
And There Were Hatchings

by Amanda Kear
2858.04.07

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Golds rose. Golds clutched. There were Hatchings.

2858.04.07

Although ostensibly the junior goldriders of Kadanzer were supposed to be helping Lybelle to familiarise herself with the personalities and politics of the Southern Continent by attending Kadanzer Hold's Summer Steeplechase with her, Dunia felt that there was also an unspoken hope that the older woman would educate *them*. After all, by reputation, Lybelle was as at home in Weyr, Hall and Hold politics as she was on the back of a dragon.

"It's the *scale* of things down here that always bemuses me," Lybelle was saying, as she strode with Luka, Cassidoria and Dunia by her side from the area their queens had set them down. Since Amiseth had a clutch on the Sands, Cassidoria had doubled up with Dunia on Nioranth. "Northern Weyr's have so few Holds looking to them compared to Kadanzer. In some ways it makes life so much simpler."

"Only in some ways?" asked Luka.

"Of course," came the reply. "Fewer Lords looking to Telgar Weyr, means fewer personalities that a goldrider has to deal with on a regular basis, which is always simpler. But it also means that Northern goldriders have regular contact with Lords and Mastercrafters who look to other Weyr's – and must avoid treading on toes amongst the weyrfolk or causing problems that another Weyr will have to sort out. Take this gather—" Lybelle gestured at the crowds assembled to enjoy Kadanzer Hold's Summer Steeplechase.

"What about it?" Dunia couldn't see how they could cause trouble for another Weyr by being here.

"Imagine we are riders from Telgar or Eastern," said Lybelle. "Dunia, you take a fancy to some trinket on a holder's stall and decide to take it as tithe."

"But this hold doesn't tithe to Telgar or Eastern," said Dunia. "So if I came from there I wouldn't—"

"—You wouldn't, but some riders might," replied Lybelle. "That's one sort of thing the Northern Weyr's have to deal with. Then... Cassidoria here might have a tumble in the hay with someone she shouldn't—" Cassidoria went a little pink at the suggestion. "—and Luka might get involved in a duel. Hypothetically of course."

Luka laughed and quirked an eyebrow at Dunia, with an expression that said she could think of an opponent, should she ever find herself living in such a harper's tale.

"So can you see the problems that might cause?" queried Lybelle.

"The Holder might complain to Kadanzer instead of Telgar?" hazarded Cassidoria. "Even if it was Telgar riders who caused the problem."

"Exactly. Or they might complain directly to Telgar – and if Telgar had prickly Weyrleaders, they might complain that Kadanzer was stirring up holders against them. Or if Kadanzer had prickly Weyrleaders, they could take exception to the holders going behind their backs."

"Really? That kind of thing actually happens?" said Luka. "I am *so* glad I don't live in a Northern Weyr."

"Yes," said Dunia wearily. "Down here *everyone* just comes straight to *us* to complain!"

The Summer Steeplechase was as much a race meet as a Gather. Lords and Holders came here not just to socialise and talk politics, but to trade horseflesh and bet on the outcome of the day's main event – a frantic race over the countryside, with the start and finish lines close to the main hold. So as well as any Lord Holders who had just fancied going to a gather today, it was pretty much guaranteed that all of the Lords with even a passing interest in horses would be here – a perfect chance for Lybelle to meet and greet them. Some would have sent prized animals on ahead of them months ago, to give their beasts time to reach Kadanzer and then rest and train up in time for today's steeplechase.

Dunia didn't know what a steeple was, and as far as she was aware the horses didn't chase anything apart from whoever happened to be in the lead. Instead a steeplechase was a race with lots of fences and ditches for the contestants to jump over. Perhaps some of those were called steeples? She would have to remember to ask Lord Dracir in a quiet moment if he knew what the origin of the term was.

