

Lost Gods

by Drew Beatty

Chapter Fifteen



“Thai food sounds great, I should just go freshen up.”

“You do that, buddy. Kanene and I will finish with the table.”

I hated to leave Kanene alone with Coyote, even for a minute, but I had to do something. I walked to the cupboard, just out of sight of Coyote, and quietly pulled it open. I reached up and found the hat and the bones I had taken from Baron Samedi. I was sure they were the keys to his power, if I could only harness them, and get them to take me to the library, I could at least warn Judy and find out who her source of information was.

“Watcha got there, buddy?” asked Coyote, so close behind me I could feel his hot breath on my neck. “I think I smell the Baron.” He pulled the hat and bones from my hands “Now, you weren't thinking about sneaking off with this stuff, were you? Leaving me alone with Kanene? That would be a terrible idea, just a terrible idea.”

I walked away without saying a word to him. My best plan, my only plan defeated without Coyote so much as breaking a sweat. I went into my little washroom, sat on the edge of the claw-footed tub and cursed under my breath. I attempted to compose myself, washed my hands and face, hoped I could make it through this evening without doing something foolish, without risking Kanene, or myself.

Kanene and Coyote were laughing again when I came out of the washroom. She looked up at me as I entered. “Coyote was just telling me about the problems with the burst pipe at his apartment. I told him that his staying here tonight would be no problem.” She glanced at her watch. “Dinner will be here soon, Kweku. Can you finish setting the table?”

I nodded meekly, slid past them into the kitchen, gathered plates and cutlery. I dug in a little used drawer, found the chopstick set we had picked up a few years ago in Chinatown. We had never used them before, I wasn't sure why I decided to bring them out tonight. Perhaps I thought they could be a more effective weapon if the need should arise; a sharper point than a table knife. I could probably stab Coyote right through the heart with one of these, if I had the opportunity. But I really didn't relish doing that in front of Kanene.

“So, how was your day, Kweku?” Kanene asked, watching my every move from the living room. I looked at her blankly. Coyote caught my eye, smiled at me.

“Best day ever,” I replied.

“Lots of sales?” she asked.

I nodded. “You could say that Maichel and I were very successful in a new venture.”

“I see.” She looked at me, questions on her face. I was saved from having to explain myself when the buzzer rang, Thai delivery rescuing me from further cross examination by Kanene. I suppose I should just be happy that she was once again speaking to me amicably. I walked over

to the small panel beside our front door, pressed the button that opened the main entrance. There was a pause as the delivery man walked up the two flights to our floor. Coyote walked over and joined me, pulling his wallet from his pocket as he did so.

“Let me get this, my thanks for you and Kanene letting me stay here tonight” he said, as though he were the king of generosity.

“Thanks,” I muttered, leaving him to it.

“Kweku, you are being rude,” said Kanene. “The least you can do is to bring the food to the table. You are the host, after all. You should try to remember your manners.” Significantly chastised, I returned to the doorway, took the heavy, but delightful smelling sack of food from the smiling delivery man. I tried to smile back, but all I could think was that in twenty four hours he could be dead, unless I did something. Anything. I set the bag down on the table and pulled open the staples holding it shut. The delightful smell of mixed spices burst forth from the bag, lemongrass and coconut blending with savoury curry odours. I would miss Thai food after the apocalypse. I placed the containers of food out, covering the table with little cardboard and Styrofoam boxes.

Kanene and Coyote joined me. We sat and served out the food. I tried to muster some enthusiasm, but Kanene and Coyote had to carry the conversation.

“So, tell me about this new venture. You intend to leave your current position?” Kanene asked.

“Well, Kanene, to tell you the truth, Kweku and I have been working on a side project for some time,” said Coyote. “We have been engaged in, how should I explain this, exploiting a loophole in banking systems, a loophole that if properly recognised and utilized can bring us some profit, with no repercussions.”

“I see,” said Kanene. “And is this venture strictly legal?”

