
Welcome to the Family

by Smitty & Whitney Ware

2858.05.16

Printed in FTA #22 (2005)

This story is printed by Kadanzer Weyr (www.kadanzer.org), a fan club approved by Anne McCaffrey in 1995. Kadanzer Weyr is a non-profit group -- all materials pertaining to Ms. McCaffrey's works displayed on this website may only be accessed for personal, non-commercial purposes. Please do not reproduce without permission. All references to worlds and characters based on Anne McCaffrey's fiction are copyright© Anne McCaffrey 1967, 2005, all rights reserved, and used by permission of the author. The Dragonriders of Pern® is registered U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, by Anne McCaffrey, used here with permission. Use or reproduction without a license is strictly prohibited.

Amiseth's clutch was hardening on the sands and liable to crack within the next three or four days, the Weyr was short half a dozen candidates for the Hatching yet, they were short twice that many candidate robes still, and the Weyrlingmaster had just spent a long, miserable, sleepless night in the Infirmary, holding his Headsecond's hand as Resla had miscarried a child neither of them had even realized she was carrying. He still had familiarization flights to oversee with L'ward's class that afternoon, rope drills with E'zok's, and had flown through the morning's rope drills with Ambri's class in a dangerous daze, the likes of which would have earned any of the weyrlings a hard cuff to the ear. Now D'zan sat at his office desk, a requisition form half-completed beneath a quill long since gone dry, and staring hard at some spot of *between* that had materialized between his ink pot and the cold cup of klah.

He had left Resla in the Infirmary that morning, where Glynda and the other healers wanted her for a day of observation. His headsecond was a strong woman, and D'zan had little doubt that she would recover fully. But her fall yesterday, and the horrible resulting surprise, had left its painful mark. D'zan had left her this morning with promises made. Resla had spoken of wanting to try again to bear him a child. And he had agreed to that, and at the time, his agreement had been whole-hearted.

It still was, he thought. But a child would be a complication. Their relationship was nothing but a complication. D'zan was painfully aware that it was a taboo at the Weyr for a wingleader or wingsecond to sleep with his subordinates. Granted – Headsecond Resla was technically supposed to report directly to Headwoman Raecliffe, but she still worked closely enough with him on a day-to-day basis that he, and the rest of the Weyrling Wing, generally considered Resla a part of the Weyrling Wing, rather than a member of the support staff hierarchy. Greenriders like Tildy or Karlina might pass that sort of restriction without comment – but D'zan had felt, many times, that his relationship with Resla was somehow not appropriate, and while he did not regret a moment of solace he had found with her, his pride still rankled at knowing what he had chosen to do might be viewed as some as contrary to the very rules he was training up in his students. As a result, he

tried to keep their relationship as quiet and unobtrusive as possible, not wanting to flaunt himself as a hypocrite to the rest of the Weyr.

But the events of last night, and this morning's promises, changed things considerably. Resla wanted to bear his child. And D'zan had been raised to know what was proper, at least by holder terms. If she was going to be a mother to his children, and to share his bed at night – then he knew what he needed to do. Wanted to do. The next restday he had, he needed to visit a jewelsmith's stall at some gather and find a ring. Make Resla an honest woman, and do her proud. The Weyrwoman normally wouldn't allow a dragonman to marry, but even Valenne would see the sense in this. And D'zan figured he had earned the right to be an exception to that rule. He had served the Weyr long enough, and bled enough for it – certainly Valenne would grant him and Resla their happiness...

There was a knock at the office door. D'zan shook himself alert and quickly dipped the quill into the ink pot, not wanting to be caught wool-gathering. "Come in," he called.

The door opened, and Tori, his oldest daughter, stepped in. D'zan put aside the wet quill at once, his heart lightening at the sight of her. "Good afternoon, kitten," he said, while thinking with some dismay that she must have already heard rumors about Resla's miscarriage. No doubt they had been swirling like a pair of firelizards since breakfast.

Tori crossed the room and sat in the upholstered chair across from his desk. He watched her with pride, aware of her grace and beauty and wondering, as he always had, how any such perfection could have come from his loins. She was dressed in a blue gown, her chestnut hair swept back with a simple ivory pin, and her tanned skin glowed with health. "I was looking for you in the Weyrhall," she said, giving her father that familiar smile that had always melted his heart. "I didn't see you at lunch; I'm so sorry to hear about Resla."

"Resla will recover," D'zan said. He hesitated, almost about to confess his intentions, then held back. No, Resla herself should be the first to know. "How is Zeliath today?"

