Would have loved to hear him explain that barbarism to his wife and children. Bet he wouldn't tell them that he ordered sea justice in sight of Greenhaven.”

“Thank you,” I whispered to him, burying my feminine body into him again as I knew he liked. He'd said it so often. “I would have hated to have been found swinging on a ship spar by the crew one morning.”

“Speaking of swinging,” said my husband between wet, tantalizing kisses that were making both of us moisten one another's abdomens, “where is your necklace, my darling, and your darling earrings tonight? I'm not being entranced with the touch of pearls on a woman's skin ...”

Oh, that had to be rewarded and it was. I just kept that thought in my mind, ‘a woman's skin’, and I



erupted and spasmed before my husband. He had to come into a wriggly, aroused woman, clinging in a deathhold to him, her mouth, breasts and lips burning with the passion and bliss, she alternated between them, in every movement she made beneath her loving husband.

It was morning before I was able to answer his questions and tell him about the sticky substance on the pearls that didn't seem to be a cleanser. "I'll get rid of the stuff later today," I told him as there was a tap on the door. The housemaids were smiling as they had robes for me to wear as they escorted me to the women's baths.

"You'll have them all to yourself, milady," Rusala said with a smile. "It's almost noon but you and Elder Peveret did need some time together, didn't you? You're only days married, so 'tis said."

I blushed, confirming all her assumptions, as Rusala and her companion laid out toiletries for me and pretty pink panties and a bra. There was a pink-trimmed dress that I didn't recall ever seeing before but Rusala said it had come off the ship for me.

"Take your time, milady," beamed Rusala as she tested that the bathwater was warm. I blushed again as I waited for them to leave, which they did with a giggle. I could almost hear them saying that I was overly modest, not at all as Baract ladies were reputed to be.

I noticed that Rusala had carefully set my earrings on my fresh panties that were on a stool at the low end of the bath. It was lovely to be in scented water and look over my body, my breasts so alert in the wa-

ter, my legs concealing what I wouldn't have wanted my maids to see.

"No, I didn't tell her what I was doing yesterday," Peveret said. I whipped around and covered myself with the bath cloth, thinking that he was walking in with someone else.

"What about all this talk of never lying to her, of always telling her the truth?" sneered Wesset. "Omissions aren't telling her all of the truth."

"Don't talk to me about omissions," snarled my husband as I was striding out of the bath and reaching for a toweling robe, certain that he must be just outside the bathroom door which must be open. But it was deep in women's quarters. What was he doing here in the women's quarters with his father?

I reached frantically for the panties left on the stool for me. As I lifted them, I knocked my earrings to the floor. Amazingly, what I heard next was a muffled voice coming from floor. I pulled on my panties and cautiously lifted the earrings.

"Don't tell me that!" I heard Peveret shout at his father. "Yes, she is a woman. She's the woman I love. I have married her, my father. You'll have to accept the fact that she is your daughter."

"A daughter would give heirs to the line," snapped Wesset as I stared at the pearls in my hand that were transmitting a conversation to me, I realized, that was occurring somewhere else in the Komer Clanhouse.

"So shall we give you heirs, grandchildren," said Peveret loudly. "Lady Sherrene has done it for Torthard; and so have several of the cabin boys who fled with her to the Foreshore. It isn't too hard to figure how they've done it."

“You intend to corrupt everything Cunya’s ever stood for ...” raged the older man.

“Spying on and exploiting our neighbors across the seas,” said Peveret bitterly in return. “Has there ever been a time when we didn’t want to rule the world?”

“We will, soon,” snarled the father.

“I’ve seen all those new ships and the innovations you’ve had made,” said Peveret. “You think those cannon will bring the witches to obeying us?”

“When we close up all their ports and not even a fishing boat can leave a coastal village,” stated Wesset firmly, “the rulers will bargain with us, particularly after we bombard their ports. They’ll be gaining no wealth through trade, no foreign spices or the silky materials they love.”

“Don’t gloat, father,” snapped Peveret. “You haven’t taken those new ships and their cannons against the witches of the Foreshore yet.”

“We have no challengers left to our ships now but the Foreshore,” laughed Wesset. “When you return to parley with the Baracts on Liss Isle, Ballaro’s fleet will be with you, below the horizon. The Isle will be surrounded. The witch they send to parley with you, in time, will be blasted to pieces on whatever vessel she resides. That will prove the worth of the cannon to the most superstitious men of the fleet. The cannon will blow apart Grey Men, ships’ witches, any soldiers or seamen who get in our way. Witches powders and potions fade over distance and the cannon will outduel them.”

“And I’m to do what?” asked Peveret angrily. “What about all the spies we have in place ...?”

“Forget about them,” snapped Wesset. “We’ve learned enough about these fearful witches of the Foreshore. Most can barely do more than old women medicine. They’re scarcely as effective as any well-trained alchemist like you and me. The only skill they have is their advanced sense of smell. I wouldn’t be surprised if they didn’t have a potion for that which they give their young girls to make them witches.”

“They communicate over distance in some way,” said Peveret obstinately. “Some can control and use swamp gas. There is that great lake where Moth’s town used to be. And Perisord is open. The mines are being worked; and there are the Grey Men.”

“Which King Tathally has banned,” laughed Wesset. “Or Torthard. Sherrene’s still bespelling him into thinking he’s married to the most wonderful of women. What a poor fool Torthard is! Do you think someone like that can stop us taking over the Fore-shore?”

“Armies of ironball-firing cannons,” said Peveret as if he was thinking about it. “The witches will send thousands and thousands of Grey Men, mindless, fighting even when blood is draining from them against us ...”

“That’s where your pretty, little witch can be of help to us,” said Wesset. I slumped onto the stool, my hair in disarray about me, just my panties and a towel covering my smooth, feminine body. There was a tapping on the door from the housemaids to let me know that they should come in and help me.

“A few moments longer,” I called as I strained to hear what Wesset wanted of me. My husband must be holding the carabet and was walking away from his father.

“... antidote like Lady Sherrene made,” Wesset was going on. “Tell her how it’s so awful to enchant men like that and send them to their deaths. Appeal to her love for you. She does love you, doesn’t she?”

“She loves the fact that I don’t lie to her,” said Peveret loudly. “And I’m not going to do it, my clan father and elder.” The last was said so bitterly that even I cringed, as I’m sure Wesset must have, to be addressed that way. “I’m not leaving her now that she’s my wife. I’m not going on any mad invasion of yours just for you to revenge yourself on a woman who attracted and frightened you, years ago!”

“Not just me,” said Wesset from a distance. “The Clans’ High Council is united in this, Peveret, and the Clanmeet, from Bridgewater to Faroy. I’m only their tool. You know the Foreshore and the network of spies we have. We’ll need them all as we take over the Kingdom of the Baracts.

“We need the grain of the Foreshore. We’ll take it since they won’t lower the tariffs they charge. The Baract King and his witches will be destroyed by black powder and iron. And if you don’t trap the first witch on Liss Isle, someone else like your brother, will. He’s already volunteered.”

A slamming of a door followed by footsteps came from the resonating earrings. “Yes, good morning, afternoon,” said Peveret harshly to someone.

The bathroom door opened. “Oh milady,” said Rusala, “you are out of the bath. Come on in, Mirelee! My lady is ready for us!”

I tried to protest but the maids didn’t or couldn’t hear me. I was a woman, sitting there in my panties, listening to my husband greet and be teased about lying all day in bed with his pretty wife. Surprisingly, even though Peveret’s voice was sometimes very loud, the maids totally ignored what was being said.

It was if they couldn't hear anything at all. Then, it came to me that Sherrene must have used this on her Captain Anjaro. She must have heard him betraying her with another woman. She must have heard, as I was, Wesset and Anjaro planning to use her against the Baracts, my people. Only, for me, it was Wesset and Peveret.

I was dressed so prettily, I noticed, even though my whole body seemed numb. I finally left off the last argument over the prettiest necklace I should wear.

"My husband has the carabet for me," I said, standing up and swaying femininely from my waiting room. "He is awaiting me on the landing with it, talking to my sister, Hettie."

"H-how d-does she know that?" asked Mirelee as the maids scurried after me.

"She's a witch," I heard Rusala whisper. "They can smell people through walls!"

If only I could, I thought grimly. Peveret's expression must have matched my own when I came swaying out of the women's quarters in my high heels and short dress.

"Well, you two don't look like you'll be any fun today!" Hettie laughed at us. "I'll leave you to work out what it is that's bringing on such glum expressions."

Peveret looked at me in surprise as he put the carabet necklace about my neck. "I know what's wrong with me but what is it with you?" he asked. "Did one of the women say something she shouldn't about you?"

"No," I whispered to him. "I'm still managing to keep my manhood concealed from their prying eyes."

Peveret winced as I said that. "Please, darling," he whispered in his turn, putting his arm about my

waist and guiding me to the outer doors of the castle. A carriage awaited us there. "Let's ride into town and find some place quiet where we can talk."

I didn't remind him that he'd said he'd never lie to me. I wondered if this was going to be another of many he'd told since we'd landed in Greenhaven.

