

Engelian Adventures: Transformations

Book 2: Transitions

Chapter 6

by

Phillip Berrie

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

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

Chapter 6

"Boys," said the woman in charge as she picked up Nessa's and Simad's confiscated belongings. "We may have other visitors, so be wary. Narim or I will back soon." The two young men nodded and set about resetting the trap over the drain as she turned to Nessa and Simad. "I am the Magus Althea. We will go to Magus Minton. He will be able to sort this out. If you are telling the truth then all will be well." She did not dwell on the alternate case, just indicated that they should walk in the direction of the larger buildings of the School.

Nessa swallowed hard and said nothing. She wasn't at all sure she wanted someone hearing her thoughts.

Simad on the other hand seemed relieved at the prospect. "Good. He will vouch for me. I saw him earlier today and the Gundian Seer Sarina as well, but who is this Wamzut?"

Althea gave him a scathing look that she also turned on Nessa as she spoke. "He is, or should I say *was*, one of the School's major benefactors. Did you never read the honour board above the main table in the dining room?"

Chastised, Simad lapsed into silence and moved off in the direction Althea had indicated. Nessa followed and they crossed what appeared to be an athlete's training ground before entering through a gate into a cloister bordering a grassy quadrangle dominated by a huge tree with low spreading branches.

“Mistress Althea,” ventured Nessa while the older woman struggled to close the gate burdened as she was with Nessa’s cloak, bag and the other smaller items she was carrying. “Is the Magus Sarina still here? She told me she was coming to the library. I would like to see her. She will vouch for me.”

Of all outcomes, having to face the possible anger and disappointment of her lover was the least fearful. Yes, she had betrayed Wamzut, but he might not yet know the full extent of her betrayal. In which case she might be able to convince him that what she had done was in their own best interests. She also could not help but think that he would forgive her of even the worst. He had seemed very much in love with her this morning, surely he would not allow her to be thrown to the Mithran lions.

Althea scowled and turned so that she could see both Nessa and Simad. “She? I thought you said *she* was Wamzut?”

“She ... I mean he, is ... Oh, it is difficult to explain ...” ventured Nessa. “But, he could explain it far better than I.”

“Humph. And if *she* is a confederate of yours?” Althea gestured for them to move on. “I think we will let Magus Minton get to the bottom of this.” Althea’s look did not bode well for Nessa. “And besides, I think she is gone. I could not find her earlier.”

Nessa thoughts began to race. This Magus they were going to see would hear her thoughts. He would soon know everything. She would be undone. They would throw her out the gate to the waiting Mithran men-at-arms at the very least.

Tears welled up in her eyes. Suddenly it was all too much. "Please, no." she murmured and then her shoulders heaved with a uncontrollable sob of emotion. Fear, guilt, sadness, everything she'd been bottling up over the last several days welled up and overcame her.

Mistress Althea and Simad looked at each other in awkward silence.

"Go on, comfort her," said Althea.

Simad just stared at her.

"She needs comforting. You are a man. Comfort her."

"Me?" He shook his head. "I have known her less than an hour and thought her name was Belle."

Althea shook her head abruptly and then stepped passed them both heading along the cloister. "Be it trickery or truth, I do not have time for this. Hold her hand, or something, but bring her along."

Simad hesitated and then approached Nessa and put his arm around her quaking shoulders. "I do not know what you are playing at," he whispered, "but—"

Immersed in her own misery Nessa felt the contact of Simad's arm and plainly heard the unpleasantness in his voice. She looked up to see his grimy, ash-encrusted, frizzle-haired, piebald and far too male face much too close to her own.

"Get away from me, you horrid man," shouted Nessa repulsed by the sight of him and the feel of his sorcerer's aura on her own.

Mistress Althea spun about, dropped her burdens and from her left sleeve drew a thin flexible length of willow, which she pointed at both of them.

Nessa didn't notice and pushed Simad away from her with everything she had immediately regretting it as she felt the surge of her goddess-given power.

Simad flew backwards as every muscle in his body spasmed. His back struck one of the cloister columns — there was a separate distinct sound as his head hit the stone — and he collapsed in a sitting position slumped against the pillar.

The two women stood transfixed for several moments and it was Althea who moved first. She spoke a word and a wisp of pale green smoke wafted from the end of the wand and then struck at Nessa like a snake.

Meanwhile, Nessa had been far too absorbed by what she was feeling to move. Although she had physically thrust Simad away her power had stayed connected to him and she had felt the jolt as he'd lost consciousness. And now she could feel everything that was happening within his body. Every muscle in it screamed abuse as a result of what her power had done to him. But more importantly, though his heart still beat, it was beating far too fast and with a wild rhythm.

Then something bit her and suddenly her own body was under attack. Already she could feel her joints locking up as something foul raced through her nerves overpowering her control over her own muscles.

She moaned aloud in consternation. *No, not now*, she thought. Something was wrong with Simad's heart. It was beating far too fast and worse still, all that frenetic activity appeared to be for nothing. There was not enough of his lifeblood flowing through his veins. Not enough getting to his lungs. His brain. Simad would die, by her hand. She had to save him.

In desperation she channelled her healing energies into herself to counteract the paralysis that was gripping her body. She felt her power warring against the alien force. It was strong but she was stronger. She would, she *must*, prevail.

She felt hands grab her arm and someone shouted, but couldn't make out what they wanted. *Stop it*, she screamed silently and with a supreme effort she threw off the paralysis and brought her other hand round to grasp the wrist of her attacker.

Althea's was a strong will but Simad's need was greater so Nessa bore down on the woman's will and smothered it with her power. Outmatched, Althea succumbed and collapsed retreating into slumber.

