

Engelian Adventures: Transformations

Book 2: Transitions

Chapter 13

by

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Chapter 13

Half an hour later we left the tarmac and headed off up a dirt road into the forest. We had driven through the middle of the city and out the other side with Justin refusing to say where he was headed. As I had no better destination in mind I'd let him go his merry way. Jonathan on the other hand was starting to get annoyed.

"Just where in hell are you taking us, Justin?" he said as the big black man adjusted the gearbox to cater for the rougher surface.

"Somewhere safe. Dickson's got too many eyes in the city for us to hide there."

"Yeah, but what's out here?" said Jonathan gesturing at the trees.

"Somewhere he'd never think to look," said Justin, his eyes on the deeply rutted road.

Five minutes later we arrived at a small collection of ramshackle buildings set on a spit of land at the mouth of a creek. The main buildings were raised off the ground on stumps and made from weatherboard patched with all varieties of scavenged materials. There were a couple of small boats tied up at the end of a rickety-looking dock and the smell of swamp and fish guts was heavy in the air. Justin stopped the vehicle next to a rusted sign that read, 'Boats for Hire'.

"You were right," said Jonathan, eyeing the surroundings. "No one would think to look here for anything."

Justin gave him a hard stare and Jonathan said nothing more, instead turning away to look at the water and the mud flats on the opposite side of the creek.

My eyes were drawn to the five dogs that came out from under the largest building to look at us. They were all mongrels, but they looked well fed and looked after. The surprising thing was that none of them barked at us, though they were wary, slinking towards us with their tails low.

"Hide the guns," said Justin, casually handing his own weapon to Jonathan before opening his door and climbing out.

"Hey, Moses?" said the big black man in a friendly tone of voice as he walked towards the foremost dog. "You forget me or something, old fellah? I a'int been away that long, have I?"

The dog was big, and white, and partly labrador and its tail started to wag as it moved in on Justin to have its head rubbed.

This seemed to break the ice and the other dogs visibly relaxed and came trotting over amiably to investigate the car. One even pushed himself up on his back legs and looked through the window at me. He was an intelligent looking brute with the long ears of some sort of hound. It was fortunate the window was up, because I wasn't sure if he wanted to be friends.

These were not the first dogs I'd seen back here on Earth. On Andros Island, when I'd jumped ship to avoid discovery by the press and the authorities, I'd snuck through the settlement and run afoul of several dogs. Their keen sense of smell had told them I was something unusual and many had barked at me and some of them I'd had to use magick on to stop their owners becoming suspicious.

"You can get out now," called Justin giving another of the dogs a rough pat.

"You sure?" said Jonathan looking uncomfortable.

I felt the same. I could hardly do surreptitious magick with witnesses about and if the dogs didn't like my scent, I could be in trouble.

Fortunately, a two-tone whistle sent all the dogs trotting back under the house. I looked up to see a large black woman in a floral frock using the handrail to descend the front stairs of the main house. She had a caliper on her left leg, which made the process look ungainly.

Justin moved towards her and they began talking, but I couldn't hear what was said because Jonathan turned towards me and spoke. "You okay,

Babe?" he said and gave me a smirk. "Justin's right, you know. No one will look for us here. We'll lay low for a couple of days, then I'll fly us all out of here and leave Dickson and all this behind. You ever been to the States, Babe?"

"What about her?" I said looking at Lizzie. "What do we do with her? Does she have family?"

He looked at Lizzie and shrugged his shoulders. "Don't know. Poor kid. No mother and now no father. Justin'll know what to do with her. He's got a soft spot for her too, y'know. He'll look after her."

I wasn't convinced, but had no better solution.

Jonathan opened his door and got down from the cabin. He then opened the door opposite me and, looking at me over Lizzie's sleeping form said, "I can't believe she's still asleep. Is that healthy?" Then, not waiting for a reply, he leant forward and gently pulled her up into his arms.

Alone in the car, I took a second to pull out the stack of notes I had stuck in my underwear; they were too bulky to stay unnoticed where they were. Then, having little time, I hid the money under the back of the passenger-side front seat for retrieval at some later time.

Having secured my little nest egg, I got out and followed Jonathan across to where Justin stood talking with the black woman. She and he had the same jet-black skin and similar features; *a relative perhaps?* I wondered.

As we neared, the woman stopped talking and looked me up and down. I wore no glasses or hat, but still, the baleful look in her eyes was not the reaction I expected.

"An who's dis den?"

"Jonathan, Tina and the girl's name is Lizzie," said Justin and then he turned and indicated the woman. "And this is Mama Belvedere."

"What you, girl?" said Mama still looking at me. "Where you done get dose ears, dose eyes?"

"She's an actress," said Jonathan shifting Lizzie weight to a more comfortable position. "She got them for a part she played. Haven't you seen that movie?"

"Don' got no teevee," said Mama Belvedere, not taking her eyes off me. "Where you from, girl?"

"England." They all turned to look at me.

"What part?"

"London." I was beginning to feel very self-conscious.

