



*Reluctant Press* presents:

# The Making Suzie

Philippa Peters



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARLEY SPINN

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A 'NEW WOMAN' E-BOOK

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# THE MAKING OF SUZIE

by **Philippa Peters**

## I. DOMESTICITY

I love being a woman. Perhaps being a rich, young-looking, beautiful woman helps in that assessment. It's hard in the modern world not to be beautiful. Nanotechnology and longevity drugs have made us all the way we want to be, or, as in cases like mine, the way other people want you to be.

My daughter, Joanne, smiled at me as she walked up onto the stage in her long, white dress, one of a long stream of young girls, in white dresses, followed by teenaged boys, in black shirts and pants, who filed across the stage area of the school to receive their first doses of longurum, the longevity drug. It would slow down the growing and aging process for a very long time and guarantee about one hundred and thirty years of active, productive life before the inevitable 'Crash.' It does deserve to be written with a capital letter, since it is such a different time, that brief 'old age,' so different from the rest of a life lived as, basically, a young man or young woman.

My husband, Lord Rohan Sutcliffe, squeezed my hand as Joanne exposed her arm and the school medtech used the autodoc to find a vein and give her the first of a series of injections that she would receive for quite a long time until she was just like Rohan and I, a nanotech protected human. 'Naturals' often derided us as 'Artificial humans' and to a large extent, they are right.

Biosculpture has invaded even childhood and the children who followed Joanne and her age group were all handsome or beautiful. If you had even more money than the average citizen of Carmichael, you could do even more. The peak of artificiality was reached in

the very expensive nanotech transformation where, not only looks, but your gender could be determined, as mine had been after sixty-plus years as a male.

This wasn't a program that was widely known or talked about. In fact, to be truthful, it was, by its sexual nature, a secretive program. Even those unwillingly changed seemed not to want to have their condition made common knowledge. I certainly didn't. I may have been unwilling at the start but now I enjoyed being a woman. I loved being a wife and a mother. I was enthralled at seeing my daughter following in my high-heeled footsteps. I hugged my husband's arm in return for his squeeze of my hand as our daughter went through her rite of passage to adulthood and citizenship.

Rohan knew of course what his touch was doing to me. I could feel it in him as well. I wished I was at home in Shannondale where neither one of us would have had to control our lust for one another. That was the greatest benefit of being a woman. I had a man who would love me at any time of the day or night, who would strip my clothes from me and have me in his office or any nook or cranny where he could get on top of me and into me, while I would lift my skirts and co-operate with him in every way that I could. Such thoughts made me squeeze his hand even harder and he got the message.

"Later," he whispered in my jewelled ear and I had to practise self-control. Only with Rohan, I didn't have any at all and he knew it. My dratted husband was teasing me, knowing how aroused I would be when he could get his hands on me, perhaps in our darkened car on the ride back to Shannondale.

Lady Helen Sutcliffe, my co-wife, on Rohan's other side, had as much to do with Joanne's conception as I did. At times like these ceremonies, with my daughter's blue eyes gleaming at me, I loved being a mother. I loved being able to hug my children and kiss them openly. I loved my husband doing the same to me, my long silk skirts swirling about my high heels as I played the role of doting mother. I didn't care any more how I became a mother, having been born a man.

I knew Doctor Jacqueline Ivany, as much a changeling as me, so to speak, would have loved to have had me in her lab to find out the reasons why I was as I was. She talked about how little was really certain in genetics. She had told me about rare mutations that appeared sometimes when a person had two DNA codes. That had been noted at the start of DNA testing in the twentieth century; she suspected that I had a condition similar to that. I might have been born as twins if something had not gone wrong in my conception, she theorized, as she begged me to let her test to find answers to her queries.

I didn't care. I loved being a woman and didn't care how it was that I had become one. Not now. Not with my wonderful husband on my arm who loved me and fulfilled me in ways that Jackie Ivany's string of temporary husbands, and her daughter, Miranda, seemed to fulfill her.

There were usually cameras upon me and Lady Helen, my co-wife, who put her arm tenderly about Rohan's waist, and hugged my hand at the same time. We stood as an anthem played. Our husband was, after all, the most important man on the planet of Carmichael, its Lord Protector, in fact.

The students re-crossed the stage, receiving their citizenship certificates from the chief educator of the Shannon school district. Such ceremonies didn't happen anywhere else in

the Nebula sector of the galaxy as far as I knew. Trust Carmichael, my adopted planet, to make a first step into adulthood a proper, ritualized ceremony.