"Oh, she's fine. We hunted this morning with some of our wingmates, and she's sleeping off a belly full of wherry now." Tori hesitated then, and smoothed out the folds of her gown with a quick, anxious hand. D'zan saw that, and looked at his daughter again. Tori's smile was brilliant, and belatedly, D'zan recognized the sparkle in his eldest's eyes.

"What is it?" D'zan asked, leaning forward, across the desk toward her. "You're here for something other than condolences for Resla."

Tori laughed, and her hands did another quick pass over her thighs to smooth away non-existent wrinkles. "This is probably a bad time for this, I know – but you deserve to hear it from me first, and not from one of my wingmates or the support staff gossips. Daddy, I'm pregnant."

D'zan sat and stared. The words hit him like a blow, and he felt his hands curl into fists. Tori watched the shifting expression on her father's face, and laughed knowingly.

"Oh, da', don't be like that," she said. "I'm so happy! I'm going to have this baby, and you're going to be a grandsire. Isn't that wonderful?"

Tori was nineteen Turns old. If she were a holdergirl, she would have likely married two or three Turns ago, and would already have one or two children at her skirts. But Tori wasn't just some holdergirl. She was *his*. *His* firstborn child. *His* baby girl. And some randy dragonrider had violated her. "Who is the father?"

Tori grinned, unperturbed by the fierceness of her father's voice or expression. "Does it matter?" she countered. "I love you, Da', but I don't want to see you go hurt someone. Certainly the Weyrwoman wouldn't approve or understand, and I'm sure I don't want to see you try and force my hand in marriage!" She laughed happily and rested her hands on her flat stomach. "I just want you to be one of the first to know. I'm going to keep flying with SkySoaring for as long as I'm able. And I want it to be a girl, so I can name her after Mother."

That sent his heart seizing in his throat. D'zan swallowed with difficulty, his rage flooding away as suddenly as it had come. "Oh, kitten—" he said, choking on what he feared might be tears.

Tori rose to her feet and came around her desk to hug him. He rose, arms open, and embraced her tightly. "Da', I just want you to be proud of me, and happy for me. You're going to have a grandchild. Isn't that wonderful?" she whispered against his shoulder.

"I've always been proud of you," D'zan said against her chestnut crown. "And I always will be. Nothing can change that, kitten."

"You'll be happy for me, then?"

D'zan managed a strangled laugh. "When I get over the shock of it, sweet, yes, of course. My baby, having a baby. I can't believe it."

Tori drew back far enough to beam up at him, tears overflowing from her hazel eyes. "Believe it, daddy. You're going to be a grandsire."

They hugged for a while longer, and then Tori stiffened in his arms. "Zeliath has woken," she said, stepping back and wiping at her face.

D'zan reached up to brush tears from her face. "Go, and we'll talk about this again tonight," he said. Tori nodded and turned to go. He followed her to the door, and stood there for a time, watching her walk away, his own thoughts scattered and bouncing like henscratch.

It was only when D'zan was about to turn back to his work that he saw a lean figure in flight leathers slip out of the trees to intercept Tori. A familiar brown-haired head leaned close in urgent conversation, then the pair traded a friendly embrace. D'zan's eyes narrowed dangerously, and he was staring murder at Bh'ruk's back when the weyrling bronzerider turned away from Tori's hug and found himself caught out. Even from a distance, D'zan could see how the boy's face paled and his blue eyes widened in dismay.

"Yeah, you whorson," D'zan muttered. "You touched my daughter. Be afraid. Be very afraid."



Much to his own surprise, Bh'ruk had survived the afternoon's rope drills. The exercises had been getting increasingly more difficult over the last couple of sevendays, and today they had been escorted by both Weyrlingsecond E'zok and the Weyrlingmaster to the rolling hill country of Izmir, where the afternoon sun could be guaranteed to raise a good bit of turbulence. Telia had avoided colliding with Halrae only by a few fingerlengths; N'kalo's brown Cavalth had nearly flamed Tyleta's Bolyanth; Bolyanth had responded with a swipe of claws which would mean stitches for Cavalth; Neicea, J'rald and Z'min had all dropped firestone sacks; and through the whole afternoon the Weyrlingmaster's brown Yoseth had flown with eyes that roiled in shades of red and orange. D'zan's orders were normally short and terse; during the afternoon's drills, they had practically been blazing, enough so that all of the dragonets were keeping their distance from Yoseth.

Having bathed and cared for their weary dragons, the weyrings of Class #24 filed into the lecture hall for the regular drill debriefing. Weyrlingsecond E'zok was already there, standing tall and grim by the podium. Bh'ruk dropped onto a bench at the end of a row beside R'ka, feeling loose-boned from exhaustion and anxiety. It had been no secret to *him* why the Weyrlingmaster and his brown had been radiating anger all afternoon, and he was grateful that it was only E'zok now in front of the podium.

