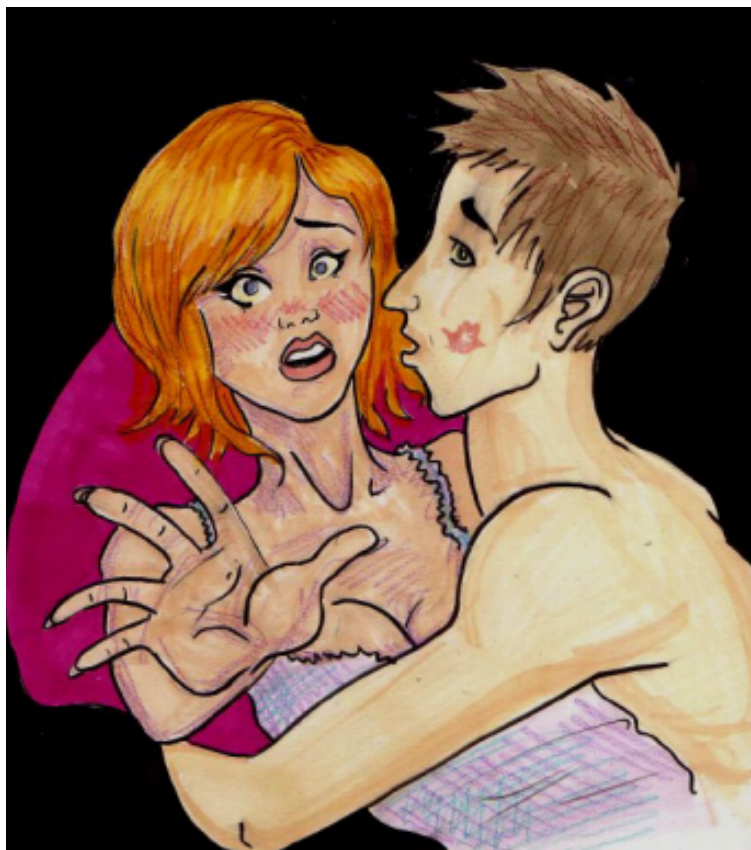




*Reluctant Press* presents:

# The Making Of Daniela

Philippa Peters



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HARLEY SPINN

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A 'NEW WOMAN' E-BOOK

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# THE MAKING OF DANIELA

by **Philippa Peters**

## I. A NEW MISSION

Lady Myra Colach, Countess of Galloway, Minister of Security Services for the Nebula Kingdom, got straight to the point. “Daniela Cole, whom the human part of the galaxy knows as Danni Colonni, is dead.”

The medtech beside me, Tarna Persons, gasped and turned to me goggle-eyed as I watched the message she had brought me. She was slack-jawed as well as in shock. Not a pretty picture. And, of course, when she looked at me, that’s what she saw, a pretty picture known as Danni Colonni, me.

No, I am not the *real* Danni Colonni. I was not born Daniela Cole. In fact, I was not even born a woman. But here I was, long, golden hair over my shoulders, in panties and a bra. Yes, I had breasts and no, I did not have a visible penis; my legs were long and smooth and round, my rear was tight and rounded, and I was in a woman’s frilly robe. I had been two different women over the last eight years and so I ought to have just taken to it naturally, shouldn’t I? But I didn’t. Everytime I looked at my gorgeous female face and figure in the mirror, I just shook, knowing that I could never pull it off. This time, for sure, I would be exposed as the fraud I was.

“I told you, Willen, on Carmichael, that my agents were coming back to me dead.” Colach’s voice suddenly became intense in the vid Tarna and I had been instructed to watch. “Danni Colonni was one of my best agents, nearly as good as you, Willen. In many ways, she really was Star-girl. I trusted her more and more over the fifty years she has worked for this agency and for me personally. If she died because I used her for too long, too often, I need to know that and accept the blame for her death.”

The tape went from her tense face—my goodness, her eyes were actually tearing,—to a montage of Danni doing press interviews on Foreman. I thought she was the most beauti-

ful woman I had ever seen. She looked so young and vulnerable, her eyes laughing as the wind blew her platinum blonde hair across her face. She raised a hand, wearing a golden charm bracelet, a match for the one I was wearing now. That expression of delight as she bent and kissed the young boy who had run up to her with the midnight blue roses to hand her was from inside her. I was supposed to be her now. I could never duplicate that easy femininity. I knew it.

“Willen?” Tarna asked, staring at me. “Is that you? Isn’t that a boy’s name?”

“Yes and yes,” I said, taking another sip of iced water. When I awoke from the induced sleep that had let me endure a nanotech transformation, and I saw that I was still a woman and that I had the face of the most well-known actress in galactic entertainment industry, I smugly lay back in my bed; I thought that this assignment might be fun.

