

# **Engelian Adventures: Transformations**

## **Book 1: Transgressions**

### **Chapter 16**

**by**

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## Chapter 16

***"Being a psychic adept as well as an innate sorcerer, Wamzut was placed under the tutelage of one of the Eldar Wizard's own brothers, the Yellow Adept: he who is also known as the Serene One. According to Wamzut this was fortuitous for his master was more understanding and forgiving of his strange ways than the magi who taught him his first spells."***

***The Life Story of Wamzut by Harold Minton.***

"And now you have joined me in my sin," said Nessa into the darkness of the room.

"Pardon," I said, my lazy thoughts coming back from the comfortable place where they had been lingering in the afterglow of our lovemaking and the warmth of Nessa's aura. We lay in the cosiness of our shared bed, my taller body curled behind hers, the blanket keeping our body heat and my feeling of security close.

"They do not normally send *the Gifted of Mithra* to such out of the way places as Ilbarsis ... Who knows where I might be now if I had been willing to give of my favours freely to men. Perhaps even the High Temple in New Ninevah."

"So, your being sent to Ilbarsis was a punishment?" I said, a little surprised that my adopted home was considered a hardship posting by her temple.

"Yes," she said and snuggled closer.

I hugged her in return and asked, "What happened?"

"Someone with a lot of say in the temple hierarchy wanted to bed me. He would not take no for an answer and eventually he had me sent here

for a year. I expect he thought it would teach me a lesson in humility and make me more amenable to his advances."

"Have you always preferred women?"

"My first lover was a fellow novice," she said cautiously. "We were both young and far from home. Both pledged to Aieda. She was my friend and we ... we experimented under the sheets." She took my right hand from where it lay tucked under her side and moved it up onto one of her breasts.

"She had been with a man before. She said it had been ghastly — he had been rough and the act itself had been painful and unsatisfying. I had never even been allowed outside of the temple grounds on my own. We of the Gifted are not given the chance to sully ourselves with non-believers, and I was still too young to be trusted ... I fell very much in love with her."

"Where is she now?"

"She was older than I and was not gifted. She became a priestess and they sent her off to a temple in the country somewhere. Last I heard she was married and had children." She said the last with distaste in her voice.

"Have you ever lain with a man?"

"Not willingly," she said, a touch of something hard in her voice. "And not at all since I learnt to control my power — they would not dare." Then she twisted around in my arms and, with her face close to mine, whispered, "And why would I want to? What man could compete with your beauty?"

We kissed and let ourselves forget all about our pasts and the future in each other's arms again.

For the next few days Nessa used the cloak of invisibility to come and go as she pleased. This allowed her to continue with her responsibilities at

the temple as normal while I stayed in the inn in her place. Fortunately, it was not a ceremonial time for her sect — they being most active during the nights of the full moon — and so no one became wise to the apparent existence of two of her. Nessa and I spend this time making love and sharing each other's secrets — though I am not sure how much she believed of what I told her.

However, all too soon this holiday had to come to an end. I needed to present my new self to Lord and Lady Vead at the castle and take back up the responsibilities of Ilbarsis' magus. And so, four days after she had last been seen in Ilbarsis, Sarina the Seer appeared at the door of the Seaview Inn where she took over the room of the departing Priestess of Aieda. Then on the morning of the fifth day I presented myself at the castle gate.

The acting guard Commander, Lieutenant Nestus, painstakingly checked my letter of authority, mouthing every word silently. He then sent a runner to the main hall who, as expected, came back saying that Lord Vead would see me immediately. Nestus himself escorted me to the main hall, where he passed me over to the old scribe Jamis, who had perforce taken on the role of Lord Vead's secretary. I surprised them both by calling one of Vead's hounds by name and letting it sniff my hand so that it would know my scent in the future — a reputation can be worth a dozen spells if created wisely.

Jamis led me into the presence of Lord and Lady Vead and made formal introductions. He had been Willis' scribe and knew the details of the Lord's business well enough, however he was not as socially adept as his former master. I suspected that he would not keep the position for long and would not miss the extra responsibility when it was gone. He preferred the quiet art of writing to speaking.

Lord Vead had Jamis call the other chief members of staff into the room so that they could be introduced. With solemn demeanour but with

tongue firmly planted in his cheek, Vead told his staff to treat me as if I were Wamzut and that he would not tolerate any discrimination of me based on my gender. This was probably unnecessary because I had already noticed the nervous glances of some of the less-worldly staff members present. As far as they were concerned, the fact that I was capable of magick was much more relevant than my wearing a dress.

