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# A View from the Sidelines

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**Ihyanith will rise today.** Nioranth's words were in Dunia's mind almost as she awoke, with that strange tone – half anxiety and half jealousy – that the gold always adopted when another queen was close to rising.

The goldrider acknowledged the warning and grabbed for the pile of clothes suitable for wearing with her riding gear. A hungry Balt popped into the weycot, creeling hopefully for food. Now where was the little greedy gut's message harness? If he'd sit still for a moment, she could dispatch him to the kitchens with a message for them to pack a breakfast and bit of lunch for her and send it over. But Balt had caught the image of the kitchens and the idea of food from her mind and zipped *between* before she managed to get the message written. Wretched creature!

Still, there was time yet to go in person – Nioranth was grumbling about the lack of attention the bronzes were paying to her, but had made no mention of any heading for the feeding grounds. Dunia pulled on her boots and headed outside with Nioranth's riding straps. Harness first, then breakfast – just in case anything precipitous happened, like Ihyanith awakening before the bronzes gave adequate warning.

*Stop fussing and stand still while I get your straps on!* Dunia chided her bondmate for staring at her bronze neighbours – Udoth and Terianth – and not lowering her head for the riding straps.

The gold acquiesced with some minor grumbles, then said: **Savukath's rider asks if you are awake. I tell her you are. She says Velcroth is awake, but her rider still sleeps.**

*What about Orylath's rider?*

**Orylath and her rider are awake. Ihyanith sleeps. Amiseth guards her eggs. All the bronzes are awake but they do not notice me,** responded Nioranth, her tone turning sulky on this last observation.

*Well, it is time to make some of them notice you,* Dunia said in a mollifying tone. On Lybelle's orders, only the bronzes who looked to riders with leadership experience would be permitted to respond to Ihyanith's rising. All those without said experience would have to leave the Weyr... and the one certain way to make sure that all the amorous bronzes and disgruntled riders obeyed that directive was to have the order reinforced by the Weyrwoman-Second's queen. Especially a grumpy and jealous queen!

As she fastened Nioranth's straps, Dunia relayed the names of the dragons who were to leave, starting with the un-ranked bronzes in her own complex. *Ask the other golds*

*to confirm as the bronzes in their complexes leave, please,* she said.

Her queen gave an unhappy rumble and relayed the names of a couple of bronzes who were already on the verge of departing. Dunia noted with satisfaction that at least *some* of their bronzeriders were taking a pragmatic and prepared attitude to their enforced departure. She glanced up as the large form of Vhauth winged overhead and then blinked *between*.

**Vhauth notices me, but he leaves!** the gold observed petulantly.

"Good morning, Mama!" Farnya's cheery call interrupted Dunia's tart response to her gold's jealousy.

The queenrider turned to see her daughter hurrying towards her cot, a small basket hanging on each arm. "Grandma Farny sent me with breakfast and snacks for you and goldrider Revanne."

"Oh you are a sweetie!" Dunia bent to give her eldest a kiss as she took a proffered basket. The smell of freshly baked bread wafted up to her. "And so is my mother. Balt disappeared before I could write a message to send..."

"Hah! Grandma doesn't need no flitter to tell her," said Farnya, emphatically but ungrammatically. "She says if there's a dozen bronzeriders up before breakfast's done cooking on a day without Thread, then it's either a queen rising or Firestormers up to no good!"

Dunia laughed, gave her daughter a hug and sent her on her way to deliver the second basket to Revanne's cot in the Weyrleader's Complex. She warned Revanne, via their queens, that the girl was coming, then finished tightening Nioranth's straps in between bites of deliciously warm bread and slices of cheese.

Fifteen minutes later all the junior golds – apart from Amiseth, who had a clutch on the Sands – were airborne and circling above the Weyr, just as the first ranking bronze winged his way to the feeding grounds. Dunia transmitted coordinates via Nioranth and they vanished *between*.



She'd picked an isolated beach in Dorado, just being touched by the first rays of the rising sun. There might be a fisherman or two coming past when the tide turned, but for now it was a gloriously empty stretch of wet sand to wander along while they engaged in idle chat, and received news of Ihyanith's rising – safely muted into dispassionate commentary by the distance from the Weyr.

During her time as Weyrwoman-Second back in the Ninth Pass, it had been Dunia's job to pick a location like this for the goldriders to retreat to during another gold's rising – their communal departure being a long-standing Southern tradition. She and Revanne had mentioned this custom to the Kadanzer goldriders and they had decided that it might make a nice change from their own usual habit of the golds dispersing.

