



*Reluctant Press* presents:

# The Princess

Philippa Peters



ILLUSTRATIONS BY C. HAIGHT

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AN 'ADULT TV' E-BOOK

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# THE PRINCESS

by **Philippa Peters**

## I. ATARA'S PLOT

*HERO OR HEROINE? How to refer to the Princess, later Queen, Rina has always been a difficulty for serious historians. The ordinary person of Niccobi always refers to Rina as 'she' despite 'incontrovertible evidence' that Rina was a 'he'. She has statues erected to her that depict her as the attractive woman she became. There are none that depict her as the Army cadet she was reputed to be before her transformation.*

*In Niccobi, too, as part of Independence Day celebrations, at the balls and festivities, it is not considered illegal or improper for young men to 'become' Princess Rina at the balls and celebrations that follow. Indeed, it would be a strange celebration to have a festivity without at least one 'Rina' present, willing to sacrifice her masculinity for the good of the state. (From the authorized biography, "The Boy Princess of Niccobi" by Helena Meravon.)*

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The Storm Guard of Therentia caught me early. At least I fired shots at the invaders, I thought sourly, as I lay on the wooden bed of my tiny cell. The blast of a stun grenade had taken out my section of the outer citadel walls. As I was reeling, clutching my ears, my broken helmet yards away, a grinning Theren asked me if I wanted to die like my men. I looked about and saw bodies everywhere, Sergeant Corso, the toughest man I knew, in two pieces over his shattered cannon piece.

After I finished throwing up, my Theren captor put my hands in shackles and hauled me to his command post. When I said my name, Lieutenant Kellas Buron Osterick of Ashun, the Theren major looked up from his computer and grinned at me.

“We got us royalty, lads,” he said to the grinning Storm Guard, looking at me. “He goes into the royal cells.”

That is how I ended up stripped stark naked. I was then thrown into the cells beneath the citadel I was pledged to defend. I knew why. A Storm Guard who let a prisoner escape, even by way of suicide, was a dead man as was the officer who commanded him. I was too dazed anyway to think of anything like flight, but every now and then I sensed eyes watching me from the tiny grill in the door.

I was dragged out once and frogmarched into the lower crypts of the Citadel. I saw other men and women, as naked and bruised as I, being brought in too. I didn't recognize any of the people we were shown to, with their helmets concealing their faces. The way they gestured, however, made it seem that they were very angry.

As I was marched in past the tombs, I suddenly saw why. Ossarie, our King, had vowed that he and his family would not be slaves of the mad King of Therentia, Gendrick. The new tombs in the lower hall showed me why. I'd heard that they would take poison rather than be captured and it looked like they had. Five sarcophagi were partly broken open by Storm Guards and I could see that they were painted in House Ospero colors. I just wished our King had spent more on fighting men and better arms than on preparing his own funeral.

A woman in red stopped the guards marching me by and had them hold up my head. She looked me over very carefully. I couldn't think why such a beautiful woman would be there until she said, “That's enough. Guard this youth well,” to the lout twisting my arms back.

“Yes, my Lady Atara,” mumbled the guard, almost sneering at her.

I knew the name. She was Gendrick's concubine, his mistress really, since he had no wife. Ossarie had had three daughters and we all knew that the Therentian ambassador had proposed several times the marriage of one of the daughters to Gendrick “to bring peace to all of Vesia.” We all knew that once he had married an Ospero, Gendrick would have claimed our city as his own. We didn't blame Ossarie for his disdainful remarks to the Therentian ambassador. We knew of the brutality wrought on Esta and Covarri, other states overcome by the Storm Guard. Every telecast carried vivid reminders of their attacks on the broken nobilities of those cities. If only Ossarie had done something about it, allied himself with the other major states, but he hadn't. He was still negotiating a peace treaty when the Therens crossed the Border Hills and swept down on our hastily assembled defences.

