

The Orange One whined and she threw her pillow at it.

"Shaddap," she said, and put her head on her forearm. She opened her eyes a smidgen. Four in the morning. Four in the goddamned morning.

"You too fat now anyway," she said. "You can wait another hour or two. Shaddap."

Her husband groaned and started to roll over onto his back. She wasn't going to have any of that. He snored fit to wake the dead when he slept on his back. And he kept on bending that one leg and it never stayed up and whenever he jerked it back into the upright position, he would wake her up. That and the goddamned fat orange cat of theirs would be too much to take this early in the morning. She pushed him back over onto his side.

"Stay there," she said. "Me sleep."

She took a deep breath and closed her eyes, thinking that the best sleeps always came in the last few hours before waking up. She would wake up for six and feel rested and refreshed and ready to start the day. Parts of her day, her waking life, started to creep into her thoughts. Go into work, turn on the computer, get a coffee while it boots up, check email, look for an email from Nancy, telling me that she shipped her parts to me on time and making the rest of my day go good, and be sure to check with production to see if they made what they said they were going to make, and then when the email check was done, out to the floor to do a walkaround to compare what was on the spreadsheets and reports with that was actually on the floor.

"No," she said. "Me sleep. Go way."

She scrunched her eyes closed in concentration, to actively banish the thoughts from her head, imagining a soothing calm starting at the crown of her head and slowing flowing down past her ears, to her shoulders, to her chest, to the muscles in her back. The thoughts, those horrible waking thoughts of work and life and reality, went away and she could feel the mounds of sleep piling on top of her.

Then The Orange One started. Then Fibby chimed in. Before she stole from her husband, a few moments away from seriously considering rolling her husband overtop of one of them and crushing them to death so she could manage just a few more gorgeous hours of sleep, Ilsa got into the act. All three were going.

Her duty called to her then. She couldn't go to sleep. Existence hung in the balance. Her three cats would never cry all at the same time about the same thing unless it was the one thing that destiny - that aldar rök - demanded they cry about.

She rolled out of bed and went straight to the bathroom to take a shower. Her husband rolled over onto his back and bent his knee and started to snore. She reached in and turned on the bathroom light, just so's a bit of the light could catch his form under the thick duvet. He snored with a smile on his face and his bent knee fell over a little, then a little more, then shot up bolt straight again and the snore became a short snort then went back to it's drone. She went into the bathroom and closed the door behind her.

She turned on the light for the walk in shower but left the light for the bathroom off. She didn't want the light from under the door to wake him up. Once her husband saw what time it was and saw that his wife was in the shower, he would start to think that something was wrong. Then she remembered her cell phone.

"Oh, shit," she said. She kept it on her side of the bed, on the floor, on top of the book she read before falling asleep. Joe Hill's "Heart Shaped Box." The guy was no Stephen King, but he certainly had it going on. She turned off the walk-in shower light, opened the door to the bathroom and crept back to grab her phone, one eye on her husband the whole time, to see if he would wake up. He slept soundly most all of the time, not even waking up if she gave him a jab with her elbow, a reminder to roll back onto his side, but today would be the day that he would have trouble sleeping. She grabbed the phone and went back to the bathroom, shutting the door behind her and turning the walk in shower light on. Again. She put the phone on the counter to her left and started to undress.

No one would ever use the word svelte to describe her, but by God, take her out to dinner and she wasn't afraid to eat a burger and enjoy herself. That had

been her, up and down, her whole life. There was a brief affair with sweets and candy and chocolate when she was a teenager, mostly as a means by which to challenge her mother's notion of beauty and attraction, but she had long since grown accustomed to her proportions. Men say things to get what they want and she was not so ignorant as that, but she knew her husband liked what he had and kept on coming back for more. She slipped her nightdress over her head and slid out of her underwear and took stock of herself in the mirror.

Part of the rebellion when she was young was tattoos. The first one she got without even thinking about. The man behind the counter said the symbol meant 'dragon' and she always liked dragons and the tattoo looked small enough that she knew it was there so she made an appointment for that day. The artist was not the man who took her appointment. The artist had been a dirty blonde, shaggy haired, revenant of a man in a wifebeater style undershirt and a pair of blue jeans that, had he of taken them off, they likely would have taken a bow and walked out of the room. He apologized to her for not being at his best and excused himself to freshen up. He went to the bathroom almost long enough for her to reconsider her decision, when he came out looking like a new man, despite the fact he did not even change his clothes.

