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# Attitude

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"Hey, brownrider!" M'mon said, grinning, as Ryuri caught up to him. She looked back at her brother and felt a silly grin spread across her own face. "Hey, brownrider," she replied.

"So, you used to it yet?" he said.

Ryuri laughed. "It hasn't even been a sevenday! I remember you were bug-eyed and walking into doors for a month. Of course I'm not used to it yet. Come on, let's get some breakfast."

"Oh, I was just headed to the Weyrhall to look at girls, I don't need breakfast." M'mon said teasingly. "Are you sure you aren't still feeling Ceorth's hunger?"

"You're sure cheerful since your six months ran out. No, he's stuffed to the ears and snoring away. I can barely feel him."

"Ah I remember the joys of hatchlings in the morning. They wake up feeling like their bellies are caving in..."

"...and you have to hold them back from the door when they smell the meat outside..." Ryuri continued.

"...while you try to get dressed..."

"...and two older classes are laughing at you!" Ryuri finished with a grin as they entered the Weyrhall and got in the breakfast line.

"That's right, they're all old enough for the noon, afternoon, and evening schedule by now, aren't they, so they get to sit and watch in the morning."

"Yep, can't have them full-bellied and snoring during morning drills! I can't wait until Ceorth gets that old. Then all I have to do is bathe and oil him in the morning before I come here and take care of myself."

"Who knows, you may even have time to shower once or twice!"

Ryuri poked him hard in the shoulder. "Hey!" he squawked. "I need that muscle for flying!"

"You mean hanging on to your straps for dear life while your dragon does the flying?" She teased, but M'mon did not seem to hear. He had the faraway look he always got when anyone brought up the subject of flying. "Hey, wake up there!" Ryuri said, poking him more lightly this time.

M'mon sighed, then grinned. "How's Jallori as a weyringsecond?" They were at the food table now, and began loading their trays.

"Haven't heard her yell once, or get mad, even when people like Rubi and M'con give totally stupid answers in class."

"Huh. Nothing like B'baer, then. I envy you. B'baer doesn't yell all the time, just when he's mad..."

"...but he's mad all the time," Ryuri finished the joke she had heard often enough from M'mon and others in his class. "I figure Jallori will start yelling when we get out on the drill field and people start shaffing up in bigger ways. I don't intend to be the one to provoke it, though."

"So how are classes? Can you stay awake with nobody yelling?"

"They're interesting, actually. I mean, sure, I've known most of it since before I was old enough to Stand, but it's fun to watch the holdbreds suffer." And besides, it was amazing how actually having a dragon made all the little details interesting. Not that she was going to admit that to her brother.

"That's right, they are mostly holdbred in your class, aren't they."

"Yes, and half Threadfodder."

M'mon looked at her seriously. "You shouldn't talk about them that way."

"Why not? It's true!" she said, as they reached the end of the food table. "Most of them barely know which end of the dragon the food goes into!"

"They're still your classmates," said M'mon, getting a cup of juice and starting towards his class's table. Ryuri followed, passing right by her own classmates.

"Hey, come sit with us!" little Rubi called out.

"No, she thinks she's too good for us," M'con said. "Once again."

"You really should sit with us," M'ronit said earnestly.

"With you? Hardly!" Ryuri laughed. "You're a waste of a brown!"

"You really do think you're too good for us," muttered Faydra. "Stuck-up weyrbred."

"Don't talk to us like that, brownrider!" ordered T'yan, with a scowl.

"Or what, bronzerider?" Ryuri laughed. "You think you're a wingleader already!" T'yan's scowl deepened at that.

"Ryuri, you really should sit with them," M'mon said after she passed the table. "You're my sister, but right now you're also a real wher's ass."

"Why? I'd rather sit with your class," Ryuri said.

"Well, you can't. There's a reason classes sit together."

"Why should I be stuck with them just because we Impressed at the same Hatching?" Ryuri snorted. "I notice G'rian isn't sitting at their table either!"

"Yes, but K'zuan and Synde and Gwenlynn are. And they have the right of it."

Ryuri looked him up and down with mock curiosity. "Funny, you don't *look* like you have a stick up your ass," she said sarcastically.

"Ryuri, what the shell is wrong with you? Is it because of Incane?"

"Oh, go shaff off. Of course I miss Incane, but that has nothing to do with this!" Actually, she had not remembered Incane all morning. Her sister's death, though it did still hurt sometimes, seemed part of another world, for all it had been just eight days ago.

"Well, you'll not sit at our table with your attitude."

"Fine. I'll sit somewhere else. There's G'rian."

She walked a few tables farther down and sat next to her friend G'rian. Nearly her age, he had transferred in with his family at the same time she had, and stood candidate almost as long, too, before finally Impressing. They had even shared a romance, way back when they were still young enough to be painfully serious about it; it was a joke between them now, even though the fight that ended it had been painful at the time. This morning he sat with Lodrun and Zaras and some of their other friends from the playing fields. "Can you believe that M'mon? Trying to get me to sit with that pack of losers I bunk with."

"He always sits with his class now," Zaras said, though of course they all knew it. "K'levan too. I suppose the mysteries of weyrlinghood are beyond the lowly such as ourselves."

"Yes, us lowly sods!" Lodrun grinned. "Actually, I think we simply showed your brother up in dashball one time too many, so he's got to find a place with the smaller and weaker soft-boned types."

"Well, who cares," Ryuri said. "I need to eat."



That morning, Jallori assembled the class outside the Weyrling Barracks, instead of the lecture hall. The weyrlingsecond had done this a few times before, and so Ryuri knew what to expect.

"This morning we'll work some more on strengthening the dragon-rider bond," Jallori said as she called the class to attention. "Sit somewhere comfortable, as long as you're close enough to hear me clearly," Jallori went on, and Ryuri walked the few steps over to the barracks wall and sat with her back against it. Others joined her, or simply sat where they were on the grassy turf.

"Once you're comfortable, close your eyes and feel for your dragon's presence. They are still asleep; don't try to talk to them or wake them. Just feel what they are feeling."

Ceorth's sleeping presence was a light touch somewhere in the back of Ryuri's mind; after a few days of exercises like this one she could easily move her mind just so and dimly hear the slow beating of his hearts, and feel the satiated languor of his full belly.

"...open your eyes, but maintain the connection," Jallori was saying, and Ryuri realized she had missed a few words. She looked straight ahead, and her sense of Ceorth barely wavered. Experimentally she looked around, and saw some of the rest of the class frowning in concentration or looking uncertain. Some still had their eyes closed.

She saw Faydra looking at her and stared back with a flicker of annoyance; then felt Ceorth sleepily stir and

decided winning a staring contest was not worth disturbing her dragon. She sneered at Faydra and looked away, her eyes meeting G'rian's instead. He winked, and she winked back.