Here, everything of importance was ritualized. And a ceremony *must* be followed by a ball. The Children's Ball would be first with its obligatory curfew and then, beyond that, there would be the parents' Grand Ball; such would be going on in all of the baronies and cities of Carmichael over the next two weeks. My husband, the elected Lord Protector, would attend several and one of his wives, Helen or me, would have to attend with him, in a new dress, of course, and a new hair style, to be commented on and endlessly copied in the balls of the late fall and winter season.

Oh, it was fabulous to be a woman. I had a staff of personal maids and assistants and my own beautician, my own dress designer and my own hair stylist. I needed a chief of staff just to co-ordinate them all. I could have done nothing, I think, without Lady Bettina Gardner to co-ordinate it all. What I liked most about Betty and Lady Aileen Semple, who designed my dresses and lingerie was that they had both been born women and believed that I and Helen were women like them. Which, of course, we weren't.

Neither were our maids. Suzie was still very nervous about going out in public. The games that the young male bodyguards—and there weren't any other kind on a chauvinistic world like Carmichael—played to get next to her, perplexed her. She had such perfectly beautiful female features in a world of feminine perfection. She had been made small and slender and yet her figure was in perfect female proportion, like mine. She didn't seem to realize how femininely attractive she was and, of course, that was part of her outstanding sex appeal. At least, over the last few years, she didn't cry so much over her previous life where she had had a wife and children of her own.

As Suzie saw me hugging Joanne, however, she came forward with shawls for us both, and I could see that her eyes were bright as she looked wistfully at my daughter, doubtless thinking of her own.

We allowed ourselves to be swept along by the crowd, just a regular mother and daughter and family, into the massive Assembly Hall of the Shannon Institute. The hall was arranged into many circular tables for the new citizens and their families to partake in a grand banquet before the Children's Ball began. Despite being the ruling family on the planet, we were deliberately part of the audience, as much out of the limelight as we could be.

I didn't expect who I saw seated at our table at all. I was blindsided by her presence. The Duchess of Galloway, her title referring to her holdings on Nebula Prime, the leading kingdom of the sector, was already at our table awaiting us as we ambled in. I greeted her with a curtsy and a "Welcome, your grace."

I knew her, of course, as Lady Myra Colach, the head of Internal Security for the Nebula Kingdom, and the woman who was partly responsible for me being a woman now. "My darling," Lady Myra gushed to my daughter. She never gushed. She had never before acknowledged our local custom and worn a gown as long and as beautiful as my own. Now she did. "I was there when you were born, you know. I just had to be here today when you are acknowledged as a young woman," she said, smiling at Joanne who gave her a guarded look. "You have changed so much."

She regaled my daughter with stories of her birth and how she had looked like a little red frog and how patriotic her mother, me, had been in going on with my spying mission and helping to save the Giant's Rim Worlds from being engulfed in war between the Kingdom and the Shelter Republics.

Joanne looked at me and smiled at last. She loved her 'Star-girl' videos and I knew she had listened to some of the guards talking about the last time I came home. The stories of me saving all our lives had lost nothing in the telling, I was sure, and now here was the woman who had employed me, Willen Smit, as her private investigator, confirming all that Joanne suspected about me, her mother.

When I got the chance, I murmured, "What are you here for?"

"I need you," said Lady Myra Colach, while Joanne was listening to Helen introduce her to the mother of a tall, interesting-looking boy. "I need you as Willen Smit."

I was flabbergasted. I raised my fan over my breasts and spread it to whisper back to her. "You must be crazy!" I hissed. "I'm totally Lady Caroline now. I don't think even if I had the body that I could ever be a man again!"

Lady Myra, no, now she was Her Grace the Duchess Myra, extended her fan and said, "It is very nice, isn't it, to be so feminine, so protected, so flattered and so pampered. But isn't five years of cloying womanhood enough?"

"Never," I laughed. No, in a dress that hugged my womanly figure, with a diamond necklace that cost a king's ransom and earrings much the same, why should I want to be a man in a drab suit and tie again? Certainly not when I could wear gorgeous fragrances and whimsical bits of lace beneath my swirling skirts. Not when I had such things as my sensitive, shapely breasts. Not when I had my long, blonde hair swirled up on my head and laced through with pearls, one of which was on my forehead. Every woman on Carmichael wished she was as glamorous as me, wished she had a husband as handsome as mine and wished she had the access to feminine frippery that I had. Yes, I was totally pampered and I loved it.