I could scarcely believe it when we drove through the walled gate that had been pointed out to me, from the ship. This gate led into the Deviants' Quarter of Greenhaven. We drove on for quite a while through what seemed to be just an ordinary port with taverns and markets.

I did shiver a little as I saw women at some of the market stalls as customers and sellers. It was strange that no-one paid any attention to us as the carriage took us to a tall building that must be an inn.

"You will return for us at the tenth hour," said Peveret to the stone-faced driver. Peveret didn't explain to me, as he always had to, what he meant by that as Seafarers had different ways of dividing up the clock to we people of the Foreshore.

The inn was sumptuously decorated beyond the thick, oaken doors that kept anyone from just looking in. A woman in an evening gown rose to her feet, smiling at Peveret and frowning at me as she asked, "A booth, sir, or a room?" in a neutral drawl that I'd heard so many times before I manufactured more throat clasp cordial for the cabbies on *Silvery Seas*.

What kind of place have we come to, I wanted to ask my darling husband as he tucked my arm through his, me shivering in agitation at where we

were. "We are expected at a booth," my husband said. "Sailing Officer Robady should be awaiting his undercaptain."

The pretty man in a dress gasped as she looked us over and led us into the large room where curtained booths divided the diners from one another. The curtains were usually drawn back and many of the couples sitting in the room looked up to stare at us as the hostess, I suppose that would be the word, wiggled down the aisle and led us to a booth where Rob was sitting all alone.

Robady got to his feet as my husband ushered me past all the well-dressed couples, men and women, many looking at me intently in my short, swishy dress. Peveret assisted me in sitting down by holding my chair for me as the hostess drawled that our waitress would be with us soon.

"Sir," said Robady to my husband. "My lady," he added, gulping as he looked at me.

"Free of all controlling and compelling potions," commented my husband, as he held a chair for me. I sat as femininely as I could, aware of all the painted eyes across the room looking at me and how I moved. "It's a blessing of the goddess, isn't it," he said to Robady, "to be able to think clearly without suspecting that everything that you do is at the whim of someone else?"

"That, that is true, sir," said Robady, his eyes flickering at me, making me wonder how he saw me. Was I a man to him, a cadet officer-to-be, as he'd been, or was I a woman, whom he had loved and called his seawife, under orders, or so he'd said, from the man who now was my husband? Or was I simply a deviate?

"My father has no spies in Hecala's establishment," said Peveret, gesturing to the splendidly fur-

nished room we were in. A blonde boy in a long dress and red ribbons in his hair came nervously down the aisle to serve us, saying nothing as my husband ordered drinks for us, mine turning out to be a frothy, feminine affair while he and Robady had manly beers.

“You wish to return to the Foreshore, Rob?” asked Peveret when we were past the politeness and service. “And you have others who wish to return there, too, riggers with wives, girls, even children, left behind.”

“Yes, sir,” agreed Robady, “but you knew ...”

“The delectable Gennee hasn’t been able to change your mind?” asked Peveret. My former friend and lover almost jumped off his seat in surprise.

Rob’s eyes flicked at me as he gulped, “No-no, sir.”

“Pity,” said Peveret bluntly. “But have you persuaded her to go with you across the Ocean of Clouds once more? Surely no girl like Gennee could resist your offer. What was it? Oh yes, you told her you’d make her into your Countess and take her to meet your family as your landwife?”

I was surprised me to hear the words Rob had murmured to me time after time, as he made love to me, both of us under the influence of lovebane. Rob stared at my husband, now acting the part of the undercaptain again.

“You never intended to take her with you when you sailed off on the ship I’ve promised you, did you?” asked my husband quietly, his brew half emptied in one draft. Rob went white and began to shake. “Don’t worry, my boy,” said Peveret, correctly using that word.

That was the difference between Rob and Pev, I could see. My husband was a man while Rob was really just a boy. As I was, a betraying thought swept through me. "I do intend to keep my word," Pev said. "And I expect you to keep yours and be my eyes and ears in certain quarters. You will make the Foreshore again. Can I trust you to ask every man of your former crew if he wishes to return with you, or should I leave that task to Maresey?"

"I-I can do that," said a clearly uncomfortable Rob.

"I expect you also to ask the cadets, too, whom we assigned to the ranks of cabin boys," said my husband forcefully. "Mollee, I remember, but the others, I don't know if I ever heard their feminine names."

"Mollee, Deedee, Kadee, Mazee, Ellie, Naluvis and Anora," said Rob, still shaking as he said the feminine names of my former colleagues on *King Tatheren's Sword*. Some I didn't know at all by their male names. I felt very guilty that I hadn't tried to find any of them or talked to them about the predicament we'd all found ourselves in.

"You've missed one," said Peveret, letting Rob fret over it for a few minutes.

"I shall be going with my husband wherever he goes," I murmured to Rob. My former friend went scarlet as he looked at me and realized what Peveret had meant.

"You exceeded my orders aboard *Zephyr*," said my husband. I thought he meant the time I'd given the enhanced shells to Robady and how he'd fired them off. But the blushing on Rob's face, and the way he couldn't look at me, revealed to me that his seduction of me hadn't been on Peveret's orders, as I had thought it was.

I suddenly felt so warm and loved. I had to reach over and put my soft hand on my husband's sea-man-roughened hand. Pev smiled at me. We were in a little man-woman world of our own for a moment.

"I'm supposed to be going back to the parley off Liss Isle on a slow-moving, great ship," said Peveret. "At this time of year, it will have to sail so far north to find complimentary winds to move such bulk, it'll take forever. I can't stand another sea voyage like the last we endured. No, I'll be heading East with a scout for Ballaro's fleet, as part of the invasion of the Foreshore."

Rob almost dropped his tankard on the table. His hands shook as he stared open-mouthed at my husband and then at me.

"Seafarer ships have some new weapons," whispered Robady.

"Of course," said my husband in approval. "You've been listening at keyholes again, Rob, doing what you do best, gathering information. So I'll tell you. Against witches, swamp gas pellets, and Grey Men, we had to have an answer. The Clanmeet think they have it. We have cannons, black powder and ball-shaped missiles.

"The Foreshore will see a war unlike any it's ever seen. Thousands of innocents will die. At the end of it all, alchemists like my father will probably have wiped out your witches, destroyed your ports and enslaved your peoples, Russet, Malesian, and Baract alike." Peveret took a long drink again. "Ready to choose the winning side, Lord Robady?"

Peveret took my hand in his and squeezed it. "How about you, my darling wife? Are you on the side of other beautiful witches, like you?" That made Rob start as my husband spoke so lightly to me. "Or are you on the side of your loving husband?"

“I can’t ...” I began nervously. No, I couldn’t be on the side of those who were going to destroy the home of my parents and family.

“There are many things you, as a witch, can do,” Peveret said slowly, taking a drink of his beer. I shivered and didn’t know how to tell him that I wouldn’t be on his side, not in a war that he was describing to a white-faced Robady. I listened to Rob trying to plead his loyalty to my husband.

I pulled a face at what Pev would taste like if I kissed him now. I really didn’t want to be tasting a brewery in a kiss. Oh, how times had changed! What women must have thought of me when I was a man!

“I’m really glad that you haven’t revealed half of what you can do as a witch to my father,” Peveret stated to me earnestly before turning back to the traitor opposite him, pretending, that he’d do whatever he, Robady, could to assist this master of Cunian spies. “Now, Robady, I need allies in the Kingdom. I need men I can trust whom the ordinary people will follow.

“I’ll tell you as well that these new cannon ships are going to fly over the ocean in comparison to the crawl we took to get here. We’ll be on Liss in three tendays, maybe less, after heading out. Don’t worry about arrangements for my darling wife. I’ll make sure she’s on board but she’ll be the only woman, save for her maids. By then, she’ll have every power of Sherrene’s, that Wesset and I can teach her, at her disposal.”

Peveret and Robady spoke more as I sat there numbly, hearing Pev keep part of his promise to always tell me the truth. He didn’t know what I’d learned about the terrible invasion to be launched, from him, that morning. If I’d told him what I knew, things on the Black Sea might have gone differently.

Before my husband took me finally into a beautiful suite above the inn, I was introduced to the lovely Hecala, her handsome, well-muscled husband adorning her arm. She sat with us. I complimented her on the beautiful room, fit to grace any castle I'd seen on Cunya, I gushed to her.

"You are not here to see my lovely dancers?" Hecala asked Peveret. "It is your lovely wife that I owe for what she's done, do I not? Such pretty girls, with voices like nightingales, they make my establishment the envy of all the Quarter."

Hecala invited us to a dance performance which we could watch from her private booth. "We should let this boy join us as well," said Hecala, stroking Robady's hand with her smooth one. Rob hastily jerked his hand away which amused her and her husband.

"This young man has his investment to protect," said Hecala. "Gennee is one of the most graceful dancers in our new show. We had to find a place for her. Clan Elder Assonder is making a special visit to the Quarter tonight to see her dance the sea goddess part of *The Forging of the Gods*. You know that ballet well, do you not, Elder Peveret? You used to be here every time I performed it, years ago. But you never sent me a note to my room or asked me to call on you while you were here."

