

The Making of Luci



Philippa Peters

A "New Woman" Novel

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THE MAKING OF LUCI

by **Philippa Peters**

I. YOU'RE GOING TO LIVE FOREVER

I was barely twelve hours out of my nanotech transformation when the shuttle landed gently at Duncansford Spaceport. My darling husband cuddled me to him, even tighter than we'd been pressed together all the way down to landing. I ignored the smiles and knowing glances as I clung to my husband, the most important man on the planet, its Lord Protector. My short, frilly skirts swirled about me, scandalizing the locals, the older ones, as much as they thrilled me with the womanly feelings they fed to me, now a girl again.

Yes, it was me, scarcely a day out of my medshell, now who I wanted to be, Lady Caroline Sutcliffe, demanding my husband kiss me as passionately as I was kissing him.

Eloise, the 'woman' I'd made head of my security, shooed away other male aides, wanting to welcome me home and praise me, the beautiful woman they thought they were seeing.

I was just out of nano, however, still reeling with feelings of what I'd been. Yes, I knew and felt I was Willen Smit, male investigator for the Nebula Kingdom's Ministry of Interior Security. Yes, that's how I'd lived the first sixty years of my life.

Only now, I'd been transformed entirely into my other me, Caroline, woman and wife of the most darling man in the universe. Yes, I'd already had that confirmed in the bedroom the Lord Protector had reserved to welcome me, his woman, back from her mission. 'Saving the galaxy' my daughter, Joanne, my eldest child, used to call my missions.

Rohan had confirmed me as a woman by being gentle and wonderful in loving me. Ooo, yes, he penetrated my womanly organs so wonderfully and deeply while his aides outside paced and paced, probably raising their eyebrows and saying things like, "He's really getting his rocks off, isn't he, with Her Ladyship?"

Yes, he was! And so was I, Her Ladyship, getting mine. No, I wasn't reluctant to be a woman, having to be coaxed, as I was that very first time, by Rohan, captain of an interstellar warship. No, I was fully engaged with my man, laughingly stripping naked for him, his mouth making my women's breasts and nipples yearningly hard for him. I'd wriggled over his manhood delicately, femininely, until he couldn't stand the emotions running through him.

Yes, I'd been his wife, his woman, fully, intensely, passionately, not content with one measly penetration upabove. It had been eight months since I'd been made love to by my husband! He'd a lot to make up to me for that dearth. Not a lack of sex, of course, as there was an enormous amount of that on my 'mission'.

Those trysts as Willen Smit had re-awakened me to who I was, besides Lady Caroline. I could have stayed in my nano-disguise, a man, and married the lovely Princess Julia. She'd wanted me to, so much. Oh, I shudder to think of that. Yes, I nearly gave in and became her husband, a William Henry lookalike, with Julia as my wedded wife, the original William Henry 'herself'.

"She's unique, like you?" Rohan whispered as we journeyed down to Carmichael, the planet. "She has ovaries and can produce babies as if she's a real woman?"

"She's not unique," I had to smile and kiss him as I said it.

“Both of you are unique,” Rohan had said with a grin, bending the meaning of the word, ‘unique’, again. “Jacqueline Ivany’s longing to meet Princess Julia again. You won’t co-operate with Jackie on her research program into your uniqueness. She’s convinced Julia Morton will, given the right inducements.”

We’d landed at the planetary capital’s spaceport. Eloise cleared the media away from us as we took the planetary shuttle into Shannondale, our home.

“Dr Antonia Garner is the Lannan doctor overseeing Joanne’s and Melissa’s birthings,” said Eloise, giving me a woman’s hug of welcome as I entered the specially prepared shuttle, the one that made our aides snicker. It had a bedroom, specifically for my husband and whichever wife he was travelling with.

“Any problems?” I asked.

“Ben Garner has Dronnell’s men inspecting his every move,” said the former marine, now transformed into a stunning woman and feminine athlete, leading me to the bedroom on the Lord Protector’s shuttle. Eloise attracted men as honey attracted bees. Eloise loved her new role as a ‘woman security chief’, the first ever on Carmichael. She was regarded in awe by every young girl, no matter if they were geecee or not.

