

Engelian Adventures: Transformations

Book 2: Transitions

Chapter 19

by

Phillip Berrie

A Story (Vers 1.0); © Phillip Berrie, 2010.

Check www.phillberrie.com.au/Fiction for other episodes and other tales.

Chapter 19

I knew that defeating Mama Belvedere and her tame spirit was only the beginning of what I needed to do to get myself out of the predicament I was in. Forty years was a long time and I wasn't even the man I was when I was last on Earth. This group of people — poor choice, though they might be — were the only contacts I had. I couldn't really afford to make them enemies while I still needed to find out all the changes that had occurred here while I'd been away.

There was a loud knock at the door and I silently cursed at not being given the time I needed to think.

I got to my feet and moved to the door expecting Justin to burst in with every step I took. My heart began to race and the world started to slow down as Attina's fey adrenaline kicked in. Why? Sure, Justin was big, and strong, and a killer, but that was not enough reason for me to feel this way. After all I should be able to handle him easily with a little magick, if necessary.

Then I realised that this was not my reaction, but Attina's.

Justin was a foe she could understand and one she rightly feared. This was her primal fight or flight reaction, an instinctual response to someone who had recently hit her and someone she saw as a threat. That her body perceived this threat without him being visible came to me as a revelation. To do so required a certain amount of cognitive power. Cognitive power that I had assumed I had been providing in our association.

It looked like you can't keep a good elf down, at least not for very long. Was she somehow recovering her spirit? Would she eventually find a way to evict me?

The last was not a pleasant thought, but it was something best left to ponder another time. And, this was definitely not a good time for her to start thinking for herself. I needed complete control, or both of us might very well end up dead, again.

I forced calmness onto the body we shared using deep breathing exercises and strength of will. Attina's heightened reflexes, while useful, were a double-edged sword. They'd already brought about the death of one person without my volition and while she could be forgiven for the death of Seeker Harlan — he had been trying to kill us at the time — I didn't want her killing Justin, unless it was absolutely necessary.

Fortunately, the knocking was not repeated. I could only think that Justin was loath to interrupt his mother while she was possibly in ritual and took no answer as being the equivalent of a 'do not disturb' sign. I was thankful for his consideration.

When I'd calmed Attina enough and it had become clear that Justin wasn't about to knock the door down I went back to Mama Belvedere. Her psychic aura was no longer visible; the eye drops having apparently worn off. I knelt and examined her again. She was how I'd left her, asleep, the hem of her dress tangled up in her caliper.

I straightened her clothing to allow her to retain some dignity. As I did so, I couldn't help noticing that the leg under the metal support, while scrawny, appeared uninjured. I suspect hers was a long term impairment — most likely Polio.

Still, it appeared her disability hadn't prevented her from becoming a practitioner of Voodoo, and it seemed like she had the respect of her son. She was definitely a strong personality, and practiced in the ways of the mind — in her own primitive way.

It would be hard to keep her under control with mesmerism, but I knew she was the key to solving my dilemma. If I could convert her to my cause then Justin would follow, bringing the others with him. But how? She'd most likely been severely upset by her recent experience, and even if she hadn't, she would still think of me as an enemy.

Then it dawned on me that as she was the key to Justin, so was he the key to her. Justin was a fine strapping lad, one that any mother should rightly be proud of. And, even if they did live in very different worlds, I was willing to bet that he was the apple of her eye. It would mean using

more of my precious magick for an illusion, but it might be the only chance I had to turn things around.

I concentrated on the features of Justin's face: the glossy darkness of his skin, his shaved head, the brown depths of his eyes and the fullness of the lips. I dredged up what I remembered of his voice and mannerisms and tried to imbue the image of him I had in my mind with those qualities until I thought I had captured the man. Then I did some magick.

It was harder without my circlet — left in Brother Nathaniel's room back in Constantine — and made more difficult because I had no way to see the results. It was also a drain on my limited supply of magick, so I needed to be quick. Once I thought the illusion was in place I shook Mama Belvedere by the shoulder.

There was no reaction.

"Mama! Wake up," I said trusting to the illusion to make me sound like Justin but keeping my voice low enough that it wouldn't escape the room.

She stirred and tried to roll onto her side. I placed a restraining hand on her shoulder.

"Mama? It's morning. Time to wake up. I've got breakfast for you."

Her eyelids fluttered and her lips quirked upwards at the ends. "Justin?" she murmured.

"Yes, Mama, time to wake up now."

Her eyes opened, turned towards me and came into focus. Her lips formed a smile of recognition. It was then that I struck, pouring the full force of my will behind my mesmerism spell. Taken by surprise, and in such a manner, Mama Belvedere was no contest.

Placing one hand over Mama's eyes so she couldn't see, I let the illusion of her son drop. She lay unmoving, her will not her own, waiting for my directions. I felt dirty, playing on a mother's love, but pulled myself

together with the thought that there were worse, more damaging, ways I could be using to survive.

"Mama?" I said, still using Justin's voice.

"Yes, Justin?"

