

Engelian Adventures: Transformations

Book 2: Transitions

Chapter 9

by

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Chapter 9

Robert and I entered into a lounge decorated with large black & white photographs of what must now, surely, be old movie celebrities. The dour servant then directed me to a walk-in wardrobe with mirrored doors. It was filled with elegant clothing racked according to size.

"Is there anything I can get for you ... Miss," said Robert forcing the honorific.

It was clear he had taken a dislike to me. This put paid to my idea of mesmerising him. It probably wouldn't work because of his distrust and the last thing I wanted was to have someone in Loomis' camp that was actively suspicious of me.

"No thank you," I said, smiling in a vain attempt to win him over. I obviously had lots to learn in this area for he turned on his heel without comment and went about his duties.

I pulled the nearest dress that was close to my size off the rack; I needed to get back so I could protect my existing asset, Jonathan. However, a glance in the mirror with it held up in front of me made me put it back. It was inappropriate and I didn't want to give them the idea I was some sort of floozy.

The next dress was too short and there was another that was the right size and length but the colour didn't suit my hair. It was as I was putting this last one back that I realised I was not alone. There was a small blonde girl peeking round the corner of the doorway.

"Hello? Who are you?" I asked.

"That's my question," she said stepping into the doorway and putting her hands on her hips. "I live here."

I smiled at this. "Quite correct of course," I said amused at her audacity. "My name is ... Tina, Tina Smith. I'm a friend of Jonathan's and I have been invited to lunch." I lowered myself to a crouch to bring myself down to her height and asked, "And what's your name little girl?"

"You talk funny," she said stepping into the room, her eyes on my face.

She appeared to be no more than ten but the clothes she was wearing belonged to a young woman, not a child. If I were a parent I would not let my daughter out in such a revealing outfit even if she hadn't bloomed yet. She was even wearing makeup.

"Do I?" I said realising the child's guileless questioning could very well catch me out if it were done in the presence of adults. Perhaps it would be best to get her questioning over with now. "I suspect that because I come from another country."

"Are you from Faerie Land?" Her innocent words at odds with the man's singlet, short shorts and rouge she was wearing.

"Very close," I said smiling again at the truth of her guess. "I was actually born in England. Do you like my ears? Would you like to touch them?"

She nodded and I turned my head slightly to one side. She approached and I felt her tentative little fingers run their course from lobe to pointed tip.

"I wish daddy would let me have ears like yours, but he won't even let me get my ears pierced."

"Well," I said amused by her precociousness. "Perhaps when you're older. Now what do I call you?"

"I'm Lizzie."

"Well ... Lizzie. Do you have any more questions for me?"

"Are you on teevee?"

"Ummm ... Television? ... No."

"Why do you look like that, then?"

"I was an extra in a movie," I said. *Thank you, Mr. Loomis.*

"Which movie?"

"You know? The one with the elves," I said hoping she would tell me. "You probably don't remember me. I only had a small part."

"Oh. Okay. Did you come here with Uncle Johnny?"

Young children, such mercurial minds — bless them.

"Yes, I did. He's outside talking with your father."

She turned and started to run off.

"Lizzie," I called after her.

She stopped in the entrance and looked at me questioningly.

"What type of dress should I wear to lunch? I want to impress your father."

She pointed at one of the enlarged photos on the wall. "One like that. He likes women when they look like her." And then she was gone off to find Uncle Johnny.

I looked where she had pointed. The infamous and ill-fated Marilyn Monroe, dress floating around her knickers, laughed back at me from the frame.

"No. I think not," I said to myself. "I'm not that sort of girl."

In the end I mixed clothing from the male and female sections to achieve an outfit similar to something I'd seen in the fashion pages of the newspaper I'd looked at earlier: men's trousers with a woman's blouse and a suit waistcoat. The waistcoat was a necessity, the material of blouse being too sheer for respectability.

I would have tried to put on a brassiere — despite not really knowing how — but I couldn't find any. Presumably this wardrobe was for emergencies only and people were expected to have their own undergarments, which I did not for my upper body.

When I thought I could past muster — there were toiletries and even a hairbrush in the attached bathroom — I headed back outside arriving

just in time to see Jonathan, Loomis and the bodyguard Justin entering the house at the other end of the courtyard through some French doors. They were deep in conversation, so I hurried after them eager to hear what they were discussing.

The bodyguard met me just inside the door. His height, muscular development and the contrasting white clothes on ebony skin were very imposing, especially as he blocked my way. I half expected him to send me back for another outfit.

"Excuse me." His voice was incongruously high pitched. "Did you see a young girl?"

"Yes. She's not here? She went looking for Jonathan."

He said nothing but stood aside and indicated with a sweep of one gigantic hand the direction I should take. As I entered into a magnificently decorated dining room I heard him leave the building calling in his manifestly contrasting voice the name, 'Elizabeth'.