"Remember to keep the connection," Jallori was saying. "Concentrate on calm and happy thoughts, even if you have trouble with the exercise. We still have days to master this so it's all right if you lose the link for a bit."

Ryuri wondered how anyone could not feel the link. Sure, when the dragonets were asleep, it was faint, but it was always there. When Ceorth was awake, sometimes his feelings and images were so strong that they almost drowned out everything else.

She looked around the rest of the class. Skinny, brown-haired K'zuan, Bh'ruk's little brother, grinned at the world in general as he communed with his brown Ayerth. Rubi had an impudent smile on her dusky-skinned face and looked as though she were suppressing a laugh. As usual, M'ronit would not meet anyone's eyes, but Impressing his brown Jerrinth seemed to have put some spine into him, because he was sitting up straight and tall, with a contented smile on his face. M'con sat staring at the ground, looking like he was having a hard time of the lesson. H'jari grinned like an idiot at nothing in particular. Young T'yan, who always seemed a bit too proud that the only bronze in the clutch had chosen him, sat stiffly to one side.

The exercise went on for some time, with Jallori occasionally offering calm encouragement, but mostly staying quiet. Ryuri felt Ceorth begin to stir; he had been one of the first in the class to do more than eat and sleep all day, though by now all of them spent the midday hours awake or only lightly drowsing, until the afternoon feeding sent them to sleep again.

"All right," Jallori said. "It's getting close to lunch time, but before we go, we're going to do a new exercise. Your dragonets are waking up by now; if they aren't, give them a gentle nudge or two. They're going to have to learn to adjust to some human schedules, but give them an easy start. In a bit, we're going to bring them out and do a bit of walking with them; just around the Barracks a few times at first. Remember, they are still babies, and haven't seen much of the world yet, other than right here around the Barracks, and the insides of their food bowls. We need to get them used to everything that goes on around here, so they'll not always be getting distracted later on when we need their attention on the drill field."

Ceorth had fully woken now, his bright curiosity filling Ryuri's mind, along with his contentment at her mental presence.

"...bring them out now." Ryuri's attention snapped back to Jallori in time to hear the last bit of the instruction. Dragonets began leaving the barracks, some stumbling, others walking proudly. She called for Ceorth and he came with the last few from the women's side of the barracks, then almost leaped the few steps toward where she was. He sat on his haunches before her, curling his tail around his forefeet, and eyed her brightly with swirling blue-green

eyes. Suddenly his mouth opened in a jaw-creaking yawn barely a handspan from her face.

*Well hello to you too, meatbreath,* she thought wryly. *Getting hungry already and seeing if my head will fit in there?*

***I would never eat you,*** Ceorth said matter-of-factly. ***You are my rider. We belong together.*** Of course, it wasn't words he used, not quite exactly, anyway; some of their first lessons had explained that it was really the rider's mind that made the words to match the thoughts coming through the link. Ryuri was not sure why that distinction was worth worrying about, though; it sure *sounded* like Ceorth was using words.

*Yes, we do belong together.* She never seemed to get tired of just looking at him. But she had to get up and walk now, so she did.

Ceorth eyed everything eagerly as it came into view. Between the weycots and the few trees north of the Barracks, they caught a few glimpses of the drill field. Shahara's class was stepping through a ground drill alongside their dragonets, two months older than Ceorth and his clutchmates. ***Is it a game?*** Ceorth asked, looking at them. ***I know you like games.***

*It is sort of a game,* she answered, but as they got further around the barracks, Ceorth got distracted all over again as two other classes came into view west of the drill grounds. Though there was too much in the way for her to see her brother or Neyth, Ryuri and Ceorth did glimpse some of M'mon's classmates at the far end of the drill field. She knew today was their first day of chewing firestone, and would have to check with K'levan later for anything she could tease M'mon about; he had been so serious lately. Well, not so serious as when he was still in his six months of celibacy.

***I want to do that!*** Ceorth's thought broke in and images of flying filled her mind. Past the last few weycots, they had a clear view of the flight practice area to the west; L'ward's class, between Shahara's and B'baer's in age, were on their fourth day of mounted flight.

Those flights would stay very short for some time to come, Ryuri knew, but still she envied them so much she could taste it. ***I want to do that too!*** she thought fervently. That look M'mon got when he talked about flying was almost as starry-eyed as when he talked about Impressing Neyth in the first place.

The three oldest classes -- K'bort's, Ambri's, and the one E'zok and G'n'an shared -- were away from the Weyr on drills. Ryuri envied them even more, until she remembered how close to Thread those classes would get each 'Fall, especially the oldest. 'I'm not so sure I want to do that,' Ryuri thought, hoping to keep it from Ceorth.

***But I do want to fight Thread! It is what I was born to do!***

*I want to fight Thread too,* she reassured him, and resolutely moved her mind away from thoughts of what Thread could do to dragon and rider. They had moved

around the Barracks now, and Ceorth looked curiously towards the path to Main.

***What is there?***

*That is where I used to live and do chores. And where I go to eat.*

***I want to go there, but I know I must not.*** The boundaries of the Weyrling Complex were enforced on the younger dragonets by orders from the Weyr's senior queen, though few enough of them ever tried to stray when their riders were not with them. Ceorth just might be an exception to that, she thought, as he walked wide of the corner of the Barracks to sniff at the hanging branch of a featherleaf tree.

"Go ahead and let them walk a wider circle if they want to," Jallori said, her voice carrying crisply even though it was far from a shout. "In fact, you can walk with them wherever they want within the complex, as long as you keep them out of buildings and well clear of the other classes, and be back by noon bell."

Ceorth was more than happy to head out east of the Barracks, even though it was away from the other classes. *I know something you'll really like to see,* Ryuri thought.

***What is it?*** Ceorth demanded eagerly. ***What is that huge thing in your mind?***

*You'll see!* She realized she was trotting, Ceorth having an awkward time keeping up but soon getting the hang of it.

Wending their way around weycots, they heard the surf, and then came to the edge of the cliff above the weyrling beach. Ceorth saw the sea and sat down with a surprised thump.

***Huge!*** came the thought. The image went on and on as Ceorth's mind tried to encompass it. ***It's... as big as between! I feel very small,*** he said, rather meekly.

*You may be small, but you're mine,* Ryuri assured him. *How do you know about between, anyway?*

***I don't remember.***

Ryuri wondered if he had picked that up from the older dragons, or if *between* was just part of a dragon's instinctive knowledge; she would have to ask Jallori in class.

***I want a closer look!*** Her brown's inquisitiveness reasserted itself; he got up and moved closer to the cliff's edge.

*Careful!* Ryuri thought at him.

