

Journal 23 - in Shadow

As we helped our selves to the whiskey, Morianna came into the room, accompanied by the faithful Bernard. I would guess that she had joined up with Julian and that he had brought her to the island; he would have had to move on, no doubt.

Intruder lazily looked over at Andreas and casually asked after Victor. Andreas made a strangled noise and leapt out of the tub, grabbed a towel and ran quickly out, leaving Intruder to smugly make the most of the extra room.

He then proceeded to warn us about some of the local denizens, a sort of amphibious race like big frogs; they would take exception to the presence of anyone in their sea, so swimming was not so a good idea. They were also attracted by the use of magic. Occasionally they even came out of the sea and attacked the hotel, though not so often as to be a worry. One advantage was that they smelt really bad out of water, and thus we would be able to smell them approaching long before they arrived.

Another amenity the hotel had was what he called an Olympic-sized swimming pool. Presumably this name was an allusion to it's remarkable size. Perhaps we could go there for an invigorating swim, and perhaps a barbecue later, whatever that was exactly.

He directed us to look in the rooms we had been assigned for swimming costumes, so I went up and found a number of items in the wardrobe. Some were clearly intended for a woman, though possibly for a very immodest one (but who am I to judge? I like women with fairly loose morals). Even some of the men's attire was of a skimpy nature.

I tried on a pair of rather tight-fitting shorts made of some smooth material only to find them slightly more revealing than I might have wished. I added on top of that some kind of all-in-one shirt and shorts garment with short sleeves. This was also smooth and comfortable, and content at last I made my way to where Intruder had said the pool was.

It was quite large, and decorated with small, pale blue tiles. The area around was covered in larger, light brown tiles and a number of reclining chairs were arranged around a couple of small tables, upon which rested a group of towels.

Zatharuss and Morianna were already swimming enthusiastically so I dove in too, making careful strokes and slowly swimming a few lengths; I am not an adept swimmer, but capable enough. Intruder joined us within a few minutes.

Our relaxing dip was interrupted by a smirk from Intruder that heralded the arrival of Andreas and Victor – about three feet above the deepest part of the pool. Neither was exactly impressed, but Victor seemed to find it the least funny, probably because he trashed around like a drowning man; indeed it looked as if he could not swim.

That turned out to be the truth, so Andreas had to rescue him and help him into the shallower end.

They pulled themselves out of the water, Andreas with a black look and the grinning Intruder and Victor with quiet, mumbled and no doubt impolite comments. They left to dry themselves, and after a short time returned, properly dressed, for Victor's first swimming lesson. He did well enough, once he learned not to thrash like a beached fish.

After perhaps a half hour Intruder directed me to help him with the cooking of the barbecue, which turned out to be nothing more than cooking over a bed of hot and flaming coals. In the meantime, Andreas told us we would be informed of our next task the following day.

The evening was pleasant, with good food, wine and some music; the strangely metallic-sounding 'techno' Intruder put on 'the stereo' was quickly replaced by the more pleasing tones of an orchestra. Even Victor cheered up after his surprise plunge eventually.

I finally fell into a light doze, and woke later to find it further past midnight than I had expected; thus I struggled off to bed.

I reluctantly surfaced into consciousness with the ringing of a gong for breakfast. Staggering out of bed, I pulled on some clothing from my pack; not entirely what I would have chosen to wear, but there was no other choice possible.

Over a light cooked breakfast I asked Andreas if we could actually refuse to go on the missions we were assigned. He looked at me a moment before saying that we could, but we would have to explain ourselves to Fiona and the others. As he had probably intended, this

had the effect of silencing me almost immediately. I remembered her 'with us or against us' principle.

So much for freedom of choice.

Victor broke in at this point and asked if the hotel had somewhere he could get some exercise with weights. Andreas directed him to what he called the weights room, and after a few minutes thought I followed him there myself. Considering the amount of physical activity we had been through, and how I had only really made it through on luck compared to Victor's strength and Morianna's shapechanging powers, I decided that a little physical training could be to my advantage.

When I got there Victor was already torturing himself with some of the larger devices, or at least it looked and sounded like it. I made use of some of the smaller devices, carefully reading the instructions provided for each before using one.

It was hard to tell if it was doing anything good; I suppose the benefits came from long and regulated use.

At this point Andreas arrived and declared himself my personal trainer. He directed me to specific machines and gave me hints on how to make the most of them, before putting me through a long and painful routine. When I could just barely walk anymore he practically half-carried me next door into a room with a fair-sized, round pool recessed into the floor. I slipped in after laboriously undressing and settled into a sort of doze, submerged up to my ears in delightfully hot water that slowly eased my pains away.

Unfortunately, not completely.

After a blissfully indeterminate period of time Victor limped in and joined me in the pool; Andreas soon returned bearing two large plates full of food that he said was high in 'carbohydrates and protein', presumably things that were good for you. The food woke me up somewhat, and I began to feel almost healthy again.

No sooner had we finished eating like we had been starved than Andreas stumbled in, in a similar state of muscular stiffness that we had both suffered earlier. Naturally, he received little sympathy from us.

Once he had recovered sufficiently, Andreas left in search of Zatharuss.