

Engelian Adventures: Transformations

Book 1: Transgressions

Chapter 29

by

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Chapter 29

Early next morning the dawn shock woke us both and we made love once more. Nessa's anger of last night had led to that lovemaking being extremely passionate and vigourous. Now, in the early morning light, she was extremely gentle and brought me to climax wanting nothing for herself. However, I insisted and when she also climaxed I looked up to see tears streaming down her face.

"What is wrong?"

"Nothing," she said drawing me up next to her. She hugged me tightly and I felt hot tears.

"You are crying! Did I do something wrong?"

"No ... It was lovely."

"Then why are you crying?"

She didn't answer immediately. Then in a quiet voice she said, "My time of bleeding is soon, sometimes I become moody, these tears mean nothing." My confusion was compounded when she added, "And, do not laugh. It might happen to you."

I didn't feel like laughing. In fact, I had a sudden urge to get up and get on with the day's business. Nessa was slow to follow and we dressed in silence. As I did so I noticed my unwritten letter to Victus lying on the table. Tonight, I promised myself. Tonight I would write something. He deserved to know some of the truth. Even if it were just to allay his fears about my coming home, eventually.

Over breakfast, we made plans for the day. I wanted to go back to the library to continue my research, so I suggested that Nessa accompany me, that being the safest course. She said that she would rather spend her day risking discovery in the streets of Constantine than sit in a stuffy old library. Finally we agreed to meet back at the inn for dinner but I insisted

she take the cloak of invisibility with her for protection. She argued with me briefly saying that she did not need the cloak then gave in. I wasn't surprised. I think she secretly liked the feeling of superiority that the cloak gives its wearer.

I approached the school with some trepidation after the events of the previous night. Hareld Minton was a devout Mithran and the thought that he might take further offence at my treatment of Seeker Harlan, after what he'd learnt of my recent activities, was a real concern. However, I need not have worried. Apparently, Harlan's reputation for arrogance was well known and Hareld was more concerned about possible reprisals towards me than about any impropriety on my part.

His attitude had softened towards me, for which I was grateful, and in answer to my unasked question he confided to me that although his faith in his gods remained true, his trust in the temple and its priests was at its lowest ebb. It seems there were far too many priests with attitudes like Seeker Harlan and Dawnmaster Tomar these days.

Relieved that our friendship was still strong, I spent an hour helping him with his biography of my life; giving him the details of how my recent change of circumstances had come about. I was rewarded by his enthusiasm at these exciting exploits. Apparently, my life had been getting somewhat staid in my dotage and there had been little written recently.

The writing of 'life stories', as he calls them, are his hobby. Mine was just one of many and, like the others, I had found it best to co-operate so that I would at least control what was written down. In truth, I believe the main goal of the exercise was to satisfy his curiosity and the recording of the person's personal history for posterity was just a lure to get people to give him the details he needed to know.

Finally, I made it to the library. Mistress Althea was not in evidence but the doors were not locked so I let myself into Nathaniel's room. I sat down at the desk, unscrewed the light jar and set to work. Hours later, I finally found a clue to what I was looking for. The reference directed me to an early volume of Nathaniel's life story, which I had to search out in the library's main collection.

As a boy of thirteen, Nathaniel had experienced a close call with death when he had almost drowned in a pond. According to Minton's biography, his spirit was already drifting away, no longer concerned with earthly matters, when his father had pulled his body from the water and attempted to revive him. This action had attracted his attention and although he'd had no feelings about his inert body or his father's frantic actions, he had been fascinated by his father's aura, which apparently was quite strong. Then his father's attempts to save him had brought about some response and he'd found himself back in his physical body coughing the water from his lungs.

This experience had brought about a change in the young Nathaniel. Previously he'd been a normal boy, full of the joy of his young life and his father had expected him to follow in his footsteps and become a carpenter. However, after the accident, he became more introspective and yearned to find out more about the spiritual side of life. So at the age of fourteen he'd run away from home, intent on becoming a priest at the Mithran Temple in Constantine.

