
Weyrwoman-Second,

Part Two

by Amanda Kear
2859.11.17

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2859.07.11

Dunia awoke with a headache and a stomach growling with hunger. She threw back the sleeping furs and hastily pulled on clothes, irritable at even this brief delay in getting to the Weyrhall and her breakfast. Balt, her blue firelizard, skittered about on the bedclothes, picking up on her emotion and generally getting in the way. Dunia chided him rather more fiercely than he probably deserved and wondered briefly whatever had possessed her to ever want a firelizard. But as she stepped outside her weycot, she realised that Nioranth was still asleep, which gave her pause for thought.

Nioranth? The great gold bulk of the queen still slumbered in her wallow, oblivious to her rider's query. A twitch of her tail was all the response that Dunia managed to elicit. Balt swooped the length of Nioranth's sleeping form, before zipping back to settle on his owner's shoulder. He gave a quizzical cheep. The little blue's mental presence was briefly submerged as her queen stirred in her sleep. Dunia received a flash of Nioranth's dream: a tangle of images... gleaming hides, red tinged eyes, and pumping wings that did not resolve into any particular dragon, but simply screamed *bronze!*

"Oh shaffit!" The reason for her headache and hunger suddenly became clear – Nioranth was on the verge of rising. Well, she'd better go and grab some breakfast before her queen awoke!

Dunia hurried round the back of her cot and through the trees. She almost bumped into young Sh'den, who was striding in the same direction. The normally shy bronzerider gave her a broad smile and a hearty "Good morning, goldrider Dunia" with no trace of his normal stutter.

She suppressed the urge to snap at him and instead managed a vaguely pleasant mumble in reply, then stretched her legs to outpace him as she passed the storage buildings. Ahead of her R'mal and S'tel were just entering the Weyrhall. Well, from all these early rising bronzeriders, the bronzes were certainly aware of Nioranth's condition!

Inside, Dunia steeled herself to ignore the bronzeriders and headed straight for the klah. She poured herself a mug, paused to gulp a goodly few mouthfuls and refill it, then snatched up a couple of meatrolls and retreated to where the goldriders usually sat, already munching on the first meatroll

as she did so. The only woman there was Headsecond Fenalara, who was collecting up plates. She raised an eyebrow in query at Dunia's evident hunger.

"She'll rise today?" she asked. "I did wonder when the other goldriders left so fast."

"Yes," Dunia said inelegantly around a mouthful of meatroll. "Still asleep. But any time now."

"Ah. Well that certainly explains why our dear bronze boys are being more than usually irritating this morning." Fenalara cast a frown in the direction of the nearest bronzerider.

Dunia wolfed down the last couple of mouthfuls of her first meatroll, and swatted at Balt as he tried to nibble on the other. Instincts not quite her own informed her that she was still ravenous and should pounce on the second meatroll, but she sipped at the klah instead, hoping that a brief pause before eating another might avoid indigestion later.

Fenalara gathered up the last of the plates. "Well, much as I'd love to stay and listen to overly amorous bronzeriders wagering on themselves—" She cast a disparaging look towards the nearest table. "—I have work to do." She paused and gave Dunia a smile. "Good flight to you girl – and don't let her pick anyone too insufferable!"



Nioranth awoke.

Awoke and screamed her hunger and fury at the world. The gold launched herself from her sleeping wallow into the sky and then angled to bear down on the feeding grounds, a ravenous emptiness inside her.

There were bronze interlopers on HER feeding grounds. Feeding on HER food. The queen shrieked her indignation and banked to sweep over the grounds again, but was distracted by the sight of panicking herdbeasts running across the grass. Her bank turned into a roll and a dive, and a buck was smashed into the ground still kicking.

She slashed its belly open and was about to gorge on the delicious, hot entrails when a commanding presence in her mind insisted that she did not. Nioranth screamed defiance again, her muzzle poised above the warm, quivering mass, but the voice would not go away. Hissing fury, the gold bit down on the buck's neck and gulped mouthfuls of rich blood instead.

All too soon the blood flow stopped. She spat the buck's body from her mouth and her head snaked about, looking for more. The herd were milling about at the far end of the grounds. Nioranth leaped into the air and power-stroked high enough to get the height for a second stoop. She dropped into the middle of the herd, scattering the others in all directions.