"You have been making monetary donations to a certain person on Westmore," murmured Lady Myra. "It has been noted by certain persons of interest. I trust you've kept up with the situation there. You were there once as a young man yourself and that is remembered as well. You are the ideal trustee for a job that must be done."

"My days as a man and as a spy are over," I said behind my fan as one of Rohan's young officers came up and invited a blushing Joanne to dance with him. She looked at me with an agonized expression but I knew if I had said 'No', that she couldn't dance with the teenaged ensign, that it would have devastated her even more. I nodded; my long, pendant earrings swept against my neck.

"Oh, come on," said Lady Myra. I smiled at my daughter and her young man as they joined the others on the floor. Every young man and woman had a partner carefully selected by doting parents and, if some of those partners had had to be bribed to get on the floor on this occasion, their smiles gave nothing away.

"Garrison," Lady Myra said, naming the intelligence liaison officer from the Nebula Kingdom who co-ordinated with our own internal security, "tells me how much you have

been using his services of late, bypassing your own. It has made him quite enamoured with you, you know. Why are you doing that? Do you think Lord John is up to something nefarious these days? I thought he was content to be barefoot and pregnant and confined to the kitchen.”

I knew it had been a mistake to use Nebula Kingdom resources but I had to. Lady Helen, my former husband, Lord John McDonald, was not currently pregnant and she was worrying me. She was a doting mother to Joanne, Hamish, Roderick, Robert and our littlest, Fiona, just a year old. There was a fertilized ovum in Lannan waiting for her when she wished to be a mother again but she had laughingly told Rohan that four pregnancies was more than any other woman was providing for her husband these days. Maybe she would agree to using the uterine replicator for our next, and possibly last, child.

Helen said that she was so busy because every woman’s organization wanted one of the Lord Protector’s wives on the directorate of such organizations. I thought I did my share but when I had found out by accident how many more groups my co-wife was counselling or directing, I got a very itchy feeling. If this had been Nebula Prime or the Republic of Congreve, I would have thought that my co-wife was angling for political power.

I had mentioned my troubling thoughts to Rohan and he had laughed at me. He had kissed me and put his arms about me and cuddled me and told me again that women on Carmichael were not like women on other planets.

I knew that. I knew we couldn’t vote or hold property and that all women were prized, bejewelled possessions of our husbands. And we loved them for the way they doted on us and pampered us and spoiled us outrageously. So what if many of us, to solve the crisis of having so few women in the outer worlds of the Rim, had started out life as men? Nanotech transformations had once been expensive, but at the Lannan facility, a transformation could be undertaken and were with assembly line dispatch. And, I tried to tell him, the luscious brunette woman who would do anything for him in bed was not like any other woman on Carmichael, never mind the rest of the galaxy.

“Women here have almost no power,” Rohan had said. Almost no power was not no power at all, I said.

“Oh, so you are a little bit jealous of Helen after all,” he said, smiling to take the sting out of his very unfair remark.

Rohan always told me in bed that he loved me more. He did spend more time with me, though Helen had him all to herself when she went with him on one of his inspection or political tours.

The media, I noted, called her the ‘political’ wife, while I was the ‘glamor queen.’ There was a fringe political party that wanted to rename the Lord Protector, King of Carmichael. That would have made Helen and me Queens and brought in new ranks and gradations among the nobility. I told anyone who would listen that I preferred being Lady Caroline to being Queen Caroline but I was constantly referred to as ‘Queen Caroline’ in some of the populist media.

“I thought you were sleeping three in a bed,” said Lady Myra and I had to look at her to conceal my astonishment. She looked back as blandly as I looked at her. I wondered where she could be getting such personal information from.

It had been true that we had slept as a threesome for a while but it just hadn't worked out. I didn't want to make love to Helen, nor hear her as she made love to Rohan. The children loved the big bed and to have us all in together. But it had been too much for me. I had found out that I was a very old-fashioned girl at heart and so we reverted to each wife having her own bedroom with Rohan visiting each of us in turn when he was home.

Rohan found a lot of times to sneak away as well from his official duties and visit me. So I was used to conjugal visits at all hours of the day and night and in all kinds of secret places. I'm sure we drove our security crazy with the way we slipped into closets and small rooms and came out breathless and mussed and wonderfully satisfied, often several times a day.