"Long ago," said Peveret with a smile, "I wanted to keep my illusions of the lovely goddess who danced so beautifully. At least that's what I tell myself, not that a woman as beautiful and rich as you, Hecala, would ever have deigned to notice a callow youth like me. Not when she was besieged by the greatest men in the Many Isles, begging for her favors."

Hecala turned to me. "Does he speak like this to you all the time, Lady Arrathee?"

“My husband does,” I said, feeling a tremble inside me as I looked at this woman whom my husband had admired once upon a time.

Hecala shook her lovely blonde hair and led us out of the dining room, where we’d eaten nothing. Robady was dispatched to meet Gennee and tell her who’d be in her audience that night, besides Clan Elder Assonder.

I could scarcely believe the splendor of the room Hecala led us to. “This is what you missed once upon a time,” Hecala said with a smile to my husband, who had the grace to swallow hard. “But now you are well past a flirtation with me as I am well settled also in this place with a man who suits me very well.”

Hecala withdrew then, wishing us well, telling us to join her as and if we wished. She’d studied me thoroughly but hadn’t asked me about drugs and potions I could make for her and her girls. I suppose she saw how submissive I was to my husband. Likely, a request for potions would come through him.

“I promised that you wouldn’t have to go back to the Foreshore,” said my husband, once we were alone. His hands drew me against him. We kissed so wonderfully, my lipstick marking him as mine.

“My darling,” I murmured to him, putting my thin arms around his neck. “Wherever you go, I want to go as well.”

“Yes, my darling wife,” my husband said to me. “I did say I was never going to sea again without you, being away from you for such an age on a voyage. But it is a promise I’ll have to break if you wish to stay here and not get involved in this terrible war. I do want you to come with me. I love you and I want to make love to you every day and every night of my life for as long as I live.”

“Promises,” I murmured as I slid out of my dress. I felt his aroused maleness, so moist, sliding between my thighs as his hands caressed my garters and panties to me.

Oh, but the afternoon then flew by as my husband tried to convince me that every word that he said to me was true. Even if his promises weren’t kept, at least for that afternoon, I was certain, as I writhed and was pleased by my husband, that he meant to make every word he had spoken be the truth. I was such a lucky woman, I knew, as I convulsed in ecstasy beneath him.

I hardly saw anything of the ballet as I was so engrossed in watching my husband. I hardly recognized Gennee until Hecala turned and asked me how I liked the ballerina in the tiny, black dress swirling so femininely about the muscular god, so angry with all of the elements that prevented him from ruling the seas.

I sat there stunned as I saw how much into the part Gennee was, swirling and tempting the man she was with. There were other faces in the girlish chorus I recognized. Mollee, with her dark hair, danced the part of the wind sprite who tempted the god. I could believe why he was tempted. I’d have been tempted if I was a man.

Seeing the girls from the ships was nerve-tingling for me. I had to retreat with Peveret to the room Hecala had provided us. She smiled knowingly as we almost ran from her box.

“It’s always like that after one of these ballets,” Hecala whispered to me as I swished by her. “It’s why I have them put on. See, here’s my husband. Oh dear, does he have to let his pants bulge like that whenever he’s after me? Excuse me, Lady Arrathee,

but I have to ease my husband from his agony as you must ease yours.”

No, I couldn't wait to return to the castle. I had to have my husband have me and it wasn't difficult to persuade him. And it was so wonderful to be a woman, potion-free, to jiggle nakedly over and under my husband and to convulse in orgasms with him, imagining myself being one of the ethereal dancers in Hecala's ballet. Oh yes, I must return again as it got me so excited, so on fire with femininity.

And no, I couldn't allow my husband to leave me and head back to the Black Sea with the war that was going to erupt. I would go with him. At the very least, I'd try to keep him alive so he could go on doing to me what I loved him doing to me. Ooo, Ooo, Ooo, I must get him to do that again!

Ooooo, my body's on fire as I gyrate beneath my husband, his lips tormenting my breasts! I'm the luckiest woman in the world! Ooooo, and there he goes inside me again! No, he'll never leave me, his darling wife, behind wherever he goes again. I won't let him. I'll bespell him first.

Women are segregated in large part from men in Seafarer societies. It's probably necessary with men away at sea for so long at times. When there's a chance for women to get together with men in a great celebration, therefore, the women go all out.

I'd been on the large island of Cunya, living as a wife to my husband, Elder Peveret, for over six tendays. It took that long for my clansisters to organize the Ball in which I was to be installed formally as a Clan Lady of the Komer Line of the Yaro Clan. I think that every dignitary and his wife, in

Greenhaven, where the Line was based, were invited to attend Clan Lady Arrathee's Ball.

Just the writing and delivering of invitations took weeks. In the women's quarters, the excitement, particularly of the younger sisters who would be attending a Ball for the first time was a tangible thing. Every morning, it seemed that there were new seamstresses arriving to measure all of us young ladies for new dresses, lingerie, stockings, jewellery and nighties for the days and nights of the long celebration. Well, who knew, said Hettie, my clansister? We might all get lucky and not necessarily with our husbands. How that made all of the girls laugh or giggle, depending on their ages!

Clan Elder Wesset was quite aggrieved with me when I begged off working with him for yet another morning, and then afternoon, as I had to have my hair design planned by the city's leading female hairdressers. Perfumiers had to visit and plan something special for every girl who was to attend the ball. There were lessons in dancing to be arranged so that all of us girls would do the Clan proud at the Ball.

It was somewhat of a scandal that I knew so few of the dances all the girls did. I had to practice them, with other girls as my 'male' partners, of course. The men were never told I couldn't do the simplest round dances that all girls were taught at an early age.

"Goodness, Reenie," exclaimed Hetteray, Hettie, as I was Reenie in the shortening of all our titles and long names when we talked in women's quarters. "Didn't the women of your house teach you anything about dancing? Every girl of twelve on Cunya knows infinitely more than you do!"

There was a reason of course why I didn't know more than a few rudimentary dances. If I could have danced the male parts of some, I could have done a

lot better in the eyes of my clansisters. But I couldn't tell them why that was; or why I was a poor dancer for a woman.

I couldn't say I'd be better as a man, after all, because I wasn't a woman. Even to my husband I'd say I was a woman as we lay in bed and he eagerly made love to me. And yes, I answered his eagerness to taste and touch me with a fervency that was at least the equal of his. I'd say to him and my sisters, that I was Peveret's woman, his wife, his lady; but I knew, deep down inside me, despite all the changes to my hair, my body and my style of dress, that I wasn't anything but Arrat, a lowly cadet in the Kingdom of the Baracts' naval forces.

"My Lady Arrathee," said a smiling Rusala, breaking in on a session I was having with Dorrie, guiding me through a long, complicated line dance. "There is a shoemaker here with shoes for you to try on for the Ball. And Clan Elder Wesset demands that you attend him some time today in the witch's workplace."

"Please tell my father," I said to Rusala, using the form of address my husband insisted I use. All women married into the Line would call Wesset their father, clanfather on more formal occasions. I had to as well or, soon, servants like Rusala, would be correcting me. "Please tell Clan Elder Wesset I'll join him as soon as I can."

"That will be a long time, milady," said the maid who attended me all of the time and complimented me constantly on my femininity and attributes as a woman. "The shoemaker alone has a more than a dozen pairs to have you try; and I do believe that Mistress Astara is arriving to fit you with proper shaping garments for the days of celebration that lead up to the ball."

Mistress Astara's fittings would not only be for me. They would be for other young women as well. We would be almost naked in front of one another as Mistress Astara fitted us into our body shapers, making sure that her stiffened lace and silk creations enhanced the feminine shape of our breasts and hips.

The Mistress didn't know I wasn't a woman but a potion-changed man desperate to hide attributes Mistress Astara should not be aware of. She treated me as if I was a very modest girl, one who always kept her panties on. Oh, how I was on edge, quaking all over at the thought of being discovered but excited, all the same, at getting away with the deception I was practicing.

I didn't have to keep a bra about my chest as the mounds that grew there were indistinguishable from the breasts other girls had. In that department, I was just like the prettiest of them. I jiggled and bounced with the other girls as I was often seized and danced with, the real girls thinking I was so lucky to be married to Peveret and now to be the 'mother' to them all.

"So our Clan Elder will take a back seat to women's work," I murmured to my clansisters and they cheered me on. Yes, we women had to stand up to the men and let them know we ruled them and not the other way round, I'd learned from my first imprisonment in women's quarters. I shivered again at the compliments that came my way for being a woman just like my sisters.

"Let me re-do your makeup, milady," said a smiling Rusala. "Oh, Lady Arrathee, I do so love your hair in ringlets as Grens has styled your hair for you. I wonder how it is that Elder Peveret doesn't ruin it all with the amount of time he spends ..." She had to stop then as she didn't know how to properly tell me, her Clan Lady, that I was always in bed, wriggling and bouncing there with my husband.

