

THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF MYRON

BLUMBERG, DRAGON

by Mike Resnick

Sylvia's always after me.

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"It's a skin condition," she says.

"It's a wart," I say.

"It's a skin condition and you're going to the doctor and
don't touch me until he gives you something for it."

So I go to the doctor, and he gives me something for it, and
she makes me sleep in the guest room anyway.

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"Myron, you're green," she says.

"You mean like I don't know the ropes, or you mean like I got ptomaine poisoning from your tuna salad?" I ask.

"I mean like you're the same color as the grass," she says.

"Maybe it's the lotion the doctor gave me," I say.

"It doesn't come off on your shirts," she says.

"So maybe it all dried up," I say.

"Maybe," she says, "but stay in your room when I have the girls over for mah jong."

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"I told you not to smoke in bed," she says.

"I know," I says.

"Well, then?" she says.

"Well then, _what_?" I say.

"Well then why are you smoking in bed?" she says.

"I'm not," I say.

"Then how did your pillow get scorched?" she says.

"Not from the passion of your love-making, that's for sure,"
I say.

"Don't be disgusting," she says.

Then I belch, and out comes all this smoke and fire, and she says if I ever lie to her again she's going to give me a rolling

pin upside my head, and then she walks out of the house before I can tell her I haven't lit up a cigarette in four days.

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"It looks like a cancerous growth," she says.

"It's just a swelling," I say. "There must be a busted spring in the chair."

"You should see a doctor," she says.

"Last time you sent me to a doctor I turned green," I say.

"This time you'll see a specialist," she says.

"A specialist in swellings?" I ask.

"A specialist in tails," she says.

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"Well?" she asks.

"Well what?"

"What did he say?"

"He says it looks like a tail," I say.

"Hah!" she says. "I_knew_it!"

"I wonder if our insurance covers tails," I say.

"Is he going to amputate it?" she asks.

"I don't think so," I say. "Why?"

"Because even if our insurance covers getting rid of tails,

it doesn't cover growing them," she says. "What am I going to do with you, Myron? We've got a bar mitzvah to attend this Saturday, and you're green and all covered with scales and you keep belching smoke and fire and now you're growing a tail. What would people say?"

"They'd say, 'There goes a well-matched couple'," I answer.

"That is not funny," she says. "What am I going to do with you? I mean, it was bad enough when you just sat around the house watching football and reading Playboy."

"You might fix some dinner while you're thinking about it," I say.

"What do you want?" she asks. "Saint George?"

I am about to lose my temper and tell her to stop teasing me about my condition, when it occurs to me that Saint George would go very well with pickles and relish between a couple of pieces of rye bread.

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It is when my arms turn into an extra set of legs that she really hits the roof.

"This is just too much!" she says. "It's bad enough that I can't let any of my friends see you and that we had to redecorate the house with asbestos wallpaper" -- it's mauve, and she hates mauve -- "but now you can't even button your own shirts or tie your shoes."

"They don't fit anyway," I point out.

"See?" she says, and then repeats it: "See? Now we'll have to get you a whole new wardrobe! Why are you doing this to me, Myron?"

"To you?" I say.

"God hates me," she says. "I could have married Nate Sobel the banker, or Harold Yingleman who's become a Wall Street big shot, and instead I married you, and now God is punishing me, as if watching you spill gravy onto your shirt for 43 years wasn't punishment enough."

"You act like you're the one who's turning into a dragon," I complain.

"Oh, shut up and stop feeling sorry for yourself," she says. She holds out the roast. "It's a bit rare. Blow on it and make yourself useful." She pauses. "And if you breathe on me, I'll give you such a slap."

That's my Sylvia. One little cockroach can send her screaming from the house. She sees a spider, she calls five different exterminators. God forbid a mouse should come into the garage looking for a snack.

But show her a dragon, and suddenly she's Joan of Arc and Wonder Woman and Golda Meier, all rolled into one steel-eyed yenta with blue hair and a double chin.

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"Where are you going?" she says.

"Out," I say.

"Out where?" she says.

"Just _out_," I say. "I have been cooped up in this house for almost two months, and I have to get some fresh air."

"So you think you're just going to walk down the street like any normal person?" she says. "That maybe you'll trade jokes with Bernie Goldberg and flirt with Mrs. Noodleman like you always do?"

"Why not?" I say.

"Well, I won't hear of it," she says. "I'm not going to have the whole neighborhood talking about how Sylvia Blumberg married a _dragon_, for God's sakes!"

I figure it is time to make a stand, so I say, "I am going out, and that's that!"

"Don't you speak to me in that tone of voice, Myron!" she says, and I stop just before she reaches for the rolling pin. She pauses for a moment, then looks up. "If you absolutely _must_ go for a walk," she says, "I will put a leash on you and tell everyone you are my new dog."