Becoming a Mithran priest is not easy for someone from a poor family. Not just anyone can join their priesthood. One either has to have a special talent, as with Nessa, or one has to pay their way. It is common to find Mithran initiates being the younger sons and daughters of rich families who are trying to increase their social standing.

So Nathaniel had found himself in Constantine in the middle of winter denied the place in the temple he so desired. All he could think to

do was to stay outside the front gates hoping that they would change their minds.

He had left home ill-prepared and soon his food and money were exhausted. Being too honest to steal he was reduced to begging for alms. However, what little he was given was not enough to sustain him. Lack of food weakened him and he fell ill with a malady, which from his description, sounded like pneumonia. Delirious with fever he started seeing auras. Auras like the one he'd seen around his father's head.

This was interesting. I had always assumed that Nathaniel had somehow taught himself to see psychic auras. Now it appeared that he'd first seen them in an altered state brought on by the delirium of his disease; a mental state I might be able to duplicate magickally in some way. I read on eagerly.

According to the biography, Nathaniel was succoured, not by a priest, but by a magus from the School. The magus was a young journeyman who, by happy chance, had been passing the temple. Nathaniel had called out to him and told him how he looked funny with his head wrapped in spidery webs. The journeyman, whose name was not recorded, brought Nathaniel back to the School under the mistaken impression that the boy was a latent sorcerer. He thought that Nathaniel had seen the magick of his aura.

Nathaniel lost the ability to see auras as he recovered his health. It was then discovered that he could not be an innate sorcerer for he could not see magick even with the Mage Sight spell cast on him. This was a real mystery. No one could explain what he had been seeing in his diseased state.

Fortunately for Nathaniel, he was allowed to stay on at the school working for the then librarian, one Magus Ethan, who was interested enough in the lad to continue to investigate the phenomenon and

according to Nathaniel's biography, Magus Ethan had found a way to activate Nathaniel's special sense using magick.

Success. If he could do it then so could I. Perhaps there would be clues in his own writings. Ethan had been the school's librarian, surely he must have recorded his experiments and they must be somewhere here in the Library.

I looked up from the page wondering where they might be and realised that I was not alone. There at the end of the bookshelf stood Simad, priest of Arion.

He smiled at me and said, "Forgive me, Madam. I could not help but stare. I mean no disrespect but beauty such as yours is rare to find in a library."

I made no reply, partly because I did not know whether his honeyed words presaged something less palatable, and partly because I was getting a little annoyed at how my looks overshadowed who I was. I was starting to think that I should change the illusion the circlet created to something a little more homely.

"I am afraid I have come on urgent business," he said suddenly serious and moved closer to where I had seated myself cross-legged on the floor between the shelves. "But before I tell you of that matter," he said, "I must thank you for putting that pig Harlan in his place last night. I am in your debt. Though, from what my friends tell me, that act may have brought about your current predicament."

"Come on man, spit it out," I said impatiently.

He looked somewhat taken aback by my terseness and I realised that I was not acting very lady-like. However that was his problem, not mine.

"I am afraid Seeker Harlan has invaded the privacy of your room at the Scholar's Retreat under the pretence of a murder investigation and even now has men out looking for you."

"A murder investigation. Whose murder?" I said and felt my stomach clench.

"I know not. However in my experience he generally needs little excuse to throw his weight around."

Word of the death of the priest in Ilbarsis must have reached Constantine. They were calling it murder now. This was not good. If Harlan had started investigating me because of my slight against him last night he would have no doubt discovered that I had recently arrived onboard a ship from that very port. Which would have no doubt been a good enough excuse for him to search my rooms.

"What of my servant? Where is she?" I asked, trying to keep my voice under control. I did not want this man to know how important Nessa was to me.

"I do not know," he replied. "But it is you I am concerned about. Can I offer you sanctuary? This is not the only place in Constantine that is protected from their scrying spells."

I smiled at the irony. He thought me a sympathiser to his cause and was willing to conspire against the Mithrans on my behalf. When really all I had wanted to do was to take Seeker Harlan down a peg or two. However, he was right. With access to my personal effects at the inn, it would be easy for Harlan to find me with magick. Currently, I was in one of the few places where they would not be able to trace me for the school has wards against such spells.