“Garner’s objects to our inspections,” said Eloise.

Oh yes, we really did enjoy the flights we made, Rohan and his pretty wives, being completely into ‘blonde bimbo-ness’, as Joanne called it. She promised a bemused Kennard that she’d never be a woman like her mothers.

“Garner protests to Lady Lannan?” I asked.

“Lady Ivany’s at Shannondale, monitoring Doctor Garner and her child, as you requested,” said Eloise, waiting for me to tell her why Antonia Garner was being scrutinized.

“Later,” I said, watching Rohan come bounding up the steps into the shuttle, his eyes searching for me, smiling as he saw me, standing in the entranceway to our private, ‘bonking’ room.

“Lord and Lady Wharton are waiting on you,” said Eloise, turning down the bed, allowing me to see the pretty panties and short, frilly nightie that would arouse any man’s passion for a

wife dressed in such. “Enjoy the ride, my lady, and let me congratulate you on being a grannie now!”

Ooo, I’ll have to get even with her for that remark! Oh, but Eloise’s choice of clothing, or lack thereof, was perfect for my husband. I felt like a girlie sex kitten again with my husband. He seized me as soon as Eloise had helped me into my ‘night clothes’, hardly waiting for her grinning departure and wishes to go ‘slow and easy’.

Ooo, Rohan rose to the occasion magnificently. We made love continuously, feverishly, all the way across the sky into Shannondale. I might have left the starship as Willen Smit, but, by the time I was at Shannondale, I was Lady Caroline, the most desirable woman on the planet. My husband could barely walk after loving me for so long, coming inside me so many times, my own orgasms outlasting his. Well, I was a woman, wasn’t I, even if I wasn’t unique any more.

My daughter, Lady Joanne Wharton, was bubbling with excitement as I entered Shannondale on the arm of my husband, Lord Rohan Sutcliffe. She was clearly pregnant, about eight months. Lord Kennard Wharton, her husband, was following her about the Great Hall, a dazed look on his face. She’d insisted on getting up to greet me. But it wasn’t her child she wanted to tell me about, or who’d be born first, my first grandchild, or my latest child, about to burst from the uterine replicator embedded in Lady Melissa Sutcliffe, Rohan’s second beautiful wife.

My co-wife, Melissa, was upstairs, in the bedroom we shared with Rohan, for a motherly nap. She was due sooner than Joanne. On the comm, Melissa had said she looked like an old cow. I was probably right, she’d added. Four young children were definitely enough. It was typical of her that she’d included my Iain among her children. She’d been mother to him over the last eight months.

“The university has granted me my doctorate,” said Joanne, waving off congratulations on her pregnancy. “Lannan Laboratories has agreed to let me do a test run on my theses. Doctor Ivany, Lady Lannan, says she thinks the way I’ve proposed bio-engineering the new longurum drugs, my estimate of twenty

more years added to human lifespans, may be conservative! Just think, Mummy, Daddy, you may get to live thirty or more years longer than you expected, all thanks to me! Who knows, it could be you're going to live forever!"

Rohan hugged me tightly and swung me around to kiss me affectionately in front of our children. "I never thought a hundred years of making love to my darling Caroline," he said with a smile, "was enough." He turned to my beaming, blushing daughter. "Thank you, Joanne. We'll make very good use of your precious gift."

"Oh, Daddy!" said Joanne, flinging her arms about the man who'd raised her, and been there for her, during her early childhood years. I'd been off, unknowing, not believing her real, on an assassin's mission, at the behest of the late Lady Myra Colach, Minister of Internal Security for the Nebula Kingdom, where I was born.

Myra Colach had eventually risen to be Duchess of Galloway in the Kingdom, while I, her principal male investigator, had become the blonde-haired wife of the Lord Protector of Carmichael, his Lady, and mother of his children. Of course, on the 'backward' world of Carmichael, all children were children of their father and their mothers. Mothers, yes, that's right.