I only had to mention that I was going to change my dress and my husband came along to help me and to take me. Amanda, Suzie, and Judith had all walked in on us and I'm sure we were a scandal at Shannondale, our primary residence. But I didn't care. I did once hear one visiting lady make a catty remark, which I wasn't supposed to hear, about us being 'worse than slinks,' the furry animal trapped above Coldhaven on the Northern Continent and known for its prodigious sexual appetite in the mating season. I used it in an interview and told the planet that Rohan and I were 'worse than slinks,' we loved each other so much.

"I know others don't have such a loving husband as I have," I enthused to one of the few female interviewers who had been aghast at what I was saying, "but how else can you know that your husband loves you? Poor Rohan. I'm insatiable and he has Helen to satisfy as well. It is a good job that we have such discreet security around here. Such stories they would have to tell if we would let them."

I wouldn't, however, have liked Suzie to have told about me being thrown over a couch, my skirts up in the air, my stockinged legs flailing as Rohan pulled my panties down and impaled me. She had seen that. She had seen us as we tumbled over the sofas in a mad surge of fondling and kissing of every body part. I had spied Suzie's wide-eyed, horrified face as she retreated from our sitting room, where she must have been sitting very quietly, to wherever it was she could find other work away from her sex-starved mistress, and her husband.

"Three in a bed?" I queried Lady Myra. "Every man's fantasy I've heard it said but we don't do that."

"Not any more," she said and I really had to wonder about her sources of information. Someone in our household was leaking our personal secrets. I must set Dronnell, our own Lord Commander of Internal Security, to finding out right away who it was.

"I must tell you the story about the northern slink," I said sweetly.

"There was a time," Lady Myra said, ignoring me, "when you begged me to make you a man again. And I did. At very great expense. Merra would have married you, you know. She probably still would if you returned with a title, of say, Lord Shipley. That title is still vacant and you've well earned it. King William has agreed to raise you to the nobility with such a title."



“He will do what you tell him, you mean,” I said. Rohan suddenly realized who I was talking to and looked around sharply at me. He started coming towards us. “Can’t you see that I have a family here and how much I love them all?”

“A woman should,” murmured Lady Myra as a rigid Rohan came through the crowd, patiently smiling at all the people who wanted to greet him. “But a man, now, he has to protect his family, doesn’t he? And you are rightly worried about the possibility of an attack on yours through a betrayal, I think. You should use Garrison more, you know. He loves his little disguises almost as much as you do. His biosculpture expenses are excessive but he gets the job done, doesn’t he? He and I can give you the proof you need for Rohan if you will just do a little job for me, my lovely lady. It’s really not much more than a courier job but I need Willen to carry it out. Let me know before I leave in three days from Duncansford.”

Trust her to know that I was going to a gala affair and bridal auction for the Graham clan in the capital city. I was slowly bringing our security up to date but I wasn’t privy to the new developments in surveillance I was sure Nebula Security had made since I had been one of its leading investigators. Someone was also telling her where I was going to be at any one time. I must find out who it was.

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## II. RIVALRY

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“No, I won’t hear another word about Helen and how she plans to supplant me,” said Rohan angrily as I sat at my dressing table and tried to repair the ravages to my makeup that he had made just minutes before when he saw me in my new, black silk gown. It was now such a mess that I was having to change to my midnight blue gown that I had planned for Cartmoor later in the week.

My black silk panties were also in shreds but I had loved every moment of his attack on me that had destroyed them. I had thought that he would slip them off gently when I wrapped my legs about his waist, but he had torn them off in his haste to enter me. His arousal as seeing me as the Dark Queen for the costume ball we were invited to, was far too much for his poor male psyche.

Rohan moaned that he couldn’t wait until after the ball to have me. He would be aching too much and so he threw me on the bed in my long black boots and dark stockings, pulled apart my skirts and pulled off my garter belt and stockings. He tore my black slip to get at my eager, hardening breasts and then he had had his way with me, so willing and so eagerly female. I enjoyed every second of his fierce caressing and penetration of my re-arranged innards.

I might have been born a man, but no man making love to me would have known. Rohan knew and didn’t care at all. He knew I was a man, he had initiated me into woman-

hood after all, but he had never seen me as a man. He loved me and I loved him and I loved being so submissive a woman to him. He could enter the opening in the little triangle of golden hair between my legs and we both derived enormous pleasure, sometimes so intense that I called them orgasms, from his thrusting deeply into me. Being his wife fitted me perfectly. I hated it when he was angry with me. It made me cry. I was never emotional when I was a man. It was wonderful to feel as I did about him even when he called me a silly girl and wouldn't listen to my advice.

