

Witch IV
More Woman Than Witch



Philippa Peters



An "Adult Tv" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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

Persons seeking gender reassignment surgery, hormone therapy or any other medical and/or body-altering process should seek the counsel of a qualified therapist who follows the Benjamin Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorder. This material is intended for persons over the age of 18 only.



Copyright ©) 2015

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

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

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

Call toll free (800) 359-2116

www.reluctantpress.com

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.

“Pevo! 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 Cunha 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 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.

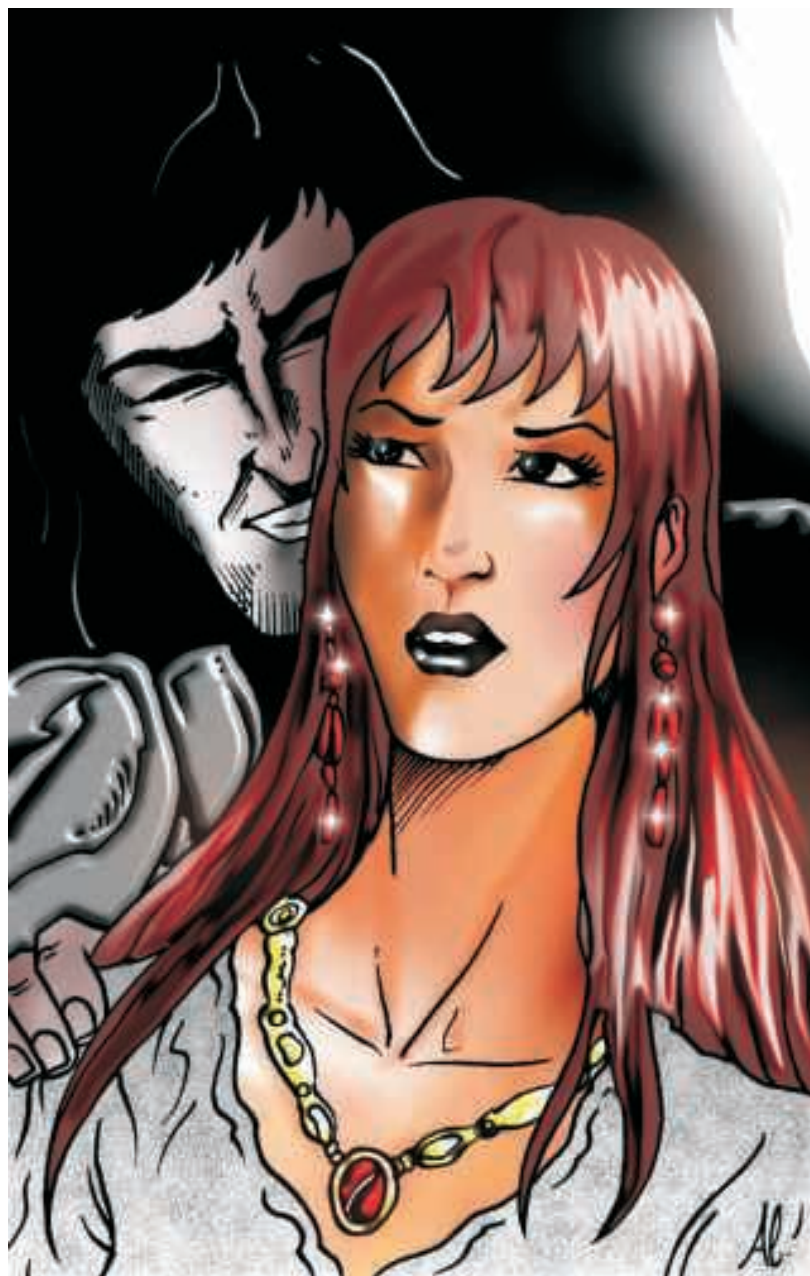
"Let us go and meet my father," whispered my so-called husband, kissing my ears and making my earrings sway against my neck and long hair as he loved to do.

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.