I didn't tell her again about masheen, the hair potion I'd learned to make from testing a potion of Lady Sherrene's. How I wish I could have known her. She'd invented potions and treatments unknown before her. Everyone on the Foreshore said that. Sometimes I felt I was just like her as I was 'inventing' or finding out about new potions and powders from Wesset's observations of the great witch. And no, I couldn't believe, wouldn't believe, she was a man just like me, pretending to be a witch.

The masheen held my hair in its grip, which should have been obvious by the way my ringlets bounced back around my face, no matter the intensity with which my husband kissed me and messed with my hair, as he loved to do. Masheen did enable the ringlets to come back so prettily together, no matter the trials my husband put me through.

I should tell Rusala all about it again but then I'd be committed to making quantities of the stuff for her and her friends. I just didn't have the time for that. I must find an apothecary and get him to start making masheen. The girls of Cunya would love it as much as the cabin boys did on the great ships in which I'd traveled so slowly to the Many Isles.

Peveret came and claimed me in the anteroom where the male tradesmen were allowed to meet with us ladies and girls of the clan. Peveret only kissed my face a few times and admired my ringlets, the girls all giggling at him as he called me Lady Arrathee so correctly.

Pev had decreed that the girls all call me 'Lady Arrathee' or 'My Lady' whenever they addressed me. It hadn't taken the girls long to find out that my husband called me 'darling wife' or 'Arrathee' without the Lady added as he'd insisted they do.

Pevo, their pet name for him, had had to sing me a love song with all the girls looking on. I had squirmed at all the romantic emotions Peveret had had to sing to me as well as all the ribald lyrics about what he, a man, should do to love me, a woman. I'd held him to what he'd sung about, later in the night, when I went from the women's quarters to his great bedroom. He'd promised he'd make love to me every day and every night as I was a woman. I, his wife, needed constant reminding of my lowly status beneath him.

I was getting so feminine that I didn't mind at all where he caught me, or how he caught me, during the day. I'd only bent to pick up a measuring spoon, dropped on the floor of the workroom, when a cold draft blew up my legs as he flicked my dress skirts over my back. Peveret had made me squeal that first time as he'd eased my panties down only a touch and penetrated me forcefully, me wiggling with all the femininity I could muster.

It was the first time we were caught by Peveret's father. It wasn't the last or even the first time that we were caught by the maid servants, me groaning and gyrating with all parts of my female body against my husband. I didn't squeal each time I was assaulted, though. I loved it too much. Oh, I really did feel so much like a woman when my husband touched me as he shouldn't, where he shouldn't, and when he shouldn't.

I became such a simpering idiot in his arms, exploring my femininity as I found that swishing my dress near to him, or lifting my skirts, were too much for him. He called me the worst kind of tease and I was. My clansisters said the same thing about me and they were right. I was a flirt and loved the way it made me feel, so womanly. I had to behave the same way at my ball, my sisters told me, but I knew I wouldn't do that. No, I knew how to act like a lady when I needed to.

The housemaids now made it a point of knocking before they came into any room where I was with Peveret. That was a good plan because we'd have been caught many, many more times than we were. Someone would surely have seen, with all the wiggles and convulsions I went through to be a woman and please my man, my legs often wrapped about his waist or neck, that I really wasn't the woman I was pretending to be.

The shoemakers' hands caressed my hairless, stocking-clad lower legs, sending all kinds of thrills through me. So I was really glad that my husband came for me and led me off to our bedroom where we promptly adjourned for the day. I danced for my husband as one of Hecala's girls might have in a private performance.

I don't think I was much of a dancing girl but then I had a captive audience. My husband praised my dancing and wanted me to do more and more. I would have, enjoying the female feelings that swept over me as I tempted a man with my feminine charms. But he didn't help my practice with the way he reached out and caressed me as I removed my dress and undies as I sang a love song to him.

I never got to finish a song. I very quickly had my legs wrapped around my husband and his manhood was penetrating my tush as I rocked beneath him as any subservient wife should.

"My father doesn't think that you're serious about being a witch," said my husband when he'd made me come several times beneath him. He pinched my nipples as I rocked against him, knowing that his mouth would find its way to my breasts, as it did.

"I'm not," I murmured to him as I wiggled my tush against him, letting him know he could have me

again whenever he wanted his 'woman'. "I have too, too many things to do, my darling Pev, I really do."

"Getting your hair done, fixing your makeup," laughed my husband at me. "And trying on such pretty underwear. It's all driving my father crazy. Couldn't happen to a more deserving person, could it?"

"It's a serious business, being a woman," I told my husband primly. He'd begun to arrange my legs about him again so that I could bounce and contort very girlishly beneath him.

"You have practiced the Maidens' Waltz?" asked Pev.

I had to give him a little, feminine punch, on the arm. He always teased me that the simple waltz was far too hard for me. Peveret should get a new partner, he'd teased me. I'd told him to go ahead. He and his father would make such a pretty pair, wouldn't they?

"I've got my orders," my husband whispered to me as if he suspected that we might be overheard. "I'm to sail on the morning tide on the day after the Ball. You may have to bespell a whole crew of men for us to smuggle you onto any ship, my darling wife. Still want to come with me?"

"Of course," I whispered back to him, wondering if there was anyone else on Cunya who'd discovered what I had, a way to listen in to other people's conversations. Wesset might have done it, but he didn't seem to be able to hear the simplest of conversations I'd heard over the carabet necklace I laid out constantly in front of him. He didn't hear the housemaids singing bawdy love songs off-key, putting my name into some of the most erotic lines as if men would be attracted to my feminine attributes the moment they saw me.

“A wife must go with her husband and assist him in every way she can to make his endeavors successful,” I whispered to the man stroking and arousing me once more for another bout of fitful lovemaking.

“You will aid me?” asked Peveret in astonishment. I knew what he meant. He thought I was saying I’d help the Seafarer fleet triumph over the Baracts if it came to that on the sea.

Well, I wouldn’t do that. I couldn’t. I flinched and couldn’t answer as all I could think of was my father and saving his life. I had to do something, but I didn’t know what, to keep him, and Polwer, safe from the marauders Peveret said were going to sweep all over my home land. And I must protect Peveret. I must.

“Lady Sherrene should have aided us,” said Peveret seriously to me as he held me. I knew he was drinking in my womanly perfume that he adored on me. “She was half Seafarer, you know.”

“A Turling,” I murmured and that made him pull a face.

“Aren’t we all,” Pev asked, “including the so holy Faroyards? There’s been so much intermingling as we’re a seafaring people ...But don’t use a term like that for Sherrene. Her father was one of our greatest captains and Elders. He arranged the marriage of his sister, Cupayat, to the King of the Baracts, that bastard Tatheren. And Tatheren killed her.”

“That’s why Countess Sherrene has such golden hair?” I said, the connection springing to mind, though I knew that all women’s hair, like my own, was subject to constant, colorful change, well, mine anyway. I was a blonde now because my husband liked me this way, not brown-haired as I was born. And yes, he was right about me being a blonde woman. I really loved my hair the way it was, so golden and beautiful, changing the way I looked and

felt as a woman. Yes, I felt so gorgeous at times when I saw the blonde woman who was me.

“Yes,” sighed Peveret. “Sherrene’s golden hair was why my father and Captain Anjaro were so certain she’d work for the Many Isles. I do believe she would have if it hadn’t been for Anjaro’s betrayal of her. I would love to know how she found out she was betrayed in love. But I don’t believe she destroyed *Tempest* just over a love spat. You wouldn’t do that to me, my darling woman, would you?”

I hadn’t told Peveret that I could listen in to him wherever he went on Cunya. I guessed that Lady Sherrene had done the same with Captain Anjaro. She must have known not only what Anjaro was doing with Nikki, I think that was her name, but also whatever he said about her with others. I could imagine she’d have heard what Wesset and his captain were saying about their plans for her. If he’d had plans for her as Wesset had for me ...?

I gave Peveret one of my earrings, each time he left me, as a ‘good-luck’ charm, to remember me by, and to know I would be burning with passion and desire as soon as he was far from me. He had to hurry back, I’d tell him, as his wife was getting so used to being made love to by an active man that she’d be so restless. Perhaps she’d find another lover if he stayed away too long.

Peveret never stayed away long now. Of course, he used me as an excuse for breaking off conversations I was listening to with great interest. The great ship that was being given to the Baracts had left long ago. Robady and his crew, minus all the lovely cabin boys, stayed, as I did, on Cunya. How I wished I could have placed one of the pearls I was using as spy monitors into someone’s pocket who’d left on that ship, *Zephyr of Serenity*.

I did it to my housemaids and to my clansisters. I found out that they were all scared of me at first but had come around to thinking that I couldn't be a great witch as I didn't seem to do anything. They all knew that Clan Elder Wesset was annoyed with me.

Dorrie, older than the others, thought I was flighty and didn't know what Peveret saw in a sexpot like me. Oh, how I blushed at that evaluation of me. If you eavesdrop, I remembered from some old saw that my father must have said to me several times, you will never hear well of yourself.

