“Aeniel struck with his sword, but not even his magical blade was strong enough to penetrate the dragon’s scales. The dragon retaliated with a swing of his huge paw and Aeniel was only just fast enough to block the blow with his shield. The shield shattered and Aeniel’s left arm broke like a twig under the force of the attack that sent him flying across the cavern. As skillful and mighty as Aeniel was, he still was only a mortal and his strength could not compare to the strength of the last high dragon in existence. The creature was huge, the shortest of its claw was about four feet long. The dragon laughed and it sounded like the roar of a thunder! ‘Puny man!’ it growled, ‘many have tried to slay me! Soon you’ll join them in the afterlife!’ The dragon laughed again, and the very ground beneath Aeniel’s feet shook. Many men would find the situation hopeless, but not Aeniel, for he knew the power hope could carry. With the last bits of his strength he rose to his feet, saying a little prayer to Armendas, the god of warriors. He knew-“

A knock stopped my mother’s telling of the famous legend. “Who could it be at this hour?” My mother said standing up and walking to the door. With every step she took, her appearance was changing. As she walked her legs were stretching longer, growing almost an entire foot. It wasn’t the only change on her body though, her bust was also growing, reaching the size of small pumpkins. Her waist long red hair was getting shorter and darker, until it only reached her shoulders and was darker than the night. I couldn’t see it, but I knew her eyes changed from emerald green to chocolate brown. I always loved to see my mum use her magic to change the way she looked and I hoped I would learn to do it as well. She said I was too young though… I wasn’t very happy to hear that. My mum was right not to teach me, who knows how much damage could an irresponsible 9 year old do?

I couldn’t see or hear who was behind the door, but I could see the annoyance in my mother’s behavior. “I already told your master, I did what I could!” My mother said, even her voice sounding differently after the transformation. “I am no priest of Ishmian.” She said, invoking the name of the god of healers. “And I’m telling you I don’t know how to help her!” She listened to something the other person said and then sighed. “Fine, go tell him I’ll be there in half an hour.” It seemed the person at the door had more to say, but my mother shouted: “I don’t give a damn!” And smashed the door closed.

“Where was I?” Mum asked, smiling, still in her changed form.

My sight was fixed on her huge chest with each breast a lot larger than my head. “Mummy, why are your boobies so big?” I asked with a childish innocence.

My mother chuckled. “Well, I found out men are more susceptible to deceit, when their focus is elsewhere than on my words. It seems it works even with little girls!” She chuckled again. “Now, do you want to hear how Aeniel defeated the dragon?”

“Yes!” I shouted. I might have heard the story many times before, but I didn’t mind it in the slightest. Besides, my mother’s version was a lot different than I ever heard elsewhere. For example in other versions, Aeniel was the son of Armendas, who seduced a queen of the ancients. In mother’s version he was just a man, which made his accomplishments and bravery so much more impressive.

“Aeniel rose to his feet. He realized he had no chance against the dragon’s hard scales and so he had decided, he had to do something insane. He ran as fast as his legs could carry him, heading straight for the dragon. The dragon was caught by surprise and so it didn’t start breathing fire. It tried to catch Aeniel with his jaws, hoping to slice him apart with its sharp teeth, but that was what Aeniel was counting on. He leaped forward, avoiding the teeth that were as long and sharp as his sword and landed inside the dragon's maw. With a single slash of his blade, he cut off the dragon’s tongue. The dragon roared, feeling pain for the first time in centuries. Encouraged by the success Aeniel started to swing his sword around, trying to do as much damage as possible. The dragon’s blood was so hot, it would have melted any sword, but for Aeniel’s magical blade.”

“Where did Aeniel get his sword?” I asked. It always bothered me that no storyteller ever said how Aeniel got his weapon.

My mother smiled. “Well, I gave it to him, of course!”

I stared at her with my mouth open wide.

“What?” She asked, smiling.

“But Aeniel lived two hundred years ago!” I shouted.

“It’s closer to three hundred, actually.” My mum said, chuckling. “I look pretty good for my age, don’t I?”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “Really?! You knew Aeniel?! What was he like?”

“Oh, he was a darling! Always very respectful. Strong, brave and handsome… but he was a bit absent-minded. Well, to be honest, the poor guy just couldn’t remember a thing!” Mum laughed.

