

*The Queen of the Valley.*  
**Women's Issues**



**Philippa Peters**

An "Adult TV" Novel

## **Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers**

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# THE QUEEN OF THE VALLEY 3: WOMEN'S ISSUES

by Philippa Peters

*Volume 25    Issue No. 2    19 October*

Of course, Jane was only joking about me. But she liked the joke, introducing me as her “wife” when we went out. It was so embarrassing to enter *The Jaundiced Eye* or *Sylvester's*, have the hostesses smile at me and say that they'd get a table ready right away for Jane Edwards's wife.

Bonnie was amused by it all. “You sound just like a man,” she giggled at me. “No, not your lovely voice, but the way you're behaving! No, you're not being demeaned by being called a wife. It's what you *are*, after all, isn't it?”

I shouldn't have been such a girlfriend to a ‘girl’ who was just like me, a boy in truth. Bonnie was going to marry her boyfriend in time and legally be his wife. I didn't know how she planned to do that, but I didn't question her about it.

Jane was at the root of all my problems. She wouldn't let me wear pants anywhere. If I wasn't all sweet and girly to her, she'd get really snappy with me. She ordered me to go out with Bonnie, to exchange girl talk and buy some new, feminine lingerie for myself. I shivered, but I did as ordered. I always did! It was so long, nearly ten months since I'd started this project—to be a girl for a day, Jane had said, telling our readers what it was like to be a man in a dress.

I'd done that for her. Not for myself, of course, oh no! I wasn't getting anything out of this daily dressing as a girl but constant bouts of embarrassment, lately. Now, everyone was calling me a wife or Mrs Edwards, as Jane had introduced me afresh to the Garth waitresses. I tried to explain to Bonnie how embarrassed I was, but she didn't understand at all. She'd have loved her David to introduce her as his wife-to-be, I was certain. She wouldn't have been embarrassed at all.

My embarrassment, luckily, became overshadowed by a far greater sensation. We were in *Sylvester's* when it happened. We were just debating whether we should go over and talk to the 'Misses Beman'. They were in an animated conversation with the tall, handsome guy I'd seen at the Prom with Donna Gardner, as 'she' was then.

Suddenly, Ellen Beman got up and stormed out as Tom, looking very womanly and pretty in a yellow dress and gold jewelry, got up to stop his wife leaving. John Stephens pulled on 'her' arm. 'She' sat down, flustered, in a rustle of petticoats.

"Okay, girl reporter." Bonnie laughed. "Which do you want, the boy or the girl?"

"The girl," I said, a tingle of emotion going through me.



“Well, she’s over there,” said Bonnie, picking up her purse and handing me the check. “I’ll catch Ellen. You get Tom.”

With Bonnie scooting away, I couldn’t tell her she’d got it wrong. Well, she’d have known it, as she did. She just wanted me to talk, ‘girl to girl’, which neither of us were, to Councillor Tom Beman. I nervously approached the booth where the Bemans had been sitting. I always found it difficult to invade people’s privacy and ask them questions. The public might want the answers—but I wouldn’t give them if I was the one whose privacy was being invaded..

“Michelle Little, ‘girl’ reporter,” said John Stephens, emphasizing what he knew was untrue, to the golden-haired woman beside him. He gave me a lopsided smile. “Don’t miss a trick, do you?”

“My, my p-partner,” I said. “B-Bonnie Helman, she’s going to talk to Ellen.”

“You think her storming out is a news story?” asked John Stephens, while the woman beside him just looked at me as if I was some kind of annoying insect.

“She was very angry,” I said. “If it’s personal, I’ll go away.”

John Stephens actually smiled at me. He was a millionaire. He owned the Valley’s bank and was financing the new highway, Jane had told me.

“A considerate girl reporter,” Mr. Stephens said, his hand resting on the woman’s feminized hand beside his. ‘She’, Tom Beman, made no move to push him away. He was leaning into her as if he was consoling her. “We should take advantage of her, Laura; have your side of the story told before it all hits the fan.”

“What would you like to know?” asked Councillor Tom ‘Laura’ Beman in a soft, trained, womanish voice, just like mine.

“L-Laura?” I squeaked. ‘Laura’ turned her lovely, madeup eyes to the man beside her and smiled.

“John calls me that when we go up to Brampton,” ‘Laura’ Beman said very femininely. “It’s a lot easier to use a woman’s name up there. People there think I’m Councillor Beman’s wife. I hear a lot of people are calling *you* a wife these days, Michelle.”