But now was not the time for that. Instead the goldriders were in a constant ebb and flow of attention from high-ranking visitors who wished to take the measure of Lybelle. The list so far included Masterherder Jorel, Masterhealer Talloran, Lord Gibran of Drake, Lord Elim of Waterfall, Lord Andlin of Windsong, Lord Morgav of Cibola, Lord Korys of Maori, a veritable host of sons, brothers, nephews and cousins including an Heir or two, a smattering of Ladies, and of course their host, Lord Dracir. Kadanzer Weyr's newest goldrider had remarked cynically that perhaps she ought to go and stand in a paddock alongside the runner bloodstock to afford the great and the good a better view!

It was, however – as Lybelle and Valenne had intimated when the plan was concocted – *very* educational. Some of the conversations were subtle, with Lybelle's inquisitor inquiring about her interest in runner races, or how she was finding the difference in climate between Telgar and Kadanzer Weyr, before gradually circling into other areas more related to Weyr-Hold politics, and gently teasing out

her opinion on this or that. Others plunged straight in with a brusque *Lord So-and-so tells me that when you were at Telgar...* or a lengthy critique of the Kadanzer Compact.

Lybelle had requested that the junior goldriders didn't cluster round her like wherry chicks, but took turns to accompany her around the Gather. That suited Dunia just fine. Having dragons made organising a 'shift change' very easy, and was also fantastically useful for informing Lybelle of the name of her latest interrogator, assuming rank cords hadn't given that away already. That was almost funny at times – a holder would start to jabber to Lybelle, hoping to put her on the back foot by not introducing himself, then look startled when she would reply to him by name. Dunia spotted Lord Gibran rolling his eyes when one of Elim's nephews got caught out that way.

It was also interesting noting who hung around when someone new joined in the conversation, who changed the subject and who scurried away as if he and Lybelle had just been illicitly swapping craft secrets. You could, Dunia realised when astute questions came her way via Ihyanith and Nioranth, read a lot between the lines from those retreats and changes of subjects. It brought things that she had known, or partly known, about the relationships between different Holds sharply into focus in her mind. The feud between Maori and Drake, for instance: Korys and Gibran were icily civil to each other and the topic of conversation would immediately shift to something unutterably bland until one or the other found an excuse to be elsewhere.

Or Elim and Morgav. Dunia and Lybelle had joined them at the ringside where the entrants for the main steeplechase were being paraded, and the pair had been engaged in an intense and frankly – to Dunia's reckoning – incomprehensible debate about the bloodlines of Morgav's rangerbred horses versus Elim's finest bloodstock, and how to breed and train the ideal bullfighting horse. You'd have thought they were the best of friends, until Elim considered himself to be coming second best in the argument, became prickly and vanished – allegedly to give some last minute instructions to a jockey.



After the day's race and other displays of horsemanship were over, Dunia and Lybelle sat in a sunny spot with a good view of the Gather Square, watching as the other goldriders danced. Cassidoria was partnered with Jahne, Heir to Lord Dracir, and had an expression of rigid politeness on her face. Luka was partnered with a master from the Healerhall and appeared to be genuinely enjoying herself, which gladdened Dunia, given how uncomfortable her friend could sometimes be in social situations.

When the dance ended and the harpers struck up the first few chords of a lively reel, Luka nodded and smiled at her dance partner and they joined another pair to make up the dance set, Cassidoria however, could be seen making polite excuses to Jahne, and extricated herself from the dance floor, heading back to the other goldriders.

Cassidoria made a strangled noise as she slumped down into a chair beside Dunia. "If another holder asks me how Amisseth's eggs are doing in that condescending 'shouldn't you be at their side' tone, I swear I'll... I'll..." The older woman broke off, unable to articulate her annoyance.

"Throttle them?" suggested Dunia.

"Use them for flamethrower practice?" put in Lybelle. She flicked her fingers at a passing drudge, indicating that Cassidoria needed a wine glass.