With the second kill, she clawed at its belly more from stubbornness than from any real desire to gorge on flesh and bone. Only the barest prompting from her rider was needed for her to clamp onto the beast's throat. Whirling eyes now regarded the gathered bronzes as she greedily gulped at the warm fluid. The urge to feed was dying and the urge to mate was gathering intensity in its place.

Nioranth raised her head, the body of the buck still hanging from her jaws. A latecomer joined the bronzes already on the feeding grounds and there was a hissing and jostling for position as the others reacted to his presence. Many, many, fine bronzes. But were they strong and clever enough to catch HER?

The gold flicked her head to the side to gaze at the still living herdbeasts, letting their dead companion's body sail off to crash into the ground. She took a couple of steps towards the herd and launched herself at them a third time. She skimmed low over the panicking beasts as they fled, and dropped her hind legs down – not to smash one over in a kill, but to give her an extra thrust against the ground as she powered skywards on a tremendous downstroke, bugling defiance and desire at the gathered males.

Hah! Several were too slow off the ground because of her ruse. Nioranth broadcast lust and amusement in all directions as she swept up, up, up.



Dunia blinked to muzzy consciousness, becoming gradually aware that she was pinned face down beneath a heavier weight. Someone was snoring softly into one ear. Various aches, stiffnesses and bruises scattered all over her body made themselves known. Fragmented memories of Nioranth's mating lust were mixed and jumbled with images of bronze wings, hands grabbing, rushing air as the bronze-gold pair fell, teeth sinking into her flesh, she and her partner raking at each other with fingernails.

G'tin.

She tried to roll over and push G'tin off her, but he was heavy and inert. She settled instead for slapping at his side with a free hand. "G'tin – wake up."

"Wha--?" The bronzerider stirred slightly, then Dunia could feel him freeze as he realised where he was. He pulled abruptly clear of her body.

"Thank you." Dunia rolled over and sat up, wincing involuntarily at some new bruises she'd discovered. Her breasts felt tender and either she or G'tin had apparently bitten her lip hard enough to cut it. She poked gingerly at that injury with a fingertip. "Well, I see Valenne wasn't exaggerating when she said things could get a bit out of control if Fordath won a flight," she remarked. She wasn't quite sure whether to be annoyed or laugh out loud.

In the end G'tin's mortified expression settled the matter. Dunia took one look at him and burst into fits of giggles.



2859.07.12

"Ow!" Dunia winced as the hot klah stung her cut and bruised lip.

"You should put numbweed on that," said Luka, as she and Zherra set down their breakfasts at the goldriders' table.

"I tried that yesterday," sighed Dunia. "I accidentally numbed my whole lip... and then I dribbled like a senile old auntie every time I tried to drink anything!"

Luka tried to smother a laugh. "I'm sorry..." she spluttered.

"No you're not," grumbled Dunia good-naturedly. "I thought it was funny too, until all the bruises and aches started to stiffen up. Just you wait – Savukath is far too interested in her bronze brothers. It isn't out of the question that Fordath catches her one flight. That bronze seems to have a talent for catching golds!"

"I wouldn't mind if Fordath flew Velcroth on her first flight," said Zherra dreamily. "G'tin is a sweetie."

Sweetie? That wasn't one of the phrases that Dunia had ever found herself using about the man. 'A stick up his butt' was more what came to mind. She and Luka met gazes and Dunia raised an eyebrow. Was this Zherra's latest crush? Luka gave a small shrug.

Oblivious to the silent interchange, Zherra reached for the klah jug and poured herself a half cupful, then topped it up with cream. "Master Corsan has been glaring daggers at G'tin since the flight," she said. "And at anyone who mentions how – uh – *enthusiastic* a lover G'tin is in flights."

Dunia frowned, not quite sure what to make of this. Her relationship with Corsan was dead and buried back in the Ninth Pass, with all the other victims of the tsunami. "Really?"

"Uh huh." Zherra sipped at the klah, frowned, then added a half spoonful of sugar. "Ishanra said that he gave two of the apprentices extra duties when he caught them gossiping about it."

"You don't think...?" There was a wistful tone in Luka's voice.