He did not tell her until three quarters of the way through the procedure that he could never pickup a tattoo needle without shooting up first. Otherwise, his hands would shake and he would make a mess of it. She sat stock still through the whole thing, as he inked away at her right arm, and watched the movie "Goonies". That was her first tattoo. And as she stood looking in the mirror at the faded black ink on her bicep she marveled at the magic of a mirror. She looked at a reflection of herself, and saw where her life had marked her, and she used that reflection to look back into time. She wondered if that was where the notion a crystal ball or a magic mirror came from. People seeing their pasts in themselves, fancying they could see all pasts and futures of all people using an enchanted version.

"Mirror, Mirror, on the wall," she said. "Who's the craziest one of all?" Her reflection did not change.

"Thanks," she said, and turned around.

The last pair of tattoos she had, five years ago, almost to the day, in fact, were on her back. She researched better this time. The dragon symbol she had been so proud of turned out to be something completely different. Time waxed and people came and went, and soon enough, she came into contact with a pleasant woman who was chinese and good enough to tell her what her dragon tattoo meant.

"My son," the lady said. "His name is Dragon." The lady looked forty but could have been four hundred, for all she knew.

"That's a very cool name for a boy," she answered. "How old is he."

"His name is Dragon," the lady continued. "And I do not sign his name like that."

"You sign his name?" she asked.

"He named his own name when he got older," she said. "He calls himself Eggelber."

She didn't think that was what he called himself, though when she ran the pronunciation in her mind of what the lady might have been trying to say, she figured that the lady's son had named himself Englebert, and she was none too sure that one name was better than the other.

"And that," the lady finished. "is not the symbol for Dragon."

"Oh," she said. "The guy in the shop said it was."

"Do you know what means?" the lady asked.

"What what means?" she asked.

"Turtle," the lady said.

"Pardon?"

"But Grand Imperial Turtle," the lady said. "Very lucky."

But I bet you say that to all the round-eyed girls, she had thought to herself, rather unkindly she had admitted.

The very last pair of tattoos she decided to get was a year long process of

internet searches and examining images online, scanning them and zooming in to the nearest, clearest pixel. She went to libraries when those images got too blurry. Then she went to the ROM and went to the floor with all the birds, stuffed and hung from the ceiling as if in flight. She spent one week's vacation, taking the bus all the way there, along with a bag lunch, to the ROM and sat and drew every single bird they had to offer. She went to the Toronto Zoo not long after the first day of spring, to see the birds when they took flight. She wanted to see the ones she had imagined and viewed come to life and move the air above and below them to move themselves through time and space. Much to her boyfriends dismay - a boy who was a friend who was now her husband - she did her level best to attract Mourning Doves by putting out a basket next to the front door. The doves did not last for long and he came to like them after a time. The best part of her whole intention was to watch the life cycle of them. Mourning Doves, she had learned from her researches up to that point, usually had two to three eggs and the male and female took turns caring for the eggs, and did the same once the eggs were hatched. But once that was done and the fledglings had grown to a size where their feathers came in, the parents took off and left them alone. If the fledglings were able to take flight, they went off on their own. If they didn't, they would starve and die.

"What do those birds eat anyway," her husband had asked. "Could we put out birdseed or anything?"

She wouldn't let him and he shrugged and walked away. If she stood outside, the baby birds would not so much as show their heads. If she stood at the front door and peered through the window at them, she felt safer and would try to make it out of the nest on their own.

When the first one took flight she watched it go from the nest to the porch, to the front lawn. It walked around for a long time and she wanted so very badly to go out and pick it up and put it back into its nest and tell it that everything was okay and she would bring it food and care for it and nothing would be bad and everything would be good. Her boyfriend came up behind her and put his hands on her shoulders and didn't say a word and she thought he was thinking the same thing, only he thought it a couple of days ago and erred on the side of his girlfriend's better judgment - a girlfriend that wouldn't be a girlfriend much longer as far as he was concerned and he would correct that problem when things were right and that would be what he would do on his own, knowing that pressure from her or someone else to correct that issue would cheapen it and question his resolve. But for then, the two stood there, pushing aside the gauze of the curtains that covered the front door's window, watching that little baby bird take flight. And when it did, she turned around, kissed her boyfriend, thinking to herself then and knowing that when he did ask she would say Yes Yes I will Yes, and went to her upstairs art studio and drew herself a pair of wings.