"Something like that." Cassidoria sighed. "They make me feel like I'm some sort of irresponsible mother who has abandoned her children in the wilderness to starve. They are all *Isn't this your first clutch, dear*. You'd think I'd laid the eggs myself the way some of them carry on."

"Is Amisseth unhappy that you're away?" asked Lybelle.

"Oh no, she doesn't mind at all." Cassidoria smiled gratefully as the drudge presented her with a brimming cup of white wine.

"Then that's all there is to it," said Lybelle.

"Yes, but it's so irritating..." sighed Cassidoria.

"Just something that a goldrider has to grin and bear," said Lybelle. "Although..." Her voice took on a conspiratorial tone, and she glanced around to make sure the drudge was no longer in earshot. The younger goldriders leaned closer. "Next time someone hints you should be by the eggs' side, try to look shocked and say 'Have you heard about a plot to harm my queen's eggs?'"

Dunia's snort of laughter made her choke on her wine. Cassidoria had to slap her on the back, all the time hardly able to control her own laughter. People at nearby tables were looking at them askance.

"Oh that's..." Dunia shook a wagging finger at Lybelle. "That's very wicked – but priceless."

"Works too," said Lybelle.

"You've actually *used* that line?" squeaked Cassidoria.

Lybelle nodded. "Several times. On two lords, one craftmaster and a really irritating steward, as I recall."

"Oh do tell." Dunia and Cassidoria were all ears.



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2859.03.10

"There's nothing like a gold egg on the Sands to turn normally sensible girls into a gaggle of giggling wherry-heads," said Dunia, from where she and Lybelle were observing the class of candidates who had come to visit Nioranth's clutch. Snippets of girlish chatter kept drifting their way about how *romantic* and *exciting* it would be to become a goldrider. Especially a goldrider whose bondmate had been conceived in the Ninth Pass.

"I'm not so sure that all of them started out sensible," observed Lybelle wryly. Dunia laughed.

They turned their attention back to the matter in hand, glancing up occasionally as more girlish giggling broke out. Weyrlingssecond K'darin's quiet voice silenced the candidates periodically. Lybelle had brought more records for Dunia to read, as well as a handful of letters from various Lord Holders, Stewards and Craftmasters. All mundane matters, but exactly the kind of thing that Dunia needed to get herself grounded in the Tenth Pass again. Ten Turns had passed since she'd had to interact with these people, so most of them were just faint memories. She needed to jog that memory, and get reacquainted with the quirks and foibles of the high-ranking people the Weyr had to deal with. Records and letters were one way to get that process started.

Today's selection included the bloodlines of Drake and Waterfall, so that Dunia could begin to re-memorise the names of those she might have to deal with in the future. Holders' lives may not be as precarious as dragonriders', but untimely death was not unknown. Should a Lord Holder die, then the Weyr needed prior knowledge of the man who would be his Heir: for reasons as trivial as spelling his name correctly on the letter congratulating him on his ascension to the Lordship, or as profound as knowing his attitude to tithes and Search. Should no Heir be named, then to have knowledge of those who were in the running was equally useful.

Of course, Heirs too were mortal – or fell out of favour – so the whole web of bloodlines, marriages and bastards was essential for the Weyr's goldriders to know. Being a goldrider was part harper, part headwoman, part dragonrider, Dunia mused.

She frowned at the name of one of Lord Elim's nephews, wondering if her memory of someone with a similar sounding name was actually of this person. She started to ask Lybelle a question on the matter, but was interrupted by another bout of girlish giggling from the candidates.

"Oh it would just be a *dream* to Impress gold!" one exclaimed. Dunia rolled her eyes.

Lybelle snorted. "Yes, as a girl I often dreamed of poring over fusty old record hides," she said.

The candidates looked over, startled, as Lybelle and Dunia erupted into giggles of their own.



