



*Reluctant Press* presents:

# Reconciled To Desire

Philippa Peters



ILLUSTRATIONS BY

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**A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL**

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# Reconciled To Desire

by **Philippa Peters**

*This continues the story of David McCann begun in Release of Desire.*

## **I AM FIRED**

The note on my desk said I should report to Mr. Corcoran's office immediately. I was early so there were only a few secretaries and early birds like Joe Ascetti, with his yen to make partner by the time he was thirty, at work at their terminals. So, I didn't have to run a gauntlet of people I knew in the firm, which is why I was in early. I hoped to hide in my cubicle and leave after most of the others were gone.

George Corcoran's secretary was an older woman who was quite flustered at seeing me so early at her desk, I think. It took no time at all before I was sent into the sumptuously furnished inner sanctum of a senior partner's office.

I prayed that this was about the good work I had done on the company's communications folder, highlighted by the recommendation. I wanted it to be that. It wasn't, of course.

Corcoran had several newspapers on his desk, open to the wire service pictures of the Halloween contest winners at the Ulysses. He looked over his half glasses at me and came straight to the point.

“A stockbroker named David...” he said without bothering with a greeting or invitation to sit down. He jabbed at the larger picture in the Post, showing three girls, Kelly, Ginny and me, David, vamping the audience, mouths in a lipsticked O, looking over our shoulders at the camera, my legs being the ones exposed for

anyone to see how shapely they were in dark pantyhose. My mouth was so dry and my heart beating so heavily I didn't dare answer. I must have looked like a rabbit caught in the headlights of an onrushing truck.

"I will ask it," he said, looking over his glasses at me. "That is you, isn't it?" He pointed with his finger at me in my blonde wig and heavy makeup. I hadn't thought that anyone could tell by the photograph. When I had looked at it at my desk, I went hot at the sight, breaking out in perspiration. But it was rather good, fascinating and flattering to my growing female ego. I thought I looked more like Marilyn than either Ginny or Kelly in the photos but, as David, I was nothing at all like Norma Jean Baker or her blonde alter ego. But I definitely looked womanly.



Should I lie? I had been debating that all over the weekend. But I had been thinking of the challenges I would likely get from Jenny, Herb, Buddy or Louise. They would certainly notice my eyebrows. Even my glasses couldn't hide the ravages we had committed there. I had thrashed around in bed as I played and re-played different scenarios involving just such a challenge.

I had been prepared to be angry, embarrassed, ridiculed, put down, even congratulated on my performance as Marilyn but now that I faced one of the most important men in the company, all I felt was numbness and resentment. I hadn't killed anybody, robbed anybody or committed any crime. I had done the opposite

in fact. I had done my best for the portfolio on which I had worked and I was one of the best profit producers for Connelly, Corcoran and O'Brien. I had worn a dress in a public performance. Well, a little more than that, to be fair. A *lot* more than that, to be honest. But what I did in my private life was my own affair, wasn't it?

I looked up at Corcoran's face and knew with a sinking feeling that it wasn't. I had delayed too long for any denial to be accepted. "Yes, it was me," I said, trying to keep the shakes out of my voice.

"You enjoy wearing women's clothes in public," said Corcoran in a neutral voice. "You are a transvestite."

"It was a one-time thing for Halloween," I said, knowing that my voice was wobbling all over the place. I had had to practice with Kelly at breakfast to keep my voice low and in a masculine register after so much continuous speaking as Heather. Now, I couldn't tell where my voice was coming from, only that George Corcoran was looking at me in astonishment.

Kelly had told me what to say if I was confronted and I had been pleased that she had been thinking of me and the troubles I might face at work. I repeated what she had told me to say, "My girl friend and her friend had the idea and sucked me into it. We had no idea that we would win the stupid contest, never mind be photographed and have it go national."

I could see that Corcoran was not buying it. "You did not answer my question," he said, still peering at me over his glasses. "But that is probably irrelevant, isn't it?"

He closed the papers on his desk and then deposited them in his waste basket. "I do hate phone calls at my weekend home," he said while I felt as if someone had suddenly applied a blow torch to my skin, "especially the kinds that suggest an employee of my firm is some kind of deviant, worse, a *sexual* deviant."

