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# Wingrider

by Juniper  
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N'vai looked round the table at his classmates. Dinner was almost over, and only a few people were still eating. Most of the others were cheerfully speculating about their Wing assignments, but N'vai was letting their chatter wash over him as he picked at the last of his fruit. His stomach was knotted with anticipation, and he had little appetite. 'This is the last time we'll all be together as a class.'

Weyrlihood hadn't been easy, and he was in some ways glad that it was over, but he was nervous about how he'd get on in a Wing. At least he'd have the opportunity to start again, without everyone knowing all his past mistakes and struggles. He'd made enough of a fool of himself at various stages of training to welcome that. And, he would be a wingrider of Kadanzer Weyr – and, finally, treated as an adult! That had to be a good thing.

He wondered what it would be like to be part of a larger group again. A Wing had at least thirty members, while just ten of what was now called Weyrli Class 31 remained, out of the twenty-seven that had Impressed. It was hard not to dwell on the others, the ones who should have been there. D'lyn, of course, who had been his best friend; and K'yr, and Sk'ler, and the rest. J'taren, too. After all they had survived on their journey forward in time, it seemed especially hard that he had been lost in a *betweening* accident during training, only a few sevendays ago.

'N'vai? Wake up!' That was V'shel, inevitably: the older weyrli insisted on looking out for him. 'Still trying to make me sociable – you'd think he'd have given up!'

The bronzerider persisted: 'Come on, where do you think they'll put you?'

N'vai shrugged. 'No idea. As long as it's not StrongWind or FireStorm, I don't really care.'

'FireStorm's a great Wing!' V'shel protested, and A'dek said at the same time, 'FireStorm always does well in the Games. It's the Weyrleader's Wing, too.'

Y'sak chipped in, 'Don't think you're up to StrongWind's standard, then? Well, that's fine, because I want that one.'

N'vai was rather tired of the brownrider's snide comments, and ignored Y'sak in favour of answering V'shel.

'Well, I'll leave it for you party-lovers, then. Really, I don't mind, as long as it's not those two. And what difference does it make, anyway? We're going where they put us, whether we like it or not.'

'Maybe you won't get a fighting Wing.' There was a sneer in Y'sak's tone. 'You're still too young: they put babes that aren't old enough to fight in the Queens' Wing. Or keep them back in the Weyrli Wing.'

'Who says I'm not old enough?' N'vai glared at the brownrider, but the familiar nagging voice of self-doubt had been given an opening. 'It's true, though. They only have older candidates here: they never have someone graduating who still only has fifteen Turns.' He was good enough to join a fighting Wing: he and Zalyth had been doing all right in drills for sevendays, now, and he knew his lessons. They couldn't say he wasn't good enough, could they? He couldn't be marked out as a failure when all the others were in the fighting Wings. They couldn't do that! If he weren't going to a fighting Wing, Weyrlisecond Ambri would have said something by now, wouldn't she?

'Hey, this is our last meal together. Let's not ruin it!' That was A'dek, responsible as always. The bronzerider raised his half-empty glass of juice. 'Here's to us! The last and best weyrli class of Southern Weyr!'

N'vai raised his glass and joined in the toast. It seemed to distract Y'sak, which left N'vai to his thoughts. He hadn't really taken much interest in the speculation that had gripped the rest of the class for sevendays. Whatever he'd said to the others, he did have a preference, but if he didn't voice it, it would be easier to hide his disappointment if he were put somewhere else.

He looked round the Weyrhall, picking out the tables where Wings were having dinner together. There was StrongWind, with Wingleader Z'hon at the head of the table. 'Not there. Please, not there.' Z'hon's regime and the tough treatment that Wing meted out were legendary. Y'sak was right: N'vai really wasn't up to that. He'd heard stories about how Z'hon would pick on his riders over every little thing, real or imaginary, and pile on the punishments until they had no free time for months, and make them exercise until they dropped. He considered the man from a safe distance. 'Looks hard. But why would anyone carry on like that?' It crossed his mind that perhaps someone had been exaggerating the tales at his expense. Either way, he'd rather not find out from personal experience.

