

CHAPTER 18: REST AND RELAXATION

by Paul Watson

Several days later, Stone leans back in his office chair, his landline to his ear, “No, there haven't been any repeats of Miss Eurayle's transformation. Hardly surprising. Faerie affected her mother the same way. Yes, I agree. Sloppy on my part to forget the gate was there, but, in my defence, it was last active in, what, the Napoleonic Wars?”

“And Morn? Has she broken any more chains? For God's sake, Stone, that was why I sent her to you in the first place!”

“Not to my knowledge, but she's been refusing to come out of her room since we returned. On the other hand, as the old place hasn't burnt down yet, I'm confident to say no. Have you had any luck with our...joint issue?”

“No, they've gone quiet. And you don't have to be circumspect, Stone. This line is as secure as it gets.”

“I hate it when secretive murder cults go quiet. You never know if they're retreating or regrouping.”

“I don't like waiting for them to make the next move, either. But would you really prefer them to be trying to murder you?”

“It would break up the day, at least.”

“Stone!”

“No, obviously I'm not keen on getting murdered, it's always unpleasant, but it would at least give us a lead. We can't even threaten their goals to stir them up because we don't know what they are. Well, we know they need the Philosopher's Stone to accomplish them, but that doesn't narrow the options for chaos down too much. And that's not here, anyway, so they may have moved on from me.”

“Maybe, but who knows it's not there?”

“Outside of you, me, Morn and the Archive, who I assume we're trusting not to be part of the cult? Fergusson. Anyone he's bitched about me to, so it's likely the spy in his office has heard. The Archive hasn't reported anything to me. To you?”

“No. Your sources haven't turned up anything, either?”

“No. They claim they don't even know anything about that Jacobs boy's death that started this whole shebang going.”

“And your...other sources?”

“I'm not at the point where that risk matches the rewards. Our questions are too vague and unformed. Any answers would be similarly, frustratingly unclear. No, I'm afraid we need to do our own legwork before we consult outside. Have you made progress on our mole?”

“No.” Westenra replies, sounding irritated, “Having to work around Fergusson makes the investigation trickier, but we'll find them and then we can start to unravel things.”

“I do hope so. I hate not knowing.”

“You always did.”

“The Great Detective rubbed off on me, what can I say?”

“That you'll keep a closer eye on your team? I'd rather not have more reports about Morn's chains breaking. Or complaints from the Doctor about her torturing him.”

“It was hardly torture...”

“Stone...” he replies with just a hint of warning.

“I shall see to it, Jonothan.”

“Good man.”

He replaces the phone in the cradle. “Now if only I had some clue how I'll be achieving that particular miracle.”

There is a polite cough from the door way. “Your Lordship, Ms Arbogast has requested confirmation that you will be available to open the fete this weekend as usual.”

“That's this weekend?”

“Quite so, sir. Time marches on for us all.”

"Yes, yes, obviously I'll be there."

"Very good, sir. Shall I tell her to expect you alone? Or with company?"

"Company? Who do you think I'd be...oh, Adam, you are a genius."

"I do try, sir." he replies dryly.

Later, they sprawl into the drawing room, "A fete?" Manny says incredulously, his feet dangling over the arm of the chair he's slouching in, "Full on Midsommer Murders?"

"Hopefully no murders this year. We've gone a good few years without one."

"A good few yearss? How many have there been?"

"None. That was what we old people call a joke."

"Don't give up your day job for sstand-up comedy."

"I wasn't planning to. So..."

"If we're going are we going ass uss? Or ass normiess?"

"I don't..."

"She's asking if we have to pretend we're not freaks so Mr and Mrs Home Counties don't freak out?"

"Ah. Well, that's a rather low opinion of the people around here."

Manny shrugs.

"So, to answer, no need to hide yourselves."

"And will her demon highness be coming?"

"If she wishes to. It would mean leaving her room, though."

"Another 'joke'?"