"I'm not ..." I began, my throat hoarse and grating.

"Spare me the lies," Corcoran said, lifting a hand in a parody, if he had but known it, of our performance of the Supremes. "I have heard them again and again from those found to have a secret sexual peccadillo. I know you will swear that it will never happen again, that it was one time, that you will be the perfect employee from now on. I have heard that so often. Once upon a time, I even believed it of some people.

"You may be the most exemplary employee ever in the future, and your work record here says that you will be a great analyst, but these things will have to become true at another place of business."

I began to shake, to stutter. He couldn't mean it. I couldn't be fired, just like that.

"We shall terminate your contract with us, Mr. McCann," he said forcefully. "You will of course receive termination reimbursement but please do not ask us for any recommendation should you choose to apply for work with another stock-

broker. Not that, I think, any firm in the city will hire you. You will find that your impersonation of Miss Monroe and your feminization of yourself over the last few weeks at this firm are widely known throughout the city's business community. I have had to exert considerable influence not to have you and this company linked in the local papers. That is the best I can do for you right now. You probably should consider work in some other business."

"In *what* other business?" I asked bitterly, letting the words out before I thought about the impression they would make.

He glanced at his garbage can and raised his eyebrows. "How about female impersonation?" he asked, a slight smirk coming to his mouth. "You seem to be remarkably good at it."

I wanted to smack him; I was so angry and frustrated. "We have had offers," I said, knowing there was still a quiver in my voice. "We would have to actively pursue publicity, then."

"Drag us in, if you like, Mr. McCann," he said, smiling at his own pun. "With you no longer working here, it is a different story from the one they wanted to print today. Tomorrow, it will be about an *ex*-stockbroker."

I had nothing left to say. What *was* there to say in the face of his intransigence? They didn't want me to work there even while I was being paid. In fact, a security guard was waiting with my coat and a box full of my belongings as I left, numb with shock and pain, from Corcoran's inner sanctum. The silent guard escorted me past busy secretaries to the elevator and out of the building.

Jenny was just coming in as I was buckling my raincoat, the box at my feet. She actually smiled at me. "David," she said brightly. "Want to walk up with me?" She obviously thought I had just arrived for work, like her.

"I've just been canned," I told her, my lip still quivering as I tried to grasp the news myself.

"Oh no!" she gasped, her hand reaching out to me to touch my arm. "Because of Saturday night?" She actually looked concerned.

"Yes," I said, picking up my box. I looked at her defiantly, trembling inside but defying her to say anything.

"That's terrible," she said and seemed to mean it. "You and your friends were so good. It made our night and weekend." Her voice trailed off and I could imagine the speculations she and her friends must have been making about me.

"It also made all the papers," I said bitterly. "It doesn't seem to have been very hard to work out who 'David the stockbroker' was."

"No," Jenny agreed. "You really shouldn't have done it so openly, you know. I mean, there are other gay people in the firm, you know, but they don't ..."

"I'm not gay," I snapped and was pleased to see how astonished she looked. "It was just a prank that got out of hand." I related Kelly's version of the facts but I could see Jenny wasn't buying that any more than Corcoran had.

“I have to go,” she said, looking into the building as if suddenly aware that other people might see her talking to me. “Call me, David, if you need help. I don't know that many people but I will keep my ears open for you.”

I left her and headed down Great Met Street and finally over to the Whittimore itself. It was strange to see so many people rushing about, couriers and bike messengers. There were people going for breakfast and on their way to business meetings, briefcases in hand, the girls, so smart in their business suits; they all seemed to be in a rush. And I wasn't part of it any more.

I was almost crying when I got back to our apartment, our apartment for only a short time, and entered an almost silent sanctuary, light pouring in the windows as it never did when I got home in the evenings. The whole place felt empty and lonely, just like me.

The phone rang and it was Nora's voice on the other end asking if she could leave a message for David McCann.

“This is David,” I said, dropping my voice after realizing that I had automatically answered in a high, light, breathless tone.

There was silence for a moment and then Nora said, “Was that first voice yours, too?”

“Ginny's,” I lied desperately. “We both picked up at the same time. How are you?”