The upper, wealthy classes on Carmichael allowed its leading men more than one wife. Three was an upper limit in the old days, thirty years ago, even though Carmichael, like most Rim Worlds, had an acute shortage of women. Carmichael, however, had come up with a unique way of solving its problem. I, Caroline, like the pregnant Melissa, had been part of the solution to that problem. Yes, none of Rohan's wives, Helen, Melissa or me, had started out life as a woman.

Rohan hugged our daughter as we went into the Little Hall. A welcoming fire roared in the tall fireplace. It was where we congregated as a family in winter. Roberta and Fiona, my other daughters, sprang up on seeing us enter and ran over to hug us as well.

Fiona, the younger, always the quickest, was first to hug me, telling me that William, Gowan and Harral, Rohan's 'young men', were cheating at Bones, a card game, and would I please make them stop.

The young men, handsome in their off duty, casual uniforms, which they called ‘fatigues’, looked very military even as they hastily buttoned and zipped themselves up before presenting themselves to Rohan. The three of them eyed me a little warily, as did most of our security and military aides, these days.

William McLean? Rohan’s aide? I’d have to challenge Rohan on that. Oh, I knew the boy I’d loved, when I was transformed into a little schoolgirl, had become a military officer. Most upperclass men did. But I’d made love to him, for goodness’ sake, as the randy schoolgirl I was pretending to be! The attraction was still there between us. When he touched my hand, me the wife of the Lord Protector, dancing with me at a formal ball at the Gerbridges’, it was as if we were teens again. I’d been schoolgirl Melissa then, some time before the real Melissa became Rohan’s wife.

William had pursued me like a little puppy dog through several Great Balls, much to Rohan’s amusement. But it wasn’t funny to me. Not even my grim reputation stopped him. He gazed at me, even in my home, of all places, like a little boy seeing the Goddess for the first time.

My feminine appearance, of course, doesn’t scare anyone. I’m not tall, even in my high heels. I’ve long, blonde hair, most of it false after my last adventure. I’ve a slim, young woman’s body, my breasts high and well shaped, naturally exposed by the latest fashionable dress I was wearing. My waist is slender, my arms as well. I’m lightly tanned and soft-skinned. My legs, tantalizingly revealed by the slits in my dress, a new addition to Carmichael dress styles, while I’d been away, showed off my shapely thighs and calves to advantage.

Men called my face beautiful. I enhanced it with cosmetics and had a permanent staff of maids, cosmeticians, and stylists, to make sure I set fashions for the whole planet. I was the Lord Protector’s Lady, after all. Lady Melissa, my co-wife, a converted male like me, was subject to the same strictures as me. But currently she was pregnant. I was back from the Nebula Kingdom’s aborted Civil War. I was news. I’d been filmed and photographed, openly and surreptitiously, upabove and downbelow.

Ignore the moon-eyed calf, I said to myself, swishing femininely past William, loving every second of moving like a woman. “Shame on you,” I mocked Rohan’s other young aides,

who grinned at me. “The reason I always win at Bones is that no-one ever knows I’m cheating.”

You’re allowed to cheat in Bones. It’s in the rules.

“Oh, we know you cheat,” said Fiona, my irrepressible, bratty daughter. “We’re just too scared to ever call you out.”

I smiled and ruffled her shiny, groomed, strawberry blonde hair.

“Oh, Mum-mee!” Fiona said, while the young men smiled nervously at me.

That’s what it’s like to have a ‘reputation’. I’d been trained as an investigator in Internal Security in the Nebula Kingdom. The ‘Internal’ part is a misnomer. Investigators went everywhere for the Kingdom. When needed, we were the assassins of the Kingdom’s enemies.

It was general knowledge in Carmichael’s upper classes that I’d killed my husband’s enemies in our local Civil War. I’d killed Lady Helen, acknowledged by everyone as the ‘mother’ of Fiona, Roberta, Roderick and Hamish, my elder children. Many stories came back to me from Eloise and my ‘women security’. That was an oxymoron that made men laugh. Yet, they whispered that I’d killed all the great Peers of the Protectorate who’d died in Lady Helen’s War.