A flash of gold drew his attention to the next table, where a young man with wavy blond hair was detaching the firelizard that had just landed on his shoulder. He launched her into the air again, where she vanished *between*. 'Doesn't want her pestering people at dinner, I guess. Quite right, too.' The good-looking young man was bronzerider G'tin, and the Wing was StormWind. N'vai wasn't terribly interested in gossip, but it clung like creeper vines to G'tin, because he had been Weyrleader when he wasn't much older than N'vai. He'd ousted Wingleader A'nar from the position, and rumour had it that A'nar still hated him for it. Now he was in A'nar's Wing. A'nar was supposed to be a good wingleader, but that didn't sound like a comfortable place to be.

He sought out another group of riders, though the distinctive figure of their wingleader was at the head table. FlameWind. That Wing had a reputation for being a collection of failures. He thought wryly that a babe whose

class-mates thought he wasn't old enough to fight Thread would probably fit in perfectly, if that were true. Anyway, R'mal had to be a good wingleader, or he wouldn't be a flightleader and Weyrsecond, and he had to be a good sort of person, or he wouldn't be Weyrharper Andrian's weyrmate. That was a pretty good recommendation, in N'vai's view, and besides, he'd not heard anything to suggest that the Wing performed badly in Threadfall. Yes, a posting to FlameWind would suit him just fine – but he wouldn't let himself hope too hard, in case...

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed movement at the head table, and turned. The Weyrwingmaster was getting to his feet. It was time!

"Today sees the graduation of two Weyrwing Classes, Class 27 and – after what must certainly be the *longest* weyrwinghood in Kadanzer's history – Class 31." D'zan's remark attracted a small ripple of laughter from those who found it funny. N'vai didn't join in. He gripped the back of his chair as he waited to hear his Wing assignment.



As the group around FireStar Wing's table broke up, B'nalsh beckoned the three new wingriders closer. N'vai didn't know V'ret and T'varren terribly well, as the greenrider and brownrider had both been in the other class to graduate tonight, but the three exchanged glances as they gathered around the wingleader. N'vai tried to look serious and adult, even though there was a bubble of joy inside him trying to burst out. He was a wingrider! And FireStar seemed a decent Wing, even if he didn't know much about it. The three graduating weyrwings had been welcomed very cordially by their new wingmates, and B'nalsh had a good reputation. Why had he ever wanted to go to FlameWind? But he had to pay attention to B'nalsh!

"Now, FireFlight's on deck for the 'Fall tomorrow. You won't join us for that: I won't have you fighting with us until you've had a few drills. The next 'Fall or the one after will be soon enough. Come to the briefing, though. It won't hurt to see how we do things, but you've the rest of the day to get moved. Lista's our headsecond: she'll tell you which weyrcots they've got ready for you."

His own weyrcot! It was going to be wonderful to have a whole cottage to himself, with nobody around to chatter and distract him. V'shel was going to fit in perfectly with FireStorm! He repressed the little whisper that told him he'd miss the bronzerider's company. Then he realised that the others were turning away. B'nalsh must have dismissed them. He followed.

On his way out, he found himself alongside Weyrwingsecond Ambri. The weyrwingsecond was looking almost amiably at him – not an expression he associated with her.

"Well, I suppose that makes you the youngest wingrider in the Weyr. Make sure you live long enough not to be."

N'vai was rather taken aback, and gulped, "Ah, yes, weyrwingsecond. I'll do my best."

Ambri slapped him on the back, which surprised him. She'd never shown the slightest trace of being friendly to the weyrwings before. But then, he wasn't a weyrwing any longer! He could smell the faint odour of wine on her breath: maybe she'd had a glass or two to celebrate seeing her class graduate. Anyway, she was continuing jovially, "See you do. I stuck my neck out for you, saying you were all right to graduate despite being such a babe. Don't you dare prove me wrong!"