"Hope it doesn't take the Weyrlingsecond that long to skin N'kalo, J'rald and the rest," R'ka said in an undertone to Bh'ruk. "I'm starved! The sooner we get away to supper, the better!"

"Yeah," Bh'ruk agreed, while mentally counting up favor points, to see who he might be able to get to sneak him a meal from the kitchens -- he didn't want to risk being under the same roof with the Weyrlingmaster, not tonight, not until Tori had finished gentling her father's infamous temper. Perhaps Luka might; the goldrider still owed him for that bag of treehoppers. The thought of spending the dinner hour in Luka's fair company was enough to begin to rally his spirits...

Then the lecture hall door opened and the Weyrlingmaster came limping through, his face set like thunder. Bh'ruk swallowed convulsively and slunk down in his seat.

"So much for dinner at a reasonable hour," R'ka said mournfully.

The Weyrlingmaster reached the front of the room and stood to one side of the podium, his arms crossed over his chest. D'zan stood staring fixed murder at Bh'ruk as Weyrlingsecond E'zok began his debriefing.

"I didn't think you crack-skulled weyrings could flame out any worse than you did yesterday, but once again, you sorry failures have proved me wrong," E'zok started, launching into his usual compassionate pep talk. "It might

just take us all night, but let's review your mistakes of today and see if *maybe* you might learn to avoid them tomorrow..."

E'zok launched into a rotating dress-down of several of Bh'ruk's classmates, most notably N'kalo, Telia and Tyleta. Bh'ruk tried to focus on what was being said, but he was far too aware of D'zan's steady, unblinking stare. He avoided looking at the Weyrlingmaster and fought at first to simply present the façade of ignorance, but the effort soon failed and he sat squirming, conscious of the beads of sweat that had popped out on his brow. Other weyrings were beginning to notice as well; there were curious looks being slid in Bh'ruk's direction, while R'ka had begun to imperceptibly edge away.

"-- I understand your dragon has a remarkable temper on her," E'zok was chastising Tyleta, "but that does *not* mean that you can allow her to respond when provoked, especially when her manner of response means a visit to the Dragonhealers --"

Bh'ruk couldn't help himself. He met D'zan's steady, furious stare for a moment, and knew that he winced visibly. Tori's father looked like he wanted to just *kill* him, and Bh'ruk could only imagine that the man was planning murder. A very gruesome, bloody, and drawn out murder.

"But it's not my fault!" he wanted to protest. It had been Tori's idea -- she had been the one to find him that night on the beach. She had been the one with the offer to celebrate their almost-shared birthday -- after six months of celibacy and a month of only playing with his classmates, he could hardly be blamed for what had followed. Only a dead man or one completely cold to women would have been able to keep his hands off of Tori after the first few shared kisses.... Not his fault at all; any man would have done it, and well, babies were just sometimes the result. The Weyrlingmaster, of all men, should know that, considering his own ever-expanding brood of the creatures --

Abruptly, D'zan took a limping step towards the podium. E'zok gave him a glance and stopped his lecture midsentence, looking curiously towards Bh'ruk as he stepped aside and gave up the speaker's spot to the Weyrlingmaster.

D'zan's stare never wavered from Bh'ruk as he began to speak. "You are all young, and being young, you all suffer from misguided faith in your own immortality. To think that you and your dragon will survive to see the end of this Pass is delusional. Two of your own classmates have already died, and any one of you could be next."

There was a nervous stir around Bh'ruk, and R'ka managed to scoot a little farther away. The young bronzerider tried to straighten his spine and put on a show of not being alarmed by either the Weyrlingmaster's determined stare or the inevitably gruesome content of the lecture.

"As an example, let me spell out to you how my own classmates have died. Out of the twenty-two of us in gold Elseth's clutch, only two of us remain today -- myself and bluerider L'ward. Greenrider Salla was tortured to death by the Riverman. Half a dozen others died in the Poisoning.

One died in childbirth, and another of firehead. Of those remaining, ten died in Threadfall within the first Turn of the Pass."

The nervous stir continued, as Bh'ruk's classmates squirmed in their seats, anticipating something dreadful. The Weyrlingmaster didn't disappoint.

"Ilana, rider of green Navuth, disemboweled her own dragon by flying too close to the treetops during a nighttime 'Fall,' D'zan said, his voice even and unemotional. "T'lal suffered a Threadscore to one shoulder. The burn didn't kill him, but dismounting from his dragon did. He fell and broke his neck. Fira was holderbred and treasured her long curls. She flew with a loose braid, and didn't know it'd been snarled by Thread until the Thread had eaten its way to the nape of her neck."

