

A Really REALLY Bad Day

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I'm not, as you know, wont to jabber to my mimir for very long; but today was a day like no other day. Since I have to stay up tonight anyway, I've got a whole stack of paper and a couple spare pens and my mimir is going to prove the value of its existence.

It started at, oh, two a.m. or so. The wife was downstairs with the little one, it being my night to sleep, and asleep I was—so asleep, in fact, that nothing short of a catastrophe could have waken me. Catastrophes never happen, though, because we live nowhere. The wife's a bit of a witch, I suppose, and so when we got married she found us a nice little planet way out in the middle of nowhere all to ourselves. There's a portal, oh, fifteen miles to the south, but we keep the gate key in the basement so we don't have any visitors. It's just me, the little lady, and Chigger, our new son.

Despite its impossibility, the catastrophe happened. That is to say, the wall and roof of the bedroom was removed with surgical precision and a claw roughly the same size as the room came in and snagged me out of bed. Nightshirts are not designed well for this kind of activity, and a little ripping sound alerted me, while still half asleep, that my ride up was being replaced by a fall.

With me so far? Two hours into the day, part of my house destroyed, hundreds of feet in the air, ripped night-shirt and a long fall facing me. Tell me you understand what I mean by "not a good start" and I won't have to drill it in anymore.

So, as I'm falling I'm thinking to myself, isn't this the kind of thing that is supposed to happen right *before* I wake up, not right *after*? And then I see a gigantic something shoot into my field of view and suddenly I land on it, rather hard. I broke my ankle. Either that or it suddenly developed new directions of rotation. A very *painful* directions of rotation.

Barely more than two hours into the day; not only is my house destroyed, my sleep destroyed, my night shirt destroyed, and my worst nightmare happening after I wake up instead of before, but I am also maimed. Keep reading if you understand what is meant by "really bad day;" otherwise, find a sledgehammer and a strong friend who can help you understand.

You think it can't get any worse, do you? Optimist.

I looked at what I landed on and—well, you remember that claw I mentioned early, the one a bit larger than my master bedroom? Yeah. I was sitting on the hand that it belonged to. And trust me, it was a pretty small claw for such a hand. The whole hand was covered with scales, for lack of a better word, each several feet across, that were like diamond-steel plates, harder than any stone. Which is why my ankle broke like it was a toothpick.

Then came the best break of my entire day. I blacked out from pain.

When I woke up again I was still in the hand, but my ankle was fixed. My whole leg felt like all the blood in it had been replaced with molten lead and I thought my spinal column was on fire, but I was awake and my leg was no longer broken. And, staring down at me from a giddy height were two massive eyes.

I really don't want to think what the beast looked like, so rather than describe it in detail as I noticed it, I'll just tell you now what I figured out later on: I was in the hand of an unbelievably huge dragon. I didn't know that at the time, remember, but I figured it out as things went on. And yes, things go on for some time.

So, the first thing the beast said to me was "you're no wizard." Well, duh! Like anyone could doubt that. "You don't know any magic at all."

"My wife does," I said. I didn't want to say it; there was just something about the gaze of those planet-sized eyes that made me say things without wanting to. So I said "my wife does," startled and disgusted by the sound as it left my mouth.

"Yes, but she's nursing a baby. Show some respect."

Great. First it forces me to say something, then reprimands me for saying it. What a wonderful conversationalist!

"How do you come to live here?" it asked.

"We moved here when we got married."

"How?"

Again, a question I was not eager to answer, but what could I do? "My wife opened a portal. It's much too small for you, though."

“My name is Maliutka Malkh,” said the dragon. Kind of random, don’t you think? I always introduce myself halfway through the conversation.

“Sounds Russian,” I said. I was quickly loosing the thread of the conversation, but somehow admitting that to the dragon seemed unwise.

“You know Russian?”

“No sir.”

“‘Empress,’ not ‘sir.’”

“Empress. Gotcha. What empire?”

“The lower universe.”

