
Life at the Weyr

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"Where do they all *come* from?" Tasyr said.

He and his two-years-older brother Tanyer bent over their hoes in the long rows of potatoes, attacking the weeds with vigor. It never seemed to matter how much time they spent on the sharding things, the weeds always came back in force, and they always seemed to bring reinforcements. All the youth -- many of them cousins in some way or other -- had turned out of the cothold on this Thread-free day to rid the late summer crops of weeds.

"Look at it this way," Tanyer said, "at least we aren't hauling rocks." He winked at Tasyr, who laughed. Every spring, once the ground had thawed somewhat, the fields had to be cleared of rocks before they could be sown -- and Tasyr often asked the same question then.

Tanyer was old enough to have other tasks (as their oldest brother, Telarin, frequently reminded him), but he and Tasyr enjoyed these earthy chores; it offered relief from the crowded, stuffy cot.

"Have you seen the new family that moved into the cothold over the hill last sevenday?" Tanyer said. The group had traveled through and paid their respects before the last Threadfall.

"Yeah," Tasyr said, "the one with seven daughters? Better keep away from 'em. What would you tell your new girlfriend?"

Tanyer flushed, but instead of picking a fight, he leaned over, grabbed a particularly stubborn weed and yanked it out by the root. He flung it towards a small handcart already stacked high with weeds. "I just thought you might be interested in them. You need a girlfriend too."

Tasyr felt his face go hot. He quickly recovered, though. "Nah," he said, "has time for girls? There's too much else to do."

"Yeah, like what? This?" Tanyer yanked out another weed and threw it at Tasyr's head. With a laugh, Tasyr ducked and caught it, and tossed it at the pile.

"Well, if you're so eager to be married and settled just like Telarin..." Their oldest brother, at twenty-seven Turns, had a pleasant, plump wife and three children already. He'd been eighteen, just Tanyer's age, when he'd married.

Tanyer smirked, then tossed another handful of weeds at the cart. "Time to empty out. Finish off this row; I'll be

back." Tanyer headed off to the compost heaps bordering the field.

Tasyr sighed, glad to leave that train of thought alone. He would never admit to his brother that it wasn't the *daughters* he thought were cute, but the son, about Tasyr's own age. Those were forbidden thoughts, things on which it was best not to dwell. He would do his duty; perhaps marry if his father arranged it. He knew he wouldn't be happy, but what else was there for him to do?

He hated keeping secrets from Tanyer, but he also wanted to stay friends with him. If his brother ever found out... Tasyr suspected how he would react, and it wouldn't be good.

Tasyr worked on, then, hoeing diligently and stacking more weeds in a new pile for Tanyer to pick up when he returned with the cart -- but he stopped when he heard excited voices and shouts. The group of boys nearest were looking up and pointing. Tasyr followed their gesture.

A blue dragon circled above the hold. Another appeared above it out of *between*. Together the dragons circled down to land at the main cothold proper. "Whoa," Tasyr breathed. He heard other noises of awe and curiosity around him. Everyone had stopped to watch, just as he had.

No more work today, he thought; not until the dragons were gone.

Tanyer pulled up behind him with the cart. "Wow, look at that!"

"Search, you think?"

"I heard there's eggs on the sands at Kadanzer," Tanyer said, shading his eyes and squinting toward the cot.

Tasyr's heart skipped. Search dragons came through perhaps once a Turn, but Tasyr could only barely remember one of his elder cousins being Searched years ago. And he'd come back without Impressing.

Maybe this time was Tasyr's chance.

Sure enough, it wasn't long before a messenger from the cot came to the fields to gather all the fifteen- to 20-year-olds. Tanyer and Tasyr grinned at each other, left their hoes and cart at the edge of the field and ran up to the hold proper. Whatever the adults thought about Weyr life, *they* had always been curious, and met the chance to be Searched eagerly. Besides, any chance to postpone chores was welcome.



It was over quickly. The growing mob of youth -- boys and girls, though fewer of the latter -- was introduced to L'rino and Branth, and Z'blon and Toreth. L'rino surveyed the group, asking each in turn their names and ages.