Tarna pressed on the databox control and it spat out the datacube which promptly burst into flame. I emptied a dish of candied nuts and pushed the tray in front of Tarna as she dropped the cube. She was blowing on her hands as the cube dissolved first into a black, gooey mess, then into greasy, white ashes.

Tarna was a trained medical technician. She was also under contract to Myra Colach, as I was. When I asked her what she did for Lady Myra (I always thought of my boss that way and not as the exalted ‘Countess of Galloway’), Tarna had brightly replied that she was in training.

“To be what?” I asked.

“To be an investigator,” Tarna had said. “Just like you.”

It has to be some kind of joke, I thought. It *has* to be. First, I get to be a lookalike for the most famous woman anywhere and then I get lumbered with a real woman, a bubble-headed blonde, to train while I worked. Colach just *had* to be kidding me.

The second cube explained some of it. “You were right, Willen,” Myra went on, her anger visible on her face, but there was something more as well, more like personal grief. “Against my will, I have been penetrated.” She still gave a slight, bitter smile at the second sexual meaning of the phrase she had used on Carmichael to me. “That’s why I am sending you Tarna and not a man. She can go with you where men can’t and she’s there to guard your back. She’s probably better than you, Willen, in most martial arts but, as you’ve seen already, she’s no intellectual. If you looked inside her, I’m sure you would find that her brain is still in its wrappings and virtually unused.”

“Hey!” said Tarna in indignation at the console.

“Find out who killed Danni Colonna and who has penetrated my organization, Willen,” Countess Myra went on. “Then do what you always do: kill them all.” The last was said with such vehemence that I almost stepped back from the console.

The vid showed flames then and I didn’t doubt that all her words were now gone from the console. What followed were the dry-as-dust facts collected by Foreman and Nebula monitors detailing everything I would want to know and more about the secret and abrupt death of Danni Colonna.

Tarna kicked out the second cube and it flamed like the first one but this time she had the tray ready and didn't get burned. She dumped the residues into the trash collector and finally stopped her fidgeting long enough to look at me.

I could guess what she was thinking. I didn't look like a Willen, a man, and I didn't look like a killer. But that was the information she had gleaned from the datacubes. She looked at me and saw a platinum blonde woman in her twenties, the longevity drugs and nanobodies in my system seeing to that.

My face was that of one of the most well-known women anywhere. I had large, blue eyes, a delicate, slightly upturned nose and full, wide, well-shaped lips that women throughout human space tried to copy in their own biosculpting. My chin was small and rounded; when all the features were put together, anyone would say that I was Danni Colonna and that I was beautiful.

My body matched my face. My legs were long, bronzed and rounded where they should be. My hips flared out and complimented my tiny waist. My breasts were not huge, but they were high and well-formed, a teenaged girl's breasts. Yet Danni, like me, must have been well over sixty years of age. Ah, the wonders of modern biosculpture! If I could afford it, I could look like anyone the law allowed.

Shalimar Station, notorious for biosculpting people to look like their favorite vidstars, had recently signed on to an agreement with the Nebula Kingdom not to replicate living political figures and to pay vidstars and famous personalities whenever they were replicated. They also promised to document such procedures. It was wonderful what having a Hammer-class dreadnought warship in their local space could do to clarify the minds of even the most venal politicians.

We were in dock there now aboard Danni's private yacht. Actually, it was a clone of her famous space yacht, *Aphrodite*, the original of which had disintegrated, along with all on board, in its transit to hyperspace off Foreman. The analysis was clear. Someone had tampered with the computers that controlled the yacht's hyperspace conversion engines or with the engines themselves. They just couldn't have fired the components in that irrational order, said the experts, without deliberate sabotage. It was far easier, the experts added, to compromise artificial intelligence systems than to actually sabotage the massive interstellar engine drives.

I thought I should have started a sabotage investigation there on Foreman. But Danni Colonna was supposed to be on Shalimar shooting scenes for the new Star-girl vid she was making. So, I was starting here on Shalimar. It made sense in a way. I, the new Danni Colonna, was still a target. The new *Aphrodite* looked just like the old one and I didn't doubt that, with her usual thoroughness, Lady Myra had suppressed all news of the original's demise. I had checked. Not a word of Danni Colonna's death had hit the newswaves.

"Um, Willen," began Tarna nervously. "Um, what are you going to do first?"

"First," I said, standing up and letting the light, silk robe whisper delightfully about my feminized body, "you must forget you ever heard the name Willen. You must call me Danni or Daniela from now on. 'Mistress Colonna' alerts me to a problem, got it?"

Tarna nodded and her eyes opened wider as I took off the robe and stood before her, naked, a little honey-blonde triangle between my legs. *I'm getting used to having no penis*, I thought, grimacing.

"Second," I said, trying not to let her know how stupid I felt. "Bring in my beauticians and stylists. I am supposed to do an interview in two hours, aren't I? And then I have to meet with Leon Turing about this vid."