“It’s not true,” I said hastily, wondering how such rumors got around. It wasn’t as if I was anybody in the Valley. She—Tom, Laura, Tom Beman—was the important figure who was gossiped about all the time, not me.

“Ellen said something to the hostess about seeing her in court,” I said. Mandy, in her black strapless evening dress even though it was lunch time, was talking to the girls at the bar, gesticulating with her arms as if claiming she’d done nothing.

“She probably meant me,” said Councillor Beman, shifting and re-crossing his legs in a rustle of silk. I loved the white, high-heeled sandals he, ‘she’, was wearing. “Ellen just broke up with me.” She surprised me by beginning to cry. John Stephens put his arm about her and hugged her.

“Maybe it’s not a good idea to talk now,” John murmured to ‘Laura’. “I’m sure Ellen will reconsider. This will blow over.”

“Is it over you, um, Laura, dressing as a woman?” I asked. Councillor Beman’s lovely eyes opened wider.

“I’m not going to dress as a man ever again,” ‘Laura’ said while John Stephens tried to shush her. “John’s always been my political manager,” she patted his hand in womanly fashion as she said that, her bracelets jiggling at her wrist. “You can print what I



said, Michelle. Let those who voted for me know I'm a full-time woman now."

The baldness of that statement shook me to the tips of my high heels. My loosely brushed hair flickered about my neck and ears at such a statement. "You don't mind if I write that in *The Queen*?" I asked her.

Laura smiled. "You're the right person to break the news, aren't you?" she said to me. I could sense the kinship she claimed, with another man in a dress like her.

John Stephens stood up, asking Laura to say nothing more, as he hustled her out of *Sylvester's*. Bonnie passed them on the way in.

"The Bemans have split up!" Bonnie said excitedly to me. "Ellen just gave me an interview on the street! She was heading into the Courthouse to meet with one of the Wyatts to file her petition for divorce! This will be the biggest news to hit the Valley since Tom first put on a dress! What did he say?"

"It isn't Tom any more," I said. "It's Laura!"

Bonnie's thin eyebrows almost disappeared into her bangs. "Laura!" she breathed excitedly. "That's a lovely name for a lovely woman, isn't it?"

"What else did Ellen Beman say?" I asked.

"The usual platitudes," sniffed Bonnie, making a derisive face. She consulted her notes. "The last two weeks have been so very difficult," Bonnie read. " 'My husband has refused to dress as a man again. He won't have his hair cut. He told me he likes to dress in women's clothes now, that he feels more fulfilled that way, blah, blah.' Oh yes, Ellen gave him an ultimatum. He chose, she says, to leave her to go and live with John Stephens."

I gasped and looked at Bonnie who was coyly smiling at me. “Word it that way and you’re implying—” I began.

“I know,” said Bonnie. “We really should talk to Laura and get it straight. Has she really left her wife for a man? John Stephens is so rich! You know what Marilyn Monroe said about money on a man being like sex appeal on a woman.”

We grabbed our purses, stopped in the ladies’ room to re-do our lipsticks and brush our hair. I consoled Mandy, who was having a conniption about what Ellen had said. We told her not to tell anyone else, as Ellen wasn’t talking about her but only about Laura.

“Laura who?” Mandy wanted to know.

“Read the next edition of *The Queen*,” I told Mandy. “We’ll have the full story.”

I was wrong about Mandy not being called to court. She was, to testify about the late suppers Ellen’s husband and his political manager had in *Sylvester’s* several times per week, about the way John held Laura’s hand and how they laughed and giggled together as Laura never did with Ellen.

Yes, Ellen Beman filed for divorce, giving her husband’s adultery as the cause of the marriage’s breakup. And yes, she cited John Stephens as ‘the other man’ in the case.

The following day, Bonnie and I hired a car and went up to the Stephens’ ranch on the edge of the Northern Forestry Reserve, but John Stephens wouldn’t let us meet and talk to Laura at all, even though he knew very well who both of us were.

“The whole thing is devastating to Laura,” Stephens said. “She pleaded with Ellen to understand. I pleaded with Ellen as well, to save their marriage. But Ellen’s adamant. I understand Ellen want-

ing a man in her life, and so does Laura. Laura just can't be the kind of man Ellen wants any more. And yes, I'm going to vigorously—you can quote me, *vigorously*—defend the charges Ellen's levelled against me."