Uh. . . lower? I mean, come on. “Who’s in charge of the upper, then?” Big mistake. My veins lit on fire again and the dragon dropped me. A hundred yards. All the way to the ground. I landed on my shoulder in the wallow, and it was all I could do to get my head above the muck before my bruised muscles froze up completely.

Maybe ten minutes after two. Chalk up another unbelievable fall, a few broken ribs, intense magical torture (though I’m sure the empress would have called it “healing” the first time and “preventative healing” or some such the second), and a cryptic conversation with a massive lunatic dragon to the list of the day’s accomplishments.

I didn’t black out this time; the liquid fire coursing through my veins wouldn’t let me. Let me tell you, magically mending bones is more painful than just letting them be broken.

As I lay there, immobile and covered in mud, the dragon just sort of vanished. A little quiet Pop! and it was gone. But mere seconds later, Pop! Pop-pop-pop-pop pop-pop pop! Pop! Right where it had been standing appeared a hag, a little girl, and seven huge giants.

For a while they stood there, looking about themselves (and often looking into my bedroom, where I too looked often in hopes of seeing my wife come to bed) and talking in low voices. Then one of the giants spotted me in the mud (how, I’ll never know; I was laying down, without moving, in a mud wallow, covered in mud myself so I blended in perfectly, and it was night—a dark, moonless night. . .) and came bounding over, scooped me up (you do know what “pain” is, don’t you?) and rejoined his companions.

“Look what I found, Em’ly!” boomed my captor as he ran up.

“What is it, Chomper?” asked the hag.

“It looks like a human,” answered another of the giants.

“Yeah,” boomed my captor, “from the mud.” He held me out at arm’s length for all to see.

Some people, I am sure, enjoy being the center of at-

tention. Like, they actually want people to look at them; it gives them a kick to be ogled. Yeah, so, not me. Especially not when I’m muddy, half-dressed, bruised beyond repair, and it’s two in the morning. Not my best time of day.

“Good catch, Chomper,” said the hag. “Put him down; he won’t run away.”

Understatement of the year. I couldn’t even stand up; I just collapsed on my face, my left arm all awkwardly stuffed beneath me.

“Is he dead?” asked someone

“No,” replied someone else, “just—”

Then I heard my wife scream. It was a lovely scream; no one can scream like the Mrs. It started out high (she tells me she usually aims for a high B♭) and went up and up until I couldn’t hear it at all. A work of art, like everything my wife does. It was followed almost immediately by the less glorious but equally expressive sound of Chigger crying at the top of his lungs.

“Uh-oh.” That was it. Someone said “Uh-oh” and they all took off running toward the house. After a bit I heard huge feet running back to me, I was snatched unceremoniously from the ground, and off my carrier and I went, toward the house.

My wife is good. There is no doubt about it. Bone tired, scared out of her wits, but she still managed to freeze the hag. The little girl seemed a bit angry at this and lit up some glowing swords, but before she struck the hag said “**NO**, Cor!” and that was that. Here we were, seven giants, a little girl, and myself standing in a loose semicircle around my wife, still-screaming son, and the frozen hag.

“What an hour for visitors!” said my wife in a very expressive mix of annoyance and disbelief.

“Release my mother!” shouted the girl in reply.

“All in good time, my dear, all in good time.”

“Who are you?” asked the middle-aged giant.

“I think, (though I could be mistaken; etiquette was never my strong suit) that it is you who should be answering that question first. Am I mistaken, my dear?”

“Quite right,” said I.

“There you have it,” she said. “Can’t ask for a better authority than that. By the way, dear, have you seen the other half of our bedroom?”

“Well. . .” what was I to say? “let’s talk about it later.”

“Of course! You are quite correct to correct me. Visitors take precedence over little things like destruction of the home and so on. Who were you all again?”

“I’m Emily Mulgrave,” said the still-frozen hag, “and

this is my daughter, Cordelia. Behind me somewhere are Gar and Nejak Thoris” (here a middle-aged giant couple bowed), “their nephew Nit Thoris” (the specified giant bowed), “Paooi Ar” (a (relatively) short giant) , “Feejl Frau” (nondescript), “Mo Bo” (the best dressed of the lot), “and Chomper” (my captor).