Then she was gone, leaving N'vai blinking in her wake. "Thanks, weyrwingsecond. No pressure there, of course." Bemused, he headed back to his weyrwingcot to pack up his few possessions.



2859.11.05

Exhausted but satisfied, N'vai jumped to the ground and gave Zalyth's neck an affectionate slap. *You did well, girl. I think we're getting it, at last.* He went to join the rest of FireStar's riders as they gathered round B'nalsh to hear his comments on their drill. He had developed a healthy respect for his Wingleader: B'nalsh could certainly make his views felt, but he seemed very competent. Even when he wasn't doing too well, N'vai didn't have the sense of being bullied that the Weyrwingstaff had usually given him.

His first few drills hadn't been a rousing success. He'd been out of place far too often, and slow to work out what the formation was doing in the difficult changeover manoeuvres that had been the focus of their last two practices. It had been hard, too, when the other two new riders had been allowed to fly the last 'Fall, but he'd been kept on the ground. Today, though, something had clicked. Keeping the right distance from the next in line seemed natural, just as it had in the Weyrwing Class by the time they were fully trained. He couldn't help smiling: he really could do this!

"Well done, everyone: that was a lot better than yesterday. Zrella, Jalth looked as if she was flagging at the end – try and pace her better. T'mani, you're still dropping on the left-hand turns. G'lant, you've got to stop Malyuth paying more attention to Tanth than to her neighbours." There was a ripple of laughter at that. Malyuth's interest in male dragons brought her rider a good deal of teasing. B'nalsh raised his voice. "It won't be funny if she's batting her eyelids at him in 'Fall," Silence fell immediately. "V'ret, N'vai, your spacing was a lot better today."

The glow of warmth brought by his wingleader's praise lasted for the rest of the debriefing. At the end, though, B'nalsh picked him out again. "N'vai, stay back. The rest of you – dismissed!"

As the riders scattered, N'vai made his way to what had been the front of the group.

"Sir?"

"So, N'vai. Do you think you're ready to fly the next 'Fall?"

"Yes, sir!"

“Good. So do I. Make sure your gear’s in good trim.”

N’vai couldn’t help smiling. “I will, sir.” He waited to be dismissed, but B’nalsh seemed inclined to talk. “Settling in all right? It’s a good Wing, even if we’ve not got the traditions of some of the others. Haven’t had long enough to make them, really. But we will.”

N’vai didn’t really understand that. “Is FireStar quite a new Wing, then, sir?” He had a nagging sense that he was forgetting something.

“Not new, exactly, but it was reformed when the original members all died. Didn’t they tell you about that, when you got here? Anyway, I must go and see to Drannath. Clear skies, greenrider.”

“Clear skies, sir.” The words came out without conscious thought. Even a couple of days ago, being addressed as ‘greenrider’ rather than ‘weyrling’ had been a thrill, but now he scarcely noticed it.

“They all died? All of them?” He couldn’t help seeing the mental images of towering waves and rushing water that had haunted his imagination after the tsunami that destroyed Southern Weyr and Hold. ‘They all died?’ He must have heard about this. It must have been covered in the Weyrharper’s classes, when he first arrived at Kadanzer. He knew he ought to remember it, but his memory refused to provide the details. He had to find out! But first, he must tend to Zalyth, who was still waiting patiently, and enquiring why he was so worried about something that was long in the past. *Not so far in the past to me, my love. I need to know this!*



N’vai tapped hesitantly at the door of the Weyrharper’s office. It certainly wasn’t the first time he’d taken Master Andrian up on his offer of advice about life in the Tenth Pass, and he really didn’t want to discuss this with his wingmates.

“Enter!”

At the sound of the voice from inside, he pushed open the door. Andrian was sitting at the sandtable, and his blue Tigli was perched on the edge of the frame and leaning over the sand, as if he were reading what the harper had written.