I had a thousand questions I wanted to ask, but my mother cut me short.

“Enough.” She said, “It’s time to go to sleep.”

“But I’m not tired!” I protested.

Mum let out a sigh and then kissed me on the lips. My eyelids suddenly became heavy as lead and my head fell on the pillow.

“Goodnight, sweetie.” Mother said with her hand on my cheek. It sounded like it came from a long distance, even though she was right next to me.

In my dreams that night I saw men with swords and torches and my mother trembling in fear and burning with anger. I woke up to the smell of rotting meat. I started to cry and my mother comforted me in a tight embrace. I’ll never forget how pale her face was and how cold her hands felt on my skin. I didn’t know what happened that night, but my mother was never the same after it, staying away from people even more than before.

We lived alone in a small shack a few hundred feet from a village. The villagers always came to my mum when they had health issues and she helped them as best as she could. Sometimes with a little spell, but mostly with the knowledge of local herbs. It was about a week after that night that we went into the village together to buy food and a couple of other things we needed. My mother changed into a tall, busty lady again. I didn’t know why she did it, but to be honest, I didn’t really care, fascinated by her change. People in the village always carried a great respect for my mother, but I guess she wasn’t the only one who changed after that night. When the villagers saw us, they hid if they could, rushing away from us. Where used to be respect, only fear and hostility remained.

We left Lars’ shop, only to find a group of men waiting for us outside. Henrik Halfhand, the veteran of the Great War, stood tall and proud in front of his peers. “We heard what you did to poor Matty, murderer!” He shouted and spat on the ground.”

“You have not heard the truth.” My mother replied calmly.

“Don’t lie to me!” Henrik cried, pulling his sword out of scabbard with his healthy hand. “You’re not welcomed here anymore! Stay out of our village!”

“I will go where I wish to and I won’t be stopped by the likes of you!” My mother said, losing her temper.

I felt anger swelling up inside of me. I remembered how my mother saved the life of Henrik’s wife just a few months ago. How he promised endless gratitude. Now he stood there, threatening her with a sword in his hand. A wave of heat swept over me and suddenly, everyone was deafened by the loud rumble of thunder. A lightning struck Henrik’s sword, shattering it into pieces. Cries of shock filled the air, my mother’s eyes aglow. The heat I felt subsided and then my mum grabbed my arm firmly. “Let’s go, Melody.”

Once we were out of sight, my mother collapsed to her knees, and had a fit of horrible cough.

“Are you alright mummy?!” I yelped, never witnessing my mother so weak. Even her disguise was starting to fail, her hair growing longer and brightening.

“I’ll live.” She croaked, once her coughing had stopped for long enough.

My mum was back to her original form, pale and on the verge of fainting, when we finally managed to get back home. She was leaning against my little body all the way there. Another horrifying fit of cough filled the small shack. It took a couple of minutes before she caught her breath again. She looked at me intensely before speaking. “We need to have a little talk.”

“I wanted to wait until you were older, but you’re too powerful to wait any longer, so I’ll have to start with your training. If I didn’t intervene today… we’d be all dead!”

I was confused. “But I didn’t do anything!” I protested.

“You might not realize it, but you did. Magic is extremely volatile and it reacts to emotions. Tell me, how did you feel when those guys were waiting for us?”

“I was scared they would hurt us. And angry, because it was so unfair! Then I felt as if I had a fever and then you threw that lightning.”

“I didn’t cast that lightning, honey. That was you! And it would be much, much worse than a single lightning, if I didn’t step in. You would have torn us all into pieces! I have never seen so much raw power before!”

“I did that?!” I said, shocked. Never in my short nine years of life I thought I would be capable of something like this.

“Yes, you did.” My mother nodded. “It almost killed me, but I managed to absorb enough of the blow, so no one was harmed.” She said, starting to cough again.

The realization came as a slap. “I did this to you?!” I cried out, tears forming in my emerald eyes. The whole shack started to shake.

“Calm down, Melody.” My mother said gently, pulling me into an embrace. The shaking stopped. “It’s my fault. I underestimated how much power you have. Besides, it wouldn’t have happened if I started teaching you sooner.” She gave me a weak smile. “I’m going to start teaching you magic, but tomorrow. I’m exhausted and I need to rest.

