

THE LAND WHALE MURDERS

Chapter 9: Left In The Larch

AUTHOR

The Four Elementals are down by half. Hiram was murdered early on and Maryanne was beaten to nothing by the Blow Hole goons. Speaking of the Blow Hole Gang let's catch up with Pirate Penny and her lackies. They are currently in the sewers below Wall Street.

9.1:

PIRATE PENNY

Place the barrels there!

GOON 5

Yes Pirate Penny.

PIRATE PENNY

Those fools never knew when they built the sewers that we'd commandeer them for our noble purpose! I guess it's the one benefit of that cholera outbreak.

GOON 2

That and my cousin inherited a mint when his folks croaked from the cholera.

GOON 5

What kind of mint?

GOON 2

Spearmint.

GOON 5

Oh ...

GOON 2

Hey that's a good mint!

GOON 5

I guess.

PIRATE PENNY

Enough talk of mint! Lash the barrels together. This shall provide a suitable hidey hole until we activate them!

GOON 2

How do you activate a barrel?

PIRATE PENNY

It's not the barrel, rather what's in the barrel.

GOON 5

The oil?

PIRATE PENNY

Yes. All part of the plan.

GOON 2

How is it that whale oil, olive oil, and crude oil are all oil? Seems like they ain't similar at all.

GOON 5

Thems all liquids.

GOON 2

So is water, rum, and lava but, hey, I'm only drinking one of them.

GOON 5

Right, but –

PIRATE PENNY

Didn't your parents teach you anything? Oil is any nonpolar chemical substance that is both a water fearing and fat loving liquid at room temperature! My brother and I would ... NO! There is no time for the mawkish remembrances of oil talk! Finish tying up the barrels and meet back at the lair!

PIRATE PENNY leaves.

GOON 5

I like that she's a hands-on leader, not all leaders would go with you into a sewer.

GOON 2

I'd like to get 'hands on' with her.

GOON 5

Whoa! Reducing her down to her parts is retrograde and beneath you, Mitch, you have a daughter you want a Velvet Spanker drooling over her when she's leading a gang?

GOON 2

You're right. What's the deal with room temperature anyway? I've been in a lot of rooms with lots of temperatures. And don't get me started on seasons –

GOON 5

Here we go you and the seasons!

GOON 2

I'm just saying in order of hotness of temperature it goes summer, spring, fall, winter but in terms of hotness in looks it's fall, spring, winter, summer.

GOON 5

That's crazy! Spring is way hotter than Fall!

GOON 2

Imagine Spring's ideo on Summer's kalends?

AUTHOR

Their conversation degrades into vulgarity very quickly. And even for Goon talk it's quite blush-inducing. Kalends by the way, is the first of the month, but that's all I'm getting into regarding calendar talk. Rather let's get back to Eugene's brownstone. Eugene passed out after eating some more of a hallucinogenic mushroom and Anjus finds herself face to face with Almost Officer Shaindel 'Doubles' Blum. Shaindel wants to bring them in because it was promised that whoever captured Henry B. Lubbins' murders would get an instant promotion to sergeant. Or was it captain. One of those. Let me check my notes ... Two Bar Captain. So there you have it ...

9.2:

ANJUS

Were you hiding there the whole time?

SHAINDEL

Yes.

ANJUS

We've been here for over half an hour.

SHAINDEL

I was crouching.

ANJUS

How did I not see you?

SHAINDEL

Jews are excellent at hiding, we've had to hide throughout our history.

ANJUS

But half an hour?

SHAINDEL

I was going to say something, but then the moment passed and I wanted to make it kind of dramatic ...

ANJUS

You did.

SHAINDEL

A dank. So I guess it was worth it. Though I do have a kleynem cramp.

ANJUS

You should stretch before you crouch.

SHAINDEL

You say that now, where were you half an hour ago?

ANJUS

Here!

SHAINDEL

Right. But. No more of this delightful banter! I'm bringing you in.

ANJUS

But we're innocent.

SHAINDEL

Then you'll be acquitted in court. The justice system works.

ANJUS

You don't believe that, no one believes it, not even the judges.

SHAINDEL

Especially the judges. You could try the new appeals court where they let a weasel scratch at a series of verdicts and if he sees his shadow then you get time served.

ANJUS

It's always a male weasel isn't it? Never a she-weasel, never a she-sel. Typical.

SHAINDEL

I know it's not perfect, but this is the only way I'll become an actual officer. No one takes me seriously. Not at the station, not even at my Shul. We were supposed to have Goymer Oymer hit a baseball in celebration of the end of the counting of the oymer but I messed up the days, so my shomer of the Goymer Oymer homer over Lag BaOymer was a haOymer boner. So you understand my predicament!