I felt the tears brimming as he was being so obtuse about the data I had been compiling on Helen. She smiled sweetly at us and told Rohan how much she loved him. Now she said that she would have our last child impregnated into her over the summer so that our new little girl wouldn't feel that she was any different from the others in how she had been born.

As Lord John McDonald, Lady Helen had been head of security on Carmichael, way back when. She had, or rather he, had run schemes of ten years' duration and more to make Carmichael come out of its backward place in the galaxy. Others claimed their part in that rise but I myself had had no doubt that it was my former husband's energy and persistence that had brought Carmichael into a new age. He knew, did Lord John McDonald, how to plan for the long term. He had paid twenty-two million for me at my bridal auction, an unheard-of price for any bride, and it was still the source of wonder to all who looked at me at the Grand Balls in my revealing dresses.

Almost every man who held me and danced with me said that Lord John had not paid enough as if to compliment me. Rohan's price had been considerably less, I told them gaily, and if I ever remarried, no one would pay a groat for me any more.

Of course, I was reassured that I would still fetch millions; that enabled me to tease my dance partners unmercifully by asking them demurely how much they would have paid for me. I flustered so many men that way and Rohan told me I was wicked and to stop or he would spank me. I had only been spanked once and it had been no pleasure. Just the thought of it sent chills through me and always brought me back to Lady Helen Sutcliffe, my former husband, and why she was so nice to me.

Helen had wanted us to be three in a bed. She had arranged my rooms for just such a manner of living. She had tentatively stroked me as Rohan made love to me. She lay beside us and encouraged me to stroke her and kiss her as she made love to Rohan. I had heard that other wives did that with their husbands but I had to get up and withdraw when she and Rohan got into heavy petting and making love. I'm sorry but I could be wild and abandoned with Rohan, or a lot of other men for that matter, but I could not, did not, want to love the woman who had once been my husband and had taken me as strongly as Rohan now did him, that is, her.

"Lady Myra was here," I said to Rohan, putting soothing lotion on my breasts where his mouth had ravaged me. "She came to warn us." Well, that was sort of what she did.

"Funny," Rohan said angrily. "I talked to her while she was here and what she said to me was the opposite. She said, 'Oh, one of your wives is being disloyal? You need to be a better lover, Rohan,' and so I gave Helen the ride of her life this last weekend when I took her and the children to Pauline and Sheila's."

Sheila was Rohan's sister's, married to Lord Carty. Pauline, her co-wife, had once been her husband, and the Lord Carty before the present one, Aidan. Lord John had punished Paul for the rebellion he had fomented by having him changed and so he had become Pauline. Sheila had insisted, knowing he could not be turned back, that Pauline be her co-wife. She wouldn't have married Aidan if he hadn't agreed. Aidan was very willing to marry the lovely Pauline and had worked for a long time to get her to accept him as a loving husband. With the help of his former wife, Pauline had at last succumbed to being a woman entirely, even in bed with Aidan.

As a co-wife, Pauline was now a mother through implantation and loved her children intensely. Her children and ours loved to get together. We would be picking them all up and taking them back to our house so that Lord Aidan could have time with his wives; we had heard that Lady Pauline, the co-wife, was begging him to let her get pregnant again.

I loved visiting her. I knew how much she loved being a woman. Pauline had been a Lord and had led a rebellion because of her empathy with the plight of her retainers. Being transformed had been part of Lord John's punishment for the former Lord Carty. It was only poetic justice that John should receive the same 'punishment.' I would have shot Lord John McDonald, my husband, myself if I had been given the opportunity at the time.

Even now, I thought of 'accidents' I could arrange for my loving and friendly co-wife that no one would ever be able to prove that I had done. I would think it and then Helen would come in, breast-feeding one of our babies, even though she couldn't have her own. She was a repository for Rohan's and my fertilized ova, and had been the birth mother for them all but Joanne, who was mine and whose father she had been. It's a very complicated family we have, but, in a generation or so, all this will be forgotten. I will only be remembered as Lady Caroline Sutcliffe, the mother of my family.