"No, I don't think!" said Dunia brusquely. That part of her life was over.



2859.08.23

Savukath rose... and was caught by her bronze brother, Fordath. In the aftermath of this second genetic indiscretion of Savukath's, Lybelle called a meeting of all the goldriders.

It was no surprise to Dunia – nor, she suspected to any of the other goldriders – that an exasperated Lybelle laid down the law and put an immediate ban on full siblings taking part in mating flights. She also emphasised that the sires of the relevant golds would be banned from participating as well. L'ars already dutifully took Phanth away when Savukath rose. Now Valorith would have to avoid Amiseth's flights and when Velcroth was old enough to rise, W'hulf's Tolvumuth would have to leave the Weyr for the duration. All the goldriders were instructed to have their queens reinforce these orders on the day of a flight. Throughout the meeting poor Luka looked as if she wanted to sink into the floor.

Finally the Weyrwoman dismissed the others, but requested that Dunia stay, saying she had a related matter to discuss with her.

Lybelle poured each of them a cup of redfruit juice and sipped at it a moment before speaking. “Full-sibling and parent-child matings are obvious, but we may need to think about banning certain other bronzes from flying particular gold flights because of the inbreeding risk. We don’t want Kadanzer’s bloodlines going the way of Benden’s.” She grimaced.

Dunia frowned. Nioranth was Renorath’s daughter, sired by Dormiath. Fordath was Renorath’s grandson, his dam being Evath. “My Nioranth’s flights—“ she began.

“—Yes, your Nioranth,” the Weyrwoman agreed. “And maybe some others. Too many of our golds and bronzes trace their lineage back to Renorath.”

“Or to Eliath,” Dunia added. “On the sire’s side,” she qualified when she saw Lybelle’s raised eyebrow. “Eliath was Renorath’s dam, but she was also Takarth and Girmanth’s. G’nan’s Takarth won’t be flying any golds, but there’s nothing to stop Girmanth winning a flight.”

“Hmm.” Lybelle drummed her fingers on her leg momentarily, and Dunia guessed that she was thinking again about transferring Savukath out of Kadanzer to widen the bloodlines of the Weyr. Luka’s gold had chosen the wrong time to let her obsession with her bronze brothers influence her in a flight.

But if Girmanth flew Nioranth in her next flight, wouldn’t that be as bad? In the long run, the mating of a son and granddaughter of Charayn’s gold Eliath was as bad for the bloodlines as Savukath’s sister-brother flight. Wasn’t it? Dunia ran through the arithmetic of the bloodlines in her mind. “Girmanth should definitely be banned from Nioranth’s future flights,” she concluded. She gave an amused snort. “It’s just as well that Ihyaniath shares no blood with Eliath – I wouldn’t envy you telling a bunch of bronzeriders that they had to stand aside in a Weyrleadership flight!”

Lybelle’s serious mood cracked into a grin. “I don’t know – it would almost be worth it to watch the sparks fly!” The two women shared a momentary chuckle over the vagaries of bronzerider ambitions and egos.

But amusing though the potential personality clashes might be, Kadanzer’s inbreeding problem still loomed large. “If and when Nioranth ever becomes Senior,” the Weyrwoman pointed out, “that conversation with the bronzeriders will be your headache, not mine!”

Becoming Senior Weyrwoman was *not* something that Dunia hoped or expected to happen any time in the near future. “We need our records updated,” she mused. “The formal pedigree, that is. To trace the lineages of all our recently hatched golds and bronzes...”

Lybelle nodded. “If it is written in black and white, then none of our bronze flyboys can protest that they are being unfairly singled out if they are banned from a particular flight.” She looked at Dunia and gave another nod, decisive this time. “Traditionally a retired goldrider’s duty, but Kadanzer has had none of those since the Poisoning! The individual records doubtless exist, but not, as you say, any

sort of formal pedigree. I’d like you to get started on that as soon as possible, Dunia. You can update all the goldriders on what you find.”

Dunia gave a smile of agreement. The task was one that appealed to her. A lot of the information would no doubt be in the Weyr records, but there would be snippets that she’d need to confirm with the oldsters of Kadanzer – those who had survived the Poisoning and could remember details of clutches of times past. Goldrider Kira had been retrieving the last of the Clutch Records from the Old Weyr the day of the eruption. Some records would have perished with Kira and Nanyth. “How much detail would you want on the bronzes and golds who transferred in from other Weys?” she asked. “For instance, Nicareth was flown by Phanth – they both originate from Ista.”