ANJUS

No ... and yes. We all are captive to our past, our mistakes, our lives. You know I am sexually and emotionally attracted to plants.

SHAINDEL

That I did not know.

ANJUS

Oh. I ... well the sapling is out of the burlap now. I thought you were with me when I told Eugene ...

SHAINDEL

No.

ANJUS

Oh that was Big Stick.

SHAINDEL

Who?

ANJUS

Crime fighting hero.

SHAINDEL

Neat. But go on about your grins-shtupn.

ANJUS

It dominated me for so long. When my parents died at the Castle Clinton clown fire I was orphaned. I was adopted by the wealthy widow Clara Peachtree for which a type of apple are named – peaches. Which was very confusing. But she let me explore her

orchards upstate and I ... fell in love with an apple tree. We carried on our affair in secret until one night Clara caught us mid coitus –

SHAINDEL

How? So many hows, but also I don't ... just keep going.

ANJUS

She made Pervis, her manservant, cut the tree down right in front of me. I pushed away my feelings, turned them toward the botanical pursuits. I theorized if I could shunt my passions toward studies scientific I could turn my sickness into something useful. I was the first female graduate of the botany school at Rutgers and I earned a doctorate which they were unable to award to me because it is illegal for a woman to hold a doctorate in New Jersey. And yes there was a law saying goats could be doctors, but not women – only Jersey understands Jersey as they say. Clara died and left me her fortune. Most of it was kept in convertible bonds and erotic silverware. I sold off the phallic forks to fund my education in Europe. In Zurich I was able to earn a special doctorate in corsetry from the Radical College of Women's Arts so I could call myself doctor. It was demeaning, but I wanted the title and I also learned how to make busk fasteners. Also if you used an overbust corset it would really flatter your bosom.

SHAINDEL

My bosom flatters itself just fine.

ANJUS

True. But anyway with that degree I could call myself Dr. Anjus Troup, officially. Later I met Hiram at a party celebrating Boron.

SHAINDEL

This part I heard about.

ANJUS

Yes well our little coterie formed and ... and I thought I had beaten those feelings. I closed my eyes and thought of the pleasures of being normal as I let Hiram court me. We were engaged but ... I found employment at the Botanical Gardens, put in charge of the ferniseum – the largest collection of ferns in the hemisphere. And this little marattoid ... its fronds were so ... and the way its fleshy rootstock – it was love. I spent days, weeks in the ferniseum I let everything else lapse, I was love-drunk and ... and one night Hiram showed up he ... he saw my tongue sliding down the pinna and ... the engagement was over, my normalcy was over. I left for the Amazon on the next boat. I joined with a National Geographic expedition to photograph the most dateable cannibal. It was not a success. I didn't care. I only cared about the jungle, about pushing myself to find the most

vicious, the ugliest of plants. Choking vines, poisonous blooms, razor sharp grass. The acid of a spitting orchid took my eye but I still pressed on.

SHAINDEL

Terrible.

ANJUS

I wanted to hate every carbon dioxide needing, sun loving vegetable. But instead the plant kingdom's beauty filled me. The fields of flowers, the sunlight through a canopy of trees. The lily pads. So I traveled further, I traversed the world, pushing my truth deep inside me as I saw the first blades of spring grass on Mt. Ararat. The fireweed turn the Alaskan hills purple. Smelled the yadey abebe blooms that signaled the coming of Meskel in Abyssinia. And I hated myself. So I decided to hunt the rarest and most feared of plants ...

SHAINDEL

Poison ivy?

ANJUS

Hardly. No, the Uzbek Snapper. It was rumored to grow in the Kyzyl-Kum desert. The Uzbek Snapper according to legend was said to growl like a jackal and bite like a shark. It was believed to be only a myth ... until I found it. When I discovered it, I was broken, tired, exhausted. My guide had run off days ago with my camels and supplies. Left me to die. I staggered the wasteland praying for death through blistered lips and a bone dry tongue.

ANJUS (cont.)

I finally collapsed on a small outcrop of rocks, my breaths shallow, the blood pounding in my ears but I could hear ... something. A low snarl. I turned and there it was. The Uzbek Snapper. It was like a giant flytrap, its stalk undulating back and forth. I reached out toward it and in one quick bite it took my hand. But then ... slowly a warm milky sap ran down its leaves and into my mouth. I had fed it my hand and now it was feeding me. It saved me. It kept producing the sap and leaking it into my mouth for days until I was strong enough to get to my feet. I was going to take the snapper with me, but it had turned brown and brittle. It gave up all its nutrients so I could live. I don't know why; I don't know ...

(Beat. Takes a breath.)

I was found by some wandering Tartars and they brought me to Tashauz. On the long voyage home I accepted myself. And here I am.

SHAINDEL

But you didn't tell anyone.