“Weyrharper, if it’s not a bother...”

“N’vai!” Andrian stood up, smiling, and interrupted his apologies. “Come in! This is a pleasant surprise. Congratulations on your graduation! How are you finding your new Wing?”

N’vai couldn’t help smiling. “It’s going all right, I think. I’ve had some drills, now, and we didn’t make *that* many mistakes at the last one. We haven’t flown a ’Fall with the Wing yet, though, and it’s all a bit different from being in class. Everybody else knows what they’re doing.”

“I’m sure you’ll do well. Is this just a friendly visit, or is there something I can do for you? Have a seat.”

N’vai pulled up a chair next to the sandtable and sat down as the harper also sat. “I was wondering. Somebody said something I didn’t understand, and I thought you would

know what it meant.” He frowned a little, uneasy at the thought of what he’d heard.

Andrian smiled. “Tell me, and I’ll try.”

“FireStar Wing. Wingleader B’nalsh said they’d all died. A whole Wing?”

Andrian looked grieved. “That’s right. It was a real tragedy – I think I told you about it in the briefing sessions when you all arrived. You know that the Weyr moved here from Kadanzer Mountain, when the volcano became active?”

N’vai nodded. “You told us that, yes.”

“It took a long while to get the new Weyr built and everyone moved here. FireStar and some other riders went back to the old Weyr to bring back the last of the supplies that had been left there. Weyrwoman-second Kira was with them, and her gold Nanyth. The mountain was getting more and more unstable, and there was a ’shake while a lot of the riders were still in the caverns. They started to evacuate, but then the mountain erupted. We lost the whole of FireStar, and some riders from other Wings as well. R’mal said that Udoth just gave him the names one after the other: “Nanyth is gone. Imicith is gone. Bevorith is gone...” He said it went on and on. The dragons went *between* as their riders died, of course.”

N’vai’s eyes grew wide with shock as the harper’s voice recreated the litany. “The whole Wing? Thirty or more riders?”

Andrian nodded. “More than that, and in less time than it took to say their names. It was dreadful. FireStar was reformed with different riders, rather than leave a gap in the Wings, but all those riders were a grievous loss, and it had an impact on the numbers in the Wings. Weyrleader Th’rin – N’vai?”

The words seemed to be passing him without registering.

“N’vai! What is it, lad? You’re as white as a sheet.”

“So many, all at once. Like what happened to us. To Southern. That’s horrible.”

“Yes, it was.” Andrian was still looking at him: he could see the concern on the harper’s face, but now, he just wanted to get away on his own and think this over.

He stood up abruptly. “Thank you, Master Andrian. I’m sure you did tell us about that, but I suppose I didn’t take it in. I won’t take any more of your time.”

“You’re always welcome, N’vai.”

N’vai was already at the door.



2859.11.06

Late evening over the tip of Thornblaze was as dark as the early morning that they had left behind at Kadanzer. As they waited to meet the Leading Edge of ’Fall, N’vai could feel Zalyth’s excitement mingling with his own anticipation and pride. Even now, Thread was approaching over the sea, and they would start to fight as it reached the

land. At last, they were going to do what they had been trained for.

FireStar was the top-level Wing at the start of the 'Fall, and it was windy at that height, with erratic crosswinds caused by the boundaries of sea and land. N'vai was between G'lant and E'gar, but he could only tell where they were by the deeper blackness against the dark sky and the angry red glint of the dragons' eyes. He peered upwards into the darkness, wishing that his first real 'Fall had been during the day and trying to ignore the little voice in the back of his mind that was repeating, "They all died. They all died." Well, he wasn't going to die, and neither was the rest of FireStar!