“Just a brief check to see if there are any bloodline problems waiting to score our tails in the future, I think,” said Lybelle.

Dunia nodded. “I’ll finish those supply tallies I was making this morning and make a start going through the records after lunch, then. I should have all the Kadanzer information compiled well before Her Ladyship is too egg-heavy to travel. Then I can start making trips to Ista and anywhere else that looks useful.” Yes, producing an accurate pedigree definitely appealed to her sense of organisation and planning.

“Send Zherra to do that,” said Lybelle. “She needs to get out and about to more than gathers. It’ll do her good having to deal with other Weyrwomen on their home turf.”

Dunia felt a brief twinge at not being able to do that part of the research herself, but agreed that it would indeed be of benefit to Zherra, who had only graduated into the Queen’s Wing three months ago. Another thought occurred to her and she gave a small smile. “She may come back with another crush on some handsome bronzerider.”

Lybelle snorted in amusement. “Well if he follows her to Kadanzer and flies her Velcroth, then at least the bloodlines will profit! And, joking aside, throwing open the junior golds’ flights is another way to expand our bloodlines. I’ve no doubt that outsider bronzes will be queuing up to fly Orylath when she’s old enough to rise.”

“All that Benden blood she carries!” Dunia smiled again.

A nod from Lybelle. “I need to speak to the other Weyrwomen before I make my decision, but be aware that open flights for the juniors are a distinct possibility.”



2859.09.25

“We currently have twenty six bronzes descended from Charayn’s Eliath and bronze Golteth in the Weyr.” Dunia spread out her diagram of the pedigree of Kadanzer Weyr’s bronzes on the table, for all the assembled goldriders to see. She unrolled the smaller pedigree for the Weyr’s golds and laid it beside the bronze one, using one hand to weight down a curling corner. “And of course we all know that only

Ihyanith and Orylath do not share blood with either Eliath or Golteth, so any bronzes from the future clutches of the other queens will also be their descendants.” She gave Luka an apologetic look as she said this, knowing that the threat of her transfer had diminished with the arrival of new blood in the form of Orylath, but had not vanished completely, especially with Savukath’s latest flight.

“All twenty six bronzes are descended from *both* Eliath and Golteth?” Revanne asked, studying the lines and relationships of the male pedigree chart.

“Yes.” Dunia nodded. “Eliath rarely let any other bronze but Golteth catch her, and none of the gold or bronze offspring from those other clutches survived the Poisoning.”

“Hmm. It is a pity that Kielani transferred out to make way for me,” commented Lybelle. “We could have done with more of the Nanyth-Virankath bloodline remaining here.”

“Yes,” agreed Dunia. “In bloodline terms it really would have made more sense to transfer my Nioranth, as she carries the largest component of inheritance from Eliath. Or to a lesser extent, Savukath or Amisseth. All three of us were almost as inexperienced as Kielani back then.” But bloodlines had not been on the agenda at that particular meeting. And no-one could have anticipated Nicareth’s subsequent infertility, nor her own ten Turn sojourn in the Ninth Pass.

“You’ve calculated the degree of relationship?” Revanne asked.

Dunia reached for her notebook. “Yes, and here it is for all the golds and also the names of the bronzes who have the greatest proportion of Eliath and Golteth’s blood.” She took out the loose pages on which she’d copied the relevant information and handed one copy to Lybelle, and two others for the rest to share. “I did them as fractions – the figures were easier for me to juggle that way.”

The goldriders scanned her list. “Girmanth and Takarth are both down as a half...” observed Cassidoria.

“Yes, they are Eliath and Golteth’s sons, so have the closest relationship,” said Dunia. “Half of Eliath’s blood.”

“At least there is no problem with Takarth catching a gold any more,” said Lybelle dryly, referring to the unlucky bronze’s amputated wing.