"She's in love with him," I'd heard Hettie say from across the room they were in, doing something of women's work, making lace as I should have been. "They can't keep their hands off one another. She's really going to find it strange when her husband's gone for months on this invasion the clanmeet's planning. Perhaps she'll make Wesset more pleased with her when she has nothing to do but make potions for him."

"She'll find a man to keep her satisfied," said Dorrie to our clansister, mine and hers.

"Just so long as it isn't Nessard," said Hettie with a laugh.

"He does have a wandering eye," remarked Dorrie thoughtfully.

"Which Pevo will poke out if he finds that his brother's been poking his wife," said Hettie decidedly. "You know what Pevo's temper is like!"

"She's so pretty," said Dorrie then. "We should find someone for her."

"Don't involve me," said Hettie. "I think we should keep her locked up. Only when Wesset calls for her should we let her out of quarters!"

No shopping trips, I thought in amusement. Oh yes, I'd really be a treasure to the Komer Line if I was kept away for tendays on end from my lover and husband. I'd almost certainly do something which would reveal what a snake there was in the women's quarters.

"Pevo won't miss her as much as she misses him," said Hettie after a pause. "You know what he's like when he's at sea. I wonder if she knows, our Lady Arrathee," that was said with such a sneer, "that he set up the last cabin boy he was sleeping with in a splendid inn along the Red Shore. Nessard's been in it. He told me the girls there are unbelievable!"

"Girls?" sneered Dorrie right away.

"Not unbelievable in a bad way," Hettie went on. "Ness told me that Lady Arrathee had made some fantastic potions for the cabin boys she came back with. They had girlish voices, lovely hair and breasts and figures as if they were really girls. They've attracted business like you wouldn't believe, Ness was saying. Officers, even Elders, who would never go into that Quarter, are flocking in to see Panella's girls!"

"There've always been a few since that other witch ..." began Dorrie.

"Yes, a few who managed to keep the potions Lady Sherrene made for them," laughed Hettie. "I heard that Wesset was trying to repeat all of her potions. He makes something that makes the cabin boys go all femmy whenever they put on a dress and a man admires them."

"And some had a potion that changed their voices," Dorrie said thoughtfully.

"This witch made them all potions that did more than that," laughed Hettie again. "It's being sold all

over the Quarter, ganasate they call it; and there's some kind of love potion as well that Wesset's trying to get the High Council to confiscate. I guess it makes those who take it really get it on with the fake women on the ships. Ness said it was wafting in the air at Panella's. Several of the men he was with got too big a dose and went off chasing after the cabbies they thought were pretty girls."

"Ness wouldn't do that," said Dorrie sarcastically.

"I bet he did," giggled Hettie. "I bet he had a great time at Panella's but then he had to come home to me. He'd have to tell me because you know his friends. I'll hear all about it at the Ball anyways. I'm willing to bet that all of Nessard's friends balled a pretty girl, as they call them, at Panella's or Hecala's or Folline's. Amazing how we all know of the most prominent houses with pretty cabin boys, isn't it?"

"We should organize a night out for us girls," said Dorrie. "We should go and see the shows the men see, the plays and the ballets."

"The ones that only have men in women's roles," said a highly amused Hettie. "Do you think we could get away with it?"

"If we had a witch with us," murmured Dorrie as if the idea had just come to her.

"Yes," said Hettie with the loudest guffaw of all. "We'll say it was her idea. She wanted to see her old shipmates. She doesn't know about the laws, written and unwritten, that we women have to follow in Greenhaven."

"As soon as the ball is over," said Dorrie.

"Yes," said Hettie. "Pevo will be gone. We'll tell her she's been asked to visit her former shipmates in their special quarter. After the excitement of the ball

has died away, she'll be glad to get out of here for a little entertainment. I wonder if she'll be able to tell that the girls on stage in a ballet aren't girls. Ness was telling me about a show at Hecala's, very expensive ..."

I'd had to stop listening to that fascinating conversation as Peveret came looking for me. I'd had to kiss him as femininely as I could as his words about me, his compliments about me to his fellow officers, were still ringing in my ears. Someone had sneered to him about Brisard and the fool he was making of himself in the Deviants' Quarter.

"A cabbie, even if she's really pretty enough to be a seawife, is all right on the water," one of the men, a captain, said. "But here on land? You've never been involved with a cabbie on land, have you, Peveret?"

"Now you know that I have, Dalco," said my husband. "You know that I've set up Panella in her own house. She did great work on all the ships she went out on for us, for my line, getting the cabin boys to find out things I couldn't on foreign docks. After all, she was a mother, and I was the officer she had to report to; you know how it is on a great ship. Panella wanted to retire and so I set her up. Only fair, after all she'd done for me."

"Oh, she used to do for you, all right," I heard one man sneer at my husband. I shivered though I privately agreed with him.

"That stopped the instant I rescued my wife," said Peveret, "and don't ask about that. It's quite another story!"

"What did your new wife think of Panella?" asked another, a thin-voiced man.

"I love my wife," said Peveret simply. I felt wonderfully feminine tremors running through my body as I

listened to him telling the other men what a woman I was. “She wouldn’t have understood about Panella and so I didn’t tell her, at first, but, when I did, she reacted as any woman would.”

“She struck you,” said one man.

“She refused to let you touch her,” said another.

“No,” said Peveret with a laugh. “She understood and was glad that I’d treated Panella well. I think she liked that in a man.”

“How would you know that?” asked a distrusting voice.

“She gave me the most loving, passionate kiss a woman has ever given a man,” said Peveret, “setting me on fire for her. And then she said that she’d marry me, which she did. And married life couldn’t be better with any other woman in the world. I’ve married the very best in my Lady Arrathee.”

Of course, Peveret was chided by his friends over his marriage.

“Wait till you meet her at her Ball,” said Peveret. “You’re all invited on condition that you promise to dance with her. But I won’t dance with any other woman but her. I promise that I’ll be jealous of you for just touching her hand. I want her all to myself but I know I have to think of her as well and share her loveliness. She deserves to be the belle of her own First Ball.”

Peveret kept telling the men patiently that I was all the woman he needed. No, he wasn’t going anywhere with any of them and certainly not to the Quarter. Not with the wonderful woman he had waiting at home for him.

That wonderful woman was all a-flutter when he came in and rescued her from having her legs ca-

ressed by an overly friendly shoemaker. She had to reward her husband for all his compliments that he didn't know she'd overheard. Oh, and in bed as well, I had his words ringing through my mind as I was as passionate and loving as I could possibly be, the new lingerie I had to wear helping our lovemaking as Pev told me that I'd never been more beautiful or affectionate as a woman.

It was a half tenday of parties before the final Ball where I was acclaimed by Clan Elder Wesset as the Clan Lady of the Komer Line. In each party, I was the center of attention. The first was a family party where all the little girls and boys, most of whom I'd never seen before, got to meet me, sit in my lap and press themselves against my bosom. They gave me sticky kisses which their mothers and fathers thought was just the cutest of expressions of 'love' to make to me. Needless to say, my pretty pink dress, fashionably short and showing off my feminine legs, was ruined.

The next was a clan gathering where my husband had to surrender me to all the other males in the house, his brother, Nessard, being the most lecherous. All of the men had to have private chats with me in a corner of the large room. All of them seemed to think that running their hands over my tush as they put their arms around me to hug me affectionately was just the family thing to do.

Nessard, of course, had to kiss me, one eye on my husband, I think, which let me turn my soft cheek to him and let his lips brush me, the aroma of lovebane rising from him. Luckily, Peveret had warned me. My antidote kicked in and then it was rather a giggle to see the luckless brother making a fool of himself as I tried to chat to Gobbern, Dorrie's husband.

“We’re a very passionate clan,” my husband teased me after I complained as I took off my makeup and heavy earrings and necklace and slid out of my ruined, short, black dress, that I really had liked so much. I slipped into my nightie, only to find my husband beside me, his lips sliding all along my shoulders as I brushed out my braided hair.

“Oversexed,” I murmured.

“It’s keeping women in seclusion,” Peveret whispered to me between kisses as I perfumed my breasts and beneath my panties as that was where he would soon have his mouth as he knew exactly what to do to arouse my feminine passion. “We don’t see you like this all day long. No wonder our manhoods are inflamed when we see a woman with such lovely legs and breasts. I bet every man in the family is having his woman now, or one of the maidservants, and thinking all the time about you.”

“Awful,” I said to him with a shudder as I thought of so many men wishing that they were making love to me instead of the real women they had married.

“Awful for them,” whispered my husband, “and ecstasy for me, my darling. I get to possess the real thing, don’t I?”

I wanted to point out to him what the ‘real thing’ was and it wasn’t me. That’s the problem with not having lovebane influencing me. I could, for a short time, anyway, think such thoughts as that I was not really a woman, no ‘real thing’.

But his lips took possession of me and, very quickly, Peveret was lifting me onto his manhood as he caressed and stroked me. My new panties were slitted to make his penetrations much easier for him when I was flitting or mincing around the workroom or his study. It was so entrancing to make love to a man when I was still in all my clothes, lifting my leg

or legs about him to accommodate his passion and desire for me which never seemed to slacken.

