
Sunrise

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"No," Resla told Serania firmly after listening to the girl's laundry list of complaints. "I won't switch partners for you again. I've rearranged your safety partners three times in six months, and I don't have any girls without pairs right now. You're going to have to learn to get along with her."

Serania gave a wail that would have done a firelizard justice. "You're so unfair! You never even listen to me!" she shouted, then turned on her heels and fled.

Hope grumbled at that disruption, the noisiest of the morning's usual steady stream of visitors, and hopped off the windowsill to walk across the counter and thrust his head into Resla's hand.

Resla scratched him with a tired sigh and shook her head. "Poor Hope," she told him. "I wish I was better company in your head right now." She turned back to the klah bark she was crushing and focused her thoughts to the duty roster she was trying to work out in her head. Farny had asked for a few extra candidates for kitchen duty that afternoon, but she didn't dare trust the two newest not to get underfoot and be more hassle than help. Perhaps if she moved Reyda from afternoon laundry duty for the day?

"Headsecond!"

Resla turned at once. "Goldrider," she greeted respectfully, and she wiped her hands on her apron. "Can I help you?"

Goldrider Lybelle had become a frequent visitor at the Weyrling Wing in the months since her arrival at Kadanzer. She and D'zan found common ground on many subjects, and the dark-skinned weyrwoman had taken a personal interest in Zherra's training.

"Yes, you can," Lybelle told her as she entered the kitchen, wearing her flight leathers and a harried expression. "Our stubborn ass of a Weyrlingmaster has something for you but thought that I might pass it off being from me." The goldrider thrust a small, heavy basket at Resla. "I told him he could give his own gifts, that I wasn't going to play some adolescent role in his little melodrama or cover up for his stupidity in losing you. I had a mind to let him Impress the thing himself -- it would serve him right to get saddled with a firelizard. But..."

"It's hatching now," Resla finished. Hope was bouncing on the counter, humming low in his chest, his attention

completely riveted on the basket that Lybelle had made her take.

"So it would seem," Lybelle said wryly. "And I really don't have the time for a firelizard."

"You could sell it," Resla offered tentatively. The sand in the basket was still, but there was a hint of vibration in her hands. "I'm sure someone would pay good marks --" She made a motion to hand her burden back.

Lybelle unexpectedly covered on of her hands on the basket. "You take it," she said firmly. "D'zan has already paid the favors for it, and... I suspect you could use it."

Resla met her eyes at that, and was surprised by the sympathy in the weyrwoman's eyes. Lybelle was friendly, and Resla appreciated her outspoken honesty and sense of humor. She was the kind of woman Resla would have liked to make a friend out of -- but the gloss of her rank was enough to keep Resla to shy smiles and polite answers. That, and the ugly, jealous self-consciousness that was aware -- too aware -- of Lybelle's grace and beauty next to her own oxen plainness.

Lybelle pulled a small, wrapped package that smelled of fish from a pocket and put it into Resla's free hand. "I've lost a child myself, Resla," she said forthrightly. "It's no secret that you took your loss hard. There's no shame in that... but sometimes it helps to have something that really needs you to look after it for a while."

Hope interrupted his humming with a squawk. Even having the advantage of his scatter-brained thoughts couldn't help Resla decide if he was agreeing or protesting Lybelle's words.

"Anyway, whether you take it as a gift from me or from D'zan, you don't have much of a choice now," Lybelle said crisply. "I'm needed to fly 'Fall, and that thing's closer to cracking than a virgin weyrling at the six-month mark!"

"Thank you," Resla said faintly but sincerely, with a creeping smile.

Lybelle chuckled as she turned to go. "I'd almost rather have saddled D'zan with the creature, but I think you'll give the poor beast a warmer welcome."

Resla turned numbly back to the counter as Lybelle took her leave, and nearly dropped the basket as it jumped in her hands. Half of a dozen firelizards had appeared out of nowhere and were perching around the kitchen, carefully clear of Hope, and adding their hums to the bronze's efforts.

Resla carefully tipped the basket on its side, emptying a small mountain of sand onto her counter, and one jerking egg. It was the largest firelizard egg Resla had ever seen, and it was wriggling at an increasing rate as its occupant struggled for freedom.

The humming filled the kitchen, beating at the headsecond's eardrums. The crack split further, and a shard of shell detached itself from the egg. A claw was first through, stuck within the egg mucus but free of shell, then another shard sprang free and a head and part of a wing joined the claw. After a tiny flurry of motion, a very wet, very golden firelizard struggled free and sat up to pose for

her very rapt audience.

For a moment, Resla forgot about the fish in her hand, too enthralled by the little gold's tiny size and newness. Hope trilled at both of them, and Resla remembered to offer the gold a piece of meat.

****hungry-hungry-new-strange-hungry-love**** The gold gobbled at the food, and took more as long as Resla offered it, until she had almost eaten her own bodyweight's worth. She then burped, lay down as if her legs had failed her, and fell asleep. Hope cheerfully ate the remains; his own breakfast was buried further back than his little memory reached, and the gold's thoughts had convinced him he was hungry, too.

Resla sank into a chair, the little gold limp in the crook of her elbow. Impression was like clarity – she could look back at the last months events with more distance and less pain than she had been able to in a very long time. What a fool she'd been; all caught up in her silly, doomed love affair with D'zan. He'd been nothing but kind to her since she'd broken off their relationship, and that he would still think to make sure she got this gift was a pleasant and eye-opening surprise. From the beginning, their friendship had been more important than the stolen nights – she was an idiot to lose sight of that, and more of an idiot to fixate on her own flaws to the point of feeling like someone not worth a friendship.

"Headseond Reslaaaaaa!" Kezuan tripped up the steps and stopped in astonishment at the sight of the egg shards and sand littering the kitchen counter. "Where did you get that?" he asked, spotting the new firelizard. "Jays! She's a pretty one, isn't she!"

"She's beautiful," Resla said, and her face felt strange and unfamiliar until she realized she was smiling, as she hadn't smiled in a very long time. "Her name is Sunrise, and..." she considered a moment. Whether it was from D'zan or from Lybelle: "I got her from a very good friend."



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