Dunia grimaced. “Every cloud has a silver lining, I suppose,” she said. “But as you see, Nioranth is next on the list, at a quarter. So if we want to keep the bloodlines as diverse as possible, Girmanth should be banned from participating in her flights, as well as her brother Koranth, though he’s never shown any inclination to chase her. And if we really want to be safe, we should bar all the bronzes who are quarters too...” She looked at her list, where they were named alphabetically. Jeth, Jreth, Jumarth, Kolvith, Koranth, Lygnoth, Miseth, Renath, Uleth, Valorith and Waheath. “Most of those are Nioranth’s half brothers, but Kolvith is a cousin.”

“*That’ll* be a fun conversation!” remarked Luka. “T’noh will be outraged for a start.”

“And D’nin will argue for the sake of arguing,” agreed Zherra.

Lybelle smiled. “I somehow think that Ihyanith will get the last word.” She glanced back at the diagram and nodded to herself. “I’ll make the announcement in the Weyrhall tonight. Now, are there any other flights we should consider for a ban, apart from the obvious, of course...”

Luka coloured at the reference to Savukath’s tendency to mate with her brothers.

Revanne spoke up. “Mathematically speaking, it is most risky for the bronze ‘quarters’ to fly Amisseth and Savukath. They are both eighths. So that would make the offspring—“ She paused while she did the mental calculation. “—three sixteenths.”

“Is three sixteenths of Eliath and Golteth’s bloodline enough for us to worry about?” asked Zherra. “And my Velcroth is only one sixteenth. Surely that’s safe enough?”

“Remember that’s one sixteenth of Eliath. The numbers will increase if we only consider Renorath’s descendants, because she’s one generation closer,” Revanne pointed out.

Dunia voiced her uncertainty on the topic of bloodline closeness. “In bloodline terms any golds or bronzes from a Savukath or Amisseth plus a quarter mating would exacerbate our problem to some degree, but I don’t know if three sixteenths is enough to fret about. And dragons are not watchwhers, but I sent a message to the Minecraft to ask about their breeding,” Dunia said. “Masterminer Mikaren kindly sent back some information on their findings over the Turns.”

Revanne raised an eyebrow. “Giving up craft secrets?”

“Hardly – it was just a summary. I think he was rather pleased that a goldrider had deigned to notice his lowly watchwhers!” Dunia said with a laugh. “Nioranth was quite indignant when she thought I was comparing her to a wher!” In fact her Nioranth’s whole opinion on the matter of mating flights and inbreeding could be summarised as *Only the best bronze will catch ME!*

“Anyway,” she continued. “The Minecraft has noted that cousin matings are generally fine, but a lineage which has a lot of brother-sister or mother-son or father-daughter matings in its history will produce small clutches and few or no gold eggs.”

“So if dragons follow the trends of watchwhers—“ Lybelle wrinkled her nose in distaste at the relationship “—then our three sixteenths would seem not to be a problem. And, of course, in addition to *not* being watchwhers, dragons are also not human. A certain amount of inbreeding is always going to happen. Fortunately the species seems reasonably resilient. It took many, many generations to produce Benden’s giants--” she gave a nod to Revanne in deference to her half-Benden Orylath “—But unfortunately only one plague to wipe them out.” That brought a moment of sober silence.

“Either way, I don’t think that an additional ban of flying Amisseth and Savukath’s flights is necessary in our current situation,” continued Lybelle. “At the very least, there would likely be several indignant bronzeriders beating a path to my door to demand a transfer. And we can’t afford to lose experienced bronzeriders.”

Dunia found herself silently agreeing. Telling eleven bronzeriders that they couldn’t participate in one queen’s

flights would be bad enough. Telling them that they'd have to stand down from three...

Cassidora smiled. "The loss of a few young hotheads wouldn't go amiss!"

"Unfortunately, all we could expect to receive in return would be more young hotheads," said Dunia with a sigh. The other Weyrwomen would not want to lose experienced bronzeriders either, so any exodus of indignant veteran riders would not be balanced by transfers of those with equivalent experience.

A curt nod from Lybelle. "Exactly. However, it does have bearing on opening the flights for junior queens." The other goldriders looked at her expectantly. "I've discussed with other Weyrwomen the idea of a reciprocal agreement – we throw open our junior flights to their riders, and they throw open their juniors' to ours. Mixes the bloodlines and soothes the bronzeriders all in one neat package."