That got a moan from Telia's side of the room. The Weyrlingmaster continued without hesitation, and without shifting his stare away from Bh'ruk to acknowledge the outburst. "B'seran got cocky, and his Soreth was flamed by another dragonpair after B'seran failed to announce which clump of Thread he was angling for. S'vin, rider of blue Gildith, died when Thread caught him across the throat. Gildith made it back to the Weyr, but S'vin drowned from his own blood flooding down his windpipe. J'doni, Eirath's rider, was hit by a dropped sack of firestone. It obliterated his head."

Another groan, this time from the other side of the lecture hall. E'zok was nodding at each method of death, not looking surprised by any of them. "Engra had Thread eat through half of her riding straps," D'zan continued. "Her green skipped *between* neatly enough, but the straps broke; Engra remain strapped to her dragon, but whiplash snapped her spine. She survived for two months, paralyzed, before an infection from the catheter in her bladder finally killed her. G'dar's riding straps were severed, and he fell off his dragon. Blue Nyelth caught him -- but incidentally put a talon through his belly. I don't know how Thread caught Lasri and green Telyth -- they just went *between* and never came back. And as for A'lart, his brown took a debilitating burn to one wing and fell in an uncontrolled plummet. The queens tried to stop his fall -- but when they caught Tesranth, it was with his rider beneath him. They had to scrub A'lart off of Elseth's hide.

"And finally, there was bronzerider J'lun. He caught a lap full of Thread. It didn't kill him -- but it left him wishing it had...." For the first time, D'zan's expression shifted, from sober grimness to what Bh'ruk feared might pass for a smile. "The Poisoning was probably a blessing to J'lun," the Weyrlingmaster finished, his eyes never having once moved from Bh'ruk's sweating face. The young bronzerider met D'zan's eyes for the second time, and couldn't help but squirm at the promise he saw there.

Message delivered, D'zan nodded imperceptibly and stepped back from the podium to allowed E'zok to return to the interrupted lecture.



Released from the lecture hall, the weyrlings fled for dinner and the Weyrhall. D'zan watched them go, unable to keep his lips from twitching with dark amusement.

"That was a notable lecture," E'zok observed, giving the Weyrlingmaster a wry look as both brownriders began to follow after the weyrlings. "It's one thing to keep the blighters on their toes, and another to try and scare the piss out of them. So let me ask. What's got your straps in such a twist? You had Bh'ruk squirming like a treehopper with its tail in a trap. The bronzerider do something I should be aware of?"

"The randy little bastard got my Tori pregnant," D'zan replied.

E'zok's dark brows rose in surprise. "I suppose congratulations are not in order, then?"

D'zan snorted in disgust. Watching Bh'ruk squirm had done wonders for D'zan's sense of justice in the world, and the rage that had fueled him for most of the afternoon had been vented. "Tori's happy enough. She's planning to carry the baby to term, even name it after her mother if it's a girl. I just wish my girl had a little bit better taste in men."

"Well, Bh'ruk *is* a bronzerider," E'zok said, smiling now. "By some standards, that's good taste."

"Huh." D'zan rolled a dry look at his weyrlingsecond. "Considering the bronzerider, I'd rather Tori'd taken a fancy to glow-cavern drudge. Bh'ruk is as fickle as a greenrider. He's already fathered some sprouts around the Weyr, and you see how well he's stuck by their mothers."

"Bh'ruk's a good weyrlad," E'zok replied. "Stop sounding like such a holder. What, you want to see the boy get down on his knees and propose marriage to your daughter? I'd bet you'd be outraged if Bh'ruk did – and furious with Tori if she accepted."

That was true enough. D'zan nodded grudgingly. "Bh'ruk's too leaky a boat to carry any cargo, but he's not been half-bad a student. Tori could have done worse," he admitted.

"Wingleader Z'hon," E'zok agreed.

"That's my girl you're disparaging," D'zan grumbled. Then he smirked. "Or Bluerider W'ldo."

"And make your grandson eligible in that line of succession?" E'zok snorted. "Oh no, that's really unkind. No, it could always be worse. Bluerider B'baer."

That finally earned D'zan's grudging laughter. "You're right. You've convinced me. There could be worse men to welcome into the family."



"Oh, Bh'ruk – you are *so* dead!" groaned Syrenni, batting her eyelashes dramatically as she spoke. "You haven't a Thread's chance in an open sea. The Weyrlingmaster is going to kill you!"