How absurd, I’d agreed, when Lady Margot Raines mentioned the story. I’d only assassinated one peer and his wife. Margot, once the wife of Connor and co-wife of Judith Raines, had fled from me and avoided me ever since. No, none of the stories lost in the telling, thanks to Eloise’s ‘girls’ and Dronnell’s security men, present at a lot of the killings. I smiled sweetly at the young faces, watching me warily.

I swished girlishly over to hug my special daughter, Roberta. Her hair was longer, a dark auburn, with some lighter highlights, her skin softer and smoother than I remembered. She might not have been wearing face makeup at all, so delicate and beautiful a young woman had she become. Just a touch of lipstick on her mouth and some expert contouring about her eyes, thin earrings dangling from her ears, showed me one very elegant, lovely, young lady.

“Mummy,” Roberta said, her smile of pleasure at seeing me, at my hugging her slim, girlish figure against me, her slitted dress skirt showing off legs as shapely as my own, well, that lovely, loving smile lit up the little room. I saw the boys gape at such a smile.

“You must smile more often, darling girl,” I said to her as she flushed.

Yes, Roberta was a girl now. Once, she’d been Robert, my son. In pursuit of Julia Morton and Roddy, I’d left Roberta under a lot of stress. She’d been insulted in a club by Georgina Raines. Yes, I’d killed her father, Lord Connor Raines, who’d tried to murder my family, twice. Everyone, especially Georgina’s mother, Lady Margot, knew that. I’d killed many, many of Castle Raines’ security, as well, which was another reason why they hated and feared me.

A word from Rohan about me being angry at Georgina, and vowing to avenge insults to my family, had stopped Lady Margot Raines’ complaints, an amused Rohan had told me. My family, aides like Lorch and Bren, and our maids, had rallied around Roberta when she’d been hurt by the words said about her earlier status as a boy. The ‘bar riot’ that ensued was still fresh in my mind since I hadn’t seen Roberta since that night.

“I’m trying, Mummy,” Roberta whispered, smiling sweetly. I hugged her again, leaving my arm casually about her waist. We swished together back to the game she and Fiona had been playing with Rohan’s aides. Roberta was wearing a variant of my ‘Upland Flowers’ perfume, I noted. It made her father very romantic. It might be having a similar effect on the young officers, the way they smiled at her.

It was part of their duty to attend to Rohan’s family’s needs as well as their own. They were scrupulous at doing that. Gowan Lorch and Harral Bren never let Roberta and Janice, her maid, go into town, Rohan told me, without one of them in attendance on the girls. Even when she went shopping for items of lingerie, Roberta had so many frillies to purchase as a new, young girl, Lorch and Bren went with her.

I looked up to see William McLean looking at my daughter, Roberta, as he’d taken to looking at me. No, I wasn’t going to let

an amorous flirt like William McLean stay this close to my daughter. Rohan, William has to go!

“Janice is the one,” Rohan had told me, when I’d asked him tentatively about my new daughter, Roberta. “She delights in embarrassing the lads. But they know her at last. She’s helped me train them. Lorch and Bren are absolutely unflappable now, in any situation.”

“Where’s Janice?” I asked.

“She has a new boy friend,” said Roberta, blushing, as I palmed two cards from the skeleton Gowan Lorch was building and dropped them on her drawn but unplayed set of cards. “Michael Greening’s cousin.”

Lorch pulled a face. I understood why. Michael Greening, from an important family on Carmichael, had known Roberta when she was a boy. He’d met her in the Golden Gates night club when he’d been there with Georgina Raines. He’d danced with Roberta and treated her like the girl she was. Georgina had been furious with Michael and his cousin, Tom Prester, who’d danced with Janice.

That led to catty remarks about Michael being a ‘boy-lover’. Roddy, my second eldest son, had risen and defended his sister, starting the riot. Michael Greening and Tom Prester hadn’t joined in. But, they hadn’t restrained their security from joining the melee, on Georgina’s side. I could see by the look on Gowan Lorch’s face, what he thought of Greening and Prester.