"And Wetton," said Tarna, naming the producer's representative who was to oversee the whole affair on Shalimar. "And," she gushed and stars came into her eyes, "you have dinner with Callan Russell at the Shalimar Starlight!"

"I'll need to re-dress for Callan," I said, referring to the well-known adventure star, whose name caused women to go all starry-eyed, like Tarna was. I wasn't calm at all as I thought of him, Danni's ex-husband. "Do you think I should invite him back here or go to his suite in the Starlight?"

Tarna flushed a deep red.

"Oh, we're going to have to do something about that," I said, trying to be the beautiful actress I was supposed to be. "This is show business, Tarna, and if he doesn't proposition me, I'll have to fire my beauty crew."

## II THE SAME OLD DANII

I had not had a man work on me before. I was still naked when he walked in along with the other girls.

Alin Sperea totally ignored my body and gestured at my hair. "Oh, gods and goddesses, Danni darling," he said and I could almost hear the lisp in his voice. "Whatever have you been *doing* to your hair?"

I cringed inwardly and looked at the other girls but not one indicated in any way that the stereotype put out by Alin bothered them in any way.

"We had a terrible ride through hyperspace," I said, speaking as softly as I could. Danni was always soft-voiced in her interviews. "We've all been sedated for over a week. I don't know how Captain Gregori did it but he got us here. We're going to have to have all the AI systems ripped out, I'm afraid, before we go anywhere again in this old bucket."

I watched the girls who had begun preparing almost immediately for whatever they had to do to me like a well-drilled team. They responded with expressions of outright surprise and their words backed them up.

"But wasn't Sylvia with you?" asked Alin, still ignoring my naked breasts and flipping my hair up over my ears.

"The buffeting really got to her," I said. "She's been so sick, I doubt she'll reappear until we leave this station and go on to Goldbrick. In fact, I've had to take on a new crew, so many of the old were ill. They all deserved a break after surviving that anyway."

Goldbrick was an asteroid out in the debris fields beyond the Van Allen Belt of the Shalimar system. The script for this latest Star-girl epic didn't have many scenes to shoot there since special effects could produce such a great background anyway but the authenticity of the 'Star-girl' series of vidcasts, bringing obscure systems to general, worldwide attention, was one of the attractions of the forty-year old franchise. At some point, we were going to blast Goldbrick into a million tiny pieces.

I imagine collectors across the nebula would be paying large amounts of money for pieces of the asteroid later. It was always that way after a Star-girl vid was completed. The games that were shot along with the vid with hours and hours of alternate scenes and alternate endings were one reason why shooting an epic could take a year and more with another year in post-production. Jackets made of planetherium hides had become all the rage after Danni had made one for herself in the *'Star-girl and the Eyes of the Jungle'* vid.

Alin complained the whole time about my hair. He said it looked as if he had never worked on it. I saw Tarna's head snap at that one and deliberately did not look at her. The costume Danni's dresser, Nicola, wanted me to wear was just too much as was the makeup Lana wanted to use on my face. The tiny red mesh skirt, showing off black net panties with red boots up over my knees and a micro black top that left my midriff bare was stylish, maybe even conservative on Shalimar where everyone played at all hours but the interview was going out on Newstop, the leading news service in the Nebula.

Danni's public image had always been muted in contrast to the outlandish costumes she wore in her films. I asked Nicola if she would wear the outfit and the purple eye-shadow she was putting on me. Would she wear it and go out and introduce me to the 'mob' of media people she said were waiting for me?

"These are for you," Nicola spluttered.

"No," I said patiently, though inside I was shaking, thinking of the skimpy costumes Danni always wore in her vids. "I am going to wear what I always do. I need a white blouse, a dark skirt and my makeup will make me look like a real woman and not a Shalimar showgirl."

Lana stopped and stared at me. "I should start again?" she said.

I nodded as far as I was able with Alin braiding my hair, muttering each time I moved. I tried not to let my nerves show.

A new scramble began; finally, I was fitted with a soft, white bra, a white, silky slip and a white blouse that was padded in the shoulders and barely opaque enough to conceal my bra straps. I changed panties without a second thought in front of Alin or the women. I agreed to stay-up stockings, mid-thigh in length and a skirt above the knee with a side slit that was going to show my fancy stocking tops when I moved or sat down.

I loved the lavender-and-something perfume Jolie sprayed on me and the gold rings she had dangling from my ears which matched my necklace, bracelets and anklet. Lana had toned down my makeup and though I was powdered a lot, to keep shine out of the photographs, my eyes were darkened by eyeliner and mascara, my eyebrows a thin, browner line than before and my cheeks just lightly brushed. I slipped into high-heeled, open-toed pumps and swivelled easily in them. The pony tail that Alin had left me, was swinging easily across my back.