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2860.06.08

The reports from brownrider S'toris, watchrider at Kadanzer Hold, had not been an exaggeration. What at first glance looked like drifts of snow, were quickly revealed to be drifts of grey ash – the latest in a periodic series of grumbings by Kadanzer Mountain. The air still smelled of it – an odd tang of burning dust, that irritated the back of Dunia's throat, and she fancied that she could taste it too.

Thank Faranth it was not still falling! Coping with Threadfall and ash fall at the same time would be horrendous.

The eerily altered ground was distracting, drawing her gaze downwards then sending it skittering to the ominous bulk of Kadanzer Mountain itself. Fighting Thread over her old home was always a slightly unsettling experience. Always in the back of her mind was the nagging thought that the volcano might explode once again. Plus she couldn't help remembering all those who had died in the eruption.

Nioranth, thankfully, was not so easily distracted. *A clump comes. Ihyanith claims it.* The gold banked slightly to clear the way for Ihyanith and Lybelle's flamethrower.

Dunia pulled her attention back to the matter in hand.



Fall ended over the mountain barrens of south-eastern Barrier. The last clumps that might threaten the scattered minecrafftholds of the region were seared out of the air, and the Wings began to disperse. The bulk of the dragons jumped back to the Weyr, but the designated few headed back over the path of the Threadfall to assist the groundcrews in their search for stray burrows.

Dunia was surprised to receive a change of plans from Lybelle, via their dragons: *Ihyanith's rider tells us to go to the Sunstone-Maori border. She and Ihyanith will fly sweep over Kadanzer Hold.* Normally Lybelle wanted to check the areas where missed Thread would have had longest to take hold. But Dunia was not averse to doing that, even though it might mean dealing with the bad tempered and dragon-phobic Lord Janol of Sunstone if there were burrows reported on his land.

Fortunately that proved not to be the case. There were two burrows on the Maori side of the border, but neither needed the assistance of a dragon to deal with it. Dunia gave her compliments to the groundcrew chief and headed back to the Weyr with the other sweepriders, longing to be out of her flying leathers.

Surprisingly, she had beaten Lybelle back. Dunia hoped that didn't augur badly for burrows around Kadanzer Hold. In the Weyrwoman's absence, she jotted a report about the Maori burrows on a wax tablet and left it on Lybelle's desk, before turning in the same report to Flightleader R'mal in person.

She was enjoying a meatroll in the Main Hall – the extremely early start to the day had left her ravenous by mid-morning – when Nioranth interrupted with a question from Lybelle. *Ihyanith's rider wishes to know where you are.*

Tell her I am in the Main Hall. Dunia quickly took another bite of meatroll, in case Lybelle needed to see her in person. She didn't want her stomach growling through any meeting.

Ihyanith's rider asks you to find the Headwoman and both to go to her office. She also wishes the Headwoman to fetch the Kadanzer Hold tithing records. Nioranth's tone was slightly puzzled at this last request. Despite many Turns

of witnessing it, the queen had never fathomed humans' interest in *marks on dried up skins that are no good to eat*.

She looked up. Headwoman Raecliffe had been here just a moment ago – oh yes, there she was, talking to some of the support staff. Swiftly Dunia washed down the last of her meatroll with a mouthful of klah and headed over to interrupt Raecliffe and pass on Lybelle's message.

"How far back does the Weyrwoman need the tithing records?" asked Raecliffe.

A quick consultation via their respective queens provided an answer: three Turns before the mountain erupted. That proved to be quite a pile. Raecliffe and Dunia arrived at the Weyrwoman's office with armloads of record hides. They found Lybelle poring over maps of Kadanzer Hold, and making sketches and annotations on her sandtable. The Weyrwoman had discarded her flying gear, which was piled untidily nearby. She padded to and fro between the maps and the sandtable, a frown of concentration on her face.

"Tithing records," said Dunia unnecessarily, as she deposited her pile on a free surface. Lybelle muttered a distracted thanks, made another notation and then gave them her full attention.