*Drannath says it is here!*

N'vai couldn't see the falling Thread until it was almost dead ahead of him, and then it was only a pale gleam against the near-total darkness. To his right, G'lant's Malyuth flamed, and he remembered not to ruin his night vision by looking at her. He sensed Zalyth focus on a strand that seemed to be falling almost directly in their path, knowing that her heat-vision let her see it long before he could. He checked the position of his wingmates, and heard Zalyth call *Mine!* as it came within range. He moved with the green as she side-slipped just enough to line up on it, glowed with pride as her long, bright flame reached out towards it – and then his back and arm were burning, and Zalyth was shrieking. His thoughts seemed to move with the slowness of pouring treacle as he told Zalyth to duck *between* in one of the short hops that were so often used in 'Fall. They'd practised that so often that it was a reflex response. 'That hurts much worse than a painted rope.' He scrambled to tear the frozen Thread from his shoulder with fingers that could feel nothing. 'Stupid thing to think... it's Thread.' He forced himself to concentrate.

However dark the night sky, it was still a relief to be able to see as they came out from the total blackness of *between*. N'vai knew without any conscious assessment that he was in trouble: his back was hurting so fiercely that he could hardly think straight, and Zalyth's pain and fear mingled with his own so that he couldn't separate them. *Tell Drannath that we're scored: going home.* The thought of home was a lodestone, drawing him, but the image that his treacherous memory served up was that of Southern Weyr, and it took him a few heartbeats to replace it with the patterned rooftops of Kadanzer. Then they were *between* again, and spiralling down to land near the Dragon Infirmary. Even before they touched down, a voice that N'vai only just recognised as his own was shouting, "Get her some numbweed!" After that, everything merged into a blur of voices and greying images.

seemed to be folded underneath him somehow, but it was strangely numb.

As thought returned, he wondered how he'd managed to get scored on his back and shoulder, from behind, when he was facing towards the falling Thread. That was certainly where it was hurting. It wasn't too bad now, though: numbweed was a wonderful thing. The worst thing was that he didn't know how badly Zalyth was hurt. He knew she'd been scored, too: what if she were badly injured? He could feel her sleeping presence in his mind, and there was no sense of pain coming from her. Surely someone would have woken him, if she needed him?

He tried to reconstruct what had happened in his mind, and remembered waiting in the darkness and the sudden, unexpected pain. After that, they must have come back here and landed safely, but his memories were blurring and he was so tired that he couldn't seem to think. As sleep reclaimed him, he realised, in a flush of shame that burned worse than the Threadscore, that his first 'Fall as a wingrider had lasted a matter of heartbeats.



"He's still sleeping, sir." The voice that drifted into his dreams was a woman's, but he didn't recognise it.

"How is he?"

He knew *that* voice! It was B'nalsh. 'Got to wake up. Wingleader...'

He forced his eyes to open and said, "Sorry, sir," but what came out of his dry mouth didn't sound much like that.

There was a tap of wood on stone as B'nalsh quietly moved a stool across. "Well, lad, looks like you're awake after all. How are you feeling?"

"Zalyth?"

The wingleader chuckled. "Good man – a rider thinks first of his dragon, eh? They tell me she's better off than you are, right now. Just a bit of light scoring on her flank. She'll be fine in a couple of sevendays."

Relief flooded him. "She's all right?" He had to hear it again.

"She's fine. Sleeping like a babe." B'nalsh shifted his stool so that he was in N'vai's line of sight. "Do you know what happened?"

"No. Not sure. It was behind me? How'd it get there?" He sounded rather stupid, even in his own ears. What must the Wingleader think?

"The wind was gusting all over the place. Sounds as if you got fixed on what you were flaming and didn't keep watching above, though."

"Oh. The number of times Weyrlingsecond Ambri told me about that..."

"Well, maybe the lesson will stick, this time. Anyway, it's going to be a month or two before you're trying it again, the healers tell me."