"Oh, you look *so* beautiful," gushed Lana.

"Yes, it really suits you," said Nicola.

"You have such great taste," simpered Jolie.

"Crap," complained Alin, still looking only at my hair. "You look like a schoolgirl, a teacher's idea of jailbait."

"I love you, Alin," I told him. "Marry me and you can do my hair for ever and ever."

"How many times do I have to refuse you?" Alin Sperea asked seriously "Haven't I already told you a hundred times that I am already married?"

"I'll keep hoping," I said, blowing him a kiss while the girls looked at me very warily. Alin looked a little pleased with himself while Tarna looked puzzled. She should have had the data download I had to endure. "Girls," I said patiently. "When I ask for opinions, I expect them to be given honestly. I expect to look dowdy by the standards of Shalimar. Shalimar has only one standard, excess. Now, tell me how do you get noticed against such a standard? By not playing that game."

Even Tarna was more colorfully dressed than me in a bright blue pantsuit that I suddenly realized I could wear. I didn't have to wear skirts all the time, and stockings and corsets. I could wear shirts if I liked with pants and low-heeled shoes. I was ticking off all the things I could do as a woman now that I wasn't being controlled by a husband or lover. I was having my hair shorn and nails cut when I was ushered through the airlock and into customs.

Flashlights went off everywhere around me, even overhead. I have never seen so many people crammed into one area before. Photographers hung off gantries, taking pictures of me. Then, shockingly, I realized the enormity and absurdity of the task I had taken on. The name I had assumed was being screamed at me from everywhere; I was supposed to pose femininely for every person there. I was supposed to smile and enjoy it, having done it many times before.

It was awful. The Shalimar Stationmaster himself was there to greet me with orchids and to welcome 'the most beautiful woman in the galaxy' to Shalimar Station. 'The most frightened and anxious' would have been more accurate. He then had to hug me and kiss my cheek and smile at me and say nice things about my perfume. Then his councillors had to be introduced to me and I had to hug men of all sizes and descriptions along with some hugely overdressed councilwomen.

"Oh dear," said Linnie Ganner, a councillor, looking at me with very old, grey eyes. "You're making us all look like a bunch of clowns." She was dressed in orange and green with a wide-brimmed hat. She also towered over me.

"Oh, I shall dress for dinner tonight," I told her nervously as I felt decidedly underdressed in my skirt and blouse. Maybe I should have listened to the staff. "I just have a lot of business meetings first and men don't take me seriously when they're staring at my breasts."

Councillor Ganner laughed heartily at me. "I always put them on display," she said, "when I'm losing an argument."



I had to head then into an auditorium specially set up for a news conference. It was all those eyes focussed on me that filled me with dread. I tried to walk like a woman in my high heels; with so many eyes on me, I felt sure they were focussed on every quiver and shiver I made. I was greeted at the table set up for me by Gus Wetton and Leon Turing who both hugged me, and I mean *hugged* me, their rough cheeks on mine as my breasts were hugged into their dark business suits. They wore no ties, of course, as they were specifically banned on Shalimar Station.

Of course I was asked about the way I was dressed. "Well, I am here to work," I answered, "unlike all you lucky people." That made them all start to laugh. "But when you've lost all your money in the casinos, come and see Gus or Leon and I'm sure we can put you to work as well." There was more laughter. "We have many crowd scenes, which is why we are here on this gorgeous station. Wouldn't you all love to have your boss see you in a Star-girl vid?" They began to whistle and applaud then. "And I categorically confirm it now, I slept with each and every one of you in our vid." That got them up off their feet and cheering.

I shivered inside as I saw all the nodding of heads and men pointing to themselves. I glanced over at Tarna; she had that wide-eyed look of surprise again as she looked at me. Maybe I should not have been so brazen but that *was* Danni's style. She always began her press conferences with an outrageous remark, usually very suggestive. It got everyone a little off base.

A woman in green and red face makeup, her eyes covered by a hideous red slash, wanted to know about the crossing from Foreman and why we were so late docking. There was even a little booing as she sat down. I gave them the prepared story I had already tried out on the girls and boy who did my hair, my clothes and my makeup.

"So you were nearly killed?" asked the woman. I realized she was from Newstop.

"Yes," I said simply. "But I am glad I wasn't. I hope you are as well. I'm *so* looking forward to working with Leon Turing and Callan in the weeks ahead. I hope I can get out and enjoy some of the unique hospitality of the Station at large as well. I understand that I am only appearing in sixteen different shows at the same time in different pods." They all began to laugh as I referred to all the Danni impersonators there were. "Wouldn't it be great if we could all get together, the men and women who dress like me, and have a contest to find the real Danni?" I waited for the laughter to subside a little before I added, "We've done this a few times before and my highest placing was when I came in fifth on Terra."

