

# **Engelian Adventures: Transformations**

## **Book 2: Transitions**

### **Chapter 8**

**by**

**Phillip Berrie**

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## Chapter 8

"Can you tell us what is happening, Magus Narim?"

"How in all the hells would I know that?" said Narim, startling the young female apprentice who'd asked the question. He then placed an apologetic hand on her arm and said more loudly, "I *can* tell you all what has happened, however. So, gather round boys and girls."

Narim's boys and girls — actually, a half dozen young men and women — left off their searching amongst the potted shrubs and long trestle tables covered with smaller plants and gathered around him. This was his senior tactics class and a promising group of young sorcerers. Some of them might be effected by recent events so it was only fair that he told them the facts in case they needed to make some hard decisions.

"There have been a lot of rumours flying around," said Narim addressing his students. Several of them nodded in agreement and Narim cleared his throat before continuing. "Well, as older students, I think you need to be in the know. So you can help squash some of the dafter ideas I have heard being bandied about — stop the younger ones fretting over silly stuff — you know what I mean." Once again he looked round the group looking for agreement. "Good. Now pull up a piece of floor and I will tell you the important stuff and then you can ask questions and I will try to answer them."

They were in the herbarium, so their piece of floor was a stretch of gravel between tables used for the tables used for growing plants and those used for the preparation of herbs. Narim lowered his big-boned

body slowly favouring his right knee. As he did so he caught the look on the face of one of his students.

"Stop looking at me like I am old man, Seb," he growled. "I was unlucky and you took advantage of the situation. That was the right thing to do in a fight and it was my own stupid fault that I got hurt."

Narim however, did feel old, and tired. They had been up all night searching the School and he was starting to feel a strong need for his bed.

"First of all I want to thank you all for the help you have given the masters. You have all done very well." He was sure they would also have preferred to be lying in their beds as well. "However, the situation is not over and we still need your help, especially in looking after the younger—"

"What is the ... situation?" interrupted one of the young men.

"I was getting to that, Allus. So if I can be allowed to continue?" he said giving the interjector a reproachful glare.

"First," said Narim indicating thus with one stubby finger, "if you do not already know, the young Lord Samus was killed yesterday in the King's Cup." Knowing silence greeted these words but there were stricken looks on the faces of the two girls present. Both had obviously been fans of the handsome young lord, along with most of the female population of Constantine.

"May his spirit rest peacefully in Donai's care," said the oldest apprentice, Seb.

"And second," continued Narim, a second finger joining the first. "Late yesterday afternoon the King decreed that the worship of all non-Mithran gods is now against the law in Constantine."

"What?" said Allus, his face going pale.

"Fear not," he said to placate the Stemians in the group. "I do not know how this has come about, but we here at the School do not condone such a rash course and I know that Archmagus Black — who has aborted his trip to New Nineveh and returned to Constantine — is particularly aware of many of your unique situations. We can but hope that his wise council will get the King to change his mind."

*Damn fool thing to do in the first place,* thought Narim. The native Stemian peoples had readily assimilated the Mithran gods into their culture, but he doubted they would be as ready to give up their old gods. And why should they? This was a daft idea of the King's. No doubt instigated by the Mithrans who were taking advantage of the mysterious death of the King's brother.

Seb raised his hand and when acknowledged, said, "I am afraid I do not see the connection between the death of the King's brother and the sanctioning of the non-Mithran temples."

Narim shrugged. "Neither can I, but there were apparently some odd circumstances surrounding the death of young Lord Samus."

"Magus Narim?" asked Tamsin quietly putting her hand up.

"Yes, lass?"

"I heard his horse was frightened by a ... turtle?"

"Tortoise, surely?" corrected Allus with a snort.

"How could a tortoise frighten a horse?" said Seb.

Narim held his hands up to silence them.

"This is one of the rumours I mentioned before. It makes no sense to speculate and we will know the truth soon enough because the Archmagus will be able to tell us the findings of the Priests of Donai."

"Do they really speak with the dead?" asked Tamsin wide-eyed.

"Yes, Tamsin. They really do."

The young girl made the Stemian gesture to ward off evil.

Narim saw the glower on Seb's face and decided to change the subject. "However, despite these events, our main concern is closer to home. There is another rumour that the school itself is in some sort of trouble."

He made calming gesture to forestall their reaction.

"That rumour is ill-founded. Yes, I know there are Mithran men-at-arms in the streets outside the gates. But, I have been told that their presence is purely to do with a Gundian sorceress who used our library yesterday and who is now wanted for questioning regarding the death of a Mithran Seeker yesterday."

The young Sorian girl, Natal, made the sign of Mithra and Narim noted with some concern the way the Stemian apprentice, Allus, visibly

restrained himself from making a comment. He hurried on to keep their attention on him and not each other.

“The Mithrans believe she is still inside. However, Magus Minton has assured me that she left yesterday afternoon. So, hopefully that situation will all be cleared up soon and the guards will depart.

“No. Our main concern is finding our missing intruder. As Seb and Allus will have no doubt told you, a woman entered the grounds last night with a former student who was seeking sanctuary.

“When challenged, she claimed she was a priestess of Aieda but while being escorted through the school she attacked both her companion and Magus Althea and is presumably still in hiding somewhere on the grounds.”

"Master Narim?" said Seb with his hand raised.

"Yes, Seb?"

“What about the Alfaran?”