"Too late to learn now to keep it in your pants, isn't it?" Halrae said dryly, while others in the cluster of weyrlings

sitting around Bh'ruk at the dinner table laughed at the bronzerider's obvious discomfiture.

"Hey, it's not *my* fault! Not completely! It *does* take two to make a baby!" Bh'ruk protested. "Tori's just as much to blame as I am."

"I doubt Tori's father is going to see it that way," R'ka laughed, spearing a bit of sliced root off of Bh'ruk's plate.

"Fathers never do," Tyleta agreed. "Bh'ruk, you're a dead man. My only question is –"

"How is he gonna kill you?" interrupted Syrenni helpfully. "And when is he gonna do it?"

"How messy can D'zan possibly make it?" J'rald said.

"You mean, just how drawn out and agonizing?" N'kalo grinned.

"My only question is," Tyleta continued pointedly, "won't be how, or when, or just how bloody – but how in the blazes to do it and get away with it. I mean, not even Weyrlingmaster D'zan can murder another dragonrider and get away with it. Right?"

"I don't know," Halrae said knowingly. "There was that time when –"

"Jays!" Telia squealed. "Here comes the Weyrlingmaster!"

The cluster of weyrlings around Bh'ruk scattered like hens before a tunnelsnake, leaving Bh'ruk to eye the Weyrlingmaster's approach warily. The bronzerider swallowed nervously and began to sink down on his seat.

The Weyrlingmaster limped up and sat, his stare fixed on Bh'ruk's face. "Bronzerider," D'zan said, his scowl unforgiving and his voice dangerously bland. "You have something to say for yourself?"

Bh'ruk looked at the brownrider, trying to weigh his options. "No, sir," he chose to say at last. "I don't think that I do."

D'zan nodded amiably. "Seems we have a small problem to address. When the six-month weyrlings are giving loose reins to get frisky again, do you or do you not remember the condition that weyrlings are allowed only to sleep with one another – not with the rest of the Weyr's population at large?"

"Yes, sir," The young bronzerider winced. "I do remember that, sir. But..." Bh'ruk hesitated, then decided that he might as well stick to the truth, no matter how incendiary a holdbred father might find it. "The greenrider approached me, sir. It would have been impolite to refuse a request from a full rider."

The Weyrlingmaster's face made a curious transformation, from studied blandness, to anger, to a wry amusement. D'zan leaned back and looked at Bh'ruk for a moment longer, then shook his head grudgingly. "You've got more nerve than brains, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir," Bh'ruk agreed, reverting to the safest route again. "Quite possibly, sir."

"Good answer. But doesn't solve our little problem. You got my daughter pregnant. What do you intend to do about that?"

Bh'ruk winced -- the moment he had dreaded had arrived. "I rather think that any decisions are Tori's to make, sir, not mine," he said carefully. "I'll support her in whatever choice she makes... but this *is* the Weyr, sir. I won't be asking to marry your daughter."

To Bh'ruk's surprise, the Weyrilingmaster continued to watch him evenly, with no flare of his notorious temper. "Bronzerider arrogance," D'zan said, as if noting a test response. "And what makes you think my daughter would even want to marry you, if the Weyr or I were to allow it?"

That, Bh'ruk thought, was something of a moot point, as seawhers would fly to the moons before he asked for anyone's hand in marriage, pregnant or not. He decided that that might not be the best approach to take with D'zan however, and instead said, "I can't speak for what Tori might want, sir, but I somehow doubt that either you *or* the Weyr would be able to stop your daughter from managing her affairs in any way she saw fit."

The Weyrilingmaster began to smile. "Aye. True enough. I'll be honest with you -- and I'm sure this'll be no surprise. I'm not glad that you've left my little girl with child. But Tori chose you, and she's choosing this child, and I've as little say in that matter as you do. You're going to be the father of my grandchild." Abruptly, D'zan stood and offered Bh'ruk a hand. "Welcome to the family, Bh'ruk. And welcome to a month on laundry detail. I'd send you to the middens, but tanner-lad that you are, soap probably bothers you more than a little shit."

"Punishment duty?" Bh'ruk asked, cautiously taking the Weyrilingmaster's hand and shaking it.

"Weyriling restrictions are that you only stick it in other weyrlings. Next time you get the itch, boy -- make it another weyrling, or make sure it won't be someone you can knock up. Otherwise, you'll still be working punishment duty in the laundry when my grandchild's born." D'zan clapped Bh'ruk on the shoulder. "And I'm sure my daughter doesn't want that. So don't disappoint her -- or me."



Kadanzer Weyr

Alternate Tenth Pass *Dragonriders of Pern*® Fanclub

www.kadanzer.org