The laughter poured down on me and I got goose bumps. Leon Turing put his hand on mine as a hundred reporters tried to get their questions in. Inevitably they wanted to know about Danni's love life. Danni had once been in a ten-year marriage with Callan Russell and that was what they *really* wanted to know about.

"We're just best friends," I insisted to four or five persistent questioners. They wanted to know about all the male actors in the 'epic' we were about to start and why had I been on Foreman in the first place. The truth would have been that I was there to have an agent Danni was transporting get in touch with certain other agents on that wild, sparsely popu-

lated planet with the object of assisting the next pro-Nebula Kingdom government there come into power.

I couldn't say that. "I had a rest," I said with a smile, my nerves still threatening to get the best of me. "And I saw some wonderful locations that, if we don't use them in this vid, we might in a future adventure or in one of the alternate game endings."

Someone shouted out a question about the rebels shutting down the towns on Foreman.

"Not while I was there," I said. "All of the people were very friendly. I had a most enjoyable rest there in the High Ranges. I love riding and they have introduced the horse there. You can race a horse for miles on the grassland." I, Willen Smit, had done that in my earlier time there as an agent for Colach. I had told her then that the agrarian people there were far too egalitarian ever to join an institution based on class, like the Kingdom of Nebula.

The reporters wanted to know about the costumes I would be wearing. I could only reveal that they would be revealing. They loved that phrase, and more questions were called out about the length of our stay on Shalimar and where we were filming and when. I referred those to Gus and Leon. They were delighted to answer and promised the media that there would be daily updates at the office they had established for the film. Strangely, I was starting to think that I *was* Danni for a while there. After all, that was what everyone was calling me.

The conference broke at last and a closed car arrived to whisk us away into the commercial pod of Shalimar Station. Tarna was acting as my new publicity aide so I kept her close by as we arrived in the Starlight Hotel and were again ushered by a number of burly guards into a suite of rooms allotted to Leon Turing.

"Just a moment," said Leon a little testily as Gus Wetton wanted to ask me about Foreman and what I had meant about locations there. He took my hand and led me to his office. "You can wait there," he said to Tarna who would have followed us. "There are script changes on my database I want Danni to check."

I entered his study and Leon firmly closed the door. Then he sighed and a grin came on his lean, saturnine face. He had kept my hand in his and now he pulled me to him and hugged me. "Darling, I can't wait any longer," he whispered in my ear to my complete shock, then he lowered his head and began to kiss me.

What could I do? I knew it was bound to happen. I had filled my head with Danni Colonni facts and figures and opinions and there was bound to be a secret. There was bound to be something that no one knew anything about. Nowhere in any of my briefings was there anything that linked Leon Turing and Danni Colonni romantically.

Turing lightly ran his tongue over my lips, the famous Colonni lips, as I shivered in his arms; he hugged me tightly as his hands caressed my back. "Oh my darling, my darling," he whispered, kissing my face, my ear and my neck before returning to my mouth. "I know I can't have you around here but it's going to drive me crazy."

"Me too," I answered without thinking of the encouragement it would give him.

Knocking started on the door and he groaned. "Why do you have to have dinner with that oaf tonight?" Leon asked, directing me to his computer and starting a copy of a script that had been printed there. "Callan's revisions are in blue," he said. "You'll note how he's augmented his role and diminished yours. I told him no on all his changes, but you know how he is. He'll be whining all night long to you about the director tonight and he'll try to enlist your help to have me fired."

"Fat chance," I murmured shakily as Leon kept his arms about my waist and rocked me against him. He kissed me again and I expected it this time. I hated myself for kissing him back. I had grown far too accomplished at kissing men. I shouldn't be. I was Willen Smit, male investigator, currently under contract to the Nebula Kingdom.

I had stopped being Lady Caroline and Belinda to become myself again. But a man only had to kiss me after I had undergone yet another nanotech transformation and I found my emotions rising, as they were now. I felt an itchiness in my bra as my nipples began to harden. Leon inserted his tongue into my partly opened lips and I welcomed him and put my arms about his neck. We swayed together as his tongue worked on my mouth very expertly.

The rapping on the outer door became more insistent.

"Blast it!" Leon said savagely, leaving me abruptly and striding to the door where an anxious Tarna Persons signalled to me that someone wanted to talk to me on the console line.

"Callan Russell," Tarna said as Leon took her arm to push her away again.

"I'd better take this," I said to Leon, "and thank you for the script changes." I tossed the datacube to Tarna. After all, she was supposed to be my new aide. I swept past Leon into the main room of the suite where Gus Wetton was talking to Callan Russell.

"She's here now," Gus said, turning the vidcom in my direction and I saw Callan Russell's head on the small screen.

"Danni," Callan said. He sounded very surprised. "I thought the big conference was to announce that you died."