“I'm fine,” she answered briskly. “And so are you if your picture in the paper is anything to go by ... David, are you still there?”

“What picture is that?” I asked dully, waiting for the recriminations to start.

“Mom saw it first,” said Nora. “She knew it was you. We had to buy a few papers before Gerry said he could see you in that Marilyn Monroe costume. Why would you do that, David, and so publicly? Now I know why you didn't want us to come and stay with you next month. Aline said you would be doing something like this as soon as you got far enough away from home and she was right, wasn't she? Aren't you going to say anything, David?”

After the sledgehammer blows she had just laid on me, what was there to say? My own family, seeing me dressed as a glamorous woman, had recognized me. Even my own brother-in-law knew about me! I was an object of fun and ridicule everywhere.

“What is there to say?” I said slowly, at last.

“You could say you're sorry,” said my sister.

Sorry for what? It crossed my mind to say that but I didn't. Perhaps Nora caught that anyway because she started going on by how much I had hurt our mother by the dressing up games I had pulled as a kid and wasn't I ever going to grow up and be a man? That really got to me.

“There's more than one kind of man, you know,” I said, interrupting her long harangue.

“What is *that* supposed to mean?” she asked sharply.

“I'm not like Dad,” I said. “I'm not off with the boys every night drinking. I don't treat women like Bart Hoover.”

“No,” she sneered. “You just get into their clothes.”

I couldn't take that from my sister, not with the blows I had just taken.

“Oh, jeez, Davey, I'm sorry,” she said quickly before I could think of a suitable insult in retort. She sounded distressed. “I promised Mom that I wouldn't get angry with you. She can't talk to you yet. She says she'd be too embarrassed, not know how to talk to you now. I promised myself I wouldn't be so bitchy to you. I do know you can't help it. Mom says the shrink really helped her to understand you, to understand all about transvestites, but *I* can't, really I can't. You know, it happens to other people, in other families, not in one like ours.”

She went on a while, talking about what we had never, ever, talked about before. It was as if the floodgates had opened. I couldn't believe half of what I was hearing. I couldn't believe how my sisters and mother had covered for me in previous indiscretions, either, particularly from my father, or the excuses they had given to protect me at Halloween when I was in my glory in their old clothes.

“Nora,” I had to cut her off, my heart hammering away. “I-I don't want to talk about this.”

“No,” she said. There was a long silence. “You did look pretty fantastic, you know. When we come up next month, are we going to see you? And which David are we going to see?”

I told her about us having to move out of the apartment.

“Because of your cross-dressing?” she asked.

“Only a little bit,” I admitted. “But I have to find a new place right away and I don't know where I'm going now that I'm finished at Connelly. They didn't like the photographs or the show we put on, either.”

“Oh no!” Nora cried down the phone. “You've lost your job!”

“I'll get another,” I said, trying to sound confident and even a little flippant. “You wouldn't believe the job offers we've had for Threesome to appear all over town.”

“Oh, you couldn't do *that*,” said Nora quickly.

“Why not?” I asked.

She was quiet for a moment. “My brother, the female impersonator,” she said, a catch in her voice.

“It's steady work,” I tried to joke. “It's very glamorous.”

“Don't joke,” she said. “Oh heck, how am I ever going to tell Mom what it was we talked about in this conversation?”

“You are still coming here before Christmas?” I asked.

“No, that's what I was phoning you for, really. Gerry's move has been put back three months, till spring. We thought we'd come up in January or February,” said Nora. “But we'll see you when you're home for Christmas this year. You will be, won't you?”

“If I'm not abroad,” I said flippantly again.

“Was that another of the jokes I'm going to have to get used to?” she said. I hadn't realized I had punned and so I was able to laugh. I promised to phone her immediately when I had a new place and a new phone number and she said she and Gerry would probably stay at a hotel in town. I gave her the names of a few good ones on the south side, across the river. We said good-bye awkwardly, promising to phone but all I could think of was Christmas and how terrible it was going to be at home this year.

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## ALINE'S LITTLE DRESS

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I did go home for Christmas. I didn't have anything else to do. Kelly had moved out a couple of days after I was fired and after we settled the lease with our landlords. A grinning Dave Matthews actually carried her across the parking lot as if she was a bride being carried across the threshold. She looked at him with smiling eyes as she had never looked at me.