"Were they interested?" asked Dunia, intrigued by this elegant and practical solution. Kadanzer bronzeriders being able to participate in flights at other Weyrwomen should take the sting out of them being barred from some at home.

"Selina of Eastern, Margetha of Landing and Lynora of Ista have given an unqualified yes. High Reaches and Fort are prepared to agree to some, but not all of their junior flights being open. Benden, Igen and Telgar are still considering it."

"I bet Benden are *considering* whether Vhauth, Tahaeth and Eryth will turn up," muttered Cassidora cynically, naming the adult bronzes from the Ninth Pass who carried the old Benden bloodlines. "They'd say yes in a flash if those three took part."

"No doubt," said Lybelle. "But in the meantime we have an agreement with five other Weyrwomen. I will make that announcement soon – and say that it takes effect from Nioranth's next flight." She gave a nod to Dunia. "Amiseth's next rising will be Kadanzer only, with the usual ban on her sibs and sire. No point confusing our dear bronzeboys with too many edicts at once!"

A chuckle from the other goldriders.

The Weyrwoman gazed at the bronze pedigree for a moment or two before she continued. "I think, ladies, that a review of the pedigree every Turn is a must. Any objections or further comments?"

None were forthcoming.

"Good," said Lybelle. "Now, has this research of yours thrown up any further little surprises for us?"

"Nothing to worry about in the short or medium term," Dunia replied. "Zherra has been though the records at other Weyrwomen. Zherra?"

The younger goldrider opened her own notebook and scanned the pages briefly, then began: "Valenne's Nicareth had no gold daughters and has five surviving bronze sons here at Kadanzer. So the close blood tie she shares with one of the three bronzes who hail from Ista – that's Rath by the way – is not a problem. She has no close blood ties with the others – that's Drannath and Phanth – so again no problems there. Telgar... There are lesser blood ties between Ihyanth and a bronze who originally hailed from Telgar—" She

paused to point out the relevant dragon on the pedigree "— But again Wardreth has only one surviving bronze son."

"So all is well there. Good." Lybelle gave a satisfied nod. "I'll finalise the lists of those bronzes barred from the flights of certain queens and have them copied and circulated, and we'll make the pedigree available to any that want to look at it. Then after a seven-day or two to digest it all, I'll make an announcement about the ban on Nioranth's flights and open flights at other Weyrwomen. Zherra and Dunia, can you get to copying the pedigree this afternoon, please? Does anyone have anything further to say on this topic, before we move on?"

Cassidora raised a hand. "Anyone want to wager if any of those bronzeriders will ask for a transfer?" she asked with a grin. "Or maybe we ought to ban Z'hon's Ulaireth from *all* gold flights!"

"Why?" Dunia asked with a laugh.

Cassidora's grin broadened. "Oh, just because we CAN!" It was several minutes before the laughter subsided enough to continue the day's business.



2859.10.10

Nioranth roused her rider in the middle of the night and headed for the main Hatching Grounds, to lay the first of what eventually proved to be a clutch of twelve eggs. Dunia dutifully praised her queen – now engaged in her usual post-laying obsession with licking the eggs – and tried to suppress the undercurrent of worry that it was such a small clutch. Only twelve! Did Nioranth still have lingering fertility problems after her journey from the Ninth Pass?

She discussed the matter first with the dragonhealers and then with Weyrwoman Lybelle, who took a pragmatic attitude to the problem. "Don't flame at Thread until it's falling, girl! She's laid, and she's happy with the eggs, and the dragonhealers aren't anticipating the problems that we had with her last clutch."

"But it's only twelve eggs..." protested Dunia. She and Lybelle sat at the edge of the Hatching Grounds, watching as Nioranth slobbered over her clutch, rearranged them into a new pattern, then gave them another licking for good measure.

"Twelve eggs are more than enough for Nioranth to earn her keep. It's not as if we're short of laying queens. And we should take the opportunity to use this clutch to improve morale after Yttrith's death." Lybelle gave Dunia an admonishing stare. "So stop fussing until they crack shell!"