The last person I was introduced to was a stout Stemian craftsman named Smit, the chief carpenter. After acknowledging his clumsy bow, I queried him about the state of the stairs in the Wizard's tower and asked him whether they had been repaired. The poor man's brow furrowed and he unconsciously twisted the brim of the battered hat he held in his hands out of all proper shape.

"Sorry milady, but I am having trouble getting anyone to help me." He looked apologetically at Lord Vead. "They say that the tower be haunted. Peoples have gone in and not come back out and them that were brave enough to go looking for 'em say the place be empty, but full of strange magickal stuff that frightens them."

"Good man Smit," I said, "I suspect it must be some wayward familiar spirits of Wamzut's having fun with your workmen." I looked at Victus and smiled. "So with Lord Vead's permission, I will come to the tower after we am finished here and see what I can do. I would like to install myself in the tower as soon as possible."

Master Smit looked at Lord Vead and, when Victus nodded, said, "Thank you, milady. That would be most kind. Once you gets rid of them pesky spirits, I am sure the lads and I can have those stairs replaced in no time."

After a few more pleasantries Vead dismissed his staff and they filed out of the room, leaving only Jamis in attendance. I formally thanked Lord and Lady Vead for taking me on as their court Magus and told them where I would be staying until the tower was ready. At this, Lady Vead offered

me a room in the main castle. I accepted, but said I would not move in until the following day; I wanted to stay in the Seaview for one last intimate night with Nessa before coming under the scrutiny of the Lord's court.

Victus then asked Jamis to go and get some documents that he said were needed and at last we were alone. I do not think he liked the subterfuge and he confirmed this by saying, "Is this going to go on all the time, Wamzut?"

"*Sarina*, dear" said Cytherin. "You must start using that name, otherwise you will say Wamzut at an inappropriate time and spoil the whole thing."

"Bah! This whole thing flies in the face of nature," he said shaking his head.

"I think it is wonderful," Cytherin replied with a mischievous look on her face. "Now I have someone more my own age to talk to about magick and fashion. The gossiping will be just marvellous."

At this Vead chuckled. "You should see your face, old man. I can see that there is going to be a price to pay for your choice of bodies. No more hunting, drinking and smoking with the men-folk, I dare say." Cytherin laughed and winked at me. "It is a pity I cut off Willis' head," continued Victus, oblivious. "You could have used that."

"Oh, must you remind me, Victus?" said Cytherin, sobering quickly. "I would rather forget that whole horrible incident."

"I suspect it will take Smit about three days to build those stairs," said Victus, placing an apologetic hand on his wife's shoulder. "You can move into one of the guest rooms until then. We cannot have the new court Magus staying in a common inn."

He pulled a purse out of his jacket and presented it to me. "This is the balance of your holdings from the vault. As Wamzut had not nominated any next-of-kin, it legally defaulted to me to do with what I want. So here

it is. I presume you will need it to help set yourself up as Sarina. No doubt you will need a complete new wardrobe and I know from experience just how expensive that can be." He studiously avoided noticing the face that Cytherin pulled.

"Thank you my Lord but, with your leave, I prefer that this money be given to Willis' family and that of the poor guard who died in my tower as some recompense for their loss."

"No," he said refusing to accept the purse back. "I have already seen that they will be well cared for. They were my men and they died doing their duty to me, as they saw it. They are my responsibility."

At this point, there was a knock on the door and Jamis entered holding some official looking scrolls, which he brought over to Victus. "I have made the changes you asked for, my Lord."

"Thank you Jamis." He turned to me and holding out one of the scrolls said, "This is your copy of the formal contract for your employment. It fully details your responsibilities and benefits. This is recognised by the Satrap of Engle and so legally binds both of us. If you would like a moment to read it, the light is better over near the window."

This was no doubt one of Willis' legacies. The agreement I had had as Wamzut had been purely one of trust, a mutually beneficial arrangement between friends, where Victus had provided me with provender and a place to live in lieu of payment for my services. Engle was getting more and more like my home world every day and I was not sure I liked that.

Mindful of Jamis' presence, I took the document over to the window and duly studied it. My responsibilities had not changed and were formally spelt out in the document. The benefits were generous. I not only had full access to the Wizard's tower and Wamzut's effects but also a place at the Lord's table and a generous stipend of ten Engles a month. Ten gold a month more than compensated me for the loss of Wamzut's

part of the profits from the Glass Emporium and, with my room-and-board provided, it was a very generous offer.