"She told me she would give me proof if I did an, an investigation, for her," I stammered to my husband. Rohan watched me intently as I undid my boots, took off my laddered stockings and sought a new pair in my drawers. I eased them on and he came and put his arms about me, interfering with me attaching them to my garter belt. He stroked my breasts and I sighed and leaned into him as his mouth sought mine.

We went back to the bed and I knew I would have to find a third pair of stockings as my husband behaved like the proverbial slink. It's always slower and better the second time around as he pays more attention to my needs as a woman. He would hold back until I had more than been pleased by him. He would hold it until I reached orgasmic pleasure; with him, the man I loved, I never faked it. I wondered if Helen did.

"You are not going off this planet again," said Rohan thickly. "I am your husband and I absolutely forbid it."

"Yes, my darling," I whispered as I cuddled into his loving arms, sated, but only for the time being. I actually did want him again but I knew it was well beyond him, even with the drugs most men used these days to give us women such fantastic performances of male ardor.

"Joanne would miss you most of all," he said, playing what he thought of as his ace in the hole, I'm sure.

“At least, if I found out what Myra knows,” I murmured, kissing his flat stomach and making him very uncomfortable with what I was hinting at doing. “Then I could either confirm or deny my feelings. I would probably owe you both an apology. And this absence would be for only six months, at most, I promise.”

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### III. SAVING THE GALAXY

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Joanne was the one who was most hurt to learn that I was off again. Hamish and Roderick just wanted to come with me and have ‘adventures.’ Someone had definitely been talking out of turn. There were no other boys I could think of on Carmichael who would have thought that their mother was anything but a very fine and beautiful lady and concerned only with the beautification of the world about her. She was not a man. She would not have ‘adventures.’ My boys were different. They knew Mummy Caroline had adventures. I think they had begun to listen to the guard’s stories about me as well.

“I know you have to go,” Joanne said, holding onto me as the maids carried out cases of my dresses. Lady Gardner, Betty, insisted that I must have a maid with me and so I selected Suzie to go with me. It was her fault, after all, that I was engaged in this business of going to Westmore.

Suzie had been part of the exile of rebel prisoners, a ‘dump,’ onto undeveloped worlds. The Westmore government was attempting a type of ‘political cleansing,’ though most of the prisoners had been of one ethnic group. Westmore had been ‘dumping’ on Carmichael because it thought our planet still a very backward world and also because, at that time, we had been supporters of the Nebula Kingdom while Westmore was a colony from a Shelter Republic world.

I had tried to arrange Suzie’s marriage to one of our handsome guardsmen but it hadn’t worked. She had been appalled when he asked her to marry him. Burnington had been everything a young man should be and he had wooed her steadily for a year. But her resistance and Amanda’s sly smile had undone my plans. Helen had laughingly assisted me in them and called me ‘Emma,’ as the whole project turned on its head. Amanda loved to be touched by the handsome guardsman and flirted with him outrageously on the dance floor while Suzie, his date and supposed girl friend, didn’t seem to care.

“I tried,” Suzie said in a flood of tears when I confronted her, “but I couldn’t go beyond the kisses I had to give at the end of an evening, as you told me I must. Nalla will hate me when she learns that I have let a man kiss me,” she added, flushing and sniffing. “I know that she has been true to me.”

I had inquired. I had had to use Kingdom resources to do it. Yes, word had finally come back. Nalla Borbeck, wife of Ansell Borbeck, had survived the Midland Purges and was still living in one of the rebel-dominated villages, which the central government was

now trying to starve and beat into submission. I sent money or easily convertible gifts to her, since I knew the pipeline the Kingdom had into Westmore. Heck, I had helped set it up when I had determined that the ranchers and mine owners of the capital could not ultimately win their fight to keep the herders, drovers, peasants and miners out of any semblance of political power. They were too greatly outnumbered.

My predictions were finally coming true. The 'dump' had enraged the liberal populations in many of the republics and so it cut the Westmore elite off from their natural allies. I had gotten Garrison's last update on the situation and a truce was once more in effect on the surface of the planet as negotiations were under way between the two sides, brokered by the Kingdom and the Republic of Bright, once the masters of the colony on Westmore.

I held onto my daughter and hugged her as Suzie, as my maid and aide, struggled to check off all the cases with my feminine things. Little did she know, that they would all go straight into storage. I had my contract from Lady Myra. For this mission, I was to be Willen Smit, myself. I hugged my daughter to my breasts and let my long hair fall about her face and she laughed at me.