The younger woman gave a nod. The Weyr had been a very subdued place since Amiseth's fateful rising a seven-day ago. A new clutch on the Sands... *any* clutch on the Sands, would at least give a new topic to the stilted conversations in the Weyrhall of late. She gave a small smile. "So we focus on the fact that Nioranth's fertility is... returning? Getting back to normal?"

“Settling back into the normal rhythm, yes,” agreed Lybelle. “Concentrate on that, if anyone asks. If you have doubts, then keep them to yourself for a while, Dunia. And quite frankly, if there’s a reason given for the small clutch, I’d prefer the Weyr gossips to speculate that Nioranth and Fordath’s bloodlines are too close. It may even be true.”

“Then Savukath’s clutch might be small too?” she asked. “Have you spoken to Luka about the possibility?”

The Weyrwoman nodded. “Yes, of course. And also pointed out that there were no bronzes in the clutch that Perffiath sired. That could just have been coincidence, of course – she laid none when she was flown by Tolvumuth either.”

“Or it could be the result of a brother-sister mating.” Dunia finished the thought for her.

“Either way, it is probably a blessing in disguise, given all our pedigree problems. I only hope we get as lucky with Savukath’s next clutch.” Lybelle regarded Nioranth’s fervent licking of a blue-swirled egg, then gave Dunia a frank stare. “You’ve shaped up into a decent Weyrwoman-Second, Dunia – and that lets Luka off the hook. Because of your time in the Ninth Pass, I don’t need to transfer her out to bring in a more experienced queenrider. But you fret too much at times. Think of the Weyr, girl – always think of the Weyr. The rest will sort itself out in the end.”



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The final green hatchling found her lifemate, and tottered from the Sands.

“Well then, all hatched and matched!” In the stands, G’tin stood, gave Dunia a formal bow and offered her his arm. “Shall we make our way to the Hatching Feast, Weyrwoman-Second Dunia?” As the riders of the sire and dam of the clutch, they were expected to arrive as a couple. Something G’tin was going to have to repeat in a few sevendays, as Savukath was due to lay her own clutch any day now – and his Fordath was the sire of those eggs too.

“That would be a very fine idea, bronzerider G’tin,” she replied. “My stomach has been growling throughout the Hatching.” Nioranth may have only laid a dozen eggs, but they had taken their own sweet time to all hatch. Still, all the hatchlings were fine healthy individuals – five greens, four blues, two browns and a single bronze. Dunia’s worries that these hatchlings would turn out to be as sickly as her queen’s last clutch had been firmly put to rest.

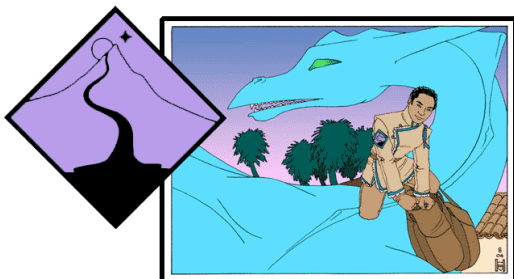
The pair walked back from the Hatching Grounds through the Weyrleader’s Complex and on toward the Weyrhall. Once there, they circulated through the crowd of weyrfolk and holders, pausing here and there to congratulate the parents of the new weyrlings. She waved to her daughters, who were helping to carry out wineskins to the higher ranking guests. Farnya briefly waved back and then went back to dutifully pouring out wine for Lord Janol of Sunstone. The harpers had already struck a merry tune, and some of the Firestormers were foregoing the chance to be first at the feast and instead taking a twirl around the dance square. A marvellous sense of well-being possessed Dunia.

It was not interrupted even by the sight of Lord Janol bearing down on them, doubtless to complain that the two youngsters from Sunstone who had just Impressed were too many or too few, and to bring the topic round to how his title to the Weyr was too large.

G’tin gave a little growl, almost under his breath. Dunia patted his arm, where it was linked with hers. “I’ll deal with him,” she said, composing her face into a pleasant smile for the oncoming Lord. “You go and fetch me something to eat before I start creeling like a hatchling firelizard.”

“I was ready to throttle Lords like him when I was Weyrleader,” remarked the bronzerider as he gracefully made his retreat. “I don’t know how you manage not to!”

“I think of the Weyr, G’tin,” said Dunia. “I always think of the Weyr.”



Kadanzer Weyr

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