"Well," I said, hoping my quivering at speaking with such a great vidstar as an equal didn't show. "How interesting. You'll have to let me know who told you that captivating news item. It's a good job that they didn't tell *me* or I might not have bothered to show up today. This isn't some ploy, is it, to get out of our dinner date?"

His 'ruggedly handsome' features showed his annoyance. I liked his vids, always had, or at least *I* had. They were loaded with action, action and more action. Then he tried to add art and introspection to his vids and I, Willen Smit, had tired of him fast. I never understood why he always had to end up with the girl, anyway. I had never understood why all the girls in his films were so instantly besotted with him. Because they were written that way, I can hear everyone say, and they were. I didn't really understand why he had signed up for this latest Danni Colonna vid, either, since it seemed to me that she had her own formula for success as well.

"No!" Callan said explosively. "And I am not boffing any of the other actresses on this vid yet so you have no reason to start getting jealous. I really called to say I was glad to

hear that you weren't dead and ask where you are staying and should I pick you up for our date tonight and should we make the grand entrance or what?"

"I'll meet you there," I said, shivering at that thought. "At what this Station calls twenty-one hours. It will be so nice to see you again and talk over how much you would have missed me if your information had been true."

"Witch!" he said and cut the connection.

I looked up and Wetton was wincing, Tarna was shocked, and Leon seemed amused as he leaned in the doorway of his study.

"Tell me again," I said to Wetton, "why Danni Colonna is making this vid with Callan Russell."

Gus Wetton licked his lips before answering. "Callan's numbers are huge on Terra and in all Terran sectors," he said. "Our research showed that a combination of the two of you, in the Terran market would eclipse the average of your last four Star-girl vids by a factor of a thousand. That means we would rake in quadrillions of credits rather than trillions if we have just a popular vid and vidgame."

"Even after *Night after Night* and *Virtue*?" I asked, naming the two most awful vids Callan had released in the last five years.

Wetton smiled. "They were never released in Terran sectors," he said. "Callan's personal services company said that it couldn't get the right deal for him. So our deal could help out both of you."

Then Gus put datacubes into the reader and began the meeting proper with Leon and myself. I listened to all the problems Gus was having in securing locations and permits for a while, then I excused myself for a visit to the Ladies' Room with Tarna.

Tarna was very embarrassed when I pulled her into the bathroom. I sat on the throne but didn't pull down my skirt or panties. I touched my distorter earrings and indicated for her to do the same with hers.

"Now," I said. "Why didn't our information include that I am having a hot and heavy affair with our director, Leon Turing?"

Tarna looked suitably horrified. Once I was awakened from nanotech transformation, she had been force-feeding me information on Danni Colonna, everything from "my" bra and pantie sizes to the hundreds of men she was rumoured to have slept with. Leon Turing had not made that list.

"Find out all the occasions on which Danni Colonna and Leon Turing have been together in the last sixty years," I said. "Biograph Turing. Particularly look into his traveling. I need to know where he and Danni could have been alone. She escorted agents all over in secrecy. I imagine she did the same with her lovers. When Leon refers to some trip we took or a Station we visited, I don't want to be totally caught out. Go as in-depth as you can and have a preliminary ready for me in twelve hours. You know the drill. No point having the services of one of the new *Leviathans* if we don't use it."

With no announcement, the Nebula Kingdom had launched a new type of warship, double the size of the redoubtable Hammers, with quadruple the power, and one was

masquerading as a Hammer now in the Shalimar system. Tarna's request for information could be assessed in just minutes on its multiple AI consoles while it would take us days on our own machines. We just had to frame our questions properly.

I rose and Tarna said nervously, "Your makeup."

I looked in the mirror. Yes, most of my lipstick was gone. Tarna opened her purse and gave me my lipstick and she watched, fascinated, as I expertly retouched my lips. I adjusted a strand or two of hair and washed my hands as she gulped watching me. I realized what her problem was.

It must be the Willen thing. She had finally figured out some of my cryptic answers. She glanced at my chest as I opened my blouse and showed off my bra and the genuine mounds there as I put another dab of cologne between my breasts. I could almost hear the wheels spinning in her head as she wondered how much of a woman I really was, or how much of a man. I didn't enlighten her. I didn't know myself. I just sent her off to work and returned to my meeting.

"The story is all wrong," I said at last and both men froze in their bickering over whether to run alternate strands for the vidgame in all of the Shalimar pods, including the most adult of adult game pods.

Turing had been arguing that there was a market for it. He was explaining to an appalled Gus Wetton that I could be a dominatrix in the adult scenes with leather boots and a leather, laced-up costume and high-heeled boots and a whip. If I didn't take off the mask, no one would know it was me. What the point of that was baffled me.