“Not as such, no,” replied Coyote. “But it was a low-risk enterprise. But anyhow, that plan is finished now. We have moved on to more interesting things. We met someone while engaged in our project today, someone with much bigger plans.”

“Legal ones?”

Coyote thought for a minute before answering. “I can say there is no law against what we will be doing. You needn't worry about that. I wouldn't get Anansi mixed up anything dangerous.” I barked out a laugh upon hearing this. A mirthless one.

“So, I see you know more about my husband than I did.” Kanene said. Coyote raised an eyebrow quizzically. “You just called him Anansi,” she explained. “His true name.”

“Yes, I know all about Anansi, here. Actually, I might as well tell you the truth. I'm Coyote.” Kanene looked at him blankly. “Coyote, the First Nation’s god of trickery. I'm like him,” here he pointed a chopstick at me, “but for North America.”

“Well, isn't it lucky that you two found each other,” said Kanene, charming smile playing across her face. “It's not often you can meet someone with so much in common with you at your work. I mean, I'm the only black person at my job, the only one. You would think it would be a little coincidental, meeting another god of, how did you phrase it, god of trickery. Very convenient.” I wondered at Kanene's relative composure. She was incredibly calm for someone having dinner with two people who were considered to be works of fiction. Batshit insane ones, at that.

“Maichel, now it is my turn to be rude. What would you like to drink? We have some wine we opened last night and didn't finish, a nice red that goes well with Thai food.”

Coyote nodded. “That sounds delightful, thank you.” I wondered at this. We hardly ever drank wine, neither of us liked it very much. And I couldn't ever remember drinking wine with Thai food before. Kanene stood and walked into the kitchen, just out of earshot, although I could still hear her bustling around, pulling open drawers, looking for the corkscrew.

“You need to relax,” Coyote hissed at me. “You need to pretend we are still friends, having fun together, about to embark on a fabulous new undertaking.”

“It's difficult to muster enthusiasm when we are actually embarking on genocide,” I replied levelly.

“I'm staying here tonight whether you like it or not, so the faster you get used to that idea, relax, and stop making your wife suspicious, the better it will be for everyone.”

“Fine.”

Kanene came back into the dining room, carrying three glasses of wine. She set one down in front of me, and passed the other to Coyote. She held her glass aloft. “To new ventures,” she exclaimed. Coyote raised his glass as well. They both waited expectantly for me to join the toast. I set down my chopsticks and held my glass aloft.

“To new ventures,” I said, tapping my glass lightly against Coyote's and Kanene's. I felt like a complete son of a bitch toasting the end of the world. Coyote drank his glass down quickly, a red blush suffusing his features almost immediately. Kanene and I drank the conservative sips of those who do not often indulge in wine. Just enough to taste, not enough to quench a thirst. Like the conservative sips of the penitent drinking Eucharistic wine, the blood of the carpenter on their lips for only a second before they tilted their heads back. Kanene returned to the kitchen, refilled Coyote's glass. We finished dinner, and retired to the living room, Coyote already unsteady on his feet.

“I sure appreciate your letting me stay here tonight,” he said, slurring his words slightly. He sat hard on the couch, leaning back heavily. Kanene and I had hardly touched our wine, leaving Coyote to finish the bottle.

“Can I interest you in an after dinner drink?” Kanene asked. “We sometime enjoy brandy after a good meal. Coyote nodded his head, smiling delightedly. I looked at Kanene as she walked into the kitchen. We never drank after dinner. What was she talking about? Did we even have brandy, and if so, why?”

“You are one lucky man,” Coyote said to me, mumbling. “Your wife is amazing. Smart, pretty, funny, kind. You lucked out.”

“Perhaps now you see why I am not as interested in the new world Loki will provide. I'm happy here with my wife.” Saying it, I realized it was true. Although it was difficult, living from paycheque to paycheque, scam to scam, I was happy with Kanene, she was all I would ever need. She was everything.

