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# Searching

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“What?” Cybris felt her stomach drop in—fear? Joy? She wasn't quite sure. Automatically, she wiped her clay-covered hands on her apron and stood up; leaving the unfinished bowl she was turning where it was.

“I just got the notice from the Seaholder,” Cybris' mother, Deidre, said quietly. “Kadanzer Weyr has requested that you come and stand as a Candidate for the next clutch. You've been Searched.”

Cybris listened in amazement. She had tried to forget the Searchriders' visit to Dog Creek Seahold but had been unsuccessful. The Searchriders had awed her, though she had hidden it well and responded to their questioning — and the dragons' scrutiny — without hesitation. She had not expected them to deem her worthy of this kind of challenge. She searched her mother's face for answers. Even such profound news would not normally have roused Deidre from the menial tasks her depression had relegated her to. “But do I...?”

Her mother's smile did not alter the deep sadness that filled the fine lines on her face. “That is for you to decide, daughter. I want you to have that right.”

“R-really?” Cybris said, numbed with disbelief. It was one thing to be Searched, but quite another to be allowed to go to the Weyr. Deidre gathered her skirts and sat on the wooden bench beside her daughter, taking a clay-smear hand.

“Your father was Seaholder. If he was still alive, it would have been his decision—after Lord Morgav. And why would Cibola prevent my daughter from Standing? But I think, out of respect for Velk, our Seaholder gave me the Search request himself.”

Cybris felt a wash of gratitude towards Seaholder Tibeer. He was a fair, energetic leader who had voiced serious concerns for Cybris' family after Seaholder Velk and his oldest son were killed out at sea almost two Turns ago. Although Deidre's continuing depression had been unwelcome and unwarranted in his — and many of the other holders' — eyes, Tibeer had still maintained a respectful attitude. The fact that he had approached Deidre first with the news even though most of the holders regarded her with pity and poorly concealed disdain, spoke volumes of his character. Of course, Cybris' family was helped generously after the accident, but Cybris herself had been left to fill her mother's absence in the community when it became clear Deidre was not recovering. She hadn't minded; it kept her thoughts off her brother's and father's deaths, and it served

the purpose of quashing the resentment created by her family's extended needs. It also had taught her to bury her thoughts and emotions deep, and control her response to anything so that she would not be seen as weak. She was not cold, because then people would think she hadn't dealt with her pain properly. She was controlled. But Deidre's news was threatening that control, and despite Cybris' attempts to batten down the flood of questions and emotions, she was only partially successful.

“That was very kind of the Seaholder,” Cybris said, her voice wavering. “but I don't know what to do. I don't want to leave everyone without my help. And what about Flegian?” Cybris couldn't prevent the shudder that passed through her body at the mention of the man who had asked her to marry her days before. She felt her mother's hand tighten on her own. Cybris looked through tears at her mother's face. It had been so long since Deidre had sat with her like this — Cybris had been taking care of her for so long that she had almost forgotten how wonderful it felt to really have a mother. And there was no doubt about it: there was a light in Deidre's eyes that hadn't been there since Velk had died.

“You don't have to marry him. You have other choices you can make now.” Deidre said firmly, correctly interpreting Cybris' reaction to the name. “The dragons want you to Stand, and if you want to go to them, you have my blessing.”

“I do?” Cybris knew it wasn't usual for the Searched to get any say in the matter. There were very few that she knew of from Dog Creek who had gone to Kadanzer with the blessing of their family and Hold. “But what about the girls?” Cybris asked. She was thinking of her younger sisters, Samanta and Zei, and how they would fare if she left Dog Creek to take her chance at Impressing.

“I would suggest you ask them yourself. If you like we can meet, as a family, this evening after supper,” her mother said, giving Cybris' shoulder a squeeze as she stood up.

“Yes. I would like that.” Cybris still felt at a loss. There were so many things to consider, and she wasn't sure she was wise enough to make such a monumental decision. Her mother climbed the steps out of the potters' shed, leaving Cybris to her thoughts—and unfinished bowl.

She seated herself comfortably on the bench again and wetted her hands. The inside of the pottery shed was cool and dark, dug partway into the ground to help keep the clay moist. Although it was quite normal for several people to be working in the small building, today most were outdoors, mending nets in the gather square or out on the sea itself. The shed was also quiet, the perfect place to think. Cybris kicked her wheel into motion and set to work forming her bowl.

