

Engelian Adventures: Transformations

Book 2: Transitions

Chapter 15

by

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Chapter 15

Unconsciousness is the body's way of dealing with trauma. Unfortunately, there is no such release in the spirit realm. Awareness brought with it the realisation that my spirit had somehow been drawn out of Attina's body against my will. I looked round in confusion and with growing fear.

Was this the end? Was I finally dead?

I could see Justin, Mama Belvedere and the others, but they were obscured. The room was full of a swirling milky translucence the contact of which sent shivers down my silver cord and made Attina's body shudder and jerk like she was having some sort of fit. Despite her distress, the sight of my silver cord stretching between myself and Attina's body was a welcome relief. I wasn't dead, yet, but I had no idea what was happening to me.

Suddenly, darkness descended over my True Sight as faintly glowing gravestones covered with indecipherable markings simultaneously thrust themselves up out of a dank mist that had risen from the floor. Inexplicably, I could smell swamp water and the reek of the jungle. I could also hear a gibbering sound that came from the sky where a gibbous moon now hung. The feel of cool mud oozing between my toes confirmed the impossible truth. I was somewhere else and — somehow — I was physical.

I looked down and saw, beneath the whiskers of my beard, my old body covered with the dark brown material of my favourite robe. Then my true age descended on me like a weight and I felt my back fall into a stoop while arthritis gripped my hands once more in its cruel bondage.

"*Who you den?*" said a voice from behind me.

I turned with a faltering step and saw a black man leaning on a crutch. His broad-brimmed hat and pale tattered clothes looked like those of a peasant and the smoking pipe he held in his right hand was a handmade corncob.

A human face, not a monster as I'd been expecting. I reached out towards him.

"I'm Wamzut... Help me. Please," I said and shuffled toward him. Sharp stones dug into the softened soles of my old feet. I'd grown used to the youth of Attina's body. Now my body was old again, and it ached more so then it had ever done when it was alive.

"Where you from, man?"

"Ilbarsis." The black man seemed to retreat from my slow advance without moving. It was as though the landscape flowed around him as I moved towards him.

"Where's dat den?"

I stopped walking.

"Magudonya," I answered, but the flaws in the setting were starting to make me wonder. Was I asleep? Was this all some strange dream?

"Neber heard of it," he said and casually took a pull on his pipe in a dismissive manner. *"Why you bin riding the fey woman?"*

I recognised the compulsion in his voice. Dream or no dream, this was no potential saviour. I shook my head to clear my thoughts and kept my mouth shut to resist answering.

"Ho, ho!" he said and there was true mirth in his voice. *"No good you bein' stubborn. You's in my place now."*

Was I? Not if this was a dream? If I was lucid dreaming then this 'place' was mine to command. I imagined him sinking into the swamp. Unfortunately, he stayed right where he was.

"Well, ain't you goin' try somethin'?" he said, apparently unaware of my endeavour to despatch him.

Okay, so I wasn't dreaming. Yet, this place seemed so real; I could even hear frogs croaking in the nearby grass. It must be some sort of illusion.

"Who are you?" I demanded with a quavering voice while trying to stand up as straight as my decrepit form would allow.

"*I'm Papa,*" he said. "*And you gotsta deal wit me fore you goes anywhere.*"

Things clicked into place — Voodoo. Not a tradition I'd studied, but I knew something of it.

"Papa Legba?"

"*Da same,*" he said with a smile and a nod of his head.

Papa Legba was the intermediary between the real world and the Voodoo gods. It seemed Mama Belvedere was a priestess of that cult, a houngan, or whatever the female equivalent was called.

"Where am I?"

"*My turn,*" he said pointing the stem of his pipe at me again. "*Why you bin riding de fey woman and what yoah dun wid her? You no one of the Loas.*"

"That's two questions." I replied with some strength. I was finding his compulsion easier to master than Arion's. "I did nothing to her and I'm *riding* her because I have no body of my own."

Despite my bravado, I didn't feel anywhere near as confident as I sounded. Still the pain in my body was receding now that I realised that it must purely be a feature of the illusion he was projecting onto me. I corrected my posture and stood a little straighter. Age was a factor of the body, not the spirit. I was doubly comforted by the fact that I could still feel the magick from my sorcerer's aura. That meant I must still be close to Attina's body as it would have been drawn from my aura if we had passed through a physical wall.

"*Ho, ho!*" said Legba. "*You a feisty one. What'm I goin' to do wit you? Mama's callin' on me to punish you.*"

He was looking for me to make a counter offer, which meant she didn't completely control him. I could hardly believe my luck. Still, I should try and bargain from a position of strength.

"So, why haven't you?"

"Ain't seen nothin' like you before. Thinkin' you somethin' special. And what does killin' you get?"

"Nothing," I replied.

"Zactly," he said pointing his pipe stem at me again as though he was proving the point.

I was beginning to feel more confident. Like it had been in Arion's Realm, what I was seeing must be some form of illusion, but it was an illusion that was fooling the True Sight of my astral self — something I had previously thought impossible. However, if I could overcome Legba's compulsion I should be able to do the same with his illusion. I concentrated and strengthened my psychic defences.