What was a concubine doing inspecting the prisoners of the defence of Niccobi, I wondered. Then I fell into daydreams that Gendrick might have been there in the vaults, ranting over the way his will had been thwarted by King Ossarie. If I had had my hands free, as I wished, I could have mounted a last attack but even that would have been of no use. We had only done a little self-defence, one-on-one combat in training. We hadn't learned how to kill an opponent with our bare hands. Sergeant Corso could have done it. He

would have showed a nineteen-year-old, newly appointed cadet officer how to do it if only he had time, I was certain.

I wasn't back in my cell long before it opened and I was dragged out again. I wasn't the only one. I couldn't see much but several of the men, no, boys, who had survived the onslaught were being hustled along corridors with me while Therentian flunkies and guards smiled at our nakedness as we were hauled past.

We passed an open window where I was slowed for a moment and I was able to see down into the Inner Ward. A group of the female servants of the castle, mostly the elderly and wounded, were being herded into a straight line by Storm Guards. The young had been released just the day before to join fighting groups with their menfolk. A volley of shots rang out and there were few high-pitched screams as the women died in the courtyard. There was more screaming then from those only wounded. It was cut off by single shots of the officers walking in among the bodies and 'cleaning up' as Therens called killing the wounded.

Horror-stricken, I was then marched forward along passageways I'd never been in before into the women's quarters, or so it had been under the Ospero Kings, of the citadel. Atara sat in a decorated chair and regarded us somberly as we were thrown onto the carpet before her. I heard whimpering from my left but didn't dare to glance to see who it was.

Another officer came in from behind us and went to stand beside her, leaning on the back of her chair as she pointed at me. "What did you see, Lady Atara," he asked in a deep baritone, his iron-grey eyes staring at me, "that no one else could see?"

"You were all looking for Princess Teva," she said lightly but her words carried to me and I felt my blood run cold. "I looked for all the princesses, Teva, Heday and Rina. I looked in both the likely and unlikely places. This one," she pointed at me, "is the most promising. Oh, I agree that she does not have the perfect female form that we would desire, but, with the surgeons, doctors and cosmetologists we employ to keep us all so healthy, I am sure we could use the same to produce acceptable changes in this Squire Osterick, or should I say, Princess Rina."

"What craziness is this?" asked the tall, dark officer, his face a mask of fury, while I felt nothing but a sense of dread.

She was still looking at me, a smile on her full, red, made-up lips. "Buron Osterick is actually the next in line to the throne," she said with a laugh. "Now that you've had all the nobility of Niccobi slaughtered, and if I know how to read genealogical tables, this is the heir. Can't you see the likeness in the face to Rina? I could see it right away."

The Therentian lord shuddered and I did the same. "You can't mean..." he began. "No, he would never allow this."

"He's already given his permission," said Atara coolly, turning to look at him. "The others here will serve as practice for the surgeons. Oh, he will co-operate, will our new Princess Rina, or his two little brothers, Juton and Maron, will find their way from my gentle protection to your execution squads."

The Theren looked revolted. I could understand that. I was revolted by her words as well. She couldn't mean what she was saying. I tried to stand. I began to say, "You..." meaning to add how evil and wrong they were to even think of me being co-operative in any way for anything with the enemies of my country but I couldn't say anything more as a heavy truncheon whacked across the back of my head.

As I lay groaning in front of her chair, looking at her red, high-heeled boot, I heard the Theren object again. "But," he said firmly, "this will not work. Isn't the whole idea of a Niccobian marriage for Gendrick so that his heir will be ruler of both kingdoms? This one could not be a mother."

"No," she said very softly; I think only the Theren and I could hear. "But, my Lord Chasmun," she used the name of the Lord Marshal of Therentia, commander of its armed forces, "I can conceive, and she can raise my child as her own."

"A concubine's brat sits on the throne of Therentia?" he hissed and I opened my eyes and looked up at him. He looked very, very angry.

"He says he doesn't care who survives him," she murmured. "You know he will marry many times in the years ahead. We are at war with the world."

The Lord Marshal stared at Atara strangely. "There will be an alliance against us," he said slowly. "No one trusts him enough to ally with us."

"It might all change," she said and her voice dropped even lower. I think she whispered, "If there was a Regency for an infant king."

His face went white. "Treason!" he hissed but his voice was so blurred I doubt it carried past me.