"A dreary but necessary task, ladies," she said. "I'd like us all to go through Kadanzer Hold's tithing records from before and after the eruption, and pay particular attention to those from after recent ash falls."

Dunia grimaced, as much from mention of the volcano and the ash as from the hours of work that lay ahead. "You think the ash is affecting the tithes?" she asked.

"Lord Dracir always sends his due," Raecliffe was quick to put in. "We've never had trouble on that front – not like some Lords I could mention."

Lybelle nodded. "Yes, he always has. I'm just concerned for the future." She shot a look at Dunia. "You read S'toris' report, I take it?" she asked, then went on at the reply in the affirmative. "I spoke to S'toris in person this morning. Lord Dracir and his Steward are in a constant turmoil about the state of the grazing land around the Hold, and what the ash is doing to it. Had you heard that the herdbeasts are sickening from it?"

Dunia and Raecliffe shook their heads.

"There is apparently something in the ash that leaches into the ground and taints the pastureland." Lybelle paused to let them exclaim their shock. "S'toris says the holders around the mountain are afraid to eat their own vegetables in case the same thing affects them. Dracir has already sent much of his herdbeast stock to outlying holdings, and requested that S'toris only take Baseth hunting more than two days ride from the mountain."

"That's generous," said Raecliffe. "There are those that would let a dragon eat sick beasts."

"Or send the sick beasts to the Weyr as tithe," commented Lybelle sardonically. "No, Dracir has always done his duty to the Weyr and sent the best. What I fear is that soon he may no longer be able to. S'toris says no-one mentions it openly about the Hold, but there are hints and rumours that Lord Dracir may be forced to request a reduction in his tithe."

"You think it may come to that?" asked Dunia.

"I hope not. But those records—" Lybelle gestured at the hides that the other women had brought with them. "— May give us some clues and help us to prepare. Anything that can tell us how much of the tithe used to come from areas now affected by the ash, and if we can realistically expect other areas of Kadanzer Hold lands to take up the slack. Also, what – if anything – can we the Weyr do with a little less of? I'd rather have to tell riders that there will be a little less mutton on the tables this Turn and not to hunt their dragons on Kadanzer land, than have them get into an uproar about some imagined slight to the Weyr if the tithe does decrease."

The three of them set to the daunting task of picking through seven Turns of tithe records.



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2860.13.09

Dunia was with Lybelle and Revanne in the former's office, looking at the revised sweep-riding charts that Weyrleader L'ars had just provided them with. Maori Hold had opened a cluster of new holdings, which meant not only a slight change in the pattern of sweep-riding in the area, but new ground crews to liaise with and a former hunting ground now off limits to dragons, as there would be livestock quartered there.

"So the river marks the boundary of the livestock areas?" Revanne asked as the three of them studied the map.

Lybelle began to reply in the affirmative, when she was interrupted by an urgent knock at the door. Headwoman Raecliffe stuck her head round the door. She made that peculiar darting gaze around all the occupants of the room that she always did when confronted by more people than the one she expected to see. Raecliffe had terrible difficulty identifying faces, so was always seeking rank cords, hair colour or clothing to assist her in identifying who she was talking to. "Terribly sorry to interrupt, Weyrwoman Lybelle, goldriders," she said. "But I've just received this letter with the tithing records from Cathay and I thought you'd want to know about it as soon as possible."

"Of course, Raecliffe," Lybelle said and gestured for her to come in.

The Headwoman handed a letter to Lybelle and then sat down in one of the vacant chairs as the Weyrwoman scanned through it, frowning. "The handwriting is the Steward's," Raecliffe said. "But Lord Purol has signed it."

Dunia and Revanne glanced at each other, intrigued. "Should we come back later?" Dunia asked.