"How you get involved wit' my boy?"

"Mama," said Justin, sounding like some guilty teenager with his strange squeaky voice. "Tina is Johnny's girl and you're being impolite. Now, how about you invite us all in and give us a drink. And you could have a look at the little girl too. She's had a bad day, but still I think it's strange she's asleep."

Mama Belvedere gave me another long appraisal before turning and making her way slowly back up the stairs. Justin and Jonathan followed her. I took a moment and looked around at the rundown buildings, the dirt, and the unnaturally quiet dogs who were all watching me from their positions under the house.

Briefly, I contemplated making a run for it. With all the money that was in the bags in the back of the vehicle I would be rich and well set up for what I needed to do. But no, I wasn't ready to face this new world on my own, just yet. I needed Jonathan. And, if truth be told, I was concerned about what would become of Lizzie. That, plus the fact that I wasn't sure I could drive the car, decided it.

I climbed the stairs after Jonathan. Perhaps he was right. Perhaps a flight to the States was the most sensible thing to do, as long as I could get

round the passport problem. And, who better to smuggle me into the country than a pilot with criminal connections.

Directly through the front door was a little foyer-cum-office where the presence of a till on a bench and a cardboard sign with rates for boat hire written in thick black letters told me that we were in the heart of Mama Belvedere's commercial empire.

We followed Justin through into a darkened room insufficiently lit by sunlight from a part open window. Jonathan reached out with his free hand and flicked a switch next to the entrance, but nothing happened in response.

"No lights until the generator is running," said Justin dropping the car keys on a dark wooden dining table littered with magazines. "Mama only starts it up at dusk. She's got a gas cylinder, though."

"Who done want tea?" came Mama's voice from the next room.

"Please," I said, loud enough to be heard.

Justin looked at Jonathan.

"Any chance of a coffee?" said Jonathan putting Lizzie down on a tattered sofa.

Justin pushed the magazines to one side of the dining table to make a space and then left us to go into the kitchen.

Jonathan took the opportunity and came over to me. "I'm sorry you've been caught up in all this, Babe." He tried to put his arm around me and I stepped away. A frown appeared on his brow and his shoulders sank. "Yeah ... Okay ... I understand. You're angry."

I didn't disagree with him, though my actions had been more against his wanting of intimacy rather than anger. I moved passed him to where Lizzie lay on the sofa and sat down beside her. Things were getting a bit maudlin.

"Tina? I'll make it up to you. I promise," he said and knelt on the floor next to me and took my hand. I was trapped, boxed in between the sofa

and his body. "Come with me to the States. My family lives in Florida. We'll be safe there."

I was stunned. This was akin to a marriage proposal and well beyond anything that I had imposed on him with my mesmerism. The look in his eyes only confirmed the depth of feeling in his words. And, he wouldn't let me extract my hand from his grasp.

This was all wrong. He wasn't supposed to have any true feelings towards me. Why couldn't he be satisfied with lust? I had difficulty meeting his eyes, but that was the only way out of the situation. So, despite the situation, and the nearness of Justin and his Mama, I met his gaze and sent my mesmeric power into his mind.

"Whatchu doin', girl?"

Mama Belvedere was standing in the doorway, a tray of cups in her hands and a scowl on her face.

"Doan you go castin' no evil eye on dat boy."

I shot to my feet knocking Jonathan off balance. "I'm not doing anything! Evil eye? What are you talking about?"

"Mama? What's going on?" said Justin coming into view.

"Yoah elf woman bin using the left hand on yoah friend."

The left hand? I closed my eyes and opened them with Mage Sight.

"Doan you try yoah witchery on me, woman," said Mama putting the tray down on the table. "Dis is my house and the Loas protect me here."

The woman was babbling about Voodoo, but she had no magick that I could see. No, my main concern was that Justin might believe her. He was dangerous. He was a killer.

"Justin, I've done nothing wrong. Believe me."

Mama Belvedere began muttering something. Justin looked at her and then scowled at me. This was going from bad to worse at a fast rate. He advanced into the room seeming to grow larger with every step. And, I

couldn't even try to mesmerise him, which was my first thought. His eyes were at my feet. I looked down. Jonathan was leaning at a strange angle against the sofa, slack-jawed and staring-eyed, still enthralled by my spell.

"What have you done to him?" growled Justin.

The anger in his voice made me aware of my peril and my elvish adrenaline kicked in. I looked back at Justin in time to see him begin his back-handed swing and, even though I could have ducked the blow, I never got the chance as some unseen psychic force came down on my aura like a smothering blanket.

The already dark room suddenly became night black as the unseen force interfered with the Mage Sight spell that was still in effect. I was under some sort of supernatural attack, the likes of which I'd never seen before. I began to fight back with all the mental strength I could muster. But, just as the darkness was beginning to recede, Justin's blow took me across the cheek. I remember my head whipping round with the force of the blow, but it was the, now unchecked, psychic force that drove me down to the floor and into darker depths of unconsciousness.

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