"Just so, my Lord Chasmun," she said sweetly as she raised her voice. She clapped her hands and motioned to all of us prisoners. "I want them all in the baths at the end of this hall," she snapped. "And I promise a hundred golds to anyone who brings me the tongue of anyone who speaks of what we are doing here today."

## II. THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

*AMARAXEL. The Emperor Pherenie, in his later years, became, it is said, impotent. At a masked ball in his palace, several of the younger nobility disguised themselves as women, apparently a common occurrence at balls in those debauched times. The Emperor Pherenie, however, was not aware that the young maiden who danced and flirted with him was indeed the young Lord Amaraxel.*

*Many of those at the Solstice Summoning knew who the Emperor was wooing so ardently and regarded the Emperor as an even greater figure of fun. This might have encouraged the young man as people knew him and laughed at him. His disguise was not then as perfect as it might have been or was to become.*

*Discovering himself aroused for the first time in many months, the Emperor proposed to the comely youth, who felt that the Emperor knew him and was making sport of him. The youth blithely accepted, little thinking that the Emperor, enraged in discovering that he had been duped, would actually force his 'betrothed' to go on with the hastily arranged marriage ceremony.*

*Thus it was that the Emperor Pherenie's consort, for the last seven years of his reign, was the unfortunate Amaraxel, although 'she' was known to most as the Empress Beatha. Pherenie showered his last wife with jewels and fashionable dresses from Opar. She had maids to do her hair and to make her the most beautiful and feminine Empress in living memory.*

*So sumptuously did she dress that the renowned artist, Forrom, painted her and is said to have declared, "No matter her gender, the Empress Beatha is the epitome of female loveliness to the Empire of Vesia." It was rumoured that he was also her lover if that can be believed. His paintings of her were reputed to be the greatest of his works to date and destroyed by the new Emperor Dinither after Pherenie's death.*

*Empress Beatha was found dead, proclaimed a suicide by Dinither, though it has often been said in servants' halls that she tried and succeeded in seducing the Great Emperor himself and that he killed 'her' in a fit of rage when he found out her true sex.*

*(From the suppressed history, "Forbidden Loves of the Empire", by Jagun Relley, a contemporary and younger son of Lord Caraxel, cousin to the unfortunate Amaraxel, quoted by Meravon to show that Princess Rina was not a unique phenomenon in Vesian history.)*

"You cannot be serious," said the thin-faced little man I thought looked like a weasel.

I had just undergone a most excruciating session in the women's baths. Silent, mocking women, Atara's attendants it seemed, had bathed me and shaved me and put hot wax on my face as they had taken hair off me in all places it was possible to grow hair. When I frantically protested and tried to resist, one had just flipped me over and left me face down in the bath, my manacled hands in no way able to prevent me from drowning.

I wasn't the only one who was nearly drowned. I saw Niremun, a cadet like me, get the same treatment. I saw his body covered in pink cream as mine had been and watched the attendants roll great strips off black hair from his body. He looked totally frightened as he was pushed under again casually as he tried to trip one of the attendants with his feet.

I was hauled out and two attendants pushed me down the hallway to where the weaselly man was talking to Atara. "Leave him for a while," I heard one woman say to a Guard as Niremun threshed in the deep bathtub.

"You can't be serious," said the little man as I stood there shivering, not just from the cold but also from the abject fear of what they were going to do to me.

"Reneth," said Atara softly. "You have only one function in the Court of Therentia. You have the responsibility of painting and otherwise improving the faces of the lords for their public transmissions."

"I am a Director of Communications," Reneth sniffed, looking at my nakedness in disgust. Then he looked at my face and seemed shocked. That mortified me even more and I tried to think of a way to get one of the Guards to kill me, quickly if I could, or slowly if necessary, because of the panic the plotting was inducing in me.

"You've often said that, through your skill with makeup, you could make anyone appear as anyone else," Atara continued. "You boasted to Lord Fave at the Esta Revels that you could even make a man into a woman, did you not?" She smiled but it was a creepy, oily smile, reminding me of a snake about to strike. "Was that an idle boast?"