Ginny blithely announced that she was moving in with Angie Clymer and that was that in regard to the Whittimore Apartment. I was left alone all day in that place and I must admit to indulging myself in crossdressing but, with the girls' wardrobes gone, I was just a shadow of the Heather I used to be.

I wrote to Lucy and Joanne and revealed how much I had come out of the closet as they were always urging me to. Lucy wrote back and suggested we meet whenever I was in her city. I'd be on holiday in Florida some day, she said, and we could go out together, just two ladies on the town.

That was all the excitement in my life except for occasional run-ins with Ben, Mike, and their friends who weren't very sure of me. I didn't dress outside the apartment and I could sense their looks when I passed them going in or out, as they wondered about me.

I did send out my resume to many firms in the city. I got back two awful comments about queers that I dumped, quivering, into the trash. Once I went to one of the biggest firms in town but the whispering and pointed looks I got from the receptionists as I waited to give my resume to the Personnel Office convinced me not to expect any reply.

I found rooms for a monthly fee after Christmas at a motel on Hubbard. It was in a seedy district but near the city center. No one, I thought, would challenge a girl leaving my room in the evening. I would move in after Christmas and I would have to find work and friends pretty soon. The room was as cheap as a furnished apartment for one. It was only marginally better than having to be in the same building as someone I knew. It was utilitarian in décor and I almost cried when I took it and paid the manager. All I could think of was my lovely room at the Whit-timore.

I wasn't immediately badly off for money. I was being paid and I would get a three-month severance pay, in consideration of which I had to sign a waiver of all lawsuits against Connelly over my termination. What a sensational lawsuit that would be, I thought. I also had money I had made on the market and had invested for myself. When Lomax-Lewiston declared unexpectedly huge successes in the Christmas market, I almost doubled my assets.

So, I wasn't bad off. The motel would hardly cost as much as sharing with the girls. That would stop my bank account from frittering away. What I lacked most was company. Oh, sure, I could have dressed up and gone to one of those clubs that who was it, Mike or someone? had talked about. I was scared to death of that, though. It wasn't sex I was after. I didn't pursue Josie and, with Kelly re-turning our dresses, I wasn't surprised that Josie didn't phone either.

I wanted friendship of the kind I'd had with Kelly and Ginny. But I heard nothing from them and I couldn't look up anyone from work or from the set that knew Greg Cuthbert. I would have to think about leaving the city, it occurred to me. I would have to make a fresh start. Maybe in Florida where Lucy lived, though she said the employment situation was bad if you didn't speak Spanish. Joanne was in Iowa where she went around the houses of like-minded friends and seemed very pleased with her social life. I wondered what I could do outside the big cities I was so used to. It was as natural to me to read the stock columns each day as it was for others to read sports statistics or the minutiae of recipes and fashions. I knew no one else with a hobby like mine and with my interests.

So, I went home for Christmas with very mixed emotions. It would be nice to have someone to talk with, and it wouldn't. I couldn't guess how I was going to be treated or the topics of conversation that would now be open for discussion after my talk with Nora.

Nora met me at the airport with Mom's car. She kept looking at me as we walked out to the car and exchanged the usual inanities about the flight and the weather.

In the car, she finally said, "You're much thinner, aren't you? You're not ill with anything, are you?"

I had to smile. "No," I said. "I do not have AIDS. I've just been dieting, that's all. I feel much better now, fitter anyway."

"You've had your ears pierced, too," she said. "Mom's not going to like that."

"It's the style for everybody these days," I said, knowing I would have to endure this scrutiny not once but many times this holiday.

"Not both ears," Nora grunted.

"Yes, both ears," I said as reasonably as I could. "Anything else?"

She hadn't mentioned my eyebrows which had grown back somewhat, short and spiky. I had brushed them messily, and I guessed by her non-comment that they didn't look so bad.

She gave me a quick look and then sighed, flexing her hands that had been gripping the steering wheel. "Aline is at home with all her kids," she said abruptly. "She left Brian this week. She's in tears all the time and leaning on Mom a lot. Dad's went to the golf course with Gerry. It's like living in a Greek tragedy at the moment at home."