Lybelle held up a hand to forestall any move on their part. "No, this concerns all of us, so stay." Her frown deepened as she finished reading the missive. "Apparently a greenrider from this Weyr – the crafter was sure of the rank cords – helped herself to a valuable bracelet from one of the

craft displays at the Cathay Spring Livestock Gather last month. This—“ Lybelle gestured with the letter. “—Is the bill.” She passed it to Dunia so that she too, could read the text.

“Does it name the rider?” asked Revanne.

“No,” replied Lybelle. Her eyes defocused a fraction as she communicated with her queen. “But Ihyanith is making enquiries.”

Ihyanith talks to all the greens. Nioranth told Dunia with interest. She says her rider is not pleased.

Too right she’s not, Dunia agreed, raising her eyebrows at the description and estimated cost of the bracelet. Emeralds and amethysts, rose cut, set in a series of gold spirals, with a clasp bearing the maker’s mark. Lord Purol was deducting a hefty amount from Cathay’s tithe to pay for the ‘purchase’ of the jewellery from a craft display by one of the gemstone mines in his Holding. Studying the phrasing used, and reading between the lines, she deduced that Purol was apparently as incensed that a mere *greenrider* should sport such a Lordly item as he was over the value of the bracelet itself. Dunia passed the letter to Revanne, for her to see for herself.

“Taine!” Lybelle uttered the name almost like a curse.

“Avluelath’s rider?” said Raecliffe.

The reply came in the affirmative. “I’ve ordered her here,” continued Lybelle, her voice tight with anger. “And asked the other goldriders to attend. Ihyanith will ensure that Taine remains outside until everyone is assembled and I call her in. Is everyone familiar with Taine?”

They all were, though Revanne less so than the others. Taine was daughter of Lord Janol of Sunstone. She had been raised to be a Lady of the Hold, pampered, praised and granted her every whim. She’d come to the Weyr expecting that her heritage guaranteed she would Impress gold, but instead bonded with green Avluelath. It must have been quite a blow to the harper’s tale future she’d expected for herself.

She was housed in Wind Complex, as was Dunia. That didn’t mean that Dunia had to deal with Taine on a day-to-day basis, but she’d been called to arbitrate often enough when the greenrider’s former rank went to her head. Quite often by Taine herself, who seemed to believe that her parentage gave her greater access to the goldrider and should also get her preferential treatment. Dunia found Taine’s strange attitude exasperating – sweet as spice one moment, often almost verging on the naïve, then being snobbish and haughty to anyone she believed to be ‘beneath her’ the next. As a result she didn’t have many friends at the Weyr, though the occasional present of marks from her relatives could buy her some when she needed them. Or alienate them – Dunia remembered being startled at a Hatching Feast when Taine turned up in a lovely dark green dress, obviously both very new and very expensive. She’d heard rumours that Taine had later thrown the cat among the wherries when she decided to gift the dress to one friend and left others feeling slighted.

Zherra arrived, with Cassidora, Luka and weyrling goldrider Dwayana appearing a few moments later. “I thought it would be instructive for Dwayana to hear this,”

Lybelle informed them. She gave the new arrivals time to read Lord Purol’s letter. Luka gave an audible groan as she scanned its contents.

“Ten bolts of woollen cloth and thirty wheels of cheese?” gasped Dwayana. “For one bracelet?”

“One bracelet of gold, emeralds and amethysts,” Revanne pointed out. “Perhaps we should be glad she didn’t take a fancy to diamonds?”

Ihyanith’s rider tells Avluelath’s rider to come into her office, said Nioranth. *Avluelath is upset by Ihyanith but says that her rider is confused, not upset.*

There was a knock at the door and greenrider Taine entered. As Nioranth had indicated, the woman indeed looked confused, Dunia observed. If that was an act, it was a good one, considering she had been summoned by an obviously irate Weyrwoman, and faced the disapproval of the massed ranks of the goldriders. Taine tried a tentative smile. “Good morning to you, Weyrwoman, goldriders, Headwoman. You asked to see me?”