Reneth's nostrils flared. "I never say or do anything idly, woman," he snapped. He didn't flatter the concubine by calling her Lady Atara, I noticed through my shaking. Her words, too, made me feel sick. They were going to do something awful to me and I knew it. I was terrified and would have taken any way out if I could have found one.

"What is it you want me to do?" asked Reneth.

Atara didn't answer right away. She looked at me and I shifted a little to conceal my masculine nakedness from her. I knew, without hair, how much like a little boy I must appear. If the Therens were humiliating us before killing us, they had probably done this before and knew that this was worse than death.

"Your boast," Atara said, "has come to the attention of the Lord Sovereign himself." I saw Reneth whiten in fear as she moved behind me and I couldn't see what she was doing. Then I felt her hands touch my shoulders gently and I shuddered and flinched.

"Look at this youth," she said to Reneth. "Before he leaves these chambers, Reneth, you are charged with transforming him into the Princess Rina of Niccobi."

Horror coursed through me and I tried to pull away from her gentle, caressing hands. Reneth looked horrified too. "Really, Atara," he gasped. "What kind of madness is this?"

Atara moved back in front of me, swinging my manacled arms. "It is no joke," she said softly. "That I can assure you, Director of Communications. You are now part of a very deadly game. You will be one of the few people who know that the real Princess Rina is, in fact, dead."

"But I just heard on the telecast news," began Reneth and then he stopped and looked at me. "Oh no!" he gasped, even paler than before.

"This knowledge has already proved fatal to more than one witness," said Atara. "Therentian and Niccobian alike. The first whisper Gendrick hears, all of us will be lucky if he only has our throats cut."

Reneth looked about to choke on his fear which was the same state that I was in.

She ran a soft hand up my arm to my hair. "You see," she said. "I thought it was Rina when I first saw him, with her hair cut short and disguised as a boy to evade capture.

What story are they, our beloved communicators, putting out about her?"

"Gendrick came here to rescue the Princess," said Reneth nervously. "King Ossarie had promised her hand in marriage and went back on his word. He tried to have her killed as he killed his other daughters in a rage at their advice to surrender their sister who had agreed to marry Gendrick, *wanted* to marry him, in fact. A loyal jailer, Caggot, I think they called him, refused the cruel order to kill his Princess and hid her until Gendrick arrived." He licked his lips nervously. "It will never work, you know. It's a story with far too many holes in it."



“But when Princess Rina appears,” said Atara, “and confirms this traitor’s story of her rescue, there will at least be confusion and, if the Niccobians try to kill her, a propaganda triumph for us all.”

They both looked at me and I edged back from them right into the heavy nightstick held by a silent Storm Guard. He caught me on my buttocks and I jumped, feeling that I had been scalded and they both laughed at me.

“Let’s get her dressed,” said Atara, and I felt sick and chilly throughout my body. I should have let myself drown in the scented bathwater; if I had the chance again, I would take that way out.

I don’t know why but the Lord Marshal Chasmun was waiting in the chamber I was hauled to by the Storm Guard. It was he who released the manacles from my arms and motioned to the Guard to be gone. Atara and Reneth had been talking about the other prisoners as I had left them; I was alone with this tall, powerful, man, looking down on me as I tried to massage my swollen wrists and twist my body so that my manhood wasn’t exposed to him.

“You have heard too much,” he said directly to me, running fingers through his well-groomed goatee beard and moustache.

“N-No, my-my lord,” I stammered and his grey eyes went flinty as he frowned at me.

“What do you think is going to happen to the man that just left here?” he asked abruptly. “Or the women who are helping Atara.”

“I-I don’t know,” I gasped nervously. I flushed as he looked me up and down.

“Not one of the Guards who entered the women’s apartments will live out this day,” said the Lord Marshal sourly. “Good men, too, dieing on your account.”

“I-I can’t help it,” I stammered, fear rising in me as he regarded me as if he wished me dead.

“The women will also be destroyed after their usefulness is done,” he went on in his deep baritone. “The order for the destruction of the women’s quarters and the deaths of all its inhabitants has already been signed and given to me. You can guess by whom. Yes, by your future husband.”