“Yeah, you got it good, but what about those other losers? Iktomi, Set, that lot. So weak and pitiful they can hardly manifest themselves. They need more to life than that. They will have power again, real power. We can all start fresh.”

“Because we did such a great job of things when we ran things before? You forget, without people, we don't exist. We need their belief, their faith. Without them, we are nothing, dust. Loki could be ending everything, including us. How can you trust him?”

“Because it's still better than going back to my one room apartment at the end of the night,” he said as Kanene walked in, holding out a large tumbler of brandy. I again tried to remember why we even had it, I think it was a gift from one of the people she worked with. Someone who didn't know us very well, I assumed. Coyote took it in shaking hands, and drank it down with surprising speed.

“This is great,” he said, barely comprehensible. “This is just...” he trailed off, eyelids dropping down over his eyes.

“Finally,” said Kanene savagely. “I thought he would never pass out.”

“What did you do?” I asked.

She smiled at me, pulled out a package of cold medication from her pocket, half empty. For once I was thrilled with our insanely small apartment, its lack of cupboard space that necessitated storing medicine in our kitchen. “If two causes drowsiness, than ten, mixed with alcohol should cause a deep enough sleep.”

“Deep enough for what,” I asked her, shocked and amazed.

“Deep enough for you to tell me what the hell is going on.”

“How did you know something was going on?”

“Honey, I have been living with you for years now. I can tell when there is something fishy happening. I knew that there was something not right with Coyote, something you were not telling me. You obviously couldn't talk to me with him around, so I did something to get him out of the picture. I did the right thing, yes?”

I took her in my arms and kissed her. “Yes, absolutely. But we need to get out of here, now.” We ran to the front hall, and I pulled our coats out of the closet. Coyote had put Baron Samedi's hat and bones back on the top shelf. I pulled them down.

“You never really told me what they were,” said Kanene.

“They are the tools of another God. Baron Samedi. He visited me here yesterday, to try and threaten you.” Her eyes grew wide in shock and fear. “Don't worry, he won't be back again. I took these from him, stripped him of his powers. I'm hoping they can help us now. Hold onto to me, tightly.” Kanene wrapped her arms around me, linking her fingers behind my back.

“What exactly are we going to do?” she asked.

“I actually have no idea. Maybe nothing, just hold tight, and don't let go.” I put the hat on. The Baron had a bigger head than I did, his hat rested on my ears, folding them down a little bit. I clutched a pile of bones in each hand, enough, I hoped, to utilize Baron's powers. I closed my eyes, and concentrated on the library, willed myself to be there.

I suddenly felt like I was growing, elongating, my body was stretching at an exponential rate, taller and taller and taller again. My bones felt like they were shattering and regrowing, and my skin felt like an elastic pulled to the breaking point. Everything went dark. I could no longer feel Kanene pressing against me, no longer feel her arms wrapped around my neck. I was afraid I had lost her, with no idea as to how I could ever find her again. Finally, after an eternity, my ears popped. I opened my eyes, and found myself standing in front of the library, Kanene still clutching my chest. Tears streamed down her cheek.

“Are we still alive?” she asked.

“I think so,” I replied. “If not, heaven is really sort of dull.” She opened her eyes and looked around, as I shoved the bones into my pockets. Carrying around handful of human bones would probably not go over very well with the police.

“I don't understand,” she said after a minute. “We went through all that just to go to the library? Don't we have enough books at home?” Her laughter took on a slightly hysterical note, before calming down.

“I have to talk to someone here. A friend. Come on.” I took her hand in mine, thrilled that she once again trusted me, was listening to me. The fear and mistrust of the night before was gone, replaced with the same intimacy we had before. Now I just had to make sure it lasted beyond tomorrow.