Those were the wings that she presented to the tattoo artist and that was what she had put across her two shoulder blades and those were what she looked at in her bathroom mirror, over her shoulder. He had loved them for many reasons, and the least of which was the inexplicable raw sexiness of seeing them on her back when he entered her from behind. He would run his hand over them and feel the raised image with his fingertips. She couldn't swear to it now though she was reasonably sure and would remember to check the next time, that his fingertips caressing her tattoo was the last thing he did before he came.

They stayed the same. She ran her own fingers over them, more rough than a caress, more of a probe, looking for something. She came up empty. She turned back and looked at herself in the mirror. Long, blonde hair, brown eyes with thick brows - her husband disliked women who trimmed their eyebrows, thinking that women should not use sharpies anywhere near their face and were not good replacements for brows. Large, mature breasts. No porn stars breasts, primed and primed for the camera or for anything else that required a form of perfection, but not ones that hung to her knees, knotted with blue veins and tipped with nipples like erasers. Thick belly, wide hips, and a plush bush of hair around what her mother had insisted were her naughty bits. She liked what she saw and was proud of who she was but none of that was what she was looking for. She could feel what her cats were howling about but

damnit, she couldn't see it.

"Damnit," she said out loud, and slammed her fist on the counter, cracking it, sending up a plume of white dust.

"Whups," she said, inspecting the crack. The bathroom counter, an upgrade she insisted on when they bought the house after getting married (the first house, the townhouse with the doves, had been hers and he had been visiting and they had never, ever lived together, she had been and was proud to say), was marble. Under any other circumstances, nothing short of a sledgehammer would have started to make so much as made a mark on it's surface. She took a closer look.

"Yup," she confirmed. "It's cracked."

Jormungandr had crested the world and the magic was back, she thought.

"I don't have much time," she thought, and turned on the shower. She waited for a few minutes for the water to warm up. Cresting had made her stronger, but that was it. It was winter and the water, she was too goddamned cold for first thing in the morning. She looked in the mirror then turned her back to it and looked at her shoulders in the mirror. Nothing. She probed with her fingertips again. Not so much as a nubbin. She tested the water of the shower, made a few slight adjustments, and got inside.

She rubbed and scrubbed, lathered and rinsed and repeated, and did was required for ablutions in as short a time as she could manage. When she turned off the water, she remembered that she had forgot to grab her towel. She stepped on tip toes from the shower, across the tiled bathroom floor, to grab her husband's towels. Her's must have been in the laundry room, either in the washing machine or the dryer, and that was as clear an indication to her now as it should have been last night that things were about to change - she was preoccupied and forgetting things.

When she went back to the confines - and frankly, the warmth - of the walk in shower, she could not help but glance to the flashing red light on her cell phone. She had missed a call when she was in the shower. She reached a wet hand to the phone and pressed a button in it.

Work.

At four goddamned thirty in the morning.

She was happy now that she was awake and showered, because calling at four thirty in the morning was never a good sign. She put the phone back on the counter and went into the walk in to dry off and wrap herself in a towel.

The green light on the phone flashed now. That means that whoever had called from work had now left a message.

"Pris," the voice on the message said. "Call me back, please."

Mimi. She might as well be a robot, but a good robot. If it it computed, she was okay. If Pris's phone did not ring all night, that means that it all computed. If it did not compute, Mimi blew a fuse and needed to make a phone call to request a reset.

She looked in the mirror and dialed work. She canceled the video input and put the phone to her ear. This would translate to all technologies that the conversation would be audio only. Her phone would transmit a stock image of her to the screen of Mimi's phone. A smiling face, blonde hair in a single braided ponytail, starting at the top of her head.

"Shipping," Mimi said when she answered the phone.

"Hey, Mimi," she said. "It's Pris. What's wrong?"

"We're sending people home early?" she said. "And I was wondering if you knew?"

Mimi, gods bless her, Pris thought, must have been challenged to join the indoor track team in high school and ended up running the hundred yard dash in a ninety yard gym and the resulting brain damage made every sentence sound like a question.

"I left work yesterday at six," Pris said. "And no one said anything about going home early."

She talked slow to Mimi, even though she really shouldn't have. Maybe Mimi only talked that way to her because she thought Pris had a hard time understanding

her.

"It's because of the snow?" Mimi said. "There's a lot of snow?"

The jacuzzi tub was over the bathroom window and Pris stepped inside it to get a look outside. The Orange One and Fibby and Helsa had cried for all the right reasons. There must have been over a foot of snow on the ground.