I quivered in fright and humiliation. Then it occurred to me that I was in the women’s quarters and I looked at him, with fear, I’m sure, written on my face.

“Yes,” he said somberly. “You will be assassinated. But not for a good while. And if Atara’s plot should work, you might even escape with your own life and those of your brothers. So, co-operate,” he said with a smile. “Even if it is against your nature as it would be any man’s, any soldier’s, to do this...this awful thing. Be a woman for the corrupt ones who have you in charge. You might get a chance to strike a blow for your country yet.”

If his words were meant to inspire me, they didn't. They just scared me even more. Then Atara and Reneth came into the chamber, arranged as a sitting room, I would have called it.

"My Lord Marshal," said Atara, giving him a brief nod of acknowledgement as Therens did to each other, men and women alike. She looked at me, rubbing at my wrists still, shivering in my anxiety at what was about to happen to me. "Where is the Guard I sent with the Princess?"

Chasmun's face showed his anger. "You have corrupted a number of the Guard in this plot of yours," he said in a clipped tone. "I have ordered that corruption removed."

"Ah," she said lightly. "And what am I to use as security?"

"The women you recruited from Stertia will suffice," he said. "Amazing to find so many mutes in one group, is it not?"

She looked at me again as she spoke. "You know as well as I do, my Lord, that the Stertians cut the vocal cords of any young girl who will not speak softly as a young girl should. The overseers can interpret their reports, however, as they are paid to do. By me. Their loyalty is to *me*."

The Lord Marshal nodded. "Use them with the Princess and her understudies," he said giving her a nod. "I leave you to your work. The first ceremony is set for the Solstice."

"What did he mean by that?" asked Reneth wildly as the Lord Marshal strode out.

Atara ignored him and pointed at me, then to a soft chair and desk with a mirror and lights all about it. I got a glimpse of myself even as I had to sit with my back to the mirror itself.

I looked like a frightened little waif from one of the beggar districts. What was so awful was that I was naked, devoid of my eyebrows, or most of them, my sideburns and my chest hair. I looked as I had at age twelve. But even then, I think I had some pubic hair. Now I had none. My head reeled as I sat down and Reneth took hold of my face.

One of the grey-clothed women who had attended us earlier entered almost silently and brought him a tray of objects that he took without acknowledging her. It was as though he was an artist painting a picture. He used brushes that tickled as he began to paint my face. I sat rigidly as Atara directed me. He worked with great adeptness, ordering me now and then to close my eyes as he worked on them, attaching new, thicker eye-lashes that threatened to stick my eyes closed; he fixed that and I had great bats in front of my eyes until he trimmed them back with a small, very sharp pair of scissors that gave me a fluttering hope for a moment.

Atara must have seen the movement of my eyes for, when he placed them on the tray and leaned back to look at his work, she reached over from the chair in which she sat beside me and removed the scissors.

Reneth painted my lips and then ran a waxy stick, lipstick, over my lips and ordered me to smear them together. "There," he said triumphantly, batting my face with some kind of powder.

Atara looked at me critically as I felt a strange taste in my mouth, my lips also seeming to want to stick together.

"I don't think that Rina ever used so much eye shadow and rouge," she said. "I also know that Niccobian women avoid using bright red lipstick as you have used on her, the women of the upper classes anyway. But," she sighed, "You have at least brought out the lines I wanted to see. Come," she signalled to one of her serving women who silently brought forward several wig blocks.

My stomach heaved as they tried them both on me, women's wigs. I wanted to get up and fight them right away until I saw the heavy club in the servant's hand, barely concealed in the folds of her long skirts. I glanced up fearfully and dark brown eyes looked at me meaningfully.

Reneth pierced my ears, stinging me and making me grunt with pain. That made Atara wince and I was pleased that some part of this plan was not going well for her. "The second," she said to Reneth and he put on the blonde wig, hair colored like my own, that I could see had kiss curls about the face and had a thick twist of hair that made me shiver as it was laid over my shoulder.

Atara took off her own earrings, dangling things of several gold and silver coins, or so I thought, and had Reneth attach them to my ears in the holes he had made. They didn't seem so heavy at first but were cold against my neck, making me shiver. The more I shivered, the more they danced against me, making me shake with fear and embarrassment as the Stertian servant smiled at me.