***Do not worry,*** he replied calmly. ***I know I am not to get my feet too close to the edge.*** That was straight out of the lectures, too; the commands of a queen would still be obeyed, somehow, even if the actual giving of the command had been forgotten. It was just part of the way dragons were. ***I can almost stretch my neck over, though!*** Ceorth went on brightly. ***I wonder if it will look like this when I fly?***

Just then the noon bell rang, sounding faint over the crashing surf. "Oh, no!" Ryuri said out loud. *We'd better get back right now.*

Ceorth reluctantly tuned away from the view. ***Let's run!*** he said eagerly. ***I can see that in your mind and it looks fun!*** Her little brown started off with a bound, but

misjudged the landing and rolled head over heels. Ryuri couldn't help laughing even as she ran to make sure he was all right; he quickly got to his feet and shook himself off. ***I want to run!*** he said again.

He landed squarely on his next try; the bound after that barely missed a weyrcot, but he managed to turn aside just in time. Ryuri had to run all-out to keep up, laughing, feeling the joy of it coming from Ceorth, and from her own heart. Surely nothing could spoil this.



2858.08.13

"This is basic formation."

The class stood in two rows, each with their dragonet to their left. Ryuri had to listen hard to hear Jallori's calm voice.

"Whenever I say to get in formation, but don't name any particular one, this is the one I mean. You'll have to do it fast sometimes, so remember who's to your left and your right and in front or behind."

Ryuri was at the left-hand end, in the first of two rows; to her right was Rubi and her green Maireth. M'ronit and Jerrinth stood behind her, with Synde and Cikelth beside them.

The other two brownriders were at the other end of the line, with K'zuan in front; T'yan stood front and center with Faydra to his left.

***Are we getting ready to play a game?*** asked Ceorth, looking about inquisitively.

*I suppose you could call it a game,* she said. *But the rules are very important and you must do exactly as Nusrath and his rider say, and do it right away or we'll both be in trouble.*

***I will,*** Ceorth promised solemnly.

Jallori was saying in a dry voice "...know you've all been looking forward to more exercise drills, so you'll be happy to hear that starting today, more is exactly what you're going to get."

Scattered mutters greeted this announcement. Ryuri was not worried, of course; running and calisthenics were not going to seem any great strain after Turns of mincraft apprenticeship and games like netball and dashball.

***What do we do now?***

Before Ryuri could answer him, Jallori spoke again. "First thing is to run a lap around the Complex. We've walked the trail before, but no more walking as of today. If you think you can't run, just run slow. You good runners, don't get too far ahead either -- this isn't a race, so it doesn't matter who comes in first as long as everybody finishes. Leave your dragons here. Once you're done, get back into basic formation. Now go!"

***I want to go too! I want to run!***

*No, you have to stay here. I'll be back soon. We can run together later.*

Ceorth looked crestfallen as Ryuri started off, but he did as he was told.

Ryuri found herself near the back of the pack, but jogged easily along the top of the cliff and into the weyrcot area, pacing herself and watching the rest of the class drop behind her one by one.

Jallori effortlessly ran beside the line, dropping back to encourage the slower runners and coming forward again to make sure those in front did not get too far ahead.

***Run faster!*** Ceorth urged. ***I like how you feel when you run fast!***

*I can't run too fast, I'll get in trouble.* She sped up a bit anyway, though.

By the time Ryuri had passed the Weyrling Barracks and headed out into the open again, she was passing K'zuan for second place.

Not surprisingly, G'rian was up front; Ryuri put on a burst of speed and caught up, then fell into a rhythm beside her bluerider friend.

"Wondered where you were," he said.

"Oh, I didn't want to make you look bad right away," she grinned at him.

"Kind of hard to look bad with this lot for competition."

Ryuri turned and ran backwards for a few steps. Many of the class were in the clear now. "Looks like a few of them are all right. Look at K'zuan back there, he's pretty strong for his age."

G'rian did not bother. "Just wait. He won't last. Doesn't know how to pace himself."

"Bet you a favor he does. Lot of stubborn in that boy. It's M'ronit who won't last. He'll be walking by the time we get back."

"Sure, I'll take both bets. That'll be two you'll owe me."

Ryuri glanced back again; to her surprise Jallori was close behind. She hissed at G'rian to be quiet, and deliberately slowed her pace. After a while Jallori dropped back, and Ryuri dared to think she and G'rian had gotten away with it.

***Look! They are flying!*** Ceorth broke in, images of one of the older classes filling her mind. It looked as though they were taking off for a drill.

*Yes, they are flying!* Ryuri replied. *We'll be flying before long, too.*

She ran on, having to concentrate to keep her step as she watched the older dragons through Ceorth's eyes. Realization suddenly hit her. *Where are you, Ceorth?*

***Close to the cliff where the sun rises,*** he replied innocently.

*Get back to the drill field right now!* she ordered. *You weren't supposed to leave, and now we'll be in trouble if we get caught.*

***I forgot,*** said Ceorth humbly.

*It's all right, just get back before Nusrath's rider sees you.*

As they rounded the point of the plateau for the last leg of the run, she saw Ceorth come bounding out of the trees and back to the drill field. Ryuri was about to remind him to stand next to Maireth, but he seemed to remember it on his own. Ryuri hoped that Jallori had not noticed his absence.

Ryuri and G'rian ran the rest of the way in silence, and returned to their places on the drill field to watch the rest of the class finish their run. Much to her surprise, M'ronit was in the first half of the pack. K'zuan was ahead of him, though, so she and G'rian would come out even.

Once everybody was back, Ranya and Nalsha last, Jallori called them to attention again. "Before we start exercise drills, there's a small matter of discipline. It seems our two lead runners were placing bets that some others of you wouldn't do well. This is not an attitude I intend to encourage. We are a team and will behave as such. Ryuri and G'rian, front and center. Demonstrate proper pushup technique for the class. Thirty ought to do it. Ten more for Ryuri, because she did not keep Ceorth in his place during the run."

**Khuth's rider says this will be easy,** Ceorth relayed.

*Tell him I agree, and that the whole of training will be easy if this is all the punishment we get.* Ryuri answered as she walked ahead and faced the line, unable to resist a bit of swagger.

"Don't start just yet." Jallori said. "This should be more challenging. Since you think you are so far ahead of the rest of the class, you won't mind doing those pushups one-handed. Switch hands every five. I'm sure the rest of the class will benefit from watching."

'Oh, shards,' Ryuri thought, her confidence deflating suddenly. 'She lets us get out here all confident, then lowers the boom.'

She had heard M'mon talk about B'baer ordering one-handed pushups as a punishment; after all, those were the only kind he and K'bort could do, and those shaffheads probably enjoyed making their students share the pain. She had tried a few on a lark but had never expected mild-mannered Jallori to assign them.

The whole class was looking at Ryuri and G'rian. She sighed, got down, and started.