Their queens could, Dunia noted with a smile as they walked along the sand, sulk communally rather than individually. She had always observed at Southern that Nioranth was less fractious when there were other queens who were also being 'deprived' of the attentions of bronze dragons. Misery loves company, as the saying went.

The goldriders laughed about this as they wandered along the shore. Their queens had found sunny spots above the high tide mark where they could bask and preen, depending on the temperament of the dragon in question.

"Maybe we could bring some of the bronzeriders with us next time," suggested Zherra, kicking off her shoes to walk barefoot.

Dunia raised a cynical eyebrow. That would make a very different dynamic to any little group which isolated itself for the duration of the flight. And not one that particularly appealed to her.

It seemed her opinion was shared. "I like my few hours away from the Weyr as-is, without any bronzeriders hanging about," said Luka. "I think I'll stick with this or go off on my own."

"A couple of dozen disgruntled bronzeriders," put in Revanne, wrinkling her nose in distaste. "And a couple of dozen irritable bronzes." She gave a mock sigh. "Is it too late to ask for a transfer?"

Everyone except Zherra laughed. The youngest goldrider looked puzzled. "I think it could be quite fun, having all those bronzeriders about. V'shel's very cute..." Her voice trailed off dreamily.

Revanne gave Zherra a withering look – which the younger rider appeared oblivious to. Dunia rolled her eyes. V'shel was Zherra's latest crush.

***Ihyanith bloods her kill!*** Nioranth's announcement interrupted Dunia in mid-thought. A glance showed that the other goldriders had also received the message.

"Here we go," said Luka.



The first bronze dropped out of the flight after half an hour.

By that point the goldriders' slow walk along the shore had brought them almost to the headland of the bay. Revanne pointed at a flicker of bright colour in the distance. "Was that a firelizard? A gold?"

Dunia peered in that direction. "I missed her if it was. But this is certainly a good breeding beach." There were grass-topped dunes extending for a distance beyond the high tide mark – providing plenty of warm sand well out of reach of the sea. And from the small flocks of wherries probing in the wet sand exposed by the tide, there was plenty to eat here too.

"We could go hunting for eggs," said Zherra. "That could be kind of fun."

Revanne took on the distant look of someone in communication with their dragon. "Orylath says there are wild firelizards around, but they are intimidated by so many queens."

A snort of amusement from Luka. "I'm not surprised. But I'm up for an egg hunt. Who else is coming?" She looked round at the others.

Revanne and Dunia declined, leaving Luka and Zherra to prowl around the dunes in an only partly serious hunt for firelizard nests. The two older riders retraced their footsteps back along the damp sand to where the four queens basked in the morning sun. Revanne mentioned her intention to travel on to Lahaina Dolphincrafthall when it reached a

civilised hour in that portion of the continent. She and Dunia chatted about aspects of the Dolphincraft that intrigued them.

***Selputh gives up. Uleth gives up.*** Nioranth passed on the latest development. It looked as if it was going to be a long flight...

Eventually Luka trudged back to join them, the egg hunt having been abandoned. She settled in the shade cast by Savukath and Nioranth. "We saw a blue watching us, and some broken shells that might have been a green's nest," she said.

Zherra meanwhile took the opportunity to splash with Velcroth in the waves like a pair of weyrings. The others watched her, and their chat drifted from the flight, to Savukath's recent hatching, to Revanne's errand at the Dolphincrafthall. Time drifted on.

***Lamoroth gives up. Udoth gives up. Ihyanith flies high.***

Luka shed some clothes and she and her gold went to join Zherra in the sea, Savukath apparently jealous of the fun Velcroth was having. If a fisherman's skiff did sail by now, he'd be treated to a fine sight of queens and queenriders sporting in the waves, Dunia mused as she rummaged in the basket that Farnya had given her. She had barely unwrapped the first meatroll from its cloth covering when Balt blinked into view and settled on the sand beside her, with a hopeful chirp. "I swear he can detect food the way a dragon knows its rider," Dunia remarked.

"I've always thought that owning a firelizard was as much hassle as it was reward," said Revanne as she cracked the shell on a hard-boiled egg. "It's why I've never really wanted one."

She and Revanne ate a companionable if early lunch, discussing the vagaries of firelizard ownership, while Balt snapped up crumbs and attempted to steal whole mouthfuls when he thought neither of them was looking.