"I don't look very much like a dog," I say.

"You look even less like Myron Blumberg," she answers. "Just don't talk to anyone while we're out. I couldn't bear the humiliation."

So we go out, and when Mrs. Noodleman passes by Sylvia tells me to hold my breath and not exhale any fire, and then we come to

Bernie Goldberg, who is just coming home from shopping at the delicatessen, and Sylvia tells him I am her new dog, and he asks what breed I am, and she says she's not sure, and he says he thinks maybe I am imported from Ireland, and then Sylvia yanks on the leash and we walk to the corner.

"He's still looking at you," she whispers.

"So?" I say.

"I don't think he believes you're a dog."

"There's nothing we can do about that," I say.

"Yes there is," she says, leading me over to a fire hydrant.

"Lift your leg on this. That will convince him."

"I don't think dragons lift their legs, Sylvia," I say.

"Why do you persist in embarrassing me?" she says. "Lift your leg!"

"I can't," I say.

"Whoever heard of a dragon that couldn't lift its leg?" she insists. "You don't have to do anything disgusting. It's just to show that know-it-all Bernie Goldberg."

I try, and I fall over on my side.

"What good are you?" demands Sylvia, as Bernie stares at me, blinking his eyes furiously behind his thick bifocals.

"Help me up," I say. "I'm not used to having all these legs."

"Myron," she says as she drags me to my feet, "the situation is becoming intolerable. Something's got to be done before you

make me the laughing-stock of the entire neighborhood."

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"This is the last straw!" she says, ripping open the envelope.

"What is?" I ask.

"The state has refused to extend your unemployment benefits. They don't care that you're a dragon, as long as you're an able-bodied one." She glares at me. "And you're going through twenty pounds of meat a day. Do you know how much that costs?"

I shrug. "What can I say? Dragons get hungry."

"Why are you always so selfish, Myron?" she says. "Why can't you graze in the back yard like a horse or something?"

"I don't think dragons like grass," I say.

"And that's it?" she demands. "You won't even try?"

"I'll try, I'll try," I say with a sigh, and go out to the back yard. It doesn't look like Caesar salad, but I close my eyes, lean down, and open my mouth.

Sylvia hides me in the basement just before the fire department comes to save what's left of the garage.

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"You did that on purpose!" she says accusingly after the firemen have left.

"I didn't," I say. "It's just that my flame seems to be getting bigger every day."

"While our bank account is getting smaller," she says.

"Either you get a job, or you'll have ask your brother Sidney for a loan."

It is an easy choice, because when Sidney dies they will need a crowbar to pry his fingers off the first dollar he ever made, and every subsequent one as well, so I go out to look for work.

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You would be surprised at how difficult it is for an honest, industrious dragon to find work in our neighborhood. Stuart Kominsky puts me on as a sand-blaster, but when I melt the stone he fires me after only half a day on the job. Herbert Baumann says maybe I could give kids rides on my back when he reopens the carnival, but it is closed until next spring. Phil Rosenheim, who has never struck me as a bigot before, says he won't hire anyone with green skin. Muriel Weinstein tells me she'd be happy to take me on just in case some out-of-town dragons come by to look at some of her real estate listings, and she'll call me the moment that happens, but somehow I know that she won't.

Finally I latch on with Milt Fein's heating company. Winter's coming on and he's short-handed, and when a furnace goes out he pays me seventeen dollars an hour to go to the scene and breathe

into the vents and keep the building warm until he can get there and solve the problem. The first week I make \$562.35, which is more than I have ever made in my life, and the second week we are so busy I get time-and-a-half on the weekend and take home almost seven hundred dollars, and Sylvia is so happy that she buys a new dress and dyes her hair bright red.

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And just when I am thinking that things are too good to last, it turns out that things are too good to last.

One day I start breathing into the ventilation shaft in an office building, and nothing happens, except that Milt Fein lays me off.

Two days later I wake up and I have hands again, and the next morning most of my scales are gone.

"I knew it!" screams Sylvia. "You finally find something you're good at, and then you decide not to be a dragon any longer!"

"I didn't exactly decide," I say. "It just kind of happened."

"Why are you doing this to me, Myron?" she demands.

"I'm not doing anything," I say. "I seem to be undoing."

"This is terrible," she says. "Look at you: you're hardly green at all. Why does God hate me so?"

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Four days later I am the old Myron Blumberg again, which as you can imagine is quite a relief to me. Two weeks after that, Sylvia packs up her clothes and the portable TV and the Cuisinart and leaves without so much as a good-bye note. The divorce papers arrive six weeks later.

I still get cards from her every Yom Kippur and Chanukah. The last time I hear from her she has married a gryphon. Sylvia, who hates snakes and can't stand to be stared at.

Boy, do I not envy him.

-The End-