The first five were as hard as she had expected, and she was relieved to be able to switch and give her right arm and shoulder a rest. But they were not rested nearly enough by the time she switched back, and it got worse from there. Her arms shook so hard she could hardly keep her balance, and her shoulders and elbows screamed. By the time she was done, Ryuri decided she would rather have B'baer, or K'bort, or even D'zan himself as a weyrlingsecond, rather than Jallori. She shakily got to her feet and snapped out a cold salute to Jallori before returning to her place in formation.

Jallori gave no visible reaction. She just turned to the rest of the class and said with no hint of irony, "Now, we will begin exercise drills..."



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The ball sailed high over Ryuri's head. She squinted into the morning sun and gave a burst of speed to catch up; beside her Solea tripped in the sand, leaving Ryuri clear to make the catch if she could only get there in time. The ball

started to come down, and she was going to have to dive for it--

**I see you!** Ceorth's excited voice suddenly filled her head. Startled, she lost her stride and the ball thumped into the sand.

*Where are you?*

**Up on the cliff! I can see a long way from here!**

She looked up and to her surprise there was Ceorth's light brown head peering down from the lip of the cliff. *Get back from there!* she ordered in sudden fear.

Beside her, Solea picked up the ball. "Come on, Ryuri, get your ass back in the game!" K'levan yelled as Solea threw the ball to Aria.

**I will not fall. I know I am not to put my feet close to the edge.** A darker brown head appeared beside Ceorth's. **Ayerth watches too! Why did you leave the ball on the ground if you were running after it so hard?**

As she hustled back up the field, Ryuri replied, *Because that's the rules of dashball. I let the ball hit the ground, so the other team gets it now.* She angled for position to block G'rian from catching, while Lodrun ran up the field to guard Aria. M'mon and K'levan harassed Zaras, who now had the ball.

**Why did he stop running when he got the ball?**

*Because that's the rules too. Only way to move the ball is to throw it and catch it. Can't hang on to it for more than a five-count either.*

Zaras was out of time and had to toss the ball to Solea behind him. K'levan moved to block her, while M'mon raced Zaras up the field. Ryuri had to run hard to keep pace with G'rian as he circled around trying to get clear. You could hardly ever stop running in this game.

**Who made the rules?**

Distracted, Ryuri fell for a fake and G'rian caught Zaras's throw. Before Ryuri could get back in position, he threw it all the way to Aria in the goal.

*I don't know who made the sharded rules!*

**You are angry at me?** Ceorth sounded hurt and confused.

*Because you made me shaff up! We're three points behind now.*

Her team jogged back to their side of the field. "What is your problem today?" K'levan asked angrily.

"Yes, you're making us look bad," Lodrun said.

"Leave her alone!" M'mon retorted. "She just Impressed a month ago. You know how it is."

"G'rian isn't having any trouble," Lodrun retorted. "Your sister is just slow to learn."

"And we were never that bad!" K'levan added hotly. "If she can't keep her mind in the game, why's she playing? She ought to be with her class anyway!"

"That bunch of losers? Not a chance!" Ryuri shot back. "Now shut up and let's play!"

The ball arched towards them, and the game was on again.



"Left side, cross over! Double line!" Weyrlingsecond Jallori's voice snapped out the command.

Ryuri moved smartly, M'ronit keeping step beside her but many of the others faltering or starting off in the wrong direction before realizing their mistake.

"Straighten it up!" Jallori ordered, and the class did. "Now form single V!" That was harder, since everyone had to go to the proper place without being able to follow a partner. She thought she had the hang of it, though...

**Look! They are chasing that green!** The image from Ceorth filled her head, bright green wings with blue and brown pursuing. **I want to fly!** He went on excitedly. She felt Ceorth's feet pounding the packed dirt as he started to run--

--and felt the ground come up and hit her as she tripped over someone.

"Ryuri!" Jallori snapped. She said something else but Ryuri didn't dare take her attention off Ceorth. *No! Stop running! Don't try to fly!*

***I know I am not to fly. But I like to run. Does flying feel like running?***

*I don't know, Ceorth, but you better get back here right now! You need to be in the next drill!*

**I forgot,** Ceorth said, sounding contrite as he usually did when this happened.

"Get up, Ryuri!" Jallori's voice cut through her daze like a knife through soft cheese.

Ryuri realized she was still on the ground and leaped to her feet, saluting. "Yes, Weyrlingsecond!"

"Did you hear a word I said?"

"No, Weyrlingsecond," Ryuri had to admit, feeling the back of her neck flush with embarrassment.

"I asked you," Jallori replied in a precise tone, "Why you keep breaking the formation."

"I don't--" but she cut herself off before her mouth got her in even more trouble. Ceorth *had* made her lose her place all too often during drills, but never this badly.

Jallori continued, still in a calm-sounding voice. "M'ronit knows the drills better than you do. Jayna does. I look to you older weyrlings as examples to the rest. T'yan does far better than you, at five Turns younger. Why are you setting a bad example?"

Behind Jallori, near the front of the V, she could see G'rian and K'zuan turn their heads to give her rueful and encouraging looks. Faydra looked too, with an obvious sneer. K'zuan mouthed something, but Ryuri dared not look far enough away from Jallori to see what he was trying to say.

"Weyrlingsecond, I have no excuse." Trying to pin the blame anywhere would only get her a withering silence. 'Besides,' a small internal voice whispered, 'it isn't Ceorth's fault anyway. If he says something while you're up there flying Thread, are you going to let it distract you then?'

"This is not the first time you have let Ceorth wander away from drills, either. I know he is easily distracted, and

that he sends vividly, but that is no excuse. You will learn to shield your mind, and give him the strong anchor that it needs. Start now, and think about it especially hard when you are cleaning out the dragonet middens this restday." Jallori paused for just a moment. Not once had her voice rise above a conversational tone, but Ryuri felt as though she were standing in the teeth of a storm. Their weyrlingsecond only ever said this much when someone was in very deep trouble. She went on, "The next time you fail to keep him where he belongs, I will find a way to make you think mucking the pit is easy duty. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Weyrlingsecond." Ryuri kept her voice steady, and made herself lift her chin and meet Jallori's cool gaze directly.

"Good. We have wasted enough time with this nonsense. Now get back in formation and start proving that you are worthy of that brown of yours."

Ryuri's face felt aflame with humiliation, but she gritted her teeth, saluted sharply, and kept her head high as she went back to her place.



2858.09.14

*Splurttch!*

The first shovelful of manure hit the bottom of the cart with a sound Ryuri was sure she was going to be sick of before long. That is, if the smell didn't get her sick first. She wasn't going to be done with this job anytime soon, though. Cleaning out the dragonet midden each restday was a punishment duty reserved for whichever weyrling among the younger classes had shaffed up the worst during that sevenday.