Old habits die hard. I watched the game re-start. Gowan’s bafflement at the run of the cards was priceless, Fiona shrieking as her sister uncertainly showed a complete skeleton. The two girls piled off their losing cards on the boys’ hands. I stood up in a swish of skirts as the girls claimed victory after William McLean’s next move. Gowan looked up at me suddenly, a ray of understanding on his face. I couldn’t help it. I winked at him. He nodded and gave a smiling shrug, complimenting the girls on their win.

I drifted across the room to set Eloise the task of finding another job for William McLean.

“Oh,” Joanne said loudly, smiling. “He’s kicking me.” Kennard was instantly at her side, his hand pressed on her abdomen. He looked completely entranced by my daughter. I felt such a fool for ordering Rohan to arrest him, for being unfaithful to her. I should have known Julia, who’d claimed Lord Kennard had fathered her child, had been mistaken.

“I have to ask you about Alvar Yesham,” said Joanne, between giggly, panting breaths. “We do want to know what he did and how severely bad it was.”

I glanced at Rohan who sighed. The younger people were playing a new game, Cheat, loudly, boisterously, led by Fiona’s laughter and complaints at being bamboozled so often by the young men and then by Roberta, of whom she didn’t expect it.

“We girls have to stick together!” Fiona scolded her sister. I silently thanked the gods for all that that remark revealed to me about the relationship between the ‘sisters’.

“You employed a female aide,” I said. Lord Kennard looked startled at the use of that term for a maid, getting a gentle kick from his grinning wife as he did so. “Her name was Julia,” I went on. “Well, she was pregnant, not an uncommon thing among maids, is it? But she did tell Doctor Antonia Garner,” who should be under arrest for betraying us to our allies, the Nebula Kingdom, “that the father was Lord Kennard.”

“What?” both Joanne and Kennard roared together.

“Julia described you as shaven-headed and rather frightening,” I told Kennard, omitting that I’d believed her and thrown colossal tantrums about Kennard, promising him every unkind death imaginable for the insult he’d given my beloved first daughter.

“Alvar,” said Kennard, his fine mouth falling open in surprise.

“Yes, Alvar Yesham,” I told them both, seeing the concern growing on Joanne’s face. “It was more of a seduction really, though at first we thought it was rape. Don’t feel sorry for Julia. She thought she’d be really clever. She tubed the child and fled our planet.” No, not the time to mention she was a man, really,

her unique way of getting pregnant, nor her wanting to get back to being a ‘daddy’, not a ‘mommy’.

“She stowed away on what she thought was a Danforth ship,” I went on as my eldest daughter stared at me, open-mouthed. “Really, it was a Nebulan raider with Crown Prince William Henry on board. Their whirlwind romance led to William Henry getting her pregnant again. He did the honorable thing and married her.

“If you haven’t heard yet, William Henry was killed in the Civil War along with his father, Queen Margrit’s recognized William Henry’s posthumous son as the new Crown Prince, which continues her Regency indefinitely, of course. Julia Morton is now Princess Julia, mother of the future King, herself a most eligible young woman, at the top of the social scene in New Vienna.”

“Oh, that’s marvellous!” exclaimed Joanne. “I must comm her right away. Has that Leviathan left port already?”

“A Leviathan leaving port at Carmichael without shore leave?” asked Lord Kennard with a smile at his wife. “You’d hear the shrieks from the girls at the Drum Theater from here.”

I looked at Rohan steadily. He knew why I was looking at him. The often naked, shapely, gorgeous girls of the Drum were becoming notorious, throughout the Nebula. Rohan thought I didn’t know that all the ‘girls’ at the Drum, in their skimpy costumes and shapely female bodies, hadn’t been born girls. If he and Jackie Ivany had their way, Alvar Yesham would be the next starlet, wiggling her pretty little fanny for panting servicemen.