"And here I come," I said.

"Yes," she said. "But Aline and Gerry won't say anything in front of Dad. I told them you'd walk out if they did."

I felt a tightness in my throat. "You're probably right," I said.

There was a little pause. "How's your job search?" she asked, clearly trying to change the subject.

"I have a few irons in the fire," I said which brought a sharp look from her.

Nora was right about the atmosphere at home. The moment she saw me, Aline burst into tears and flung her arms about me to hug me. In the first day, I heard the story of how Brian treated her so badly at least three times. I was glad to get out on the second day with Nora to do some shopping.

Of course, having sisters meant going to buy some clothing for them and it was with guilty pleasure that I accompanied Nora through several clothing stores and lingerie departments. She was embarrassed at first for me when she began hunting for panties to stuff Mom's and Aline's Christmas stockings. Then, she started to buy a blouse for Mom that I could see would never suit her coloring and I told her so. She sarcastically asked *me* to find a blouse for Mom and so I did, a classy, burgundy silk that made Nora raise her eyebrows at me.

"So what are you going to buy *me*?" she asked with a smile. I had seen a beautiful suit in Daniers and I guided her to it. I had seen so many girls wearing something like it going to work, the skirt up about mid-thigh.

"Oh, please," she said with a laugh. "Have you seen my thighs lately? It would look great on a thin girl ... like you." She gave me a teasing half-smile.

"You're right," I said, smiling back. "If you're looking for a gift for me, you are seeing what I want."

She laughed outright. "Can you see Dad's face when you open your gift?" she asked, taking my arm. "No, you get a sweater like you always do!"

I sighed. "What color this year?" I asked. "They've some really nice ones over there with the black skirts."

“Not pink,” she said firmly.

I agreed. It wasn't my color. If I wore that Marilyn wig from Masks, though, hmm.

The days hurried on to Christmas and some of us tried to do everything to make it good for Aline's children who were puzzled about why Daddy wasn't there with them. Eight-year old Breanne knew that her Mom and Dad had been fighting but kept slipping out with phrases that set Aline off again. She'd rush off to her bedroom to weep and mope so Mom and Nora were roped in to caring for the babies, two-year old Samantha and four-month old Craig.

I became the game player with Breanne and five-year old Michael as Dad and Gerry, who had given me a few, pointed looks, disappeared to the golf course. More to the nineteenth hole, I thought. It didn't surprise me when they came back with tickets to the big Boxing Day Supper at the Golf Club. It also didn't surprise me when, on Boxing Day afternoon, our next door neighbor's kid called that she was going out with her boy friend instead and wouldn't babysit.

Aline had begun to talk about seeing all her friends at the supper, to tell them all about the odious things Brian had done, I was sure, and so it didn't take much to persuade everyone that I was the logical choice to babysit.

“But you can't look after a baby!” Aline had objected.

“He changed Craig for me yesterday,” Mom pointed out.

“And fed him,” said Nora. In between the lines could be heard the question of what Aline had been doing. Having one of her lie-downs was the answer. I must admit that she looked genuinely bewildered, not having known who was looking after her children while she was out of it.

The children were good and were asleep before everyone left. I knew that no one would be back until one o'clock at the earliest since supper wasn't served until midnight.

I hadn't been by myself in the house since I had been home. If one of the kids had been up, I might not have been prowling about the house, the familiar ache in my stomach and the usual tenseness growing all through me. I had to look in Aline's room. There in her closet was the dress I had longed to wear as a teenager when I had first seen her in it. It was white with flowers on it. It had a low, round neck but halter-style top. It was a spring dress that flared out from the belted waist with one short skirt over the other and, of course, there were petticoats on the inside that always rustled seductively when she walked in it.

I swallowed hard. I hung it back up with trembling fingers. I had none of my stuff with me anyway and so I went back downstairs and put on the TV. I went up and checked on the kids. It didn't help. The tension would not go away. I made myself a drink. I was totally aware that I was alone and could do anything I wanted and no one would know. How many opportunities would I have at home? I went up and looked at the dress again. I couldn't. What if one of the kids woke up? I would have to feed the littlest one, anyway, at one o'clock. I went back downstairs, my head pounding, swallowing hard.