So what did I know about making a vid and writing a story and a script? Nothing. I didn't intend to become so committed either that I would have to stay as Danni Colonna for a year and finish it after I found out who had killed the real Danni. I was going to be a very difficult star for these two men. They were going to be so glad when, because of 'artistic differences,' we ended the project and split up.

"What do you mean?" spluttered Leon Turing. "You loved it on Prime and said to go ahead with the script."

"I've changed my mind," I said, crossing my legs again with a lovely soft rasp of my stockings. I deliberately suppressed my nervousness. I had to be Danni. I leaned back and, with my opened blouse and open slit of my skirt, I must have appeared to be vamping them, in their minds. I tossed my hair, the way young girls do.

"You want a new script?" squawked Gus Wetton. "You want us to start again?"

"A revision," I said. "We're not taking advantage of what is really going on here. Callan is a weasel. He hates me and is using me to get back his top billing outside Terra. That's the character he should be playing, a weasel at heart, and he should double-cross me. What a scene that would be. Then he wouldn't rescue me, he would rape me.

"I'd escape somehow and we'd be badly wounded and that's when one of us dies and the other has this great scene of crying and moaning along the lines of, 'I always thought I was going to grow old with you' and we weep as the flawed hero gets a Viking funeral and the other one is left to go on alone. See, we're set up as these great heroes from the start and we cry and scream when one gets more accolades for the same work as the other.

I could be the double-crosser and you could pick out some new girl to be the real heroine who saves Callan and he has to make her into the new Star-girl.”

“You’d give up being Star-girl?” asked a spluttering Gus Wetton. “But the franchise! It is you! It will end without you.”

“I’m tired of it all,” I said dispassionately. “Can’t you tell? I’m tired of all the tight costumes and absurd plots. If you can find someone else who wants to take it over, I won’t object at all. I have enough to retire on a hundred times over. I have so many projects I can get involved in. I might even go back to the stage on Prime as Daniela Cole once more.”

They were flabbergasted, as well they should have been. Lady Myra Colach was probably going to scream at me when she heard about it but I wasn’t going to be a new Danni Colonna for her forever, even though, being the most beautiful woman in the world could have enough compensations for any man.

### III. AT THE STARLIGHT

I returned to the *Aphrodite* and put myself in Alin’s hands as he re-did my hair again from scratch, as he said, washing it, putting ‘body’ in it, whatever that was, working in several weaves of hair just like my own. I seemed to be under the dryer for hours in rollers and pins while the girls pampered me and gave me a facial, a manicure, a pedicure. Then Lana did the one thing that always made me shiver and feel *so* feminine. She painted my toe nails.

On Carmichael, I had many open-toed shoes and the sight of my scarlet, rose, pink or crimson toes peaking out of my shoes always made shudders go through me. It was that that made me feel all giggly and girly, more than the painting and shaping and adding to my fingernails which I didn’t mind at all.

I didn’t need my legs waxed as I did on Carmichael. Danni had every vestige of hair save for the natural, little triangle above her private parts, removed. So the girls gave me a skin freshener all over which was like a rejuvenator for the skin. When they bathed me down and I stood up and saw my toes and my flushed, perky breasts, I felt ready for any man, even a crosspatch, such as Callan Russell was turning out to be.

I had to wear black underwear, panties and a bra. Some ad from somewhere came to my mind. “A woman who wears black panties isn’t necessarily going to go to bed with a man tonight, she’s just showing that she expects to be.” I remember some people objecting to it but whether it was because it said ‘man’ only, or whether it was just generally demeaning, I’ve forgotten.

Going out with Callan Russell meant it was a formal affair and so I wore a garter belt with my stockings. My long dress had a bustier top out of which I seemed about to pop at any moment since it had no supporting straps.

My long, blonde hair swirled about my face and neck in a huge mass. My heavy, silver and diamond earrings were bulky even though they touched my neck and swung as I moved my head.

I was liberally doused in my new perfume and Lana told me that it was called ‘Danni’ after me. Had I forgotten? I was saved an answer as I was receiving the full makeup treat-

ment, my eyelids covered in contrasting eyeshadows that made me look glamorous and seductive. I stood and stepped into my high heels, the straps transparent. Perhaps it was the heavy black and dark red skirts that swept about me or the colored toes or colored fingernails that so daintily raised the skirts so that I could walk. I don't know what it was but I felt like a woman. I felt like a beautiful woman and I wanted to feel that way forever.

I had on a diamond necklace and diamond bracelets to match my diamond earrings. When I saw myself in the mirror, I was every bit as glamorous as Danni Colonna ever was. My golden hair cascaded down my back. My soft, red lips were inviting as were my dark-fringed eyes. I accepted the wrap and purse from Jolie and headed out to the transport tram and my date with Callan.

What a re-entrance I made at the Starlight. I had to stop and let the photographers get their fill before the anxious management steered me through the cheering crowds and into the great Starlight Room of Shalimar Station. Acrobats swirled overhead as moving tracks brought wonders overhead against a backdrop of hundreds of bright stars, the dark cloud of the nebula allowing each to be picked out in its solo glory.