The shape of a window appeared against the nighttime backdrop of the jungle, and the sight of the afternoon sun beaming into the room was a welcome one. I concentrated harder and Legba and his surroundings began to fade into the background to be replaced by the diaphanous mass of the complicated and ever-moving psychic material that he had wrapped me in.

"Hey, where you goin'? I ain't done wid you yet," I heard him say faintly as he finally realised what I was doing.

In the real world Attina's now quiet body, had been thrown over Justin's shoulder and was in the process of being carried from the room. Jonathan and Lizzie lay together on the couch oblivious to everything and Mama Belvedere wasn't in sight. Although it seemed for the moment that I had the advantage over Mama Belvedere's tame spirit, physically, I was in real trouble; Attina's body was at her and Justin's mercy.

I followed Justin as quickly as I could. It was hard going. Not only was I having to work against Legba's cloying embrace, but I was having to drag my sorcerer's aura with me. I made the effort and went through the doorway instead of the wall; I needed to keep the magick I had stored for when, and if, I awoke.

Then I saw Mama Belvedere. She was in the kitchen standing just outside another opened doorway. The room beyond was dark but the entrance was covered with myriad strands of psychic material. In its own way it was warded against spirits. I hoped that this might slow Legba down because, impressive as his illusion skills seemed to be, he didn't seem very powerful otherwise. For my own part, I could only hope that where my body was taken I would be able to follow because of my astral cord.

This inner room was dark, lit only by a couple of candles that sat in a shrine on one side of the room. The rest of the room was full of a strange mixture of both Catholic and Voodoo paraphernalia. Saints and crucifixes shared shelf space with fetish dolls and chicken feet while religious icons and hand-drawn voodoo veves vied for space on the walls. It was a strange mixture, but surely it was a mixture that worked because, while I was able to follow Attina's body in through the door, apparently Legba couldn't.

The swirling mass of spirit stuff roiled ineffectually at the threshold for a moment before coalescing into the shape of the negro peasant to soundlessly express its displeasure at me with two fingers. Was this really *the* Papa Legba? He was supposed to be a powerful voodoo spirit. If such a being really existed, surely he must be more powerful than this. I turned away from his unpleasantness to see what Justin and his mother were doing.

Mama Belvedere was transferring items off a long, linen-covered table that was in a position of importance against the wall opposite the door. When she'd finished, she said something to Justin who lay Attina down on the table and then pulled both her and it into the centre of the room. Meanwhile, his mother went to one of the sets of shelves and came back

with some candles and a small brown bottle. Mama Belvedere lit the candles with some matches she pulled from a pocket of her dress and stuck them with melted wax to the corners of the table. Then, much to my surprise, she opened the small bottle and applied some of the contents to her eyes with the eyedropper in the cap.

She blinked repeatedly, said something I couldn't hear in my bodiless state, and pointed at the door. Justin complied, which I was glad to see for he was a formidable enemy, and I watched him close the door with the ersatz Legba snarling at me soundlessly over his shoulder. I then turned back to see what Mama Belvedere had in store for Attina's body only to find her staring in my direction, a look of shock on her features.

Automatically, I shifted to the left and spun around expecting to see some new threat. There was nothing. However, she had turned to follow my movement and I realised that somehow she was now able to see me. This was amazing. The ability to see astral spirits was uncommon and it looked as though she had got it from a bottle.

Whatever this was, it was what I needed to fulfil my original quest.

It seemed like years since I'd decided to leave Ilbarsis and try to find some means by which I could fight creatures of the astral plane while in my physical body. So many things had happened to me since then: Nessa's flight from Ilbarsis, the Library of Arunz, Seeker Harlan's death, Arion, exile. And now here — on Earth of all places — this backwater witch held the secret.

Mama Belvedere was mouthing something at me. This told me that her normal communications with the spirit world must be through the means of her Legba spirit's illusions; real sound cannot be heard by creatures of the spirit plane, they have no physicality for the sound to interact with.

She began gesturing and I realised that she was trying to use magick, or her equivalent, on me because I could see how her hand movements were picking up thin wisps of astral material out of her own aura.

It was interesting to see how she wove the stuff with her hand movements, while all the time mouthing the words of her ritual, which in of itself had nothing to do with the process. Perhaps it was some sort of rhyme to remind her of the movements. That at least made some sort of sense. Her expression became more confident as she wove and I began to think that perhaps it was time I did something. I had no real idea what this woman could do, but she was familiar with creatures of the spirit realm, so chances were she might actually be able to do me harm.

Her ritual came to some sort of conclusion and with a grandiose gesture she literally threw the astral construct at me. I moved to one side only to see the mass of material veer toward me. I moved back the other way. It changed course to follow, getting closer. A quick look at Mama, her actions and the concentration on her face made me think she was directing the course of her spell so I tried to duck out through the nearest wall so she would no longer be able to see me.

I was stopped dead by a veve which must have been proof against spirits and before I could get out of the way Mama's spell caught me and I felt a shock which followed me all the way back to Attina's body and into the darkness that descended on me.

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