"Thank you for the offer," I said, trying to make my voice sound unconcerned, "but I have nothing to fear from the authorities because I have done nothing wrong. However, I do find this interruption unfortunate as I have much to do." I wanted to get rid of Simad as quickly as possible

so I could contact Nessa, astrally. "Would you take a message to my servant for me?"

"Yes," he said, somewhat crestfallen at my refusal of his offer of aid. "If I can find her."

"Please tell her that she is to come to me, here. As soon as I am finished with my research we will clear this mess up with the authorities."

"I must say, you are taking this very calmly," he said, "I must warn you that Seeker Harlan is not one to be trifled with."

"Neither am I," I snapped with true anger. "And if Seeker Harlan insists on this childish display, he will discover that he has bitten off more than he can chew."

When I was sure Simad had left the building I went back to Nathaniel's room, closed and locked the door and lay down on his bed. Then, leaving my physical body behind, I carefully negotiated the wards and walls of the library in my astral body and caught up with Simad as he reached the gatehouse.

In response to my unvoiced question, Minton confirmed, with a nod of his head, that as far as he was concerned Simad was going to do as I asked and that he could be trusted. Simad's own psychic aura showed no sign of psychic abilities other than sorcery, so it was unlikely he could lie to Hareld and the fact that he was leaving the school through the main gate also meant he had nothing to hide from its gatekeeper. That was good enough for me.

I flew up to get my bearings and then travelled quickly to the Scholar's Retreat. Everything looked normal enough on the outside but when I passed through the wall into our room I found Seeker Harlan himself methodically going through the contents of my travelling chest.

Neatly laid out on the bed and table were my belongings and they did not match up with the background that Seeker Harlan would know of me.

Why would a lady carry around such rough clothing and a weapon? Where were the trappings of her elderly female servant? This was indeed an interesting question, I suddenly realised — where were Nessa's belongings?

As I watched, Seeker Harlan revealed the most damning and confusing evidence of all. Out of my component's satchel tumbled a tangled mass of silver jewellery.

We both instantly recognised this as a complete set of moon-phase medallions — the most valued possession of an Aiedan priest. If the murder Harlan was investigating was the one we had fled Ilbarsis for, then this was damning evidence indeed. The big mystery was what were they doing in my component's satchel at all? I had not even known that Nessa still carried them.

That I could see none of Nessa's other belongings disturbed me and I had the sudden realisation that she had left me, fled, even before Seeker Harlan had come calling. The thought of this morning's tears came to me and I felt a sudden sadness even through my astral body's dispassion and the distinct urge to cry. For the moment though intellect ruled.

Something had to be done about the medallions. I did not know why Nessa had left them. Was it by accident, or were they some sort of parting gift? Either way she had left Seeker Harlan the perfect means to find her, no matter who he thought they belonged to.

The scrying spells used by sorcerers, though little understood by their users, all make use of the psychic residue that rubs off of all of us onto the objects that we use regularly and have emotional attachment too. Though I would be losing one of the avenues I had of finding her myself, I had to destroy the residue of Nessa's spirit that clung to those medallions before Harlan could make use of it. Fortunately, he had moved on to look

through more of my belongings, but my attention stayed with the medallions where he'd left them on the table.

An object's aura, though it appears as a silky transparent mass clinging tightly to the object's surface, is actually many, many filaments wrapping round and through the object and is connected to the item's owner by incredibly fine strands of astral stuff akin to my silver cord. Infinitely stretchable, they would only be tangible to my astral body at their connection points. One end of the strands would be Nessa herself but following the almost invisible threads would take too long. I would have to break the connections at this end.

I moved one astral hand purposefully through the pile of jewellery feeling for the connections and was rewarded by feeling many of the tiny strands snap. It took several passes before I was happy that enough of the connections had been severed to make the medallions useless for the purposes of scrying.

Now, having protected Nessa as best I could, it was time to deal with Seeker Harlan. A little judicious rewriting of his memories and I would be removed as a potential suspect in his enquiries and Nessa would be safely removed from his memories. However, I would have to do this before he told others of his discovery. I broke my projection and returned myself to the library. Time was of the essence.

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