“Alfaran? What Alfaran?” interjected Tamsin.

Narim sighed and shook his head. “Some of the younger students said they saw one of the fair folk in the School grounds yesterday. This is another of the rumours that I have been trying to put a stop to.”

“Fair folk?” said Seb.

“It is what we call them,” said Allus avoiding Seb’s gaze.

Narim cleared his throat drawing all attention back to him.

"Yes," he said sternly looking round at the six apprentices. "I have heard this story and I believe someone was having a little joke. Someone who can create illusions and is not above playing a prank on the younger students. Someone who should know better. Hmmmm?" They all looked at each other and both Seb and Allus shook their heads in denial. Narim continued. "This supposed Alfaran was last seen running towards the gatehouse. However, Magus Minton did not see or sense anything unusual at the time. So, I think we should forget about that little incident and concentrate on something more important, like finding our missing priestess."

Natal cleared her throat to gain attention and then asked, "Magus Althea told me that the woman was not a sorcerer, and then she said that she was put to sleep. I do not understand. How could she have done that without being a sorcerer?"

"An interesting question," said Narim. "And, I am afraid, one I have no answer for. Journeyman Moonson also claims she healed him before they arrived. So I suspect her gifts are god-given and beyond our ken, by definition.

"Still, whatever her powers may be, she hasn't done much with them in the time she has been here, so I assume they are limited. And besides, it is her motives that concern me most. And that is why we must find her. So up you get."

The students got slowly to their feet and Narim heard a few groans.

"But first — if Seb will help me up — it is breakfast time." This changed their attitude amazingly and Narim had to call after them. "Wait up! Blast it. I am supposed to escort you to the dining room. Wait for me."

Meanwhile, Nessa was feeling very sorry for herself. She had spent the coldest part of the night curled up on the floor of a disused pigeon coop with only some spare clothes to keep her warm. She had wanted to climb out over the School wall, preferring to take her chances with the guard patrols and their dogs rather than face the anger of Simad. But the branches near the wall had been too thin and the danger of falling too great. So instead, she had crossed to the comparative safety of the building's slate roof and gone to roost in the coop while the searchers she could hear below had been looking not-so-high and low for her in the grounds. The smell and feel of the coop had been horrible, but at the time she hadn't cared and with the release of some of her nervous tension she had fallen into an exhausted sleep.

The Dawn Shock had roused her and the rising sun had lit up her hiding place making it impossible to go back to sleep. And, Mithra had brought her another problem; the coop was too exposed. She would be seen from neighbouring buildings if she tried to climb out the same way she got in. Still, there might be another way.

She moved aside the dress that had become necessary padding during her sleep — tisking at the white grime that now covered it — and examined the floor of the coop. There was an inset ring and the outline of the hatch she'd deduced must be there. After all, there had to have been

some way for normal people to reach the pigeons. Now she had to hope it hadn't been locked or nailed closed.

Nessa gathered together her clothes and other belongings and, after removing as much pigeon dirt as she could, stuffed it all back into her voluminous bag. As she did so her eye was drawn to the large gold ring that was already there. Its convoluted surface still had a few grains of sand in its deeper folds from when her ex-lover, Attina, had found it on the Isle of Fishes.

She had stolen it with the plan to sell it to gain enough funds so she could travel far away and hopefully start a new life somewhere where she wasn't known. Somewhere the temple would not be able to find her. She hefted the heavy ring. Wamzut had said that it was a powerful magical item, some sort of library, which was a plainly ridiculous notion. All she really cared was that it was real gold and that someone would give her coin of the realm for it.

She stuffed it back in her bag and then prised up the ring of the hatch from out of the caked grime and pulled on it. An ominous creaking made her stop immediately. She had no idea what lay below: perhaps the roof space of the building, perhaps an attic used as a dormitory. Either way she couldn't take the risk that someone was close enough to hear. She twisted round in the confined space around the hatchway and bent forward to examine the dark slit under the partly opened hatch. There was little light below but faintly in the distance she could hear voices. She cursed softly. While there were people within hearing distance she could not risk opening the hatch.

She slumped back against the walls of the coop and eyed the dirty roosting rails and boxes above her head. She was stuck here, well hidden, but not going anywhere in the near future and already the sun was making the small, confined space warmer than her dry mouth would have liked. The sudden thought that came to mind — that her mouth tasted like the floor — was probably all too true, but it was not a thought she appreciated at the moment. She forced her mind to think of more constructive thoughts.

She was in a school. People moved from place to place in a school following the demands of a daily schedule. True the normal schedule may not apply today because of recent events, but she was fairly sure she would have noticed if Mithran men-at-arms had raided the school, as the man she had eaves-dropped on last night had feared might happen.

So, hopefully, a normal routine would mean that whoever was below would move somewhere else and then she would be able to open the hatch and get inside. If luck was with her she might then be able to find something to drink and perhaps even some food.

Until then, she would just have to be patient. Wait and listen at the crack and, when it was safe, open the hatch some more. Slowly, bit-by-bit if necessary, and then — tonight perhaps — explore, but only when she was sure no one would catch her.

For some reason the much-vaunted Magi of the School of Occult Sciences had not been able to find her despite all their magick. She hoped her purely physical approach to her problems was the key to her safety and that they were too used to dealing with supernatural threats and had a

weakness when it came to simple hide-and-seek. She smiled and silently thanked her brothers for every tomboy trick they had ever taught her.

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