We didn't get to see Laura, but Bonnie and I were excited when we got back to the offices, talking about what we'd write and how we'd divide up the story. Strangely, there was a visitor in the interview office, talking animatedly to Dave Richardson and Jane.

"Donna Leslie?" I asked Jane, who came out to see us.

"She saw it coming," said Jane with a grimace. "She says it's only the first of a string of divorces that are going to happen. She warned Ellen, she says, when Tom began modulating his voice and dressing so much more fashionably than his wife.

"She's talking about John Stephens as well, and his yen for men in dresses." Jane smiled at that and rolled her eyes. "She says he tried to be Donna Gardner's boyfriend, last year, but Estelle cut it off. Huh! Estelle would be delighted to have Donna be anyone's girlfriend."

That was a real eye-opener for me into the relationship between the sisters. Jane often went off when we were at home and never said where she was going. I just had to wait at home like a good little wife, her latest joke. I think that Jane must have been visiting her sister on some of those occasions. She often treated me differently when she came home, making me obey her a lot more, and making me dress really sexily even though it was just the two of us in her house.

"Give all your notes to Dave," Jane told me when I related the story Bonnie and I were working up about Laura and Ellen.

I was stunned. I protested, but it was no use. I wasn't going to get the front page and a by-line. Bonnie was almost in tears when we handed our work over to the gloating Dave Richardson. Our facts made Jane's editorial authoritative, as she piously told the Valley not to gloat over the break-up of the Valley's most prominent political couple, or the reasons for the break-up. That was awful and bitter for both Bonnie and me.

It was so much bilgewater, as was Dave's article. He wrote it as if he'd been the one doing the interviews we'd done. He did at least get a picture of Laura and John, getting into a car, leaving for 'a week away from it all'. John's arm was around Laura's shoulder while she looked as lovely as ever, her hair newly styled and so long about her neck. I loved it that mine was so much improved as well—and then I felt so guilty about the way I was feeling, thinking so much like a woman these days.

Bonnie was our school reporter still. Jane sent her out to Tyson for a story about cheerleaders. I don't think Bonnie liked it, but it was what she was supposed to do for *The Queen*. I liked her piece mostly because of the 'girl' who was featured, 'ready to cheer on her brother in football.'

Kelly Davies had ribbons and braids as well as a short cheerleader skirt, 'her' top having a big 'T' between her breasts. "What's that for?" the Tyson boys used to chant in my day. "Titties!" they would roar at the end, thinking themselves so funny. This year's cheerleaders, said Bonnie, when we gossiped about it, strutted and wiggled for the cheering crowds whenever they heard that cheer.

So many girls wanted to be cheerleaders, Bonnie reported, that each year in school now had a squad. The Senior Squad had to enroll in Beauty Culture. Those 'girls' travelled with the revived boys' football team. Popular Miss LeeAnn Charles had the Senior Squad, while Miss Shanks, Miss Letman, and Mrs

Edwards had the tasks of teaching new girls how to be the type of cheerleaders the boys in Tyson wanted to see.

“You know each of the cheerleaders has a special boy she has to sit beside on the team bus,” Bonnie said. “She has to encourage, reward and cheer him for great plays. You should see them on the way back from a game. It’s like Makeout City!”

“Don’t knock it till you’ve tried it,” I murmured to her. Bonnie grinned at me.

“It’s working,” Bonnie said ruefully. “We’re undefeated on the road this year. Ron Burton, the quarterback, told me they can’t let the girls down as they’re so sweet to the team.”

I had work to do. I was on Layout again. There was the usual huge ad from *Transformers*, only it was advertising Halloween specials. Yes, Halloween, I thought, with butterflies in my stomach. I’d avoided it in recent years, but Jane said we should make a really big splash this year, on ‘our’ day.

Rayburn Stores had an ad of Pamela Harris in her underwear. Her body was scandalously feminine. *Jane Fisher’s* had expanded and was selling dresses as well as wigs, but, oh, did their wigs ever look so good. I just wished my blonde-dyed hair would grow more quickly. I wanted really big hair like some girls in the clubs. They looked so beautiful, so girlish. I wouldn’t mind visiting *Jane Fisher’s* for a holiday special.

Ooo, what was I thinking? I must find a way out of this stupid Valley—and soon!

Our classifieds were changing. ‘Mrs Roberts, the widow of Dr Roberts’, whom Bonnie said she’d visited as a kid, ‘wishes to announce the forthcoming marriage of her son, Kenneth, and Sharon Tolman, of Upper Raybold. A bridal shower for Kenneth will be held at *Sylvester’s* on 4 December with the nuptials on 11

December, Judge Emily Cortwright presiding. Open reception at *Sylvester's*. All classmates of happy couple invited.'