ANJUS

I'm sure Hiram told Maryanne and Eugene is Eugene so ... it's not a straight and easy path.

SHAINDEL

But they all accepted you.

ANJUS

Hiram took it hard; he named a species of fish after me.

SHAINDEL

Oh but that's nice.

ANJUS

A species of hagfish.

SHAINDEL

Not so nice, maybe.

ANJUS

Science trumps the personal.

SHAINDEL

Sounds like science is personal. So you're with the plants, what about Eugene is he seeing anyone?

ANJUS

No. Why?

SHAINDEL

Just covering my corners. But for a pisher he's not so bad.

ANJUS

You have to let us stop Project Land Whale. I'm not sure what it is or how it is, but we need to stop it.

SHAINDEL

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know. Look I want to be an officer but not like this. Not this way. Let me know how I can help.

ANJUS

Right now I need some sleep ...

SHAINDEL

You go ahead, I'll watch the streets. Zol zayn mit mazel on your quest.

AUTHOR

And Shaindel left giving up her chance at an instant promotion. Anjus went to bed, but not before taking the small cactus on Eugene's desk with her ...

ANJUS

Who are you my prickly friend?

AUTHOR

Eugene was still sleeping; he looked serene and peaceful, but his mushroom infected mind was racing. He was dreaming. A mad fungus dream ... let's see what's going on in that weird noodle of his.

Inside Eugene's dream. There's a soundscape that carries over what the Author speaks about.

AUTHOR

Eugene was on his desk but his desk was surrounded by water. He was in his study, but also at sea in that way that dreams sort of make sense and not make any sense. Various bits of his room float by, a bookshelf, a table, his ice cream bowls. Eugene peers into the water, a mermaid that looks like Maryanne is swimming around happily. She winks at him. Eugene dips a finger into the sea, but as soon as he does the mer-Maryanne turns shark-like and leaps out of the water trying to bite him. He falls back onto the desk. A bell clangs as a small dingy appears out of nowhere it's being towed by several decomposing seagulls. Sitting in the dingy is Hiram, swordfish through his chest but a jaunty cap upon his head.

9.2:

EUGENE

Hiram! Nice hat, less nice swordfish.

HIRAM

Oh he's not so bad, right fishy?

SWORDFISH

It's a living.

HIRAM

He's a real rascal. So, a little birdie told me your big Shakespeare bird release didn't go so well.

EUGENE

They'll probably kick me out of the Acclimatization Society for it. Or for all the murder I'm accused of. Not a good look for them. Or me.

HIRAM

And what of this Project Land Whale? Sounds like something.

EUGENE

I have theories. At a carnival last year there was this tic-tac-toe playing chicken Dr. Clucks. He seemed the criminal genius type.

HIRAM

Ah, but didn't they eat him at the fair's close?

EUGENE

Oh yeah. That was sad. And delicious.

HIRAM

Indeed.

EUGENE

Now everything has gone crazy. You're lucky you died before all the dying started.

HIRAM

My timing was always impeccable. I did manage to witness 20 moonlight squid orgies.

EUGENE

What's "the other side" like?

HIRAM

I can't say much but in 3 words: empty ... void ... butterscotch.

EUGENE

Wow. (Beat.)

I'm. I'm sorry about Maryanne.

HIRAM

Yes it is a ... tragedy.

EUGENE

And all that's left was a small smudge of caviar.

HIRAM

Yes ... caviar from a mackerel.

EUGENE

Is that a ...

AUTHOR

Just then a half-tugboat half scrimshaw desk floated by. Lubbins captains the odd vessel the octopus still wrapped around his face.

LUBBINS

[muffled yelling.]

EUGENE

Yipes octopus-ed Lubbins!

AUTHOR

Lubbins then banged his desk which began to leak oil, polluting the water turning it black. Symbolism. A little direct, but the dream is what it is.

LUBBINS

[muffled yelling.]

HIRAM

Quite something isn't he? In life my nemesis but in death quite the squash partner.

LUBBINS

[muffled yelling.]

HIRAM

True.

EUGENE

Were you really going to help him with that court case?

HIRAM

I was hoping I could make the jury see the beauty of cetaceans. That whales should be saved.

LUBBINS

[Muffled laughing.]

HIRAM

But it's all post now. Letter and let be.

EUGENE

What?

AUTHOR

By now the oil had turned the water completely black and the blackness was climbing up the sky and walls turning everything dark as pitch.

LUBBINS

[muffled yelling.]

HIRAM

Be mail! Slot box! Post!

EUGENE

You're not making sense.

LUBBINS

[muffled yelling.]

He bangs on the desk.

HIRAM

Mail. Stamp it. Stamp it, in velope.

AUTHOR

The whole of the world was now black except for a small pool of light which for reasons known only to Eugene's subconscious Sir Francis Drake emerged from. He walked across the water which had now solidified into a floor.