Clearer than most of her memories were those of the dragons sweeping low over the sea, looking for remains after the storm that took both her father and brother. The Seahold had been on notably better terms with the Weyr since they had agreed to help search for survivors, even though none had been found. Dog Creek had no watchrider—something to which Cybris had given little thought until she had watched as the signal flag snapped in the wind, hoping against hope that the dragonriders would see and help find those lost at sea. She had felt envious of the dragonriders

that day—they had actually been able to *do* something about the tragedy—while she had sat in a horrified trance with her mother and younger siblings, wishing she could go out and help the rescue teams.

In a way, that day nearly two Turns ago had marked the end of her childhood. With the death of her brother, Timas, the silly pranks on bossy holders had stopped. The wild runs, the exploration of each niche of Dog Creek, the fishing trips on Timas' small boat, even the firelizard egg digging had all ended with Timas.

The seahold had mourned—Cybris' father had been Seaholder after all—but none had mourned like Deidre. Cybris' mother had withdrawn into herself, leaving her surviving children and friends behind. She had once been headwoman, running the kitchens and her other duties with a courteous and exacting proficiency. The rest of the seahold had been sympathetic for a time and helped support Cybris' family, but eventually their distaste for idleness had let the aid dwindle. Deidre had refused to re-marry, making her even more of a burden upon the seafolk. In response, Cybris had stepped up and taken charge of her family. She found a nurse-mother for her baby brother, as Deidre was no longer caring for him. She worked as hard as three people in the kitchens, infirmary, garden, and wherever she was needed. It had been difficult, but Cybris knew she was able, and the work kept her mind off darker things.

Could she possibly Impress and become a dragonrider? What would become of her family if she left Dog Creek? But today, Cybris thought, Deidre looked better than she has in Turns. Could it be that she wants me to go to the Weyr? That must be—otherwise why would she leave it up to me to decide? Cybris finished the bowl she was working on and cut it from the wheel, setting it aside to trim later.

She cut off another chunk of clay from the supply and kneaded it on the flat stone table in the back of the shed. She thought about the unexpected marriage proposal Flegian had made and her mother's odd indication that she need not get married. Cybris had always assumed that she *would* be married at some point, and in general the idea did not frighten her. It was normal and proper to be married, and it was not normal and proper to be a dragonrider. Flegian himself, for all practical purposes, would not be a bad match, though he was easily twice Cybris' age. He had been a good friend of her father's and had visited Dog Creek to trade goods and gossip during Gatherdays since before she could remember. Cybris had seen little practical reason to refuse him, as he would be able to support her and her family easily. Flegian lived at a small farming cothold not far inland from Dog Creek, and did reasonably well for himself. Marrying him would move the family away from home, and it occurred to Cybris that, while her sisters might miss the seahold, it could help her mother get over the death of her husband.

When Flegian asked her it had seemed—and she typically trusted her instincts about others—that he felt sorry for her. She pounded a large lump of clay into a squashed cone and threw it on the wheel, comforted by the satisfying smack it made as it stuck there. Cybris didn't understand why he also seemed guilty; did he think that she couldn't cope without her father and that he should have cared for her family since Velk's death? She hated the idea that others

might think that she wasn't strong enough to survive and support her family herself. Hadn't she risen to the challenge after the tragedy and taken control of the situation, her own emotions aside?

She supposed she was spoiled in a sense—her parents had been in love when they had married—and she knew she was unattached to the idea of marrying to get any help with her family. More important was the fact that she did not want to marry a man that made her feel snubbed and uneasy. "It isn't marriage in general," Cybris told herself, "just, why does it have to be *him*?" She kicked the wheel into motion and studied the off-centered tilt of her clay. "And now what?" Cybris mused. "Not only do I not have to marry him, but I have the option to go to the Weyr and do some real good." Helping her family and hold was rewarding, but Cybris felt like she should be doing more.

Now there was this other offer and a real chance to make a difference. As a dragonrider, she presumed, she would have greater control over her life than if she were married. She would be able to protect her sisters and the people she loved. A dragon could very well be the tool she had longed for to help regain the respect that her family was due, and that she had been hard pressed to maintain the past couple Turns.

Her mother had said that she didn't need to get married. Cybris certainly knew she didn't need rescuing, if that was what marriage to Flegian was going to be about. And no matter how she looked at it, she couldn't get around the fact that Flegian made her skin crawl. That alone was reason enough, she justified, to hesitate. She pressed her thumb on the bubbles that were forced to the surface, popping them.

She wetted her hands in the pan of water sitting next to her and started shaping another bowl—a larger one with steeper sides.



Samanta hit Cybris' legs with a squeal of excitement. "You're gonna ride a queen. A queen!"

Cybris laughed and extricated herself from her five-Turn-old sister's grip, "Even if I go to the Weyr, I doubt I'll get a queen dragon, Sammy. Girls can get green dragons—remember the Searchriders?"