"Going to have to pass, sir." Griffin interjects, "Don't do crowds. Didn't like them when I was normal, especially don't like them now."

"Obviously, no one has to go, but I think it would be good to meet the neighbours. There's no need to make a decision now. It's not exactly an RSVP event."

Thursday, Diana knocks on Latitia's door, "Go away."

"Come on, Lat, you've been in there for days."

"Go away. I'm not safe!"

"♪Come on, do you wanna build a ssnowman?"

"Come on let'ss go and play.♪"

"What?"

"Am I the only cultured persson on thiss team? Hass no one elsse sseen Frozen?"

"Frozen? You're singing Disney songs at me?"

"I have downloaded a whole playlisst of cutessy lyricss here. And, if you don't open thiss door, I promisse, I will ssit here and ssing every lasst one of them."

The door opens a crack, "Go away."

"Tell me why I sshould."

"I'm not safe to be around."

"Are any of uss?"

"I mean, really not safe. You don't know what I am, what I've done..."

"Of coursse not. And ass long ass you hide yourssself up here, I'm not going to, am I?"

"You should go away."

"Possibly." she pushes the door fully open. "Make me."

Latitia steps back as Diana steps into the room and close the door behind her.

"Sso, what iss going on with you?"

"I...I'm a demon!"

"And I'm a gorgon. Sso?"

"No, you don't get it! I'm a literal demon. I'm evil!"

Diana stares at her for several long seconds, and then burst out laughing.

"What are you...? Stop laughing! I'm serious."

"Oh, I know you're sseriouss. Dead wrong but oh sso sseriouss about it."

"I'm..."

"No one who'ss evil would ssay it. For godss' ssake, there'ss always an excusse, a reasson they're jusstified and sstill righteouss."

"But..."

"Sso, who ssayss you're evil?"

"You don't underst..."

"Sso make me. Exsplain what'ss up."

"I...I'm...I almost killed the Doctor."

"No great losss there."

"I tortured him!"

"Why?"

"Because he was...he made a disease to kill them. And he didn't care! He was just interested in how effective it was!"

"Ssoundss like you're not the evil one here."

"But I got so angry! I wanted to hurt him. And I did! I...I summoned hellfire or soulfire or something and just burnt him, all the way down! It was just pain and horror and I...I did that. And that's how I'm damned. My righteous anger will lead me to break more of the chains until I'm fully a monster!"

"Ssayss who?"

"She..."

"Sshe'? Your little internal demon on the sshoulder? The one who wantss you damned and will ssay anything to get it to happen? Very reliable ssourcee."

"She lies. Get rid of her. You only need me. Who else is going to support something like you? I can help you make her leave. You're powerful enough."

"No. Stop it. Stop it." she shakes her head, "Look at me!!" she wails, her fingers turning to black talons that will carve flesh to the bone. Goat-like eyes stare out of her face, a forked tongue flickering between her lips.

"Scary." Diana replies, "But I've got one of thosse, too." she sticks out her own forked tongue. Several snakes twist to flick their tongues out. "Yess, yess, more than one. Sstop sshowing off." Latitia giggles.

"Ssee? Not evil. Jusst different."

"But I'm changing! Every time I get more and more..."

"We're going to have a talk about what happened to me on that damned island. If we're going to compare body horror sstoriess."

"But..."

"If you do go full Dark Phoenixs, I promisse to bite you until you calm down."

"But..."

"But you have to get out of thiss room. If the only persson you're talking to iss your demon, of coursse you're going to go dark."

"But..."

"Sso, there iss a fete thiss weekend, and we're going..."

"But..."

"I can download more ssugary ssweet ssongss to ssing. And I will."

"That's cruel!"

"Uss evil ssary bitchess have to sstick together. And if you don't go, it'ss jusst me and Manny, so, please, ssave me from that."

"Ok. I guess I can go. To save you from Manny."

"My prinscess in sshining armour."