I had come back before with short hair after being a man on Frank. Not much of a man, actually, since I was immediately disguised as a woman to escape from capture and death on the surface of that world.

That wouldn't happen again and I didn't know how I should feel about it. I should welcome it, shouldn't I? After all, I was Willen Smit. I *was*. It had been a genetic accident, Ivany admitted now, that had activated long unused genetic material in me and allowed me to become pregnant after my nanotech transformation. I had thought it all a dream or nightmare. I still did on occasion; then the daughter I had borne would come and put her arms about me, smelling so sweetly of rose petals and calling me 'Mama.' Then I would thank all the gods and goddesses for allowing such a genetic accident to happen.

Joanne loved me so much more than 'Mummy Helen.' It was obvious to everyone after just a short time of me being home. Oh, she loved Helen who was her biological father, but we could never tell her *that*. But it wasn't with the all-encompassing love that she gave to me. She followed me everywhere and insisted on complimenting me on everything I wore. If I tried a new fragrance, she was always the first to know. She tried on all my jewellery. In many ways, it was like having a kid sister, something new in my life.

I read her schoolgirl essays and, as you might expect, the person she most wanted to be like was her mother, Lady Caroline Sutcliffe, me. She had a collection of holograms of me that went back to the days when I married Lord John McDonald. She also had a secret collection that no one save a codebreaker like me could ever have found in which she had compiled an impressive number of stories about me, some of them even true.

"You're off to save the galaxy again," Joanne said with a smile and bright eyes.

"Nothing so grand this time," I said, hugging her as warmly as I could. "This is just a relic from my past. People have trusted me and know me as trustworthy. I take an offer into important people on a planet and they know that the offer will be upheld because I bring it. I'll be talking to people who have been betrayed in negotiations many times."

Joanne nodded. "And you're going back to Suzie's world," she said, which surprised me. She smiled. "We girls do talk, you know," she went on. "She's really scared about go-

ing back. Do be nice to her, Mummy, won't you? She's crying just like she used to whenever she thinks of going back. Do you know what she might have to face there that is so awful for her?"

I did and it was nothing to tell a child.

I had tried to tell Suzie what I was doing for her former family but once I had mentioned that Nalla Borbeck was alive and living in the village of Sweetwater, she dissolved into tears. She clutched my hand when I said that I had a way to send Nalla money to support herself and I could probably get her a message from Ansell. At that, she fled to her room and I didn't see her for a day.

Suzie came to us later, in control, swirling her pink gown about her lovely female shape. She curtsied to me, her ornate ringlets and long earrings framing her elfin face. She stammered as she thanked me and promised that her life was mine for the asking.

I tested her. "I want you to marry Guardsman Burnington and be his loving wife and bear his children," I told her.

Suzie curtsied to me and tried to smile. "Of course, milady," she said. "If...if he will still have me, I will be a wife to him in every way."

I let her think that that was the price of my helping her family on Westmore. I can remember her face when I called the maids in the next day and told them that one of their number was going to be in the next bridal auction. Amanda was as astounded as Suzie when I told her that Steven Burnington would be allowed to acquire her at the next bridal auction at Shannondale.

It wasn't an open auction like the one in which Lord John had bought me. No, this was a closed auction and the money would be like a dowry from the barony of Shannon, from my lord and me, his lady, in effect. Of course, Amanda would be bid on by others but at fifty thousand or so, all the bidders would drop out and Amanda would belong to Steven Burnington.

"Of course, you will stay as my maid," I told her as her excitement grew and she giggled very girlishly and danced and hopped in her rustly petticoats and high heels. "It is time I had a married maid," I told her. "I like to have women with experience about me. I love talking about husbands and their funny ways with someone who knows exactly what I am talking about."

That made them all flush. But they were swept up in Amanda's excitement and it was worse, the female crying and giggling, when I told them that they could be her bridesmaids on her big day. They went off in a feminine huddle to plan dresses and the like; Suzie turned her head just a little to mouth, 'Thank you,' sadly, I thought, to me.

"You are taking far too many dresses," said Joanne as she walked arm-in-arm with me to the thopter where the rest of our family awaited me to say goodbye.

"Yes," I agreed. "But on some of the places we shall have to stop, and on Westmore definitely, ladies do not wear the same dress styles that we do."

"I've seen holos of ladies on Nebula Prime," said my daughter, swirling her skirts deliberately with mine. "They were single skirts just to mid-thigh. Have you ever worn skirts like that which showed off all of your legs?"