"I'm a genius," said Reneth proudly as Atara turned me and I could look at myself in the mirror at last. My head was not mine any more. It was a pretty girl's head, her face, her eyes, exquisitely made up, the kind of face one only saw in videos and telecasts, gracing the Royal ceremonies from the citadel.

I gasped and the woman's head on the obscene little boy's body gasped, parting her bright red lips almost in invitation. "I-I won't," I began croakily and a lash caught me across my buttocks, making me jump.

Atara loomed beside me in the mirror. "I can't apply the Stertian solution to you, my darling. So, pain is the only remedy. You will only speak when Reneth gives you permission and you will work on your voice until it is the same as hers."

I looked up at her and wanted to protest but she smiled at me, as my fears took over and she seemed to read them in me. "It won't be so hard," she said. "Princess Rina was known to be quite vapid and affected. You won't find a caricature of her voice too difficult, I assure you. Do not prove me wrong," she finished firmly.

We retired then into a bedchamber, leading off the back of the sitting room. A maid or servant was there hanging dresses and gowns onto a tall rack in the far wall, opposite a canopied bed.

"The special packages," said Atara. With a bow, the maid indicated a thick case at the end of the bed.

The curtains of the windowed doors opposite the door wafted in at a breeze bringing in the smell of flowers in bloom and, for a moment, I thought again of escape, one way or

another, but then realized where I was and my hopes were dashed. The flowery aroma could only come from Queen Jerna's Garden, the only green space in the citadel but surrounded by high walls, the 'folly' of the previous occupant of this room, now dead in the vaults with her husband.

"These you will wear at all times," said Atara, speaking evenly to me. She handed me what appeared to be a double cord, with a shaped, foamy plastic pad. "It will conceal your true sex for the time that this deception is necessary."

My hands trembled as I held the cords, not sure what I was to do. I should do nothing, I thought in sudden blind rage and frustration, and I looked up at her looking at me. The Stertian maid shifted slightly and I could sense her ready to move at me and my rage dissipated. There was no way out. Not yet, I prayed for myself.

Reneth had to help me. He positioned the pad over my male parts and told me to push them back into me. I didn't know that they could do that but Reneth insisted. Then he pulled the cords tightly up and about my waist. This time I had to cry out in the pain, as he paid no heed to my protests. Then when he released me, he only did it so that he could pull the cords more tightly; they cut into me savagely.

"Ice," said Atara to the maid. "Next time, bring ice as well to the fitting." The maid nodded, not taking her deep brown eyes off me, as I shed tears at the excruciating pain, not caring how she regarded me. "Enough," she said as Reneth would have pulled me tighter again. "I can see nothing now."

I could barely hobble as Atara brought me forward to delicate and dainty things, women's underthings, laid out on the bed. Reneth was staring at them and I could see that he was reddening as Atara picked up women's panties. "These are padded, you see," she pointed out to me. "Put them on."

I could barely do that. It hurt to move my legs but Atara waited until I had done that and, even though they were women's panties, I felt a little better not to have my genitals on display for everyone's eyes. She indicated then the garter belt and stockings and I balked. I couldn't put such women's frillery on me. The lash stung the top of my legs. I hadn't heard the other servant come in behind me.

I was almost weeping in frustration and shame as I put a woman's lacy garter belt about me, the dangling garters making me flush and go hot with the strange, sensual feel of them on my legs. I had so enjoyed taking them off Mella, the girl I had slept with after Duloy's bachelor party. What a wonderful girl she had been, squeaking at every little move I made. Nimerun had spoiled her for me later by letting me know that she was a prostitute, a part of the package that Perfumed Capital Inn served up for its celebrated bachelor parties.

The stockings were soft and silky and made me breathe heavily and flush as I put them on, stretching out to attach three garters on each leg, while three stonefaced women watched my struggle against the weird feelings that donning them aroused in me. The despicable male, Reneth, only grinned at my embarrassment and discomfiture. Atara directed more padding to the panties and for the garters to be pulled tighter, making me feel ashamed even more.