DRAKE

Hullo, fellow, nearly teatime!

HIRAM

Drake!

LUBBINS

[Muffled 'Drake!']

HIRAM

Oh, Eugene this is –

DRAKE

Terribly rude of me! Sir Francis Drake. Defeater of the Spanish Armada, explorer, knighted by Queen Elizabeth's own sword; later I showed her my sword if you catch my meaning.

EUGENE

Nope.

HIRAM

He has a copy of Groober's biography of you.

DRAKE

Oh a fan!

AUTHOR

Drake goes to the wall where there's now a bookshelf and takes out a book, opens it. He pulls a quill pen from nowhere.

DRAKE

Let me autograph this then. "To Eugene," tis Eugene, yes?

EUGENE

Yes.

DRAKE

Good. "Keep your sails to the wind and always check the mail. Your pal, The Drake"

He signs with a flourish then closes the book and puts it away.

DRAKE (cont.)

That ought to up its value.

HIRAM

Come now. Teatime in the afterlife.

DRAKE

Cucumber sandwiches today!

LUBBINS

[muffled yelling.]

DRAKE

Not if I squeeze yours first!

AUTHOR

With that they all begin to fade away.

EUGENE

Wait! Hiram ... I'm sorry. I'm –

HIRAM

Shhh. Just be mail. Letter post me in the morning.

EUGENE

But –

AUTHOR

They were all gone. The blackness closed in and suddenly a bit of the ink- dark sky bonked Eugene on the head. This woke him from slumber and he realized he was thrashing in his sleep and knocked a picture off the wall.

9.3:

EUGENE

Oh. It was just a dream. That bit of falling sky was just this painting. And Francis Drake was just this Drake's cake I put under my desk leg to keep it from wobbling. And the water was me wetting my ... oh.

AUTHOR

One quick change of pants later and Eugene was back to puzzling out his dream.

EUGENE

But dreams do have meanings ... maybe Hiram was speaking to me across the spectral veil! There must be a meaning. Letter? Mail. Post? Letter ... box ... box male. Of course! My collection of boxing lithographs!

Eugene hurries to a drawer, opens it and takes out several cabinet cards. He looks through them.

EUGENE (cont.)

Ha! Vic Thumps you sure could jab! Grisly Joe you sure were ... grisly. But

–

(Throws them down.)

How will you help! This can't be it! Think Neddly! Stamp. Mail. Envelope. Mail. Box.
Mail. Letter. Mail. Mail. Mail. Nothing! It's brain gibberish! (Sighs.)
Oh well I should at least check the mail ... (Realizing.)
Oh!

Triumphant music plays as Eugene realizes that was the message.

EUGENE (cont.)

The mail! The mail! Yes! Oh! A letter! A letter! There's a letter! Mail! Mail! Mail!
Whooooooo!

He runs around the room shouting. ANJUS comes out from the bedroom.

ANJUS

It's too early to be celebrating, what are you a Slovak?

EUGENE

Dream! Letter! Mail!

ANJUS

Hold on I've got prickles in some sensitive places. Cacti look good at night, but in the morning you realize that ... can we stop celebrating for a moment?

EUGENE

Sure let's not over sell it, but I did solve the old dream mystery.

ANJUS

Right but who's the letter from?

EUGENE

It's from Lubbins from the day he died!

ANJUS

Oh, wow, open it.

EUGENE

First let's see if there's a clue on the envelope. It says "urgent. Priority." On the front. Notice the stamp. George Washington. Inventor of the stamp.

ANJUS

I don't think that's true.

EUGENE

Then who did?

PROFESSOR MIKE

I can answer that!

EUGENE

Professor Mike? The man renting my top floor?

PROFESSOR MIKE

The missus caught me tutoring a student in our bed, and not during office hours; so I'm hiding here, cause she's on the warpath. But anyway to answer your query stamps were first used as part of the postal reforms initiated and overseen by Sir Rowland Hill.

ANJUS

How do you know so much about stamps?

PROFESSOR MIKE

Because I'm a master forger. Yeah I forge all sorts of things. How do you think I afford a top floor on a teacher's salary? Can I hide this hunk of rock I'm working on with you?

EUGENE

I guess.

MRS. MIKE enters.

MRS. MIKE

There you are! You scoundrel!

PROFESSOR MIKE

That's Professor Mike's cue to beat feet!

MRS. MIKE

I can out run you any day you philandering egghead!

They both run out.

EUGENE

They have fun. Oops I dropped that thing Mike gave me and it's super broken. Oh well.

ANJUS

The letter?

EUGENE

Right, from Lubbins. Let's see what we got!

EUGENE opens the letter.

EUGENE (cont.)

This solves everything.

END OF CHAPTER 9