"Are the trucks on time?" Pris asked.

"Yes?" Mimi said. "They are? And we have the parts for them?"

"Good," Pris said. "Is that all you were calling to tell me?"

"No?" Mimi said. "We sent people? Home early? Do you know about that?"

"No, Mimi," Pris said. "I don't. You just told me, as a matter of fact. Is there a problem with that?"

Pris went on, in her own head, calculating what she knew for inventory and shipping schedules from the day before and made a guess as to what number she would use to determine the factor of their issues. If it stayed under a five, day to day overtime would be okay to get through, if it was a five to an eight, daily overtime plus Saturday, eight to nine, all that plus Sunday. If it was a ten, there was serious shit to be had. But a ten would be out of her control. For Mimi, though, all that mattered to her was that it did not compute.

"Well, some people, they need the money?" Mimi went on. "And they have to work? So, Cindy went and did the Scope Thing?"

Oh, dear gods, Pris thought. Skully and The fucking Scope Thing?

"How much did she make?" Pris asked.

"I don't know? I wasn't standing there?" Mimi said. "But when I stopped her she just stood up and smiled? And then she went home? I think she was there, maybe, an hour or so."

Fifty times about fifty, Pris thought, at a low side. Twenty five hundred dollars.

Pris's back twinged. She writhed in place for a moment, almost turned all the way around without her feet moving off the bath mat. She reached around with her free hand. A nubbin. It was starting.

"Has she left the building? Don't let her back in the building. When she comes in tomorrow night, tell her to go home and come back in the morning."

"Is she fired?" Mimi asked.

"No, she has to come and see me tomorrow morning. Got it?"

"Got it? Yes? I do?" Mimi said. "Are you coming in to work? Today?"

"Send an email to Doc Holly," Pris said. Doc Holly was the nickname that the people on the plant production floor had given to the department manager for shipping and receiving. Everyone suspected she was a post-op trans-sexual and the name she gave everyone, Holly Golightly, was her stage name when she danced cabaret shows in Vegas. No one knew for sure anything about her so it was easier to make things up to put her in her place in their own minds.

"Tell her that I won't be in today." The twinge in her back sent her to her knees. She closed her eyes tight and went on. "Tell her I'll call her tomorrow."

She shut off her phone by snapping it shut. She took a step forward to put it on the bathroom counter when tendrils of pain, starting at each finger, wormed mercilessly down her arms and burrowed into her shoulder blades. She dropped the phone and slammed her hands down on the counter to catch herself from falling. Her hands dug deep into the blue countertop and she bit back the agony.

"Honey," her husband called. "Y'okay?"

"Yeah," she answered through clenched teeth. "Fine. Work called. Getting out of the shower."

"Shut off the damned thing while yer in there, willya," he said. She heard him roll onto his side, knowing for sure he would be on his back in a few minutes. She wanted to remind him she had just got out of the shower and didn't bother.

The night before, knowing that there would be a snowstorm, just that it wouldn't be The Snowstorm, she had set out two sets of clothes. She hung them on the hangers on the back of the bathroom door.

One set was her work clothes, plain front tan khakis and a white dress shirt with her company name emblazoned over it's left breast and on it's right arm, along

with a pair of thick black socks she preferred to wear with her steel toed shoes. Her feet would stink to heaven when she got home, but they were comfortable as hell when she was on her feet all day. But she put those off to the side for now. This was what she would take downstairs and put into her car. She would change into those when she got to work. What she had put out to put on was a pair of jeans, a turtleneck, a thick grey hooded sweatshirt, grey, woolen socks thicker than the black ones she wore to work, and a pair of grey long underwear, the kind you thought only your grandfather would possibly wear. This is what she would wear when she shovelled the driveway before going to work.

She reached for the long underwear - she couldn't help but think of them as longjohns, the same thing that her own grandfather had called them - and a shriek pain screamed down her arm and back. She stopped a moment and took a breath. The budding was starting and she needed to get moving and soon. She dressed with her eyes closed, not because she did not want to look at herself but because she wanted to concentrate past the pain and get dressed as fast as possible. If she waited for each twinge to pass, it would be too late to do anything.

She shut off the bathroom light, opened the door, and crept across the bedroom floor with her workclothes slung over her arm. She bent down and kissed her husband on the cheek. She felt the tears threatening to fall from her own cheek and onto his so she stood up quickly to wipe them away.

"Y'okay?" He asked without opening his eyes. "Time is it?"

