

Deirdra McAfee

an excerpt of

The Shield of the Norns

THE Berserker swung us so hard and high against the cloud-roof that Wayne and I could count the people with regular jobs snailing home on I-95. The roller coasters and the water park spread below us like a kingdom, while the ever-glowing sun drowned below the world's edge and dimmed the lovely roof. Then down we skidded. The interstate vanished, and there was Wayne's girlfriend at the gate, a grown woman who looked like a child.

Weak fall sunlight caught her straw hair and fake gold nails, and she shouted his name. "We'll take care of it later, Trisha," he said, exactly loud enough for her to hear.

"Not if I see you first!" she screeched, a bright ant under our shadow. We lurched up, and she flounced off. She was younger and prettier, but she'd never see thirty again, either. Skinny enough to wear those sprayed-on pink-and-yellow leggings, but their loud hot colors turned her even more sallow.

She reminded me of girls I knew in prison over in Goochland years ago. Hairdresser, said those talons and her bleached-out shag. Waitress, maybe even bartender. Dog groomer. Jobs I've worked, too, the kind that didn't check references too close. The kind where she mostly saw people she knew, so she could look however she wanted.

We didn't talk about her. We were screaming ballast strapped to a monstrous motorized pendulum. We were Vikings burning our way through the wind-weaver in a swift black dragon-headed ship.