Rohan did know the story I’d given Joanne was so much hog-wash. Julia hadn’t been married to Crown Prince William Henry. She *was* Crown Prince William Henry. She wanted to be a woman, after making love to Alvar, Willen Smit, and many other men. Julia’s mother, Queen Margrit, had recognized that in her son and encouraged it. Queen Margrit could now rule the Nebula Kingdom for another twenty-five years, until the baby, tubed at Lannan, had grown to be a man. That hadn’t entered into it. Of course it hadn’t!

“There’ll be an open trial soon?” Joanne asked, pausing as she led her husband upstairs to our offices where she was going to call *Osserta’s Pride* and have a message taken for Princess Julia.

“Naturally,” said my lord and master, Rohan. “Unless Yesham pleads guilty and throws himself on the mercy of the court.”

“Oh, Daddy, the courts on Carmichael don’t have any mercy!” exclaimed Joanne with a grimace, reviving an old debate between her father, herself and me.

II. AGENT OF A FRIENDLY POWER

After promising Joanne that Alvar Yesham would be treated fairly and properly, I went upstairs with my husband to visit my co-wife, Lady Melissa. She was sitting up in bed, in a pretty, purple nightie that must be new as I hadn’t seen it before. She was lightly madeup, her hair only down to her shoulders.

Her sister, the former Jennifer Yost, Lady Jennifer Sutcliffe since she’d married my son, Hamish, sat on the edge of the bed in a black dress of similar design to my own, showing off her lovely long legs and just a little of the tops of her stockings. Jennifer was dark while Melissa was as platinum blonde as me. Jennifer exuded a brunette, classy sexiness, like Roberta in fact. Many men had wanted to marry Jennifer, a classmate, I suddenly realized, of William McLean

Jennifer had admitted to me, days later, on returning dewy-eyed, after her honeymoon, that she’d been petrified. Hamish spent ten million for her, at her bridal auction. Little did she know that my resources were now pretty well limitless in Carmichael terms. He’d have had her if I’d had to turn my off-world fortune over to Hamish or even bid on her myself. What a scandal that would have been, a mother bidding for her son at a bridal auction!

“You cut your hair!” were the first words out of my mouth as I looked at my lovely co-wife, smiling, holding out her arms to have me hug her. She looked just like me as she always tried to. The media were always confusing us, calling her ‘Caroline’ as much as they identified my images as ‘Lady Melissa Sutcliffe’. “Rohan! Why didn’t you tell me?” I scolded our grinning husband.

“I prefer long hair on a woman,” said my husband, winking at Jennifer, his daughter-in-law, who had the grace to blush. She had long hair, masses of it, curled and groomed around her shoulders and down her back. Jennifer had told Fiona, who’d asked her why she kept it so long, Jennifer blushing a great deal, that Hamish liked his woman to have long hair. Hmm, like father, like son.

I hugged Melissa, as we always did, woman to woman, but she didn’t get up from the bed. Then, I saw! She was huge! The baby must have dropped! We were going to be mothers again in hours, not days!

“Oh, Missy,” I breathed in Melissa’s perfumed ear. She smelled of something new and delicate. Jennifer’s adoptive parents, the Yosts, were perfumiers. They often sent Jennifer their latest creations to try out on us. “Surely, this time, it must be caesarean.”

Melissa grimaced. She wasn’t a genetic woman and so had no true birth canal. She’d be torn up, by the look of things, worse than when she’d had Deborah and Ewan. It wasn’t pleasant but most new women managed to deliver their babies from between their legs, their first at least. Even so, they’d have died if it weren’t for Jackie Ivany’s trained doctors and surgeons.

Lately, reason was prevailing. Genetic women were turning to the uterine replicator to ‘tube’ their babies. Many geecee girls like Melissa, who loved big families and being pregnant, were doing the same, after they had their first, the ‘normal’ way. That made them really feel they were women, Jackie had told me. Melissa wanted to feel she was a woman, every time, delivering her child, made from the fertilized ovum, taken from me, Rohan’s sperm added.

Of course, Melissa had the best of doctors. It was no surprise when Antonia Garner came in from the bathroom, smiling. “Tonight or tomorrow morning,” she was saying cheerfully until she saw me. Then, she went white as a ghost, as she should.