We ran to the bright lights of the library, past the miniature display of houses the homeless artist had built. I skidded to a stop, pulling Kanene back with me to look at them again. The artist had been busy since the last time I had been here. He had erected a miniature quadrangle house, with an open courtyard in the centre, exactly the same sort of house I had lived in back in Africa, centuries before. Beside it was a Norse longhouse, its miniature thatched roof made of intertwined stalks of grass. It would appear that our homeless artist had branched out, was finding influences beyond those of the First Nations. It couldn't be a coincidence. He had constructed the dwellings of my people, Coyote's and Loki's. The artist was making a connection between the three of us, trying to tell me something, but I wasn't sure what. I knew I would have to find the artist, talk to him, after I had warned Judy.

“What are all of those?” asked Kanene, obviously impressed with the craftsmanship that had gone into the tiny structures.

“A message for me, I think,” I replied. “Come on, we have to go find Judy.”

“Who's Judy?”

It was at this point I realized just how much I had been keeping a separate life from Kanene. “Judy is a librarian. She has been helping out me and Coyote, at least before Coyote got all excited about the end of the world.”

“What, he has become one of those tin hat wearing paranoid delusional freaks?”

“No, I actually think those guys are right. If we live through the next 24 hours I might just invest in a tin hat myself. Coyote intends to cause the end of the world. I just don't know how. Let's go.”

We ran into the library, suffering the disapproving looks of the librarian behind the front counter, who obviously thought we shouldn't be running into the library this close to closing. I also think she didn't like my hat just on general principle, although in this I agreed with her. It was a rather ostentatious hat. I led Kanene up the stairs, and ran to Judy's desk. She looked up at me flatly.

“Not many people could pull off that hat,” she said levelly. “You are no exception.”

“Judy, listen to me. There is trouble, serious trouble. You have to leave, now. Take Kanene and get out of town.”

Kanene turned to face me. “What are you talking about? I'm not going anywhere.”

“Listen to me, an army of Gods wants to end the world. The only thing stopping them is me. And frankly, I have no idea how I am going to keep myself alive, let alone anyone else. I can't protect you.”

“I don't need your protection. Did you already forget who got us away from Coyote tonight?”

“Wait, what?” said Judy. “Why did you have to get away from Coyote? I thought he was your friend.” She looked from me to Kanene, confusion plastered across her face. “Oh, sorry, I'm Judy.”

“I'm Kanene, Kweku's wife. Nice to meet you.” They shook hands quickly.

“Please, Kanene, Judy, listen to me. I appreciate all of your help, I really do, but you are both mortals. This is serious, this is not some movie, or a storybook. Not everyone is going to live happily ever after. People are going to die. Humanity is going to be eradicated unless I stop it. I won't be able to focus with you around. I need you gone. I will find you when it's all over. Assuming I haven't failed, which, to be honest with you, is very probable.”

Judy and Kanene looked at each other. “Do you trust him?” Kanene asked.

“He brought my books back in perfect condition. My car too. I think I can trust him.”

Kanene turned and looked at me fiercely. “I will go with her, but understand it is only because I trust you, and I know you will be successful. If you need us to go for that to happen, we will go. But I still think we can be helpful.”

“Don't misunderstand me, I know you would be helpful, both of you have been more than helpful. But now it's time for me to deal with the other gods. It could get ugly. No, it will get ugly.” They both looked at me, defiance clear in their eyes. I looked back imploringly, hoping they would understand. Things would happen in the next twenty four hours, things I didn't want them to see. I would have to do things, things that Kanene might not be able to erase from her memory. Kanene wrapped her arms around me, kissed me deeply, a kiss that let me know that all was forgiven, all would be okay. If we both lived through this.

“Where should we go?” asked Judy.

“Out of Toronto, at least. I don't know where you would be safe, to be totally honest with you. North? North always seems safer to me.”

“My family has a cottage just outside of Bobcaygeon,” said Judy. “Do you think that would be all right?”

I thought for a minute. It was probable that Loki knew about the cottage, if he knew so much about our lives, but I couldn't think of any other options. “That will have to do.” I set the hat down on Judy's counter and pulled out my wallet. I flipped open the hidden compartment built

into the seam and fished out several bank cards, all with different names on them. Kanene raised an eyebrow, and I knew I would have some more explaining to do, eventually. "Take these, get as much cash as you can as quickly as you can. Don't use them on the road, just go to the closest bank and max them out. Don't use your own cards on the road, either credit or debit."