“A pleasure, I am sure,” replied my wife. “Chomper, would you be so good as to set my husband down?”

“He’s floppy,” boomed Chomper.

Thinking this might need some explanation, I added that after falling several hundred feet I was feeling less than pleasant.

“Oh, that’s bad,” said my wife with evident concern. “Chomper, you see the bed up there?” She pointed to the missing wall of our second-floor bedroom, and Chomper grunted. “Place him—gently—in the bed, would you? We mustn’t have him freezing out here all night while we see about limbering up Emily and getting you all some refreshments.”

I have omitted that throughout this exchange Chigger was screaming like a hungry, tired baby ought to. Since nobody seemed to pay it any mind, it didn’t seem right to point it out as often as it stood out to me.

Chomper fulfilled my wife’s request and I was unaware of the rest of the predawn. Horrible mess I made of the bed sheets, since I was still covered by mud, but that, as I hope you can see, was the *least* of my problems.

I woke up with the sun streaming in my eyes and my good wife busily packing stuff from the ^{porch-thing} room into various trunks.

“Good morning,” she said, greeting me with a kiss. “How are you today?”

“Sore. You?”

“A bit tired. What happened to the rest of this room?”

I explained, in brief, my early morning escapades and she listened sympathetically. Then she asked, “are you up for a journey?”

“A journey? Where?”

“We need to get rid of our guests, and that means one of us needs to take them through the portal to the city. Chigger caught a cold last night and I don’t think I ought to take him out of the house.”

Not much to say to that, what?

There was the problem of getting out of bed (I was sorer than chicken pox) and breakfast (some sort of strange soup that Emily made, just to be polite, followed by some real food, secretly, in the pantry) and then the walk. Actually, for me it was a ride because I could no more than hobble, and we made good time. Through the portal and there we were, in the city.

I should observe making good time was imperative, for the trip was painful in the extreme. You see, the giants talked incessantly, and about absolute bilge. Paooi was always loosing his temper and Mo would offer to fight him (if he wasn’t out playing with some rock or the other), then Nit would make some incredibly bad joke and everyone would guffaw awfully, after which Feejl would make some sort of a erudite comment to Em and Cor would ask what it meant and Feejl would “translate” for her and Paooi would get mad at Feejl for being so condescending and Mo would offer to fight him and. . . well, you get the idea.

Once we got through the portal (I managed to keep the key secret), my only hope was to loose the hag and friends in the city and take the portal back home. The problem was, how could I do that when I was bring carried by Chomper? For the time being at least, I was forced to remain the guest of my guests.

Not for very long, luckily. Giants are not exactly standard fauna in the city and it didn’t take long before the city guard came to investigate. As soon as I saw them I had a brilliant idea. I stuffed a kerchief in my mouth, jammed my hands down into Chomper’s fist, and struggled expressively for the benefit of the watching guards. My aim was to convince them that I was an unwilling captive, as indeed I was, and it seemed to work. Chomper set me down when the guards attacked the giants and, not waiting to see what happened next, I ran through the portal. And that was that.

At least, that was that part of that. I was still faced with the long journey home. Fifteen miles. On foot. And I was sorer than I have ever been before. It took the giants under three hours to get to the portal; it took me ten to get home. I would walk until I stumbled, then lie on the ground until I could move again. Stand, shamle forward, trip, lay and pant. Rise, limp along, fall, rest for a bit. Hour after hour, then hour upon hour again.

But I made it home.

Alas, that was not the end of my day. Chigger was as ill as any child could be, so hot that it almost hurt to touch him. Emily had been bathing him in cool water and tending to him all day, and was so tired that I had to make dinner, which in and of itself is enough to make an otherwise good day bad. Since this had not been a good day it was, so to speak, icing on the cake.

Now it is my turn to tend my son, which is why I have been staying up talking to this mimir. If I stopped, I might fall asleep and if I fell asleep Chigger might die. But its time for me to wake my beloved for her shift, so I think I will stop here.