Antonia had been Julia’s doctor, after all. Julia had told me Kennard, the name Alvar had given her, had made her pregnant. But how had that happened? Jackie Ivany had contacted me, delighted to tell me that she’d found another ‘unique’, someone

like me, a male with functioning female ovaries, since Julia was pregnant and didn't have a replicator inside her.

I led the terrified Antonia into the hallway, and pointed to my office. I sat Antonia in the chair across from the station where I worked. "You betrayed Carmichael," I told her frankly. "Tell me the how and the why." I didn't have to threaten her. My reputation played again to my advantage.

"You, you know," Antonia stammered, "that, I-I'm a geecee girl." She looked fearfully at me. It always surprised me that my maids never accused me of being a 'gender-corrected girl' myself, as I was. I was under a strict command from Rohan not to reveal 'secrets' about myself to anyone but Melissa, my co-wife. Yes, I always obey my husband, as a good wife should. The maids presumed I knew what they were because I was the unofficial head of security for the Sutcliffe family. Such is reputation.

"Sand and Sammel Garrison used that knowledge to blackmail you," I said. Antonia lifted large, mascara-laden eyelids in horror.

"You know the head of Nebula Internal Security?" Antonia asked, shaking at the names I used.

"Garrison was station chief on Carmichael," I told her as her eyes grew even wider. "How do they know you?"

Antonia looked at me uneasily. "My father was the Count of Graithness," she said. "He, he, disowned me. My brother took my birthright."

Anyone would have thought her 'real', as they would me. It was odd to hear her talk of herself as a man. "Tim and I were tubed, the heir and the spare. I don't think our birth mother missed a day of the Fall Season in the five years she was married to the Count. She and a lot of his money were gone at the end of five years."

"But he had you," I said as she twisted her long, painted fingernails in distress.

"Yes," Antonia said bitterly. "He had two sons. He sent us to New Vienna to be schooled. One day, a woman accosted my friends and me on the street in Ullam Bar."

“Ooo,” I winced, my dress swishing. This would be a long session. Antonia was on the point of tears. To me, she looked desperate. She’d want, if I could play her right, to tell me ‘her’ story, to excuse what she’d done, why she’d done it. She must have obsessed for months with what she’d say to me when I caught up to her. I surreptitiously sent a wakeup call to one of our nannies, Noelle, primed to take care of Jonmark Garner if I had his mother arrested.

“Thanks,” Antonia said as she took the offered cold drink. I noted her checking me out as women do each other, geecee or not. She was probably looking at my rings, my necklace, my bracelets and anklets, all in style and worth a fortune, if the stones I was flashing were real. They were. I was worth a fortune. She was probably thinking how good she’d look in the dainty dress I was wearing. Yes, we gender-corrected ‘women’ are like that.

“Ullam Bar is the deviates’ quarter,” I told her. Antonia looked at me in alarm. Clearly, I knew the Kingdom as well as she did. I watched her lick her lipsticked mouth and decide not to lie to me.

“I didn’t know,” Antonia said anxiously. “I was so naïve. I thought she was a courtesan, my friends being nice, trying to get me laid. I went with Charlotte who apologized for having the red rag on. I took it to mean she was, you know, having a period. She said she’d let me have her, another way. I mean, she excited me, even when I took her, you know, from the rear. It wasn’t bad. She was really willing. We went dancing after. She wiggled in my lap in this nightclub. I did her right there, her panties down a little.

“That’s when the Black Stripes burst in and arrested everyone. I was charged with deviancy, making love to another man in a public place. They wouldn’t listen to me! My brother and so-called friends had set up the scruffs and paid Charlotte. She, he, said, ‘Sorry, kid, I need the money’, when they booked us. She went into the men’s cells like a queen, sitting right away on this big guy’s lap, kissing and hugging him just as she had me.