“Greenrider Taine,” Lybelle began coolly. “Ihyanith has bespoken Avluelath and determined that it was yourself who *obtained* a valuable piece of jewellery from a stall at Cathay’s Spring Livestock Gather – is this the case?”

The greenrider nodded, seemingly still puzzled and not at all contrite. “Yes, Weyrwoman Lybelle. A lovely purple and green one – emeralds and amethysts – it was a perfect match for my rank cords.”

“Your rank cords?” Lybelle’s tone was colder than *between*. Taine belatedly began to look concerned. “Were you short of marks to purchase it?” Lybelle continued with icy sweetness.

“Why, no, Weyrwoman—“ Taine stopped, realising the trap she’d just led herself into. “That is... The stallholder was rude,” she blurted out indignantly. “He implied that the piece was too good for a dragonrider like me. I may be a greenrider, but I am the daughter of Lord Janol and I told him so!”

Dunia exchanged a look with Revanne. That little detail hadn’t made it into Lord Purol’s letter.

Taine had built up a head of steam now. “He had no right to deny it to me and I made sure he knew it. I named my bloodlines and told him just how many times Avluelath and I had fought Thread over Cathay. The honour of the Weyr was at stake,” she said, and Dunia blinked in surprise. Had Taine actually convinced herself of that, or was this just a desperate grasp at straws? She suspected the latter, as Taine was haughty and arrogant, but not usually manipulative. She tended to think that things were her due because of her birth rank, and be genuinely surprised when others at the Weyr disagreed. If Dunia had been asked yesterday, she’d have said Taine had been getting better over the last few Turns, but if this outburst was any indication, then there were lessons still to be learned.

Taine was still blathering on. “There were other stallholders watching, you see, and they’d heard how rude he’d been. So I took the piece and told him to let his betters sort out the cost. If he hadn’t been so rude about the Weyr it would never have happened.”

There was a moment's silence, then Lybelle let rip. "The Weyr has received less than it is due because of your thoughtless greed – and you think to blame it on the stallholder! Thirty wheels of cheese and ten bolts of cloth your trinket has cost us!"

"But he insulted—"

"I don't care if he maligned each and every one of you and your dragon's ancestors right back to when Faranth cracked shell! If you want pretty baubles to match your rank cords, girl, then you will earn them and pay for them."

Taine's cheeks flamed crimson. She opened her mouth to say something more, did a quick scan of the room and – finding no sympathetic faces – closed it again.

Lybelle sat back in her chair. "You will return to your Weyr, fetch the bracelet and give it to Headwoman Raecliffe."

"But it's mine!" exclaimed Taine.

"It is *not* yours, greenrider! The Weyr has bought and paid for that trinket. If it belongs to the Weyr, then it is only right that the Weyr gets the use of it."

"Yes, Weyrwoman." It came out as rather a squeak, as Taine replied to Lybelle meekly.

"And as you obviously cannot be trusted at Gathers, you are banned from attending any for a Turn," pronounced Lybelle. "Ihyanith and the other golds will ensure that the ban is adhered to."

Taine's face went a brighter red at the insinuation she would attempt to disobey the Weyrwoman's punishment.

"In addition, you will visit each weyring class in turn – at a time to be arranged by the weyringseconds – and report to them what you did, why it was wrong, and what the consequences to the Weyr have been."

From her expression, Taine appeared to be wishing that she could jump *between* without a dragon. For an instant, it seemed that the woman might talk back, but she held her tongue and nodded.

Lybelle drummed her fingers on the desktop. "And finally – you will report to Glowmaster Farlow twice per sevenday with a barrow load of manure from the middens, until such time as he informs you that he no longer needs your services."

At this Taine gave a strangled noise.

"You have something to say, greenrider?" Lybelle asked.

"No, Weyrwoman," Taine said in a half whisper.

Now Avluelath says her rider is VERY upset, said Nioranth.