"I want you to forget all about what happened in the spirit world, no zombies, no wizard spirits. Those are memories you are better off without. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Good, now, I also want you to forget your suspicions about Tina. She was only trying to help. There is no sign of any evil in her and, while she is special, she cannot do magic. Have you got that?"

"Yes."

There came another knock on the door.

I lowered my voice and my head and said into her ear, "Call out that you don't want to be disturbed."

"Later. I'm busy," she bellowed, making me jump.

Hoping that I had bought myself more time I continued, trying to cover all contingencies.

"Mama, when I wake you up you will have forgotten all about my having mesmerised you. In fact, I need you to tell *me* that there is nothing wrong with Tina, that your suspicions were wrong and that I should help her. Tell me that Tina is a special person beloved of the spirits and that she was only trying to help. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"One last thing. I do not want you to summon any of your Voodoo spirits until after Tina has left. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Good, now I'm going to bring you around. You will feel relaxed and embarrassed about how you have treated Tina. You will want to be her friend and help her in anyway you can. On the count of three: one, two, three. Awake."

Though a little surprised to find me bending over her, Mama Belvedere was all apologies. My mental editing of her memories seemed to have worked fine — I suspect that was partly because I had thoroughly challenged her faith in her religion and her spirit guides and she didn't want to remember that.

However, the real test would come with confronting Justin. What I needed was for his mother to lull him into a false sense of security. Then I could mesmerise him as well and have them all under my control. It was regrettable, mesmerised people weren't as adaptable, but I really needed more control of the situation.

I let Mama leave the room first. She opened the door and limped out. Justin was there sitting at the kitchen table, his own version of Jonathan's mobile phone in his hand. His gun, obviously retrieved from the car, lay on the table next to him.

"Is everything okay, Mama?" he asked, looking at me with undisguised suspicion.

"Everyt'ing's fine, boy. I just dun got confused." She gestured for me to join her and wrapped one of her thick arms around my waist when I complied.

"You got yo'self one speshel friend here, boy. She be beloved of the spirits. All she was doin' was tryin' to help."

"Spirits?" queried Justin.

"The Loas," corrected Mama Belvedere. I squirmed inside and gave Justin what I hope was a winning smile.

"What's dat den?" said Mama and pointed at the gun.

Justin looked down and it was his turn to squirm.

"It's like I told you Mama. We're in trouble."

I breathed a sigh of relief at the change of topic.

"Trouble dat needs a gun to fix. What you bin doin', boy?"

"Mama... Mister Loomis, he's been killed."

"Killed, dead?"

"Yes, Mama... Lizzie, the little girl out there in the other room, that's his daughter. She's going to be awful upset when she wakes up. I couldn't think of anyone else, anywhere else, to bring her."

"That poor lil girl," said Mama looking through the door to where Jonathan and Lizzie had been made comfortable on the couch in the outer room.

"I can help them, Mama," I said putting a hand on her arm. "Let me help them, please."

She nodded and turned back to her son. "Attina's, one specshel girl, Justin. Now, you gonna tell me what you even doin' wit a gun?"

Justin watched me as I made my way out of the room. I could see he was still suspicious. I just had to hope that his mother could change his mind for me.

I would have liked to listen to the conversation that was going to ensue between mother and son, but had already decided that my presence and interest would have just kept Justin wary of me. Fixing things with Jonathan and Lizzie was more likely to win me back into his favour.

Jonathan was still slack-jawed and staring, his mesmerism undirected. Lizzie was still asleep unaware of all that had happened. Jonathan was the one that I needed to work on first.

"Jonathan? Can you hear me?"

He closed his mouth, swallowed and then breathed the single word, "Yes."

"Good, now, when I tell you, I want you to wake up feeling relaxed and alert. I also want you to forget about everything that has happened since you were asked about tea. Do you understand?"

"Yes," he breathed.

"Okay, on the count of three I want you to wake up: one, two, three. Wake up."

His eyelids flickered open and he wiped dry lips with an equally dry tongue and sat up straighter on the couch.

"What's going on, babe?" he said looking around with a little frown.

"I need you to go and make us some tea while I wake Lizzie. Are you up for that?"

"Sure," he said and got to his feet.

He put his hand on my shoulder. I looked up into this face and he said. "I'm sorry I got you into all this mess, Tina. I'll make it up to you. I promise. Come with me to the States. My family lives in Florida. We'll be safe there."

"That sounds good, Jonathan... Johnny. I'd love to meet them."

A grin spread across his face and I felt like a heel. He leaned down his lips pursed for a kiss, but I pushed him away saying, "Let me get Lizzie awake. If she drinks tea, you should bring some for her as well. She'll need it, I think." I turned back to the girl to forestall any arguments or further amorous advances.

"You're a real doll, you know that Tina," he said and I cringed inwardly as he placed a kiss on the top of my head.

I breathed a sigh of relief as he walked away muttering something about preferring coffee.

Enjoying the Story?
For more, and other stuff, visit
www.phillberrie.com.au/Fiction