"How are we supposed to remember the PIN numbers for all of these?" asked Kanene.

"They are all the same," I replied. "0206."

"Our wedding day," said Kanene with a smile.

"Yes," I replied.

Her grin grew mischievous. "Don't all of the security experts warn you against using that as your PIN?" she asked, hints of laughter at the edge of her voice.

I shrugged. "It's not really my money, so I wasn't all that concerned. They should still be good, but go, quickly."

"Um, I'm supposed to stay until closing," said Judy.

"You have to leave early. Your mother was in a terrible accident. We are here to get you to the hospital," I told her calmly.

"Oh-kay," said Judy. She hurried back to the staff lounge to grab her coat and purse, pausing to tell her lie to another librarian who had been busy shelving books. She wrapped Judy in a brief, consoling hug, obviously buying the story hook, line and sinker. She came over to take Judy's spot.

"You're Judy's friends?" she asked. We nodded. "My God, how is her mother? Will she be all right do you think?"

"We can only hope and pray," I responded, using my most grave tone. "It will be a long night, but we should know more in the morning."

She pulled a rosary out of her pocket, and started sliding the beads between her fingers. "I'll say a prayer for her."

"That would be kind," I replied. Judy joined us again, and we started down the stairs. I paused, looked back at Judy's co-worker, who was still clutching the rosary. "If it's not to presumptuous," I said to her, "Do you think you could say one for me?"

"Of course," she replied. "What's your name?"

“Kweku. No, Anansi,” I replied. She raised her eyebrows, curious at my confusion with my own name. I flashed her my best smile, pointed upwards. “My friends know me as Kweku, but he knows me better as Anansi,” I explained.

“It's a very nice name,” she said with the sincere warmth that only religious people seem to have. “Um, is this your hat?” she asked, holding up the ragged top hat.

“Thanks,” I said taking it from her. I ran down the stairs and met Judy and Kanene.

“One more thing, Judy,” I said. “I need to know where I can find the artist.”

“Which artist?”

“I think you know who I mean,” I said. “The man who makes the miniature houses out there,” I said, pointing to the garden. “He is mixed up in all of this, isn't he?”

“I was wondering if you would figure that out. But I really can't help you with finding him. He's homeless, he sleeps at a few shelters, different places every night. I have no idea where he is.”

“Shit!” I yelled, shocking the library patrons yet again. I would have to start going to a different library, after defeating a small army of Gods and thwarting the destruction of the human species. Priorities. “I apologize. That is just very disappointing information.”

“Sorry,” said Judy. “He did want to remain private, but I think he probably would have ventured out for the end of the world.”

I clutched the hat in my hands, looked out at the tiny houses, and had a crazy idea. “Fine, I think I can find him. You two go. Go quickly. If the world is still around tomorrow, come home. Make it the day after tomorrow, just to be sure.” We exchanged a three way hug, and I sent them off to Judy's car, hoping they would be safe. Hoping the world would be safe. I went out and looked at the houses, standing over them, as close as I could without standing on top of them. I put The Baron's stupid hat on, reached into my pockets and held the bones tightly.

I was flying blind here. My hope was that the artist had spend so much time on these tiny creations of art, had invested himself so much of himself here that a trace would remain, a trace that I could reach out to, get in tune with. If I could do that, maybe, just maybe I could get to where he was. I relaxed, reached out with my mind, felt around the houses, felt him. His presence was strong, amazingly so. I could almost see him. I focused on going to him, focused on his whereabouts.

“Freeze,” I heard a voice shout from behind me. I opened my eyes, spun around, looked into the eyes of Detective Prichard. He looked furious, enraged. His gun was out of its holster, pointing at me. If he pulled the trigger, I was dead. Once again, I was caught.

Shit.