It was amazing how all reasoned thought left me as Peveret kissed and stroked my breasts, my nipples hardening with desire for him. Not a woman? There wasn't room in my head for such a thought as I became woman enough for my husband as he told me constantly.

Oh yes, I had to wriggle beneath him and even draw his manhood up between my breasts which made him gyrate so and become so firm. I tried to hold him back from coming but, that was often an impossibility, particularly if I kissed the softest part of his manhood. Oh how my husband loved that. I had to thank Hettie for mentioning how to do that when she and Dorrie were talking about how they made love to their husbands when they were pregnant. Other women did that for their men, I would think complacently, and since I was a woman, I could do anything for my husband that any other woman could do for hers, couldn't I?

There was a party just for women while the men went off wherever men go. I couldn't get Peveret to take an earring as he told me that I must wear my pearls for all the women who would deluge me. And that was a good word to describe the gathering. All had little gifts for me as well. I had to blush at the underwear that so many brought.

"Your husband won't blush to see you in this," said one old dowager, giving me a scandalously brief bodyshaper with long, thin garters to hold my stockings up. "Don't wear any panties with this, either," the old biddie whispered to me in a voice that the whole room could hear. "I never did with my husband and I had thirteen confinements from him."

Cunian women said ‘confinements’ and not pregnancies because many, I learned, did not come to full term. I didn’t know whether it was because they purposely ended them as I heard many women talking of being confined again and hoping that this one would last. But I did hear others saying that this one was not going to last the month, as they patted rounded bellies.

I would have loved to aid them, recalling the potions that Polwer made for the witch, Dolora, back in Cormallen. Women there consulted with witches, of course, about all things female; and then Dolora gossiped with Polwer about what women’s problems she had to solve and what potions she had to have made right away. I don’t recall the ‘confinement’ rate being as high in Cormallen as it was in Cunya.

But I could do nothing about it as I was going to be leaving with my husband very soon, wasn’t I?

“Are you going to place a guard on your wife while you are away?” I heard a lilting woman’s voice ask my husband as I prepared for the fourth party, a celebration with priests of several Cunian religions. It was supposed to be the most boring of the round of parties but an absolutely necessary rite in the acceptance of me as a Lady of the Clan.

“No, I won’t put any restrictions on my wife while I’m away,” said my husband.

“And no, I am not interring her in your nunnery, Fisalee.”

“You do not want to return,” said the laughing, lilting voice again, “and find that you are married to a nun who does not enjoy congress with a man, anymore.”

“That’s why I wouldn’t approach you, Fisalee,” said my husband as I was intrigued by the amused tone in his voice.

“Oh, Pevo,” laughed the woman. “What have you heard about our House?”

“I recall Alletta ...” began my husband.

“Her inclination,” said the woman. “I don’t think that this witch you’ve married, Pevo, has anything like that inclination. I have heard that you and she are, what shall I say, stocking up on your memories of her body so that you’ll never forget an inch of her loveliness, Pevo, my darling, while you are far away from her.”

“You could say that,” said my laughing husband. Then, I spied him, talking to an older, grey-haired woman as I was trying to feign interest in a fairly jovial argument by two other clerics on the merits of Haruva’s blessings on ships that sailed through his seas.

“To save her from your brother,” the older woman murmured seriously, lowering her voice. “Now, don’t give me that look, Pevo. People talk. And they have about the family party and the behaviour of the men of Komer Line. I’m astounded that your witch didn’t turn them into rutting eels. It would have been most deserved.”

“Nessard ...” began Peveret uneasily by the sound.

“Chases anything in a skirt, whether it’s in a deviant inn, on a ship, or in a clanhouse,” said the old woman, Fisalee, who sounded so young. “Your wife may need sanctuary, Peveret, while you’re away. You should talk to her about us, Pevo, about me.” There was a long silence then as if the two were thinking over whatever Fisela had said. When she spoke again, it was lightly, almost flirting with my husband.

“She is so pretty that she will be an object of affection for our younger women, that’s true, but she might enjoy the change.”

The last was said with such a mocking tone that Pevo laughed. “Not my wife,” he said. “But I will speak to her of your offer.”

“You took her with you to Hecala’s ...” Fisalee began.

“Is everyone talking about that?” asked Peveret with a rueful laugh. “I’m still intelligence chief for Cunya. I had someone I had to see.”

“Let that be the story,” teased the woman. “I did hear that Lady Arrathee has picked out more than one candidate for your seawife on this trip.”

“This port!” snarled Peveret. I saw the woman back away from him. I didn’t hear what came next as my husband saw me looking his way, smiled and strode over to join me and the priestly argument.

“Who was the older woman you were talking to?” I asked Peveret when we finally slowed down on our nightly lovemaking. I cuddled up to him, loving the feel of his body partly across me as he gently kissed my forehead and slowly roused my nipples for another fervent possession of my body.

“Fisalee,” said my husband who then gave me an exact account of what they’d talked about. “If things don’t work out,” he added. “It could be a refuge for you but only for a short time. Their rites include parading around the statues of the goddesses in the nude and arousing one another to, well, to orgasms as you have with me.”

“You don’t think I could do that with another woman?” I teased my husband and that set him off. Pev wouldn’t stop until I was squealing at him in de-

light, all reason lost in the passionate embrace of a husband determined that his wife would reach the height of womanly passion and ecstasy.

I had not one, but several orgasms as Peveret wouldn't stop nor accept little climaxes in me. I had to let go my emotions completely and spasm gloriously beneath him, saying incomprehensible things to him, such as how I loved him, how he was the only man in the world for me and that I'd never be parted from him. I'd use all my witchcraft, such as it was, to make that happen.

I didn't see my husband all day as the fifth party was the Ball. It took a team of beauticians a whole day to make me, my clansisters, and their offspring, into the most beautiful women in the world.

I shook with tangled emotions as I saw the woman I'd become in the long mirrors that all of the girls were using in excitement to pose and enjoy looking at themselves. I caught them looking at me in awe and envy and I didn't blame them. I really did look like a goddess.

And that wasn't just on the outside. On the inside as well, my undies were incredibly beautiful. I was shaped so perfectly as a woman and all of it was me. I had changed since I had been forced onto ganasate by Dowd and persuaded by my husband to maintain it. My hips were wide, my tush was rounded, my thighs were girlish and slim while my breasts bloomed and jiggled lightly as any young girl's would.

Over all, I wore a white dress that was bare across my shoulders, a goddess's dress. It was slitted to show off my sparkling stockings and strapped, high-heeled slippers. It invited me to sway as I minced forward, and I couldn't help it as I looked at my softened face. It wasn't me, Arrat, at all now. No, I was a woman, Lady Arrathee, a witch and a wife. I

had a mass of blonde ringlets that didn't cover my ears since my several pairs of dangling earrings had to show.

Round my neck, of course, was the carabet, reinforced with the listening potion although there was no-one I was tuned into, all the earrings dangling from my ears.

The look of awe on Peveret's face as I followed the other women of the Line into the Great Ballroom was worth all the tedious day of getting ready for this night. "I want you right now," were the words that burst from his lips in greeting as I curtsied to him.

"Now, now, my darling," I smiled, feeling such a glow of womanliness spreading all over me, yes, even in that part of me that couldn't really be female. "You will have me, all of me, as soon as all the guests, that you've invited, dance with me. Didn't you promise to be jealous of them all and that I should be the belle of the ball, my first?"

I said that archly as Peveret was kissing my hand by then and leading me onto the great dance floor for the Maidens' Waltz. We danced alone as my husband tried to tell me what the mirrors had already revealed to me. My dress swirled so airily and femininely about me as I smiled into his face and wished that we could indeed be united.

I thought that Peveret would maintain the decorum of the Ball but as soon as the music ended, and before he led me to his father, Peveret crushed me to him. I felt his promise of passion and male domination as he kissed me so wonderfully in front of all our guests, scandalizing all of Cunian society, or so I was told by so many smiling men, after my husband was forced to surrender me.

Wesset finally gave a flowery speech. What could I do but kiss both of his cheeks as he welcomed me as

his son's wife and Clan Lady. If he could lie about what I was, and to so many important people, I could at least play my part, I thought smugly. I let him hold me tightly about my thin waist and kissed his forehead after our cuddly dance was done, leaving quite a mark on him.

Oh, the things that the men of all Clans and Lines whispered to me, men who were supposed to be my husband's friends. I'd thought that the Grand Ball would be a staid affair but it wasn't at all. It seemed that every man there knew that my husband was going to be away for a long time. Each and every one wanted a lovely woman like me to know that I had no need to be lonely in a strange land, not while they were available and would attend me on a moment's notice.

I promised each of them most solemnly that, once my husband was away, I would ache for male company. I would most definitely be sending a handmaid with a message to invite them to console me in my bedroom on my husband's absence.

It was close to the end of the Ball when the young man who swirled me so romantically said, "But that's what you've been telling every other man who's danced with you."

"And I really mean it," I said, straight-faced, as Ergor lifted his face from my breasts long enough for me to note that he had sea-green eyes.