"I never expected to get stuck doing this job," Ryuri grumbled aloud as she jammed the shovel down into the pit for another scoop.

***I thought our waste was supposed to go in the pit,*** Ceorth said, sounding puzzled. He looked puzzled too, sitting in the sun just on the other side of the pit.

*Yes, you are supposed to drop your shit in the pit,* Ryuri said, continuing to heave shovelfuls of the greenish-brown muck up into the wagon.

***Then why are you taking it out again?***

*So the pit doesn't fill up. Why did you think it never overflowed?*

Ryuri's annoyance must have come through the link more than she had meant it to. ***I don't know. Why are you angry with me?***

*Because you are the one who got me into this!*

***I don't remember.*** Ceorth sounded confused. ***All I know is that we are to use the pit. It is strange that you are taking our waste out from the pit again. I wish you would not be angry with me. Is it because I don't understand?***

*No, Ceorth, I'm not really angry with you,* she soothed. Or tried to soothe, anyway, though it was not exactly easy to project comfort while shoveling crap. *It is all right that you*

*don't understand. You know you are not supposed to dump anywhere else because the queens told you to use the pit. But Nusrath's rider told me to do this, so I have to.* She stopped to mop the sweat from her face with the hem of her shirt. This day *would* have to be a hot one, she thought sourly. At least it was not the rainy season, yet.

***But you are not happy with me?***

*Oh, Ceorth. I am happy with you.* She looked right into his eyes; hopefully the praise would distract him if she laid it on thick enough. *I don't know what I would do without you. You are strong and quick and the smartest brown on Pern.*

***Why are you still annoyed at me, then?***

*You're perceptive, too,* she added wryly, starting to shovel again. Someday she would learn to shield her feelings from him, but until that day she really needed to work on controlling them better. *You are right that I am annoyed. It is not really at you, though. You should not wander away, but it is my fault for not reminding you. And it is not your fault that I get distracted when you talk to me, when I am in drills or in class.*

***Ayerth and his rider are here!*** Ceorth said excitedly, forgetting his confusion in that instant.

"Hey, Ryuri," K'zuan said as he and his brown approached.

"Come to add to my workload?" Ryuri asked jokingly.

"That we are," the younger brownrider said ruefully. "Baby dragons are like baby anythings -- in one end, out the other...."

"Go for it," she said with a sideways smile. "Every new dump in there puts off the time when I'll have to climb down in there in order to reach." She stood aside and waited for Ayerth to hang his tail over the edge and start doing what he needed to do.

"I thought it'd be M'con who got this job after he mouthed off about how stupid marching is when we'll be flying soon," K'zuan said, turning to face her as Ayerth emptied his tail. "Or Annalora for flirting with those StrongWind riders at dinner the other day."

"Weyrlingsecond picked me for the honor instead, though. Guess she didn't like me tripping over people in the drills."

"Yes. Those drills are getting harder," K'zuan sympathized. Unlike most of his agemates, he did all right in the drills, as did the older members of the class, even shy Jayna. Much as it galled Ryuri to admit it, even M'ronit was doing better than she was, for all he'd spent the last four Turns cringing away from anyone who even raised their voice at him.

"It's Ceorth," she said. "Well, not really Ceorth, but that I let him distract me. How do you manage with Ayerth? He's almost as curious as Ceorth."

"I don't know." K'zuan shrugged. "I don't think I'm doing anything special; I just tell him to pay attention and he does. Well, all right, I *do* have to tell him pretty often," he allowed.

"Hey, brownrider!" M'mon's voice came from behind her.

"Hey, brownrider yourself," Ryuri answered her brother as he and Neyth came up to the pit.

"Won't have to do this much longer," M'mon said as Neyth draped his tail over the edge and hunkered down.

"Solo *between* jumps coming up soon?" K'zuan asked. Ayerth was finished and went to lie down next to Ceorth, wrapping his tail neatly around himself as he settled.

"That's right," M'mon said. "Soon we can go wherever we want! I haven't been to a gather in forever."

"Oh come on, you've hitched a few rides, I know," Ryuri said, gingerly starting to shovel again. Neyth was getting large now, and made a correspondingly large amount of muck.

"Sure, but there's nothing like going under your own power, not to mention being free to stay as late as you want."

"The holdergirls are more likely to give up their virtue after dark, you mean," K'zuan put in with a grin.

"True enough," M'mon agreed with a wink.

Neyth finished, and Ryuri set to shoveling again. If she worked fast enough, she could maybe still catch a game or two of netball before dusk. Something about M'mon's attitude worried her, though, even as he and K'zuan joked about holdergirls, and Bh'ruk's latest exploits. There was an edge to him that he seemed to be trying to hide.

"When is your first solo?" she asked M'mon.

He hesitated a bare instant before answering. "We've been doing practice jumps the last few days, taking coordinates from Lynsoth or Yoseth. Plus advanced formation drills just to keep us on our toes. Tomorrow we start making coordinates ourselves to show the older dragons. Two days of that, plus whatever other drills they try to distract us with, and then we do our solos."

Tiny hints in her twin's face and voice told Ryuri all she needed to know; M'mon was scared. Hiding it well, but he could not fool her.

She was about to call him on it when K'zuan spoke up. "Shards, Ayerth says Jallori's coming! I'm off!"

"I'll head off too," M'mon said, and the two quickly left, along with their dragons.

Ryuri kept shoveling.

"You're making headway," Jallori said as she approached.

"Sure. Pretty soon I'll have to put on the waders and climb in." She eyed the chest-deep pit sourly. At least her arms were long enough that she could get the muck level down to her thighs before she had to stand in it.

"It's not supposed to be fun," Jallori said mildly.

"I know that!" Ryuri snapped, and hastily added a "ma'am" when she saw Jallori lift an eyebrow.

"Do you understand why I'm punishing you?"

"Yes. Because I tripped over M'ronit in drills."

Jallori remained silent, obviously wanting more of an admission.

Ryuri scooped a few more shovelfuls into the wagon, but finally the silence got too much for her. "And because

I'm not keeping good enough control over Ceorth, and letting him distract me," she said.

"That's just part of it. I see you don't really understand the rest."

"No, I guess I don't, sir. Aside from that problem, I'm one of the best students you've got. Why are you punishing me and not Rubi or K'red or one of those other sorry drag-ass holdbreds?"

"I'm punishing you for the kind of thing you just said, as it happens."

"What, I'm supposed to pretend I'm not any good? Act all humble to spare the poor bruised feelings of all the holdbreds?" Ceorth sat up and looked worriedly at her outburst.

"Listen to yourself, Ryuri."