“Close your eyes and try to empty your mind. Search inside yourself and find the place, where you feel absolutely still and calm. Try to imagine yourself there.” My mother said, breathing out. “Where are you?”

“We’re walking through the forest, heading to the old oak.”

I could see it as if I was really there. I felt the deep silence, disturbed only by chirping birds, making me feel even smaller than I really was. I’ve never been to this part of the woods alone, and I wasn’t alone now either. My mum in her transferred form, with her dark hair and big boobs was with me.

“We? Who’s there with you?” My mother’s voice sounded from a distance.

“You’re here with me.” I said as if it was obvious.

“That’s… unusual. Can you make me disappear?”

“I’ll try.” I stared at the busty figure, but it remained where it was, losing some of its color, looking more and more like a shadow and less like my mother. It smiled, showing its sharp teeth and it jumped, grabbing me by my arm. “I can’t!” I cried out, terrified. “It grabbed me! It hurts!” I shouted.

“Wake up, Melody! Open your eyes!”

I opened my eyes, screaming in terror. My mother tried to comfort me, but I jumped away, too afraid she could turn into that… thing.

That night I barely slept. It was there waiting for me whenever I closed my eyes. It was way past midnight when I passed out from exhaustion. In my dream I was back in the forest, in the meadow where the great oak grew. I was alone at first, but when I turned my head I saw it coming towards me. It was back in my mother’s changed form, but it looked unfocused, blurry around the edges. I started to run, but I wasn’t moving, stuck in place. I shouted and I cried in despair, knowing there was nothing I could do to run away. *It’s going to get me!*

An ice cold hand landed on my shoulder. *“You cannot run from me, Melody.”* It whispered in my ear. *“You brought me here, I am a part of you now and there’s nothing you can do about it. Do not cry, little girl, I’m not here to harm you.”*

I didn’t believe this… shadow, this demon, this whatever it was. Terrified, I felt my body get hotter the same way it felt today in the village. This time though, my mother wasn’t there to temper my outburst. Bolts of lightning were striking the ground around me and then everything faded into black.

I was woken up by the sound of thunder, louder than anything I ever heard before. The wind outside was howling, shaking with our entire home. My mother was sleeping, I couldn’t quite understand how she managed not to wake up with what was going on outside. Terrified, I rushed to her and crawled inside her bed, grasping her tightly. Only then did she wake up, comforting me in her arms. Feeling safe in my mother’s embrace I fell asleep. Luckily, no nightmares plagued the rest of my sleep as I dreamed of nothing.

The following morning my mother and I headed into the Oak’s meadow, deep inside the forest. My mum told me that since it was my place of calm, it’ll also be the place where I had the biggest chance to learn to control my abilities. On our way there we walked past several fallen trees, destroyed by the night’s storm. As we got closer to the meadow, we saw more and more trees damaged in the storm.

“I have a bad feeling about this.” My mother muttered to herself when we saw yet another tree half burned by lightning.

“No…” My mother gasped in disbelief. “No, no, no!” She cried out.

The great oak, once standing proudly in the middle of the meadow, was now nothing more than a big pile of ash, burned into nothingness. “This… this can’t be.” My mother said, her eyes glowing with tears inside them. She fell to her knees, coughing as if she was about to spit out her lungs.

“This tree…” she said when she finally got back the control of her breathing. “This tree was old even when I was a little girl. I used to play there with my brothers, climbing its branches. This was the place where I found my talent for magic. It was here, where I first met your father and it was the shade of this tree, where I spent hours sitting when I was pregnant with you.” My mother wiped the tears flowing down her cheeks. “It feels as if my heart is being ripped out of my chest!”

*“Look what you’ve done!”* The shadow’s voice sounded in my head. *“You did this!”*

“No.” I whispered.

*“Yes!”* The shadow replied.

“I didn’t do it.” I said out loud.

*“Oh yes, yes you did. Remember last night?”*

“I didn’t do it!” I screamed at the top of my lungs. The ground under my feet shook, cracking all around me.

*“You can deny it all you want, it won’t change the truth…”* The shadow said, mocking me.

“Who are you?” I whispered, tears gathering in my eyes.

The shadow in my head laughed. *“I am what you stole, little one. I am ancient, I am new. I am in every breath you take. I am life itself. And I am death. I am* ***power!****”*