***Terianth gives up.***

"What have your best and worst flights been like?" Revanne asked Dunia. She had only graduated into the Queen's Wing two and a half months ago, and Orylath had not yet had her first rising. Nor had Zherra's Velcroth risen yet.

"Well..." Dunia paused to think. Revanne was the type to appreciate honesty, not reassurances. "I was incredibly nervous about my first flight – less about the flight itself, as about what might happen to Nioranth. Evath had just died from being eggbound, you see... but I'm not sure if that counts as worst. Um, probably B'kabi at Southern Weyr. Do you remember him?"

Revanne nodded. "Why was he worst?"

"The flight was short... the wind was working its way up to a storm and Nioranth spent as much time fighting the turbulence as leading the bronzes a dance. It felt..." She paused. "I don't know, there was a kind of undercurrent of frustration to it all, mixed in with everything else. And B'kabi had the most phenomenal bad breath. I swear the man could sear Thread out of the sky with it!"

"You noticed that during the flight?"

"No. But afterwards – yuck!" Dunia shuddered at the memory. Revanne tried to suppress a laugh and failed. Dunia wagged a finger at her. "Just you wait young lady!

I'll get the kitchens to serve all the bronzeriders garlic with every meal a sevenday before your Orylath rises." That just made Revanne laugh all the harder, and Dunia could not help but join in.

After a moment she took up the thread of the conversation again. "The best... that would be when Eorawth caught her."

"That's Z'haq's bronze, isn't it?" queried Revanne.

She nodded. "Yes."

"So why was that the best?" asked Revanne bluntly.

Dunia shrugged. "All sorts of reasons. That flight felt more intense than some of the others. And Z'haq was my friend, so waking up beside him was nice. Though he was so embarrassed about it at first." She chuckled at the memory of Z'haq dutifully trying not to look at her bare breasts, even though memories of the pair of them having energetic sex had been prominent in both their minds. "We became lovers for a while after that... until my little trip to the Ninth Pass interrupted it."

The other woman tactfully did not pursue that line of conversation.

#### ***Ulaireth gives up. Rath gives up.***

Luka and Zherra rejoined them, sand sticking to their wet skin, and ate their own lunch. Zherra fed Balt her hard-boiled egg piece by piece, laughing at the fake creels of hunger he emitted. "That starving act would be much more effective if you didn't burp between mouthfuls!" Dunia told her errant firelizard acidly. Balt cocked his head at her and burped once more.

Revanne got up and stretched. "Well I think it should be a suitable time for me to arrive at Lahaina now." She smiled. "They should have the klah on to warm by now at any rate!"

"An ulterior motive if ever I heard one," remarked Dunia with a smile.

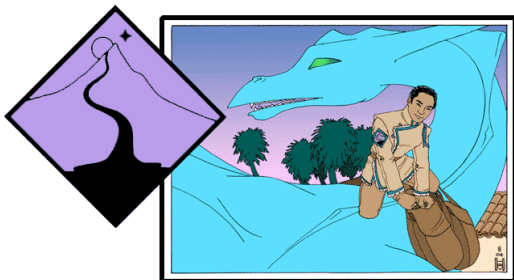
#### ***Phanth catches Ihyanith! They mate!***

The news caught all four goldriders simultaneously, and they froze listening to their dragons. The merest undercurrent of tension still felt by the queens listening in to another's flight was abruptly gone. Ihyanith and Phanth were a pair, plummeting to earth as they coupled. Lybelle and L'ars were a pair, echoing the throes of their dragons' passion. The other bronzes, no longer in Ihyanith's thrall, would again belong to all the queens of the Weyr. No rivalry was possible in this last phase of the flight, as the intertwined bronze and gold hurtled from the dizzying heights the flight had reached.

"So," said Dunia. "L'ars again." She nodded to herself in satisfaction. Stability and continuity in leadership was always good for morale in the Wings. *Nioranth dear, could you please tell all the Hold watchdragons that their riders*

*should pass along the news that L'ars is still Weyrleader.* All the major Holds and Halls in Kadanzer's vast territory would have to be informed of the outcome of the flight. She turned to the other riders. "I'll take word to the Harperhall personally. Ladies, I shall see you back at the Weyr in an hour."

The dragons had chosen. Now it was down to the riders to make of it what they would.



# Kadanzer Weyr

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