Ryuri angrily heaved scoops of manure into the wagon, refusing to look at Jallori or answer her. The weyrlingsecond did not seem bothered by the silence, though, and waited with a small smile on her face until at last Ryuri got it.

"It is the holdbreds, isn't it? How I talk about them."

"That's more like it, yes," Jallori said. "But you still don't really understand. Your problems with Ceorth and your non-weyrbred classmates are really signs of something bigger, that you need to see before it kills you."

Ryuri stopped shoveling and looked at the Weyrlingsecond. "All right, tell me, because I obviously don't see it yet," she said seriously.

"You're treating this like a game," Jallori said bluntly.

"How do you mean?"

"You are good at this, Ryuri. You started out older than most everybody else, and in far better shape, and knowing a lot more. And you seem to like rubbing their noses in it."

"I--" Ryuri started to say, but Jallori overrode her.

"Do you think that because you can do better than most of the others without half trying, you only have to half-try at everything? Do you think being good at some things somehow makes up for slacking off on everything else?"

"I'm not slacking off!" Ryuri protested automatically. "I do work hard."

"Obviously not hard enough at controlling Ceorth, just for instance. My point is, you started out better than most of them, but you've been standing still while they make progress. T'yan is already better than you at almost everything, and Jayna and M'ronit will soon surpass you."

"I'll work harder," Ryuri promised, feeling bowled over. She wanted to argue more, but deep inside she had to admit that Jallori had a point. "I'll stay ahead of them."

Jallori shook her head. "You do need to work harder, but not to beat them. If I have to scare you with the thought of being outdone by holdbreds just to light a fire under your butt, you obviously still don't get it. The point is not to beat your classmates, but lead them."

"Lead them? Isn't that your job?" Ryuri refused to knuckle under so easily, but deep inside, she really was beginning to understand, and that feeling crawled inside her like a 'snake in her belly.

"We're still in the easy part of training, and will be for months yet. By the time the really dangerous stuff starts, we need the older and stronger weyrings to help the younger and weaker, not feel smug that they're beating them in some sort of imaginary competition."

***I am worried. You feel sick inside,*** Ceorth broke in.

*I'll be all right. Hush for a bit,* she replied without thinking, as Jallori went on.

"I need you brownriders to help me, as well as T'yan and Faydra. You've all got a lot of potential, but you've all got your problems as well. Yours is that you need to learn to lead, not just look down on everyone who isn't as quick or strong as you are. It doesn't matter how good you are in class and drills if you don't have the respect of your classmates; someday you'll give an order and somebody will die because they had to waste a moment deciding whether or not to obey. If you do learn, you'll make wingsecond someday, just as I did. Now do you understand?"

Ryuri realized her mouth was hanging open. "Wingsecond?" she thought. "I... yes ma'am!" she snapped to attention and saluted.

Jallori laughed softly. "Relax, we're not on the drill field. I need you to use your head as more than the place to put your hand to salute."

"Yes ma'am, I understand. I will do better, I promise."

"I hope so. I'll expect to see changes. Keep better control of Ceorth, and keep better control of your attitude about your classmates. You don't have to like T'yan and Faydra and M'ronit and H'jari, but you have to work with them, and do it well."

"Yes ma'am!" Ryuri said, feeling the smile grow on her face. "Things will be different from now on!"

"Don't think it will be as easy as that. You've fallen behind, and you'll need to work twice as hard to catch up. Think about that while you finish mucking out this pit," Jallori said wryly. "Just remember," she said as she turned to leave, "If you lose control in drills or I catch Ceorth wandering off one more time, you'll think this job is light duty."

Crestfallen, Ryuri picked up the shovel again and set to work.



2858.09.17

### ***Look what I found!***

Ryuri stopped with the fork halfway to her mouth as the image of a tiny blue and yellow wherry filled her mind. Around its body was a nimbus of heat-glow; the colors of the featherfur must have been bright indeed for Ceorth to see them in the predawn darkness.

*That looks interesting,* she said, trying to suppress her sudden fear. *But where are you?* Besides the brightly colored wherry, the image had contained only dim shapes of trees.

***Looking at this bright thing,*** Ceorth replied blithely. ***There it goes again!***



Through her link with Ceorth, Ryuri felt a vague sensation of bounding along. Vague shapes that must be weycrots and trees flashed past, and her brown's excitement flashed through her mind.

*Ceorth, stop!* she ordered. There was nothing she could do if anyone had already seen him, but maybe not all was lost quite yet.

***I have stopped. The little bright creature is gone now.***

*Where are you, Ceorth?*

***I don't know. There are many interesting things to look at here!***

Images of flowers and plants filled her mind, though the predawn darkness made them hard to distinguish. A treehopper-shaped warm blur leaped between branches overhead -- that heat-sight still felt strange -- and a screeching firelizard dove for it and missed. The sound of crashing surf could be heard somewhere fairly close.

"Ryuri! Are you going to stare at your breakfast until the sun comes up?" M'mon's teasing voice brought her back to herself. She looked around, trying not to show her embarrassment. Other weyrings at the table stared at her; some grinning, others looking sympathetic. At least it wasn't her own classmates, but her brother's, up for a predawn drill. And at least she had put down the forkful of meatroll instead of absently holding it up like an idiot. That sort of thing had happened more than once since she had Impressed, but she needed to do better now.

*Wait where you are, and I'll come get you.*

"Sorry," she said to her tablemates. "Ceorth has gotten himself lost again. I need to go find him." She hurriedly started gulping down the rest of her food; risk of trouble or no, she would need the energy for drills.

"Will you need any help?" M'mon asked.

"Don't you have a drill to get to?" she replied between mouthfuls. "Wait, there is... mmmf... something you can do." The food muffled her words but she was in too much hurry to stop. "Try to distract Lynsoth a bit so he doesn't notice anything. And keep your classmates from saying anything! Jallori'll have my hide off in strips if she hears I didn't keep Ceorth under control."

"We can do that," M'mon said, looking down the table at K'levan and getting a nod in return. "Both things."

***Do you want me to go back to my wallow? I think I remember which way it is.***

*Stay where you are!* She had been so sure he would stay asleep until dawn after his big feeding last night. She had to find him before he moved. If anyone saw him up and about without her, and Jallori found out... she didn't want to think about it.

The food was done and she stood up. "I've got to go get him. Good luck with your drills! Don't worry about me, concentrate on your *between* practice!" Their first solo jumps would come tomorrow, part of the reason Ryuri had gotten up so early to spend time with M'mon and her other friends in his class.

M'mon laughed. "*Between* is nothing compared to the weyrlingseconds! Hope you can get Ceorth back before they find out!"

"Don't worry, I will," she said over her shoulder. 'I hope,' she added silently. 'Or I'll be finding out just what sort of duty Jallori thinks will make mucking the pit look easy.'