Loomis was obviously a man of expensive tastes for the dining room was very well appointed. The sideboard, table and chairs were highly polished regency pieces and there was a white linen tablecloth with matching napkins and what looked like proper silverware on the table.

The man himself sat at the far head of the table with Jonathan at his left hand. Robert stood at his right side pouring chilled white wine into a crystal wine glass. They'd all stopped talking as I'd entered and I suddenly felt embarrassed by their attention.

"Very striking, my dear," said Loomis as he and a sluggish Jonathan got to their feet. "The business attire is at odds with your eyes and ears, but on you ... it works."

I was left wondering if he meant it, or was just being polite.

Jonathan pulled the chair next to his own out and smiled at me. He was being a gentleman in deference to Loomis' preference. I smiled back and let him seat me. He would not have made a good servant. He scrapped the chair on the floor, several times. Still he tried and I must say it felt strange to be treated in such a manner.

Robert, who had left the room briefly, came back in through a swing door wheeling a trolley with several covered dishes. He stopped before the reseated Loomis and lifted the polished metal lid of the largest. Steam and the smell of fish poached in some fragrant sauce escaped and I immediately felt hungry, despite my large breakfast.

"Should we wait?" asked Robert.

Loomis looked at him askance and said, "I take it that we should eat this now?"

"Yes, sir," said Robert the chef.

"Go ahead," he said obviously annoyed at something.

Robert wheeled the trolley around to me and began serving while Jonathan filled my glass from the wine bottle that Robert had left on the table.

"Forgive me, my dear," said Loomis. "As if our external problems aren't enough. I'm afraid we are having a little domestic crisis at the moment."

I looked at Jonathan and he gave me a rueful smile.

"My daughter and I have just had words. I sent her off to think about her attitude and make herself more respectable for lunch."

He stopped so that Robert could serve him and then continued in an exasperated tone. "You're a woman. When did your parents start letting you wear makeup?"

I stared at him.

"She really misses not having a mother. I try to do the right thing but ..."

Robert had served Jonathan and was in the process of putting fish on a fourth plate opposite me. He didn't react to his name being mentioned.

"Ummm, sixteen I think," I said guessing wildly.

"That's more reasonable," Loomis said. "Lizzie's eleven. Justin says it's because she has no friends her own age ... He's probably right."

Robert took from the trolley a second dish that turned out to contain mixed steamed vegetables. He placed the dish next to Loomis and then sat down across from me, just like one of the family.

"Please help yourselves to vegetables," he said as he placed his napkin on his lap.

Loomis cleared his throat. "We don't say grace ... or prayers. But, I feel it would be appropriate to honour the departed before we eat." He waited until Robert's glass had been filled and then said, "To Nicky and Tom. May they rest in piece."

Jonathan and Robert echoed the toast and then in silence we drank.

As we drank, I heard the sound of the kitchen door behind me open and, over the rim of my glass, saw Robert open his mouth in surprise and then throw himself to one side just before the sideboard behind him exploded under the impact of what could only be a hail of bullets.

Everything went into slow motion as my elvish adrenaline kicked into gear.

I threw myself at Jonathan to push him off his chair and, as I myself fell between the two chairs, twisted so as to land on my hands and knees.

In the doorway was a man firing an automatic weapon. He was dressed in black leather jacket and blue jeans and was wearing a black balaclava.

Even as I hit the floor I was off again, sprinting toward him as he started to swing the gun back across the room at a lower angle. I couldn't see the bullets themselves but I could see the individual trails of smoke they left in their wake as he moved the gun through the air. His motion was slow but inexorable and I had no misapprehensions about what those bullets would do to me.

As I moved I kept to my right staying in front of his line of fire. His eyes began to track my motion but I was too fast and I was able to grab the barrel with my left hand as I barrelled into him.

We both went down, the gun still firing, and as we fell I made sure that my right forearm came down on his adam's apple with all the weight of my body behind it. At the same time his head hit the floor with a terrific impact and he was out like a light, instantly. I stayed down, lying on top of him, while the still firing gun tore chunks of plaster out of the wall for a few seconds before stopping, its clip empty.

Ears ringing, I got to my feet as quickly as I could and checking that there were no more attackers in the short corridor turned to look back into the dining room. Robert was getting to his feet and drawing a handgun from under his coat. His eyes, that had been on me, were now turning to the other entrance of the dining room and I watched in horror as crimson splotches appeared on his shirt and the sound of automatic gunfire filled the room again.

There was at least one more assassin at that other entrance.

Jonathan was on his knees just to one side of the doorway and was an open target for this new gunman; I needed to act fast. I stepped into the room keeping behind the swing door that was being held open by the legs of my first opponent and pushed my hands into view. I then closed my eyes tightly and cast my dazzle spell.