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2960.13.21

The blue screamed. He reared back, wings flapping frantically, preventing the dragonhealers and healers from getting anywhere near him. His rider dangled semi-

conscious from his straps, every movement of the dragon making his body bump and scrape over the scores that marred the blue's shoulder, starting a new cycle of pain and panic.

Nioranth! Dunia had barely begun the mind-call when her queen stepped into the breech, asserting the dominance of a gold and compelling the blue to be still. The healers and dragonhealers immediately ran forward to do their jobs.

Dunia whirled to face Dwayana. "Arohath was supposed to—"

"I know!" The weyring goldrider's distress was evident in her voice, but there was a touch of temper there too. Dwayana was very much her mother's daughter.

Arohath challenges me! There was surprise and indignation in Nioranth's tone. *I tell her she is NOT senior here. Ihyanith rules. I am second.* The queen's eyes whirled orange and she turned her head to where the younger gold sat.

The blue stirred again, twitching and shaking, with wings threatening to unfurl. Faranth's Egg, swore Dunia to herself – Nioranth was being distracted by the younger gold, and not putting her full attention into the task at hand. "Control your dragon!" she roared at Dwayana.

The girl gasped, then turned to Arohath. The young gold bugled indignation, resisting her rider, then subsided under the double onslaught of a more mature gold and an angry bondmate.

Ignore Arohath – see to Egnath. Dunia was relieved to see the orange fade from Nioranth's eyes and the blue dragon become still once more. The crafters worked feverishly, one or two casting anxious glances from one queen to the other. Shards, but they had enough to worry about without being fearful of the golds who were supposed to be there to help!

The bluerider – R'nuel – was swiftly cut free, and numbweed applied to the scores on both his and Egnath's bodies. Dunia felt Nioranth decrease her control on the blue as his pain and terror lessened. "How is R'nuel?" she called.

"Scores are minor," a healer called back. "But I think he brained himself on one of Egnath's wing joints when the straps broke. Got a lump the size of a firelizard egg on his forehead, and he's lucky he didn't get shards from smashed goggles in his eyes."

Dunia nodded her thanks. The dragonhealers were also quick on the uptake, and quickly identified where the impact had happened, to check Egnath for glass shards too. The blue was definitely quiet enough for Nioranth to break her hold now. He crooned softly, turning his head to watch the healers treat his rider.

Confident that everything was now under control, Dunia shifted her attention back to Dwayana and Arohath. "Well you're here to learn and I'd certainly rate that as a learning experience! What happened?"

Dwayana had the good grace to look contrite. "I asked Arohath to hold the blue, but she was slow to begin. Then, when Nioranth stepped in and did it for her, she got jealous, and..." The girl's voice trailed off.

Dunia nodded. She's suspected as much. Arohath had possessive tendencies that had caused a variety of troubles

during her weyrling training. With Dwayana every bit as headstrong as her dragon, Faranth help the Weyr that inherited the pair when they graduated and transferred away from Kadanzer.

“Right, well we’ll go through it again for Arohath’s benefit, then.” Dunia crossed to make sure she was within earshot of the young queen. *Nioranth, can you make sure that Arohath listens to me?*

She listens. She listens to me, you and her rider now. Nioranth sounded smugly satisfied that draconic hierarchy had been reasserted.

Good. Dunia folded her arms and looked Arohath in the eye. “We are here to *help*, not to make things worse. Arohath does not matter, Dwayana does not matter. Dunia and Nioranth do not matter. The only thing that matters in the Dragon Infirmary is the injured dragons and injured riders. Golds are here to help the dragonhealers to do their jobs. If a gold can’t do that, then she’s as useless to the Weyr as a newly hatched green!”

“Yes, Weyrwoman Second,” said Dwayana. “I promise we’ll do better. Arohath will pay attention and behave – she promises too.”

“Good,” said Dunia. “See that she does.”



Golds rose. Golds clutched. There were Hatchings.