She hurried out of the Weyrhall towards the Weyrling Barracks.

*Do you remember which way you went?*

***I went to look at the big floating moving thing out on the water. Then the bright thing flew by and I followed it. I don't remember which way.***

*I will find you, don't worry.*

***I am not worried. There are so many interesting things to see here! Other dragons are here too, but they are older than me and all asleep.***

*Try not to wake them up! Find a place to hide until I come find you. We could get in trouble if anybody tells on us. And please don't try to talk to Nusrath!*

***Nusrath sleeps. Ooh, look at that crawly thing! It changes colors!***

Ryuri stopped in front of the barracks. The door was open; she should not have been surprised that Ceorth could work the simple latch. But if she could find Ceorth, she could pretend they had gone out together and that she had not just let him wander. It all depended where Ceorth was; at least with the queens' command not to stray, he would be somewhere in the weyring complex. North didn't have the trees she had seen through his eyes, and she was about as far south as she could get, so that left somewhere to the east or west. She just hoped he was not in among the weyringstaff cots!

She closed her eyes and tried to feel the direction of Ceorth's mindlink, but she could not tell anything for sure. Some riders could tell easily, she knew, but she did not seem to be one of them. She would have to do this the old-fashioned way.

First, he had said he was watching the big floating thing. That must mean the tithe ship that had come in last night. But she didn't want to go haring off toward the docks -- and past the weyringstaff cots -- unless she was sure. She quickly crossed to the small glowbasket at the head of the trail back to Main, and filched a glow. There had been rain last night, she thought as she bent down and held the glow close to the ground. Just maybe... yes. There they were; footprints, one side with Ceorth's distinctive bent claw. They headed east into the weyring cots, before fading out on the harder packed earth of one of the trails.

*Ceorth, where are you?* she thought.

***I found a good hiding place!*** Darkness filled her mind, then the dimly perceived shapes of chair legs on a wooden floor.

'Oh, no,' Ryuri thought, trying to keep it from Ceorth.

*Don't worry, no one is here. And I pushed the door shut behind me. Please come get me soon!*

***Well, stay there and don't move a muscle!*** she sent urgently. She had to think. She could look and see which cots did not have dragons sleeping outside them; it must be one of those. Dawn was coming, though, and she did not have time to check every cot to see which were empty, let alone look inside them. One door creaking too loud this

close to dawn, and she'd have dragonets or their grumpily woken riders stirring around, and maybe reporting her.

She needed help, she admitted to herself. If she had some help, or maybe a distraction... well, Jallori *had* said to work with the others, she thought wryly.

*Ceorth, who else in the class is awake?*

***Jerrinth, Jugurth, Yttrith, Telyeth, and Maireth***

Ryuri sighed. *Wake their riders. Tell them I promise a big, fat, juicy favor if they meet me outside. Quietly! If they wake anyone else, it's all ruined and they don't get anything.*

***Yttrith's rider wants to know what this is about. She does not want to get up yet.***

*Tell her that there's still something she can do if she doesn't want to get up; just have Yttrith keep the other dragons quiet, and get ready to work on the older dragons if any of them wake up. As a queen, she should be able to do that.* Ryuri hoped the flattery would help her case. T'yan and M'ronit were coming out of their side, but there was no sign of Rubi or M'con; she was not about to take the risk of waking any of the others or Nusrath might wake up himself.

***Yttrith's rider asks what is in it for her? What will you give her?***

Ryuri had to struggle to stay aware of the world around her as she and Ceorth talked, but she stuck to it. *I'll help her in classes, and quit avoiding her and being an ass to her.*

***Plus a favor, she says?***

*If she does her part and keeps the dragons from blabbing, then I'll owe her a favor too.* If she had not been lazy before, she might have learned to do this at the same time as everyone else. She saw dusky-skinned Rubi slip out of the girls' side of the Barracks to join T'yan and M'ronit.

***She agrees.***

"What's this about?" T'yan muttered suspiciously as the three riders came up to her.

Before she could answer, Ceorth interrupted. ***Telyeth's rider will not come. He says it is not worth getting into trouble for someone who treats him badly.***

"Come here under the trees," she whispered to her three classmates, "and I'll tell you in a bit." *Tell him if he helps me I'll treat him better.*

***He says if you will do that and owe him a favor, he will help.***

*Fine. Promise him that.* "M'ronit, Rubi, T'yan, I need your help. You know how Ceorth is..." She was embarrassed to admit it. "Well, he wandered off again while I was eating breakfast with M'mon's class."

"What's that to me?" T'yan asked grumpily.

"Big favors if you help me. And..." The words stuck in her throat, but she forced them out anyway. "...and I'll quit being such an ass to you. All of you," she added with a deep breath. Pride be flamed; she had to have their help.

"Ooh, now that she needs us, Lady Brownrider will climb down off her attitude and treat us better?" Rubi said incredulously.

Ryuri winced and bit back a hot reply. "All, right, I admit I deserved that," she said, face burning. "Rubi, I'll help you in class. T'yan and M'ronit, I know you don't need

the help, but I can tell you things that are coming up before Jallori does."

"Such as?" T'yan said.

"For instance, we're about to start sack-tossing in the drills and I can show you how it's done beforehand. And pretty soon we'll get the firestone demonstration--"

"But we don't start flame drills for months!" M'con protested, having just joined them in time to hear the last bit.

"Trust me, I've had to haul stone to classes every time they get to the tenth sevenday. They'll do a demonstration, and make us learn the different grades of stone. Believe me, if there's one thing I know, it's firestone, and I can make sure you look real good in that lesson."

"So, for help in class, and better treatment, I have to give up the pleasure of seeing Jallori take you down a few pegs." Rubi said impishly. "Better sweeten that deal a bit. I'll help you if you owe me a favor, on top of all the rest."

M'con said, "A big one."

T'yan agreed. "Right, a big fat juicy one, Jugurth said you promised. We could get in trouble for this, after all."

"Sure, a favor, if it works," Ryuri promised, anything to get them moving. "Plus, even if we get caught, they'll see it as showing initiative and teamwork. My brother is in leadership training and says they're really big on that stuff there."

T'yan looked interested in that thought, and Rubi seemed ready to go along, but M'con wanted more convincing. "Just *how* big a favor?"

She didn't have time for this. "Anything, except breaking any of the really big rules. Like celibacy."

"Oh, I won't ask you for that, don't worry."

Rubi almost burst out laughing but covered her mouth just in time.

"Fine, favors for all," Ryuri said. "Now let's get going! If we do this right you all can be back in bed before Jallori comes to wake us up."

They started off up the trail. M'ronit sidled up to her and murmured, "I don't need a favor. I'll help you out just because you need it."