Then, pausing only to check that the sleeper's heart still beat, Nessa turned to Simad and placed both her hands over his heart. It still beat wildly and far too fast. She could feel the rising exhaustion of the flesh in the over-worked organ — it would fail soon, suffocated by its own wastes — she had to slow it down and somehow get the blood flowing through the body correctly again.

Normally her healing power augmented the natural healing of the body. Simad's heart was not sick or injured, it was just out of control,

forced into that state by an aspect of her power she never knew she possessed. Could she somehow harness that new ability and use it to correct and slow down his heart before it failed him?

She would have to.

She concentrated on the wild beating of his heart. Tried to 'touch' it gently with this new aspect of her power that had suddenly become available to her. She felt the wrongness of the beat. Tried to calm it, slow it, unsure how to do either.

Nothing happened, so she applied more strength and felt the separate rhythms that warred against each other. Once again she tried to slow the beat down and felt the spasming organ respond. Thinking she was at last having some effect she tried to impose her own heart rhythm on Simad's only to have his buck so hard she physically felt the blow with her hands. Then, much to her horror, she felt his heart shudder and stop.

"No!" she said through clenched teeth.

She shoved her hands against Simad's chest and poured power into his heart desperately trying to get some response.

"In Aieda's name, beat!"

No response.

"Please!"

Still there was no response as she pushed again with both her hands and her power.

"For me please, beat."

She felt the heart kick under her hands and then was rewarded as Simad's heart began beating again at a more regular rate.

Her hands fell to her sides as she thanked Aieda for the life of the man before her. He would be very sore and probably hate her even more, but he would at least be alive.

Feeling exhausted and defeated Nessa looked up expecting to see people standing around her with accusing stares, angry faces and probably drawn weapons. There were none. The quadrangle and the cloister were silent and the only sounds of people were in the distance back the way they had come. Simad and Mistress Althea were both still, one unconscious, one asleep. *Did it all really happened so quickly?*

She was going to be in even more trouble now, but for the moment she was free. A little hope came back to her. But what could she do? Panic began to rise again and the urge to run was strong, but she had no idea which way to turn.

In desperation she grabbed up her precious bag and remembering days long past, moved into the quadrangle and climbed the tree.

One of the more useful things her brothers had taught her back on the family farm was how to climb trees. Climbing trees had allowed her to secretly sample the fruits of her grandfather's labour in his orchard, had shown her the secrets of the nesting birds and the scribbler worms and had provided a refuge when she wanted time to herself; adults did not tend

look up when they were searching for a small girl. In this way she had avoided lots of unpleasant tasks and some punishments.

Now, hidden from below by the foliage Nessa crouched motionless in a fork far above the ground. Moonlight filtering down from above and the magickal lights above the walls had made it easier to climb than she had expected even burden with her bag of belongings. And, the smooth patches in the bark beneath her hands made her think that she was hardly the first to climb this tree. Hopefully, those other tree climbers were all safely tucked up in their beds at this time of night and the School's adults, like the ones approaching, had forgotten such antics.

"The Mithrans go too far." It was a woman's voice. "They are attacking all other religions."

"They take the advantage," said a deep male voice over the sound of footfalls. "The strange death of the warlord was perfectly timed for their petition. They are striking hard before the King changes his mind."

"You are not suggesting—"

"I am suggesting nothing ... Hold! By the Gods, Althea!"

There came the sound of running on stone, which ceased as the two reached Nessa's victims.

"Aieda be praised. She is alive," said the man, relief evident in his voice, "How fares the other?"

"He looks like he's been through a battle ... but he lives still. Wait. I know this man. Simad! Simad, can you hear me? Wake up."

"Have a care, Melitta, or you will kill him yourself," said the man, then more softly, "Come on Althea, dear, wake up now."

There was a moan and a voice that Nessa recognised as Mistress Althea said, "Narim! What happened? Oh no, how is he?"

"He lives. But, who is he and what happened?"

"He is a School journeyman ... Nochadan. I think he said his name was Nochadan, but he's a priest now."

"Simad Moonson. Moon magus and priest of Arion," added the other woman.

"Yes. He used that name too ... He and this woman — Hilgar? She said she was a priestess of Aieda, which was something he apparently did not know — tried to sneak into the School through the back drain. Obviously never realised that that old student trick has long been known—"

"What happened then, Althea?" interrupted the man.

"Ummm. The woman she just attacked him, for no reason."

Nessa felt ashamed.

"I tried to paralyse her but my spell must have failed. And Narim ... Even though she had no sorcerer's aura, she worked some sort of magick on me. Put me to sleep like I was a novice. I have never known the like before."

"Damn it!" said the man. "I bet the Mithrans have designs on us as well. She is most likely one of their Seekers and is here as part of a raid."

No wonder there are so many of their blasted men around the School tonight. Quick Melitta, run and warn Minton. We will be there as soon as possible."

There was the sound of running feet as the woman Nessa could not see ran back the way they had come.

"Do not worry Narim, I am fine and can walk by myself," said Mistress Althea gently. "And besides, you will have to pick up that poor fellow and bring him. Perhaps he can tell us something when he awakens." Quiet sounds below were suddenly once more punctuated by Mistress Althea's voice. "That is strange. She left most of her things here, including this magical cloak she was wearing when she arrived. The only thing she has taken is a bag. It did not glow magickally, but it must be more important to her than these magickal items. What does that mean?"

"I suspect it means that she no longer needs them," replied the gruff voice of Narim. "And that means she has an agenda and the means to achieve it. Quickly, we must sound the alarm and contact Cyrus. He must intercede with the King."

Nessa listened with tears in her eyes as the Magi left the area at the run with the unconscious Simad. So much trouble. She was in so much trouble.

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