"So do I," whispered the lovesick swain. I felt the tickle of lovebane on my skin again. It was quite an effort of will to break away from him at the end of our clingy finale, the desire on me to stay in his arms. I should have taken the antidote before I began dancing. But I hadn't, never expecting that someone like Ergor, someone my own age, would do something like that to my husband's wife.

“Such a lovely lady,” drawled the tall Seafarer who almost tore me from Ergor’s arms. “I can make no promise to love you fervently and set your world on fire,” the man said to me, “as I am Dever, the sailing master of your husband’s ship, my lady. I’ll be leaving with him in the morning. We’ll not look upon your beauty again for half a year at the very least. I shall be as disconsolate as your husband will be at sea, my lady, until I see your lovely face and figure awaiting him on quayside in Greenhaven Bay.”

I gulped a little at that and almost said that I’d be seeing him soon as I intended to be with my husband on his voyage.

“It is perhaps wise to wall yourself with Clansister Fisalee in her nunnery,” said the Sailing Master. “Not just for the temptations that you might wish to avoid, my lady, but to keep nuisances like Ergor and other male members of your intimate family at bay, I would think.”

“I wasn’t intending ...” I said with a smile to the Sailing Master.

“My pardon, my lady,” said the man with a frown. “I thought Fisalee said, while I was entertaining her, that you were joining her and her nuns later tonight as Peveret must join his ship very soon, as must I.”

“I, I think you’re wrong,” I said to the tall man, wishing I’d brought some defensive potions or concoctions with me. You’ll never lie to me, I thought, as I looked about; and there was Peveret, standing with his father, both avidly watching me.

“My lady ...” began Dever again but I slipped from his arms and moved to my husband, almost accosting him as I drew him out on the floor as my collection of earrings swayed at my ears.

“You leave when this Ball ends?” I asked him.

Peveret nodded. "You know that," he murmured, pulling me against him, his whole body shivering against me. "I have the last dance with you which you are making this waltz and then ..."

"I am to be interred in a nunnery," I said to him, moving my lips away from his attempt to kiss me.

"Shush," my husband said to me. I felt a coldness run through me. "My father does not know our arrangements ..."

"I am not going to any nunnery," I pleaded with my husband, ignoring the scandalized faces of men and women looking at me. "I am going with you, with my husband, as you promised."

The dance ended. The musicians' leader looked around uncertainly at my husband and me. Peveret lifted a hand and made a circular sign. The musician looked very surprised as he began to direct his group into playing a strange, wilder version of the Maiden's Waltz in which I was turned and pirouetted savagely by my husband.

All around us, the floor cleared and everyone was clapping as my husband twisted me so that my skirts swished all about me and my lovely, feminine undies were made visible to anyone who cared to look at me with my dress swirling about my waist.

"Oh, goddesses, you are so beautiful, Arrathee," my husband said, making me swivel so femininely about him, his hands caressing me even as he directed me in the flamboyant dance. "I can't leave you here where any man could take my place."

I shuddered at the betrayal. I spun on my high heels; and then the dance was done.

Everyone crushed together on the floor to kiss my cheek and hug me and wish me, and my husband, on his long journey, well.

“I will see you very soon,” said a heavily made up, older woman whom I realized in shock was Fisalee.

I was besieged by well-wishers and others who just wanted to congratulate me on becoming a Lady of the Clan. “Not for long,” I muttered to one woman, who stared at me in shock, as I forced a passageway through the crowd and went after my husband. He moved to a tall doorway and was smiling as he took my hand and guided me into another chamber, empty save for Wesset.

I spun around. “You said ...” I began and that was when the merenthe hit me. I think I could see my husband’s hand on a mask about his face. Sherrene was betrayed and destroyed a great ship and all your plans to use her witchcraft against her own people. Now it will be my turn ...

I awoke in a strange bed. I’d been changed from my lovely dress and undies. I felt my breasts bouncing freely on my chest as I rolled over, my legs catching in the skirts of a long, silky nightdress which I had on. I could feel the panties as well about my tush and between my legs. My hair was braided and fell over my shoulders, caught against my breasts by the bedsheet. I tried to sit up but sank back as I heard the sound of feminine high heels crossing a wooden floor. My husband had dumped me off with Fisalee’s nuns went through my head. Oh, I’d make them all pay for this!

“I think she’s coming around at last,” said a familiar, feminine, lilting voice. “Lady Arrathee, it’s time to

wake up. Oh, my lady, don't go back to sleep. We've so much to tell you. Rosee! Come and see if you can wake my lady!"

Rosee in a nunnery? I couldn't believe it but then I heard the skipping of high heels on the floor and Rosee's voice. "That sailor really liked me," giggled Rosee, as I'd heard her so many times. "He says he's a friend for you as well, Gennee. If my lady would supply us with just a little lovebane, we could have such a party, Gennee. We really could!"

"Rosee!" I gasped. "Gennee!" I struggled again to sit up and soft, girlish hands assisted me, the thin strap of my nightie sliding down my upper arm. I think my breast was revealed until Gennee pulled my nightie back around me. "What are you girls doing here in a nunnery?"

"Where did she say?" called Rosee who was getting something as Gennee helped me. The cold compress shook me awake. I could open my eyes. It was indeed Gennee and Rosee, my maids from two different ships, together, and trying to assist me out of my bed while the long skirt of the nightie clung to me.

"This is not a nunnery, my lady," said Gennee softly. "Don't you know where you are?"

The floor and the bed seemed to lurch together. I heard the curtains on the window swish. I looked up in surprise and saw a rounded window. A porthole! The word finally eased through my mind. I was on a ship!

"Where ...?" I gasped.

"The captain's stateroom, my lady," said Gennee. "Captain Peveret said that you might be a little disoriented by the way that you got here on *Cormorant*. What shall we do first, my lady? Make you a little more presentable for your husband or call him down

as you are awake. He did say that one of us, your maids on this voyage, should go and tell him if you awoke naturally at last. It's been two days."

"Two days?" I whispered.

"The captain was very annoyed," said Rosee with a giggle. "Not with you, my lady, but with his father! He said Elder Wesset shouldn't have used so much merenthe on you, my lady, and not as concentrated as it was. Is that the right word for one of the powders you make, my lady? You'd be the one to know what to use as the proper antidote, the captain said. He didn't want us to try anything at all but just to let you sleep it off."

"He was right," I had to say with a yawn. "Cold water could have induced spasms in me and led to worse things if you started treating those as well. Best with merenthe to leave the sleeper be."

Then, I remembered that I was going to be very angry with my husband when I came around. "Would a bath help first, my lady?" asked Gennee.

"With warm water?" I had to ask. Gennee laughed femininely, musically. Oh, it was such a lovely woman's voice that she had.

"Of course, my lady," said Gennee.

"Gennee!" I gasped again, remembering what I'd seen her doing the last time I'd seen her. "Your dancing!" I saw a blonde head move in embarrassment. "It was fantastic! What are you doing here, being a maid to me? You should be on stage, entertaining!"

"If I ever go back to Greenhaven, I'd like to dance again," said Gennee softly, lifting the skirts of my nightie and finally getting the nightie over my head so that I sat in front of her in just a brief pair of panties.

“Go back?” I spluttered at her. “Where are we going and why are you here?”

“We’re on the Ocean of Clouds, my lady,” said Gennee, glancing uneasily at Rosee who was arranging a bath for me, apologizing that the water wasn’t as hot as it should be. “And where else should I be, my lady, but with you? Your husband did say that it was my choice but I wanted to be here with you, my lady. I hope I’ll be able to convince you to return with us, Rosee and me, as well.”

A cold shiver passed through me. I wanted to ask Gennee what she meant by that. But Rosee came over to help me stand. My panties were whisked away, and a naked woman, well almost, had to enter her perfumed bath and begin all the rituals that a woman like me should do each day.

“I thought that I was going to be locked away in a nunnery while my husband made this voyage,” I murmured as a cloth disguised what was between my legs. I could only see the lovely, shapely, woman’s body draped out in front of me.

“All of Greenhaven thinks that’s where you are,” said a cheerful Rosee as she took my hands and began to manicure and shape my long, feminine nails. “Some novice is lying in your bed all stunned, sleeping. The mother, in charge of the place, was keeping everyone well away from your chamber. Little did they know that the dress locker, that she said you wouldn’t need and had returned, contained you, my lady! We were quite worried when you didn’t awake right away but it did make getting you in here very easy.”

“The, the crew, my lady,” said a nervous Gennee, covering my ringlets with masheen, my hair returning to the gorgeous appearance it had had at the Ball last night, no, three days away now. “The crew does-

n't know that you are aboard, not yet. El-Elder Peveret has let them all think that Rosee and I, well, we are to be his seawives for the trip across the ocean and back."

"As if two women could replace his gorgeous seawife!" said Rosee with a laugh. I looked up at Gennee who was blushing. Rosee, I knew, would never be like that. She was probably lapping up all the attention that was being given to her. I could imagine her flirting with every man on the ship as well, no matter their rank. I only hoped that the men on the ship knew about the real Rosee and the real Gennee. I shuddered; but not about the real me.