She looked at him curiously, but there was no time to ask what that was about. Hopefully he wasn't getting sweet on her; that would be the last thing she needed! Shaking off that thought, she spoke to all of them, keeping her voice low. "Now, Ceorth is hiding in one of the empty cots. T'yan and Rubi, let's you and I check the bunch at the eastern end. M'ronit, you check the ones right around here and M'con, you go farther west. You two be extra quiet since your areas are mostly full! Faydra's having Yttrith keep the older dragons quiet, but I don't know how much that will help if one of them wakes up annoyed. Tell me if you find Ceorth. If I can make it look like I was with him, Jallori won't bury me alive in dragoncrap."

"Fine," M'con agreed, and M'ronit nodded solemnly. M'con jogged away, and M'ronit crept quietly to the north.

Ryuri, T'yan, and Rubi walked as stealthily as they could over to the eastern end of the cots. "I still don't think this is a good idea," T'yan muttered.

"Well, I appreciate the help," Ryuri replied, hoping to soothe his prickly temper. "With four of us, this shouldn't take long, and you can get back to your dragons before anything happens."

"What would happen?" Rubi asked pointedly. "Our dragons don't go wandering off whenever we leave them alone."

**Are you coming soon?** Ceorth asked before Ryuri could answer the younger girl. **I do not think I can get out!**

Yes, we are coming, Ryuri said, motioning the other two to split up and start looking.

**Do you remember which cot you went into?** she said as she moved to yet another cot.

No. Only that I had to look at several before I found one with the door open.

Great. Probably some randy pair of weyrings had sneaked in for privacy and left the door ajar when they were done.

Ceorth went on, **I do not like being trapped in here! Come get me out soon, please?**

I will. Don't worry. I am looking for you. Jugurth's, Jerrinth's, Telyeth's and Maireth's riders are helping.

Ryuri crossed to the next cluster of cots. One of them had a half-grown blue dragon sleeping outside, so she kept even quieter.

**There you are!** Ceorth exulted. **Wait, it is not you, it is Jugurth's rider. Where are you? Jugurth's rider also asks.**

**I'm coming! Tell Jerrinth's and Telyeth's and Maireth's riders we found you and they can go back to the Barracks.**

She saw where T'yan was waving and hurried over. Ceorth burst out of the door and nearly bowled her over. She clung to his neck, but looked up to T'yan. "Thanks. I owe you. Go ahead and get back to the barracks and take care of Jugurth."

"Where are you going?" T'yan asked suspiciously.

"Making sure we have a good story for Jallori and Nusrath. Don't worry, I'll be back in time for the bell."

T'yan looked dubious, but left anyway.

**Come on, Ceorth.**

**Where are we going?**

**To the cliff.** They made their way through the thin treeline east of the cots, and Ryuri gasped when she saw what lay beyond. Dawn was breaking, far out over the ocean, painting the clouds of last night's rain with pinks and bronzes and yellows. The green shore stretched away to their right, wisps of morning fog drifting through the tops of the trees, and below her the waves crashed against the cliff, filling the air with bracing spray.

It all took her breath away. She sat there, one arm around Ceorth, who stared out at it all just as raptly as his rider. "This is why I didn't want to leave Kadanzer," she thought. "If I'd've gone back to old closed-in Fort, then I never would've..." the thought trailed off, lost in the vista before her.

**But you did not go,** Ceorth said quietly in her mind. **And I was here waiting for you. You are the right one for me. You see clearly.**

Suddenly Ryuri came back to herself, tearing away from the view with an almost physical wrench. *We've been out here too long. We can't blow it now after we dragged people out of bed to help us.*

**But I want to stay and look some more! I thought you liked seeing this?**

*I do, but it's time to get serious now. There will be other sunrises. I'll take you to see them every morning if you want, just don't run off without me anymore, all right?*

**I will try to remember,** he said as they left to return to their duties, with one last look at the dawn behind them.



They did make it back just in time. As Ryuri bathed and oiled Ceorth, Jallori came by and looked at her strangely, but said nothing.

Nor did she say anything in morning drills, even when Ryuri got through every formation without a single misstep.

Ryuri made a point of sitting next to M'ronit at lunch, and laughed at M'con's banter and Rubi's teasing. Afternoon classes went well, too.

At dinner, M'mon looked inquiringly at her from his table; because Ceorth was still asleep from his afternoon feeding, Ryuri could not answer directly, but she gave her brother a high-sign to show she had gotten away with it.

Except she had not.

**Nusrath's rider wants to see us in her weyrcot,** Ceorth said suddenly, soon before evening feeding time for the dragonets.

Nervously, Ryuri went over there and knocked on the door; Jallori let her in and motioned her to a seat.

"So, what did we learn this morning?" she asked.

"This morning?" Ryuri said with as much innocence as she could muster. "I learned that it's dangerous to go out and look at the sunrise, or I might be late."

Jallori grinned at that. "I'm talking about what happened before you went to look at the sunrise."

"How much does she know?" Ryuri wondered silently. For once she felt at a loss for words.

Jallori went on, "You let Ceorth wander off again and get stuck. Did you really think Nusrath would not notice when Ceorth was frightened?"

"I kept him as calm as I could. And I went and rescued him."

"But you let him get away in the first place, even after I warned you. I guess mucking the pit isn't enough of a lesson. Who helped you find him?"

Once, Ryuri might have told her and let her classmates take their chances. But she owed them, so she just looked silently at Jallori.

"Why aren't you telling me who helped you?" Jallori pressed.

"Because I owe them," Ryuri said finally. "I was the one who got them out of bed. They shouldn't get in trouble for what I did. I'll take whatever you have to give, but they don't deserve any of it." She braced herself for whatever the weyrlingsecond was going to say next.

Surprisingly, Jallori grinned. "I suppose you do deserve some punishment, but I have to say I'm surprised at your loyalty. Of course I already knew who was with you. I almost stopped you this morning, but I wanted to see how you would deal with the problem."

"And how well did I deal with it?" Ryuri asked, trying not to show the sudden hope that came over her.

"Maybe you did learn something from our last conversation after all. I've just gotten done talking with M'ronit, M'con, T'yan, and Rubi, and they defended you quite well."

'That's another one I owe them,' she thought. Ryuri was not about to ask why Faydra had been left out, but she thought she could guess.

Jallori continued, "You showed initiative, and you were willing to work with others. They say you managed to keep it together even when Ceorth was obviously talking to you, unlike in drills. You still get to shovel the pit this restday, because you still did let Ceorth stray. But you've shown that you can learn, and keep your mind where it needs to be in an emergency, so I'm not going to give you anything worse. Now let's go get the dragonets fed."

They left together, Ryuri almost floating with relief as she walked.

"Ma'am?" she said, grinning. "You were right, you really did find a way to make midden-mucking seem like easy duty!"



# Kadanzer Weyr

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