I saw the flash even through my closed eyes and then, hoping that my opponent had been blinded, I stepped in and grabbed Jonathan by the

collar of his jacket. It was as I pulling him towards the corridor to the kitchen that I saw that there were two of them.

One of them was holding a machine pistol and he'd taken the full brunt of the flash. The second man however was in the process of turning to face me and bringing his gun round to bear on the room. It was a shot gun and he had not been blinded.

Just in time I managed to drag Jonathan into the cover of the corridor. There was a loud report and the door behind us bucked and showered splinters of broken wood over Jonathan's feet.

I was definitely not going out there again. I would have to try to flank him and do so before the other got his eyesight back. Gathering up the first assassin's weapon I left Jonathan on his hands and knees and sprinted down the short corridor to the kitchen.

There must be access to the front door and the courtyard this way; Robert would have needed it. I only hoped that I was going to be fast enough to get round behind my enemy before they killed anybody else.

I heard another loud report as I ran towards the courtyard up the short corridor that Robert had taken us down when we had arrived. I hoped it wasn't Jonathan that they were firing at. Thankfully he'd been relieved of his weapon at the door. The thought of him dying while trying to shoot with a gun whose bullets were in my trouser pocket was not a good one.

I burst out into the courtyard at full tilt and stopped, only narrowly avoiding falling in the pool, such was my momentum.

Just outside the dining room entrance to the house was Loomis' bodyguard, Justin. In his hand he carried a large handgun and he was trying to look in through the door without exposing himself to the gunmen inside.

He turned to look at me, his gun coming up automatically and I flung my arms wide hoping that he would think I was not a threat. Unfortunately, he did and the gun continued to come up. I threw myself to the side as he pulled the trigger. He missed me, but I was committed to my dive now and instinctively dropped the gun so as to enter the water cleanly.

My speed would be useless in the water. If he continued his attack I was going to be in trouble so I stayed under the water and moved down and towards the deepest part of the pool.

I touched bottom and suddenly realised that I was swimming. *But I don't know how to swim*, was my immediate thought. I forced away a moment of panic. *Don't be a fool*. Attina knows how to swim. It was her reflexes and physical skills that were saving us, yet again. Still, I became very much aware of the small amount of air in our lungs as I clung to a fixture at the bottom of the pool and tried not to panic.

No shots entered the water, though I did hear them being fired. This was a good sign. If Justin was too busy with the real enemy I would be able to draw a breath. Taking heart at this I swam towards to the edge closest to where I'd seen him and, with my lungs starting to feel tight, slowly came up for air.

There was no one in sight. There were no more gunshots. This end of the pool was the shallow end so I put my legs under myself and slowly stood up. Justin was not to be seen. I was about to boost myself out of the pool when a noise off to my side made me spin round.

Standing in a doorway on the side of the courtyard opposite the one I had just used was Elizabeth.

"Run," I cried, using my voice of command spell. She jerked as if struck and then looked at me in confusion. I cursed myself for a fool and tried again. "Go back inside and hide," I called again, this time slower and in English.

She dutifully turned around and went inside.

I boosted myself out of the pool and moved towards the entrance to the dining room. I would have to use magic now, or my speed. The machine pistol I had taken lay useless behind me at the bottom of the pool.

I flattened myself next to the entrance. Inside, I could hear the murmur of voices.

"I'll go dial 911," I heard Jonathan say.

"No use, their both dead," pronounced Justin in his squeaky voice. "It ain't over yet, either. Your girl is one of them."

"What? Tina! No way, she couldn't be, man. She saved my life. Took one of them out, too."

"Where?" Justin demanded.

"This guy in the corridor here," replied Jonathan.

"Don't shoot, it's me," I called and stepped through the entrance into the house.

Justin had been decidedly efficient. The two attackers had both been shot, dead, his heavy calibre gun leaving no room for argument of the fact.

Now, he and Jonathan were at the far end of the dining room and they were the only two left standing. Blood covered the torso of Loomis where he sat sprawled in his chair and I could see Robert's feet sticking out from behind the table.

Justin raised his gun towards me.

"Don't shoot," I cried ready to dive to the side.

"Don't shoot," said Jonathan slowly. "She's on our side, really."

Justin hesitated and then lowered the gun.

"Elizabeth," he said, his face emotionless, his slowed voice directed at me. "She mustn't see her father like this. Find her. Look after her ... Please."

He then turned to Jonathan, having dismissed me to a woman's mission. "Johnny, there will be others. Grab a gun."

Justin then turned back to me and shouted, "Move woman! Bring her to the courtyard. We have to leave. Now!"

I stumbled off feeling uncertain about my being relegated to looking after a child and even more uncertain as to what I could do for her at such a time.

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