"Months?" Oh, shells! His first real 'Fall, and he'd injured himself, injured Zalyth, got himself invalidated for sevendays or months. He remembered Weyrlingsecond Ambri telling him not to let her down – but he had! He was



N'vai gradually became aware that he was lying on his stomach, with the side of his face pressed into something soft. They'd given him fellis while they cleaned and stitched his scores, and his head still felt thick from the drug. His right arm was stretched across the pillow, and the left one

useless, useless, useless.... He was scarcely aware of B'nalsh saying something about leaving him to rest, and quietly moving on to another cot.



2859.13.24

The weyrcot was spotless, as usual, and cleaning was becoming boring. However, it was the nearest thing to work that N'vai had to do right now. He'd weeded the garden yesterday, and Zalyth's straps were in perfect condition. He considered rearranging his furniture, but, really, he liked it the way it was. At least for the last seven days he'd been permitted to fly short distances. Maybe he and Zalyth could go out, later on. If nobody had any messages to deliver, they could always find a pleasant beach, if it stayed dry.

He put the broom away, wondering if anyone would like to join them. He wasn't really seeing a lot of other people at the moment. To his surprise, he missed the company. The FireStar riders had dropped in on him from time to time, and tried to make him feel included at mealtimes, but that wasn't really possible when he wasn't drilling or flying 'Fall. The two wingmates who had graduated with him had tried to make sure that he wasn't too isolated, especially T'varren, who seemed to have an endless capacity for just sitting in silence watching the view from the cliffs, though he'd seen less of V'ret recently. His classmates, too, were increasingly wrapped up in their Wings.

*Ihyanith says that her rider wants you in her office, now.*

A summons from the Weyrwoman! Zalyth was in her wallow, and it would be quicker to walk across than to put her straps on and fly. *Tell Ihyanith I'll come straight over.*

N'vai was guiltily lacing his boots and wondering what punishment he'd incurred before it dawned on him that he hadn't in fact done anything wrong.

Not recently, at least. Since the deep scores had healed enough, he'd dutifully been doing all the exercises that the healers gave him to strengthen his damaged arm and shoulder, and he'd now started joining the Wing when they went on a run. He left the weyrcot and hurried across the grass towards Main.

Could this be about his return to duty? But why would the Weyrwoman call him for that? Alarm rose in his chest: surely he wasn't going to be transferred? The fear that he would not be allowed to go back to FireStar had haunted him since he'd first been injured, and he'd let it crowd out the darker thought that worse things could still happen in 'Fall.

He was longing to get back to flying with his Wing. Now, more than two months after he was injured, he was expecting to be passed fit for duty any day. He'd really be able to be part of FireStar. He'd suffered as much from his sense of failure as from his injuries, but he'd show them that he could be a good wingrider! He'd stay focused, and he'd do everything right, this time. His initial reaction to hearing the Wing's history now seemed stupid, childish. He wasn't a useless weyrling. He wasn't!

In her impressively-furnished office, Lybelle was standing by her desk. She motioned him to a seat and watched as he sat down, but remained looking down at him as she leaned against the edge of the polished surface. He felt as if she were looking into his head. Her question took him by complete surprise.

"How old are you, N'vai?"

It took a few moments to come up with the answer. "Fifteen Turns and about eleven months, ma'am."

Lybelle raised an eyebrow. "You sound as if you aren't sure?"

"I don't get older on my birthingday any more, ma'am. It's strange to have to work it out."

The weyrwoman inclined her head with a slight smile. "I expect you'll get used to it. You must know that we don't normally have riders under sixteen in the fighting Wings. We don't take candidates of the age you were when you Impressed, any more."

"Yes, ma'am. But I was put in FireStar."

"Because you didn't have very long to go, and the Weyrstaff expressed confidence in you. On reflection, that seems to have been a mistake."

Their confidence in him was mistaken? N'vai could feel the hot colour burning his face, but he couldn't deny it. He said nothing.