"You looked so beautiful in that white, strapless dress you wore!" said Gennee, her face flushed. "We have stored it for our lady. You must wear it again, my lady. The captain said that there were sure to be balls and dances if we do go all the way to the Fore-shore but there won't be any Celebrations on this trip."

I had to smile at the disappointment in her voice.

"Well, there's only the two of us and a whole crew," cut in Rosee, smiling and shaking her long, lovely hair, her huge, dangling earrings really suiting her.

"Not a very large crew," murmured Gennee as I sat up. She began to dry my hair, carefully working the masheen into my ringlets as she did so.

I rose from my bathtub just as Peveret came bursting in through the hatchway. Rosee whipped a bathrobe about me to protect my modesty.

"Oh, wonderful!" my husband said huskily, staring at me. "Leave me with my wife for a little, Gennee, Rosee. Take your parasols and go for another stroll around the upper deck. We've found a true wind and *Cormorant* is really moving now, can't you feel it? We

should be in Liss Isle waters in just four tendays, I reckon, as this blow is going to increase and the new sail plans assist us gaining real speed all the way to Liss.”

My maids smiled at me, clutching the robe to me, not that it disguised much about me. I could hear them giggling as they went out of the hatch, twirling their pretty, pink parasols. I was gasping by then as my husband had his arms about me and was kissing me so forcefully. The robe slipped from me and so it was my naked body against him.

Pev almost ripped off his clothes as he kissed me. I backed up and wriggled quickly into the bed I'd just stepped from. Oh, how his hands roved over me as if he hadn't had me in a while. Of course, for me, it was just the night before but three days without making love to me must have been an eternity to him.

“My darling! My darling wife!” my husband called me as he wasn't as gentle as he normally is. He was far too eager to arouse me with his caresses and touches on my breasts and tush. I wanted to be angry with him about the end of the Ball, and how I'd been treated with merenthe, probably what I'd made myself.

But how could I be angry with a man who called me the ‘most beautiful woman in the world’, who told me he loved me, and said that he'd never let his father do that to me again. We had so much loving to do to make up for what he'd missed the last three days.

“I am so annoyed with you,” I had to tell my husband after I'd convulsed in womanly fashion for a second time and lay quivering beside him as I tried to recover.

“Clan Elder Wesset was not going to let you out of the Clanhouse,” whispered Peveret to me. “He had it all arranged to stop you. That's why I had to make



hasty arrangements at the end of the Ball. But I'd never have left without you. You must believe me now that we're actually at sea. There'll be a couple of ships chasing us as soon as it's found out that you're not with Fisalee. She said she'd keep the deception going for as long as she could."

"My clansisters will demand to visit with me," I said to my husband. "That ship after us is probably on its way now."

"Do you know that for true?" asked Peveret, rolling me up and over him, his hard hand grabbing my penis and squeezing and stroking me to arouse me once more.

"I've been asleep until just an hour ago," I had to tell him, easing his hand away from that part of me and bringing it back to my breast, feeling my nipples harden just at his touch. "I don't know anything for true ..."

"You haven't been listening in on me as you did when I was with my friends earlier?" Peveret asked. I felt cold all over.

"I don't know what you mean," I said with a shudder as my husband spread my legs and lifted my tush again. I yelped as he forced his manhood again into me and began to ride me as a stallion rides his mare. I couldn't have stopped his rough caresses even if I'd wanted to and I didn't want to.

Peveret was lighting a fire in me that wouldn't go out for many a long day. I joined blissfully with my husband, whispering that I loved him as well but soon my husband returned to the subject he'd opened. I knew I'd have to answer him. I'd have to tell him the truth.

"I know I said I'd never lie to you," my husband whispered to me as he pressed my panties between

our abdomens. The soft silk and the movement of his body aroused me as his hands never stopped caressing my tush and my thighs. "But that didn't apply the other way round, did it? You don't always tell me the truth." That stabbed right through me as I trembled and hugged him more tightly, increasing the desire I felt for him. "How do I know that you really love me?"

"Oh, but I do," I gasped at him, bucking my tush into position to receive him and kissing him as ardently as I could, passion flooding through me.

"Giving me your earrings," murmured Peveret through my kisses. "That had something to do with you knowing what others said to me when you weren't even in the clanhouse, didn't it?"

"Oooo, yes," I admitted, bouncing and wiggling against him as he penetrated me so strongly as he began to buck with me and kiss my breasts as I arched in passion and desire to be his woman. I felt the climax rising inside me. Pev made it increase with a gentle squeeze on the silk panties covering a growing part of me.

"Oooo! Oooo! Oooo!" I squealed as I felt the orgasm flooding through me. I couldn't hold back and Pev didn't either. His chest was shuddering over mine, my breasts contorting against him in the fury of our embrace. I started to bounce, thinking I'd never stop as my husband had me passionately as if I was his woman. I had him deeply, wonderfully, inside me, rousing every bit of femininity in me that I possessed.

"Oh, darling, darling Arrathee, my darling girl," Pev whispered to me and that was who I was. I was his wife, his woman, and his darling girl. I bruised my lips kissing him as I did as I couldn't stop wriggling and quivering beneath him, my legs about his waist clasp him so tightly to me, helping me to keep him

going until at last he could take it no more and had to roll to one side, me still locked to him.

“How, how does it work?” my husband had to ask me as his fingers traced every bone in my body as I lay against him, almost purring as his fingertips explored my rounded, alert, thrusting breasts.

It took me a while to explain what Lady Sherrene had done, what she'd said to Wesset, how it must have thrown him off the path of discovery by pretending the solution was a cleanser. Peveret's father couldn't hear the vibrations at all, not even when he was there with me and I was listening to my husband saying such lovely things about me to other men.

“I didn't hear anything at my end, either, if you were talking to him,” said my husband, exploring my tush and my hips, making me fidget against him, my legs still about him and growing restless as he touched me so suggestively.

“Sh-Sherrene must have heard all that Anjaro said about her, his plans for her, your father's plans for her. Oooo!” I couldn't help the last as Peveret rolled me over and forced his growing manhood into me once more. There was nothing to be said for an age then as I was my husband's willing woman in everything that he did to me.

Even when Pev slowed, I used my mouth and my breasts to awaken his flagging manhood, thinking of the blue potions that Sherrene had made that had kept Anjaro going for her. Wesset had known about that and had thought I made it for my husband. Clearly, Wesset must have thought that a woman like me would control his son and other men like him through sex. I wouldn't have done that.

Well, not unless Peveret asked me to do something like that for him. After all, I was the woman. I didn't need to come to an orgasm every time as he did. Yet,

he sometimes insisted that I do keep loving him until I couldn't control the convulsions that were my female orgasm, as he called it.

Yes, Pev believed I should come as fully as he did. I could go on and on taking from him. If he wanted to keep on going longer and longer, well, I could do that for him, I thought with a smile. I might mention it to him when I went over the other potions of Sherrene's I'd found.

But, first, I had to show my husband how the listening solution seemed to work.

"Can you smell what is in the solution?" Peveret asked me as we bathed together in the cold water that was all that was left in the bath. It did help to soothe and reduce the parts of us that had been most sore after all the lovemaking we'd done.

"Terogal," I said right away. "It's got a sort of metallic scent that catches the back of my throat. But it's so dangerous when it's just a powder. It will ignite in the air."

"That's what you did with the shells in Robady's harquebuss," said Peveret with a frown, drying my long hair, marveling at how it sprang back into ringlets, now Gennee had restyled my hair.

"I didn't use much with black powder," I said. "Your men were invading *Zephyr* and everyone was screaming at me to defend the ship. It was all I could think of to do."

"Didn't kill anyone, as I pointed out to Brisard," said my husband, helping me to my feet and softly beginning to towel down my feminized body. I saw us in the long mirror and what a contrast there was between us. He was so strong, muscular and masculine. I was so feminine, my hair in ringlets, my hips and tush so rounded, my figure so feminine, my skin

hairless and my breasts, well, they were so erect and hard as I leaned against the man beside me, my legs so slim and girlish as well. Standing so as to keep my manhood disguised, I did look like a woman rising from her bath with her loving man.

“Did you think about how Sherrene made swamp gas powder or pellets?” asked Peveret. “She had nothing on her when she went aboard *Tempest*, my father told me. So, she must have made them. From terogal? It’s powerful, I know that, but do you do something to it?”

“It’s just a fortifier when it’s liquefied,” I murmured as I moved and put on the panties that Rosee or Gennee had left out for me. Peveret couldn’t resist a quick feel of my tush, making me jump and squeal. That must have alerted someone outside as there was a quick tap on the door.

“Wait for a moment!” called Peveret, smiling down at me as he helped me to put on my bra, kissing my neck and shoulder as he did so. If he’d wanted me to return to the bed with him, I wouldn’t have objected at all. I loved his hands touching me, caressing me, reminding me I was a woman and so attractive to him.

“But you thought up that thing you did on *Zephyr* in a moment,” said my husband, helping me with my short dress, spinning me so that he could button the back for me. “Have you thought more about what you did since? Have you thought about making swamp gas pellets?”

*****end of part four*****