"Time for me to go to work," she said. "Are you going to be okay?"

"Yum," he said. She wasn't sure what that meant, but he was smiling. "Might call in. Hu bad isit?"

"Not bad," she said. "But you call in if you want to, 'kay?"

"You call in," he said. "And you can call in for me."

"Nothin doin, Sport," she said. "Gotta go. I'll be safe."

"Mmmmmhmmmm," he said. "Love."

"Love you too," she said and kissed him on the cheek again.

She shrugged her arm to adjust the work clothes she was carrying and to see how well her limbs were operating and then walked carefully out of the room. She turned the door handle so the bolt retracted and did not rub against the door plate and then click home to lock the door. When the door was closed, she slowly turned the handle back and let the bolt slide smoothly and quietly into place. She went downstairs to the kitchen, carefull to remember those spots on the floor and stairs that would creak, wondering to herself if the floor creaked more or less when it was cold and if it made a difference as to what spots on the floor creaked or didn't. She made a point to herself to go on a walk through the house when she got back and maybe mentally map out those points.

"When," she said to herself, softly and under her breath. She went to the kitchen and fed the three cats. She thought about the wet food - that was their favourite - but she opted on an extra helping of the dry food. They all shared one big dish, big enough for the three of them to stand around it. While they ate she let the cold water run while she cleaned out their dish. She tested the water with her finger - cold, very cold - and filled up their dish. She petted each one of the little monsters in turn and thought about picking them up to give them a kiss, but the holler of pain across her shoulders and back reminded her that there was no time. She went to laundry room to get to the garage, lugging along her work clothes and slipping her winter boots on from a standing position.

She closed the door to the garage behind her the same as she did her bedroom, carefully and quietly, and loaded up her car before tying the laces of her high, brown snowboots. She looked at them and wondered when she got them, because it seemed to her that they had been with her forever. She couldn't remember if she bought them or if her parents had bought them for her. They were made of rough, brown material and had thick, meaty soles that looked to her like they could take her through any maestrom and the flames of hell before giving up. She laced them tight and then pressed the button for the garage door to lift.

The motor over her head whined with effort but the door didn't move. She could smell burning plastic and ozone and before she could press the button a

second time to see if that would shut it off, the chain popped and the motor stopped whining but kept turning. She tugged on the red and white stringed release, disconnecting it from the door opening rig, and opened the garage door manually. What she saw when she opened the door was snow.

That was it. There was no other way to put it. Snow. Everything she knew had a world of snow dropped on top of it. And more continued to fall. The pain in her shoulders and back was still there, but nothing more. She expected there to be more by now. For all of the snow she was seeing, the time must have been near, she was sure, but still nothing. She breathed in deep through her nose, the cold biting all the way up to her sinuses. The strength was there. She saw it when she was upstairs, but that could have been just a surge. Jormungandr was awake, she knew, and when he squeezed and the magic crested, her strength grew. But he had to keep squeezing, until the wave broke and all the magic came back, she would not be ready. And when the magic did come back, she had to be in place or otherwise everything would be over and aldar rök would come true.

Notes

Pris shovels the driveway and Jormungandr crests more and she gets stronger

Pris deals with work issues over the phone

Pris gets to tell Holly exactly what the Scope and ice cube trick is (and I can't wait to tell it)

Pris drives south to Toronto

Pris's wings start to grow from nubbins to the real thing

Pris abandons her car on the 404 highway and flies south to Front street

Pris lands at Lake Ontario and waits for the Sons of Muspell to cross Bifrost and start Ragnarok

Part of her job is to defend Ontario from the son of Muspell assigned to take Ontario.

And this son of Muspell is going to be a Lovecraftian type of demon

And this demon looks like this

Head is an entire cuttlefish (not an octopus, as per Cthulhu)

Horns on either side of it's head like a ram, but they wind around the back of the head like a kind of tonsure.

Four arms.

Three fingers per hand.

Almost morbidly obese. It's belly hangs over it's waist but it is not doughy fat.

It is solid muscle.

Wings of a vulture.

Legs of a velociraptor

Prehensile reptilian tail.

Skin is the texture and appearance of a drowned man. Pale with thick, blue veins.

One ugly motherfucker.

It is this demon's job to defeat her and take her physically (klámhogg = The Shame Stroke) and impregnate her with a Child of Muspel and start the cycle of True Ragnarok (Aldar Rok is just the beginning)

I'm kinda sorta trying to re-write the myths for my own invention and pleasure.