Occasionally, a spacecraft passed overhead and that's when I understood that the glass panels were magnifying the sights outside the Station, making them more impressive than they were naturally. I was escorted through lines of people waving and cheering at me up to the highest level where I could look down on the acrobats and 'flying' aircraft and the like. It was incredible to be a woman in such a scene, to walk and talk girlishly, to smile and pout and pose and to try not to reveal the panic that threatened all the time to overcome me, a man in a dress and heels, his breasts bouncing with each step he took, his long, blonde hair flowing about his soft-skinned shoulders.

Callan almost pushed the eager manager out of his way as he pulled back an enormous, high-backed, red velvet chair for me. I smiled nervously to the manager as I sat down in a rustle of skirts and looked down demurely at my thrusting breasts. Beneath them, my scarlet toes in my skin-toned stockings peeped at me from the transparent tops of my high heels. I couldn't help the feminizing shiver that ran through me.

"You look gorgeous," said Callan Russell, leaning towards me from his high seat on my right hand. We were in a sort of alcove, surrounded by exotic plants, many stretching up to the glass above us. Suddenly the platform tilted, or I think it did, and gravity reasserted itself so that the glass ceiling had now become a wall.

Callan turned his head. "They love to do that," he said, staring at my face. "They think that it impresses us. They do it in the aquaria as well. In there, it's fascinating to see what you thought were rocks, some kind of squids, I think, coming to life and reorienting themselves to new gravitational forces."

"I'd love to see it," I said anxiously and Callan smiled at me. I hadn't realized he was so tall. He towered over me as he assisted me to sit down. Then my heart actually began to beat faster. This was Callan Russell. Callan Russell! I loved so many of his action films. I had seen him get the girl, so to speak, and thought it well justified. Now I was sitting down to dine with him. I was in a lovely evening dress and my hair was swirling over my bare shoulders and breasts. This wasn't how I had ever imagined meeting the great action star, Callan Russell. Yes, I had imagined being his buddy in a vid, I had imagined being

him, but I had not imagined being *his woman*! And I had to pretend that I remembered being married to him.

"You should have plenty of time," Callan said, indicating to a flustered serving girl which bottle of cognac she could pour for him and which lifewater for me, a green Metaxa. I glanced at the girl's shaking hands and hoped mine weren't as bad as hers. I knew now exactly how she felt. Callan Russell was smiling at me and trying to be affectionate and charming with me and I was wondering what it would be like to really kiss him. If we did make this vid, I would have to. Thank goodness I was going to sabotage it.

"Why is that?" I asked lightly, hoping my inner quaking wasn't showing, after the adoring server had withdrawn, eyeing me enviously.

"I understand that you've upset Leon Turing and Gus Wetton no end. But then I think you meant to do that, didn't you?" Callan said, taking my hand and frowning as he stroked my fingers, sending weird feelings through me. I had to let him do it and pretend that I liked it. After all, I was a woman now and his ex-wife, wasn't I? I had to force myself to think that I was.

"A new plot at this date, another new script. Just what are you doing, Danni?" Callan asked bluntly, not sensing the turmoil in me or ignoring it. "You got me to sign a contract to this project and now you're jerking me around, is that it? You don't have to sign, do you? You can keep on changing everything I signed up to do. You still don't think we're even for the ten years of married life, married *hell*, that you put me through? Is this going to be that again for another year?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," I said, crossing my legs in a rustle of skirts as he took my hand more firmly. *He thinks I am Danni*, I thought exultantly.

"So you know you are the bigger star now," Callan said heatedly. He pointed out the glass to an undistinguished yellow star. "You are Nebula Prime, I admit it, and I'm Metaxa, say. You know I need you and you don't need me. If I don't get this vid made, I will be disastrously broke. I can't work on Terra again after we used non-Association crews on *Night after Night*. I'm on the twenty-year prohibition list there and I haven't had an offer from any consortium in ten years until your production company made me this one. So, Danni, why are you doing this to me?"

"And here I thought I had been invited to an old-fashioned, romantic evening," I said nervously, trying to get away from topics I knew little about, while he looked at me, at my pretty dress and my tight bodice and shaped breasts, and struggled to smile as if he knew others were watching us.

"If that's what you want," Callan began huskily, looking down to suppress the anger I could sense in him.

"What I want is not to make the same vid that I've made endlessly since *Eyes of the Jungle*," I told him nervously at last, trying to be the Danni Colonna I had seen in her private vids, a soft-voiced, little-girl type of woman. "At our time of life, we should be making more mature vids, don't you think?"

"I just want to make some money," Callan said after a long pause in which he just looked at me. I thought he had, at last, discovered that I was not real.