Bonnie studied that for a while before saying, "That's Kendra! She's so femmy! She must be the femmiest person I've ever met! What's she doing marrying a woman?"

"Kenneth is marrying Sharon," I told her but Bonnie shook her head.

"I bet this is Kendra getting married," she said forcefully. "I'll check it out."

"For the next paper," I told her.

Another classified ad read, "If you look good in a dress, we can find a place for you in a growing entertainment industry. Female impersonators are at a premium now! Great money! Joan Treadwell, agent."

"You follow that one up." Bonnie smiled. "I'll chase down Kendra Roberts. I know she's going to be chagrined at her mother for calling her 'Kenneth'. She hasn't used that since she entered grade school, I'm sure."

The letters naturally were about revoking the Dress Code and the lack of response by the men of the Valley, men like me, who were still in their frilly panties and dresses.

"So the Dress Code is revoked," wrote Arlene Ford (wife of Council Clerk's representative, Jenny Ford). "I know my 'little woman' isn't going back to pants and drab men's wear. Jenny's a different person, so much nicer, since she reluctantly agreed to wear her panties and skirt each day. We intend to ignore the ruling. I want my Jenny in pretty dresses!"

"Why the surprise that our boyfriends are still in frilly panties?" asked Alison Rogerson in her letter. "My Annette and I have never been so close! My mom

doesn't care how many sleepovers in babydolls my friends and I have. It's so much fun to share lippy, nail polish and each other's clothes. I wouldn't want to do that with a football player. Yuck!"

"I was glad to see our lady cops haven't been replaced by men yet!" wrote Joyce Endicott. "They're so much nicer to look at and talk to. And their uniforms this summer were so lovely! No wonder the crime rate is down in the Valley!"

Tania's column for the back page had an incredible new picture of Bobbi, as I still spelled her name. She looked so cute and feminine. I think she must have had cosmetic surgery as her face was subtly different, thinner and definitely womanly. I really should have talked to her and got to know her while I had the chance but, by the changes in her now, I doubted she'd be interested in a man like me any more.

Tania saw me moon over the picture. "Should have struck while the iron was hot," she said sympathetically.

"Well, she was more interested in Dave," I sighed to her.

"Not for a long time," Tania said. "You and Jane ..."

"We're still a couple," I said, flushing.

"She doesn't know how to treat a boy like you," said Tania impatiently. "Whatever happened to Murray, was that his name?"

I blushed at that. It seemed that the whole Valley knew Michelle of *The Queen* had had a fling with a guy called Murray at the Continental North.

"Dave booted him out for his current charmer," I told her. "Dave says Murray's gone to Brampton to find work."

“Pity he’s gone,” said Tania. “Kenny Baby”— that was her squeeze or husband, though his name often changed in her columns—“and I will keep our eyes open for you, Michelle. You deserve a nice guy who knows how to treat a girl like you. But one guy it *won’t* be is Vic Perrone.”

“What happened there?” I asked, my throat dry at what she was saying to me. I did not need a nice guy. I needed to *become* a nice guy again. “How did he ever become Victoria?”

“Money, pure and simple,” said Tania in disgust. “Eloise Waters tempted him. She wanted a great band at the club in Princess River, in the Marquee. ‘Victoria’,” she said with a sneer, “can put great combos together. You should see your Bobbi with an I, just to watch and admire a woman like you. She’s a pretty fabulous chick, too, isn’t she?”

“I think so,” I admitted, ignoring the other part of the remark, though I was tingling all over as I did at compliments.

Tania had started this month’s column with Bobby, spelling it with a ‘Y’. “At the Ellis Ballroom,” Tania had written, “there are big changes. Gone is Vic Perrone, as ‘Victoria’ Perrone is leading an all-female-dressed orchestra at Princess River.

“In the Ellis is a smaller, tighter, female-dressed combo who are more adept at modern ballads and sounds. What hasn’t changed is that Bobby, once Bobby Jones, leads the band in song stylings from Mariah to Rihanna.

“Brought forward much more are the Sweethearts, a cute trio, whose female voices are much improved. Out with falsetto and in with the real thing! Terry Dupree is especially improved. When Terry and Bobby do the duet, *The Boy is Mine*, the audience and the dancers all stopped to listen and gave a great round of applause.”