“The next day, I was laughed at by everyone. They called me a deviate. Elinor Ellion told me how cruelly I’d been tricked and invited me back to her apartment. I didn’t know it was another prank until I found my clothes gone. She dressed me in hers. Her

friends were there, taking pictures. So, it was all over the city that I liked dressing in girl's clothes.

“My father was enraged. He wouldn't listen, wouldn't let me take off the skirt I was in. He just threw me out of the house. Only when I opened the suitcase he threw after me did I find it was full of girl's clothes. I'd nothing else to wear. That night I had no pyamas, only panties and a girl's top. I couldn't believe the dosshouse I roomed in was raided. I'd no time to change. I thought it was terrible luck. The Stripes didn't care. They listed me as 'deviate-transvestite' on a bench warrant and kicked me into court.

“I was fined two hundreds I didn't have. That's when this smartly dressed woman came up to the striper, outside the courtroom. He was shaking me, in my woman's skirt and top, telling me to get out on the street and pick up guys for money. This woman flashed five hundred in front of the striper. She took me, yes, still dressed, to this office in a building just across from the Royal Hospital.” I knew it well, Internal Security. “I met this older clerk, who offered me a job with a security firm. I had to disguise myself to get information, he said.

“I was put in a first-class hotel. The next morning, I was shaved totally and put on women's clothes, a wig, and makeup. I tried to protest but the woman had other instructors with her. They hit me if I didn't learn my lessons. I had to walk and sit like a woman. I learned to dance and talk like a girl. I could scarcely do anything right but the grey-haired clerk said I worked for Internal Security now and was ready to be placed.

“I came to Carmichael where they turned me loose. I was terrified as I walked onto Carmichael Station in high heels and a woman's blonde wig. The provosts picked me up right away. The woman in the pair was really nice to me while the guy was trying not to laugh. She put me on the Lannan shuttle with all these other people. The men were awful, laughing at me.

“I was given a sedative, when we landed, by the girl provost. When I woke up, a hundred days later, in hospital, I was a girl, with breasts and, and, a pussy. My face was changed as well.”

“You didn't actually want to be a woman?” I asked her, thinking, so much for Jackie Ivany's so-called screening process. And

so much for the Nebula Kingdom protesting the dumping of prisoners on other worlds.

Antonia shook her head. She was dressed and made up, a professional woman, her crossed legs shapely, her figure curvy, her breasts larger than I'd noticed before. "Not then," she whispered, flushing. "Everyone was so happy for me, where I was. I'd become a pretty woman, looking cute in dresses. Oh, I had breasts, real women's breasts! I had to wear a bra! Lannan girls, that's who they were, taught me makeup and made me look like a real girl. That made it so much easier. I had to date men, me a girl, kissing and rewarding them as the girls called it, all the time. I didn't want to but men loved making love to me."

That brought on flushes and shivers, which Antonia couldn't control. Yes, I thought cynically, all someone else'd fault, wasn't it, that you were captured and sent here to be transformed into a woman.

"I'd done sciences and pre-med at Royal," she started suddenly, "so Lannan decided I'd be a nurse. I was put in a dorm with two other girls and told I was Antonia. The other girls were shy, like me. Vivian, Martina and I learned together how to be really girlie nurses. Once a week, we dressed up, the Lannan authorities insisted, and went to dances with doctors, other nurses and security staff."

Antonia was blushing as the long story poured out of her. The way she fidgeted in her slim skirt told me she was still excited, thrilled in re-counting her first experiences in being a woman.

"When I accepted Josh Rann's invitation to a show, I didn't know I was on a date with a man," she went on. You couldn't be that dumb, I thought, listening to 'her' story. "He wanted to kiss me back at the dorm. I let him. Other girls were doing it with their dates. Oh, we kissed for such a long time. Josh touched my breast, making such a shock go through me, such a wonderful thrill. I didn't want him to stop. I was so embarrassed when security told us to break it up."

I wanted her to get to the part where she'd betrayed us but Antonia had too much story still to tell. She wanted to tell someone how she'd come to be who she was. "He wasn't at the next dance, Josh, but other men were," she went on. "I let, I let, Ben Garner take me home. He kissed even better than Josh."