"Well, N'vai, I think we must do what we can to put that right. The healers tell me that you still need to build up the strength in your arm, but you're otherwise fit to return to light duty. You'll report for drill with my Wing, immediately after breakfast tomorrow. We'll see how you do there, and think about a transfer once you're fully recovered. By that time, you should be old enough to be considered a full rider."

"But, ma'am -"

"I'm, sorry, N'vai, but this is *not* open to argument. We don't have wingriders under sixteen Turns in the fighting Wings. It's been a while since we've had a wingrider under sixteen Turns at all." She opened a drawer in the desk and removed something from it. "Here, go and put this on your jacket. You can see Headsecond Nacita about a weyrcot in our area." She held out a Wing patch, in the colours of the Queens' Wing.

There was no choice but to take it. He murmured, "Yes, ma'am," saluted, and left.

As he walked back to FireStar's area, much more slowly than he'd come, he pulled the patch from his pocket and stared at it with distaste. The verdict he'd feared had come. He'd been deemed unfit to fly with a fighting Wing, and the unbroken gold seemed like a mark of shame.

*Why are you unhappy? We shall be flying together, and fighting Thread!*

*But in the Queens' Wing! They think we aren't good enough - they think I'm not good enough - to go back to FireStar.*

*What is wrong with flying with the queens? You cannot think they are not good enough! Zalyth had a healthy respect for the Weyr's gold dragons.*

*They're... well, queens. They don't flame. They have to fly at that level. But there's not much Thread down there – it's where they put people who can't fly with a proper Wing!*

*I am sure that Ihyanith thinks that hers is a proper Wing! Zalyth sounded quite sniffy. Shall I ask her?*

*No! Don't do that. N'vai really didn't want to think about how Lybelle might react to that enquiry!*

*We shall do well in Ihyanith's Wing, Zalyth pronounced smugly. They fly every 'Fall.*

*It's just like what they give weyrings to do. Just as if we hadn't graduated at all.*

*Mulujath flies in that Wing.*

*N'larion's injured!*

*Your arm still hurts when you scrub me. Azalianth flies in that Wing. I like Azalianth. Her tone became wheedling. You like his rider.*

*C'drin's a dragonhealer! N'vai flushed a little. The apprentice had been sent to give him updates on Zalyth's progress, while he was still confined to the infirmary. He was rather attractive.... The dragonhealers are all in that Wing.*

*And we shall fly Thread with them, and we shall do well, and it will be good.*

*You don't understand!*

*I understand you very well. You think it will be too easy and you are being put there because you are not good enough. If it is easy, you can be good enough. What is the problem?*

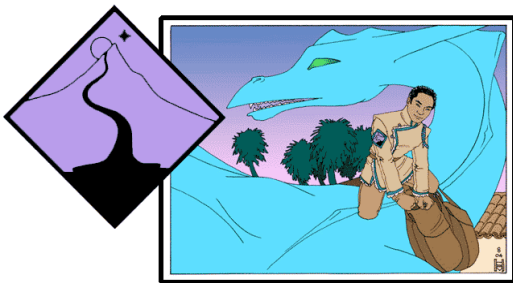
*But... N'vai bit back the thought abruptly. Zalyth's version of logic simply wasn't susceptible to argument. Besides, she didn't remember what had happened, except when he recalled it. With a sick feeling, he relived the moment when – yes, it was true – he'd forgotten a basic lesson, and both of them had paid for it. It could happen again. The admission, after months of trying to deny it, brought him to a halt.*

*Zalyth continued affectionately, You are my rider. You are always good enough for me.*

*N'vai ran back to the weyrcot and flung his arms round her neck.*

*I know, I know. I'm just being stupid. We'll be flying together, and it'll only be a few months before I'm old enough that they'll let me go back to FireStar. We'll have time to get the hang of it again before we go back, and there won't be so much happening at once. It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks, anyway.*

*The thing he dreaded had happened. And yet, along with the sense of failure, he felt the unfamiliar lightness of relief.*



# Kadanzer Weyr

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