Evening was falling and, at Deidre's request, the family had met in their apartment after Cybris finished up in the kitchen for the evening. The sounds of rowdy singing in the cot next to theirs spoke of a fruitful fishing trip, and in their own cot some of the older women were rocking babes to sleep and making up beds. Zei came in, holding their little brother on her hip. "Here, take him, Cy. He is getting too heavy to carry."

Cybris took the offered toddler and smoothed back his crinkly, dark hair. He warbled at her happily. "Uf, he really is getting huge. Soon the seamen are going to be fighting over who will get to sail with him." He *was* big, for a child who wasn't yet two Turns old, and Cybris could tell he was going to take after her father. Zei and Samanta were fair and freckled like Deidre, though Samanta had her father's dark eyes. Cybris, on the other hand, resembled her father in both height and tone. She would never have her mother's curvy figure, either, and she would never have to worry about

drawing all the boys' eyes, like Zei was beginning to at the age of thirteen.

Deidre was busily moving around their apartment, snapping dust out of the linens and lighting the lantern before it got too dark. Zei, Cybris noticed, looked a little surprised to see her mother so active without encouragement. For that matter, Cybris was heartened to see Deidre like this too, even if her movements lacked the enthusiasm they once had.

Cybris set her little brother down on the floor as she sat on the coverlet of the bed she shared with Zei.

"I'll be quick", Cybris said, "I'm not sure where to start, but I have been seriously thinking about going to the Weyr. I didn't expect for this to happen, of course, and I don't want to leave you all..."

"They're letting us decide," Zei said, sounding surprised. "If you want to go, then what's stopping you?"

"I worry that you won't be taken care of. I am responsible." Cybris hated the fact that she was saying this out loud in front of their mother, and there were so many things still left unsaid. The truth had been unspoken for a long time—the truth that Cybris had been taking on Deidre's duties to the family and the hold. Predictably, Zei snorted at that, as though the notion was ridiculous.

"You think that I can't shoulder that, Cy? I'm nearly fourteen. I'm just as useful in the kitchens. Even more," she grinned wickedly, "because I can actually cook."

"Daughter," Deidre said, "don't worry about what you leave behind." Cybris felt her throat constrict as she looked at her mother's drawn face. "I—we, we will be fine. Zei's right, she is well-taught and nearly as strong as you." She took Cybris' hand, "It's time that I was strong like you — and like your father would expect me to be. I think you being Searched is evidence of that—evidence that I am being given a second chance."

"What do you mean?" Cybris said in surprise.

"I was Searched," Deidre said. "I was Searched and old Lord Morlan told my father. But the Seaholder refused to let me go," she gave a Cybris a wry smile, "He said that it was dishonorable, what the dragonriders do."

Samanta nodded, "They *do* take our fish. But I wouldn't mind giving you fish, if you had a dragon!"

Cybris squeezed Samanta's hand, shushing her, while still trying to absorb this new information about her mother. She had never known that Deidre had been Searched herself. "So would you have wanted to go? Would you have tried to Impress?"

"I think I would have. I'm glad things turned out the way they did, of course. If I had gone to the Weyr I would have never married Velk, and had such amazing children." Deidre shook her head, her eyes sparkling with tears that did

not fall. "If you stayed here, I would be happy. If you don't want to marry Flegian there will be other men for you. Everyone in the Seahold knows how smart and what a hard worker you are, and they will be sorry to see you go."

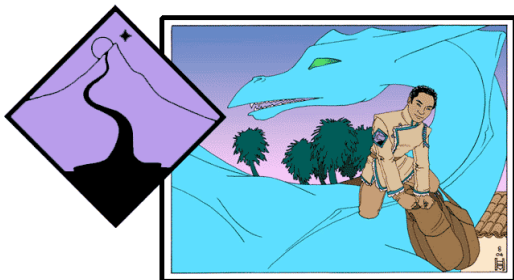
"We would miss you," Zei chimed in.

"You could visit us if you had a dragon." Samanta exclaimed excitedly.

"But," Deidre continued, her voice becoming stronger, "if you went to the Weyr and you *did* Impress, you would make me proud. I would have a daughter astride a dragon, protecting the skies of Pern." She took Cybris' hands in her own again. Stubborn faith—something that Zei had inherited—was clear on her mother's face.

Shards, Cybris thought, she might just snap out of it. She might remember that life is worth living without Father and Timas. Cybris swallowed hard, hating the reminder of their deaths, and burying her own pain deep behind her protective shell. Timas would have been glad if I did this. He would have bullied me into it if I didn't want to go. But the truth was, she did want to go.

"I will." Cybris said, looking around at her family, "I want to go. I want to be dragonrider."



# Kadanzer Weyr

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