Then it was done, and the dragons circled again over the hold and winked away *between*.

The whole thing was always anticlimactic to Tasyr. He leaned over to Tanyer as they headed back to chores. "I still can't believe that's *it*. And no clue, whether or not you're chosen. I wish they just told us right out! I hope they come

back soon! This waiting thing is so..." He gesticulated wildly.

Tanyer shrugged. "Not that they'll pick anyone, anyway... Dragons aren't for us; we'll be simple farm folk forever."



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A seven-day later, Tasyr and Tanyer were summoned together to see their father. He seemed somewhat pensive as he gestured them into his "office" -- basically a desk in a corner of their family's main cotroom.

"You've both been Searched," he said without preamble.

Tasyr blinked, not certain he heard right. He glanced sideways at Tanyer, and almost laughed when he saw his brother's mouth gaping open.

"Searched?" Tanyer said after a long pause. "You mean it? Can we go?"

Their father nodded. "I won't hold either of you back. After all, I've two sons older than you... Not that we can't use you, of course." He smiled. "We always need more field hands. But dragonriders have rank. Something I can't give you. And if you've a chance at that... So few are Searched from our cot, and I'll not deny we could use someone with that kind of rank in the family.

"But I want you to remember a few things before you make this choice." He heaved a deep sigh. "Life at the Weyr is different. They have different... ideas... of what is right and wrong. Now, I know you've been taught well, and I expect you to uphold the honor of your family and conduct yourselves accordingly. You're always welcome back if you don't..." (he waved one hand) "... you know. Impress. But you boys are close enough to being men; I expect you can make your own decisions for your future. If it's what you really want."

Tanyer smiled. "Of course, Father. Thank you."

Tasyr murmured his own thanks, still stunned. The Weyr!

Not much of one for displays of affection, their father came around the desk and put one hand on Tanyer's shoulder and the other on Tasyr's. "I know you'll both do your family proud."



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A dragon came two days later, in response to the flag, and whisked them away to the Weyr.

They landed, still shivering with cold and fright from *between*, to find the Weyr just as big and boisterous as they had always imagined. Moreso in some ways, because it was so *real*. At the cothold, dragons were rare sights. At the Weyr, of course, dragons were everywhere.

That night in their newly-assigned bunks at the Candidate barracks, they talked into the wee hours, their voices low, still trying to absorb everything -- the whirlwind of new people whose names they had to keep straight, their first reading and writing lessons, and the first of their lectures as candidates.

"Did you hear?" Tanyer whispered. "Sometimes, you know, boys Impress green dragons. And when they rise to mate? The rider has to respond to his dragon's urges. And has to... you know... with whichever rider's dragon catches his green. With men. Ugh. I just don't know how I could handle that."

"You'd just better not Impress a green, then," Tasyr replied, trying not to sound sarcastic.

"Yeah... I'd better get a bronze. Or at least a brown. If I get anything at all. Maybe I'll have to go back to being a farmer again."

Tasyr didn't know quite what to say to that, so he said nothing.

"Did you see the girl candidates?" Tanyer said. "Some of them are pretty cute!"

Tasyr grunted. "You heard what Father said."

"Yeah... but he's not here, is he?"

Tasyr said nothing for a moment. Then, "No, I guess he's not." He felt a mixture of nervous relief, thinking about it.

"And weyrfolk seem a lot more comfortable about... er... you know." He sighed, and Tasyr heard him shift in his bunk. "I think I could get used to Weyr life."

"Hey, pipe down... some of us have First Bell!" came a disembodied voice from elsewhere in the barracks.

"Yeah," said another. "Just pipe down and let some of us sleep." Then a grumpy aside, "*Holdbreds...*"

Tanyer was quiet then. Grateful, Tasyr feigned sleep... but he lay awake a long time, thinking about life at the Weyr, and that he might truly be happy... that he wouldn't have to pretend. But what would Tanyer think -- and what would he tell their father -- if he found out -- *when* he found out -- that Tasyr liked boys?



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