I looked up to see them all looking at me. Cytherin had a smile on her face and I realised that Jamis' presence as a witness to the signing meant that I could hardly argue against the terms of the agreement. My friends had trapped me into accepting their largesse through my own cleverness.

I walked back to the group and said, "You are most generous Lord Vead and I accept ... however, I do have one request."

This was also unexpected and something I'd decided on the spur of the moment. "I am afraid that I cannot take up the position immediately. I have unfinished business that must be attended to."

There was silence for a moment and then Victus asked Jamis to leave. After the door closed, he demanded, "What is this all about, Wamzut? What unfinished business?"

"Forgive me Victus, Cytherin. Your generosity has made me realise how much I owe you both and how much danger you may be in by my staying here." They both started to talk and I put up my hand. "Please, let me finish. I have not told you the whole truth about the creature. It is not dead. It merely left Ilbarsis because it thought I was dead."

Cytherin brought her hand up to her mouth and a frown creased Victus' brow.

"I want leave to make sure that the threat to me is truly past and that the creature, or perhaps something worse, will not come back to Ilbarsis to the detriment of you and the entire town."

"Something worse?" queried Victus.

"I believe the creature was acting under orders."

They looked at each other in uncertainty and then Victus said, "Surely now that you have a new body they will never know that you survived. You have the perfect hiding place."

"Normally I would agree with you," I said with a shrug, "but these are not normal adversaries. The creature was looking for my spirit and tracked me down even in this new body. Who knows what capabilities its master possesses? I have to find out why I was attacked."

Both of them looked worried which revealed to me the extent of the ordeal they'd lived through.

"Perhaps I was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. If that is the case then chances are we have no more to fear. However, if the attack was specifically against me, there will always be the chance that my assailant will learn the truth and attack me again. I am sorry, but I cannot take that risk with your lives."

I took the liberty of reaching forward and placing my hands on both their arms. "All I am asking for is some time to find out why I was attacked, and I cannot do that here in Ilbarsis. Once I have resolved these questions, I promise that I will come back and gratefully take up your generous offer. This is my home. I want to keep it a safe place."

"Very well," said Victus, speaking across whatever Cytherin was about to say. "I understand and appreciate your concern about not bringing problems down upon the town. As its rulers, we have a duty of care to protect the people from harm. You will have your time and I hope you will discover that all is now well. However, I would like to be able to call on you if necessary. You are, after all, part of the defences of the town and its strength was weakened while you were not here."

"Oh Wamzut! I thought this finished," said Cytherin, a despairing note in her voice.

"It may be, my dear Lady, I just do not know and that is the reason for my concern. Do not worry, you will have me for your tea parties soon enough."

"Oh pooh, that was a joke, do not throw it back in my face," she said angrily. "And, I do not agree that this is your best course. In fact, I think it is foolish, as you may simply bring unwanted attention back to yourself."

Her eyes glittered with the extent of her emotion.

"I think that even though you look like a woman, you are still thinking like a man and no doubt feel your manhood threatened by having to admit defeat. And, if you only survived the attack of the creature through subterfuge, here in your own tower amongst friends, what makes you think that you will survive the next time, when you will be friendless and not in a place of your own choosing?"

Touched by her concern, I said, "These are good points, my Lady, but my plan was *not* to seek out and confront the creature again. I first wish to try to find some means by which I can prevail against it and similar beings. To do this I must travel to the places where such means can be discovered. I intend to travel to the School of Occult Studies in Constantine or perhaps even to Chamon in Gunde if that is what is required."

"When will you leave and how will you go?" asked Victus.

"Soon. Hopefully there will be a berth going south available at short notice. And, my Lord, in answer to your earlier question. I shall be reachable at the School of Occult Studies in Constantine for the near future and in emergencies you should talk to the Priestess Hilgar. She will be able to reach me quickly."

"Good," he said nodding his head. "That is a useful to know. Now, is there anything you need of me?"

"No, my Lord, all I need is a home to return to when it is all over."

At this, Lady Cytherin sobbed and wrapped me in her arms. At an earlier time, in an earlier body, this would have been the culmination of a secret dream. Now, after the last four days with Nessa, all I felt was, awkward.

"Do not worry, my Lady, I will come home. It would appear that I am not easy to kill ... at least, not permanently." I looked at Victus for help.

"Come along Cytherin. You must be strong. Do not make it worse than it is." He came forward and gently pulled his wife away and into his arms. She buried her face into his shoulder and he nodded to me letting me know I should go.

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