
Before Impression, Pt. 1

by Stasha Alfonso
2860.12.02

Printed in FTA #26 (2009)

This story is printed by Kadanzer Weyr (www.kadanzer.org), a fan club approved by Anne McCaffrey in 1995. Kadanzer Weyr is a non-profit group – all materials pertaining to Ms. McCaffrey's works displayed on this website may only be accessed for personal, non-commercial purposes. Please do not reproduce without permission. All references to worlds and characters based on Anne McCaffrey's fiction are copyright© Anne McCaffrey 1967, 2005, all rights reserved, and used by permission of the author. The Dragonriders of Pern® is registered U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, by Anne McCaffrey, used here with permission. Use or reproduction without a license is strictly prohibited.

2860.12.02 (Present) - Kadanzer Weyr

With every step Consetta took off the Hatching Grounds, her pride swelled and her joyful tears nearly choked her. After several months at Kadanzer Weyr, she had finally Impressed her beloved Reshath.

And I'm hungry! the little green added to Consetta's internal revelation.

The thought from Reshath stirred their joined hunger, which only reminded Consetta that her body was no longer her own, and that they would share more than just hunger together.

Once off the Sands, Consetta gratefully accepted the blanket and the bowl of food for Reshath, and found a seat along the wall. With Reshath's first bite, Consetta found herself staring at the dragonet in amazement as she ate her mouthful and nudged Consetta for more.

Slow down, Consetta laughed at her lifemate's eagerness. *Chew.*

After a demonstration was given to her, Reshath complied and chomped on the morsels of meat with great enthusiasm. **More. I'm really hungry.** The green gaped her jaw open.

Please, was Consetta's response as she gave Reshath another few chunks. *You always say 'please' when you want something, and 'thank you' when you get it.* Consetta did not know how other dragons were, but she would make sure that at least this one had manners.

Reshath gave an inquisitive glance. **Why?**

It's polite, Consetta responded with a loving smile, but that was not enough for Reshath.

What is polite?

Consetta only laughed back. *Polite is...* She paused in her thought. How did one describe polite to a dragonet who barely grasped any of the concepts in its newly discovered world?

I understand, Reshath replied to Consetta's lacking answer with her whirling blue eyes. **Polite makes you happy. That was all she needed to know. More, please?** Reshath opened her mouth once more. She thanked Consetta once she received another mouthful.

Because it made her happy. Consetta realized that was all that would ever matter to Reshath; her happiness, which was more than Consetta could have ever asked for. She knew that Impression would be life altering, but Consetta never truly understood the sheer magnitude of it all until it finally happened. Nothing in the world would ever matter to her

more than Reshath. Nothing could even compare. Only Reshath mattered now.



2860.05.21- Porlian Seahold in Ierne Island Hold

"How dare you go behind my back!" Consetta's words lashed out at her mother, Linetta, while her blue firelizard, Polo, hissed viciously at the great offense. "How dare you arrange a marriage with Daret without consulting me first!"

Linetta kept a calm demeanor as she spoke back to her enraged daughter. "Consetta, you've already had two failed suitors-"

"Through no fault of my own." It pained her to be reminded of the death of her last betrothed, Taldin. She glanced up to the ceiling so she could prevent the tears from springing out of her eyes before she fastened her glare back onto her mother. Consetta loathed the lack of control she had over marriage. It was such a life-altering event that she felt she and she alone had the right to decide who she did and did not marry. "We're not Seaholder's family. We're crafters."

"We're holders now," Linetta corrected her.

"It doesn't matter. There's nothing to be gained out of any of this. No land, no possessions, nothing. So why didn't you ask me if I was ready? Why did you not speak to me first before you offered *me* to a man I hardly know? A man twice my age?" That last detail of the suitor was the final insult to Consetta.

"Because you never seem to be ready, Consetta. There is always a reason, an excuse." When she heard the growl in her mother's voice, Consetta could tell Linetta's patience was clearly beginning to run thin with her. "First you weren't ready. Then with Mendel's betrayal, I felt like I had to fight you with Taldin until you finally accepted him. And now you've mourned, you've mourned for two months!"

"And what was I supposed to do? Move on? Forget? Act as if it never happened? Become heartless and cold just to follow this pointless tradition?"

"It is not pointless!" Linetta shot to her feet and gave Consetta a deep, pointed stare. "This goes beyond tradition, and simple acts and motions. It's about discipline, it's about family, it's about survival."

"It's not about survival. If it was, the Weyr would do the same-"

Linetta snapped back fiercely putting the young woman back into her proper place. "The Weyr are full of harlots who know no better, and we are above that!" Linetta was breathing coarsely now. She turned away from Consetta for a moment before she faced her once more. "This will not be up for debate," Linetta began with a softer voice, though her expression was firm. "You're seventeen now, and your wedding is long overdue. And to answer your question about the age of your betrothed, Daret is the only decent match for you that is willing to accept you. At seventeen and unmarried, people begin to ask questions."

Consetta was taken aback by the implication her mother made. Her face went hot, while her stomach churned to the point of nausea, and her lips and limbs became numb. "You know I would never," Consetta stopped herself as she tried

to hold back the brewing fear from the unspoken accusation that she had been with a man before marriage. Yes, Consetta had kissed a man or two, but she never dared to do anything remotely close to sleeping with anyone, not even Mendel or Taldin. She knew better than that, but that did not mean others would not jump to conclusions. "You know me better than that."

"I do, and I know that you're terrified of what would happen if I found out. But everyone else doesn't know you like I do. Not everyone trusts me when I assure them your virginity is as pure as white snow. At seventeen and not married, people are suspicious." A frustrated sigh escaped her. "I take partial blame for giving into your wishes to wait until you were sixteen. But I didn't know that a Turn later we would still be in this predicament. I didn't expect you to be so difficult, and honestly I am disappointed in you because of your behavior."

Consetta lowered her head shamefully at the reminder of her mother's patience with her. Linetta had been more than fair in the past when a fifteen Turn old Consetta first spoke about her lack of readiness to marry. She also wondered if what her mother said was true. Was her age truly beginning to interfere with her choice in suitors? Once Consetta recognized her error she responded quietly to her mother. "I'm sorry."

Even with Consetta's heartfelt apology, Linetta's eyes remained stern with her daughter. "Well, at least I know better now, and I will not make the same mistake with your sister."

Those words stung Consetta sharply as Linetta continued.

"Whether you feel prepared or not, it no longer matters. What matters now is that you fulfill your *duty* to your husband. Do I make myself clear?"

She quietly conceded to her mother's wishes. "Yes ma'am."

The older woman gave an approving nod to her daughter. "Daret is a good man and a good sailor, and he has the means and the will to support you and the family you two will make together. You will be the obedient wife that I expect you to be. You will raise his children as if they were your own, and whatever children you two have. And you will loyally be his support and his comfort. "

Consetta only replied with her silence.

"You may never love him. But you will respect him as he will respect you, and together you will have a bond that your ideal of love could never comprehend." Slowly Linetta stepped to her daughter, and brushed a loose strand of hair away to grab Consetta's gaze.

Her gray eyes were as cold as Polo's icy blue hide while the corner of her curved lips fell solemnly with her tears.

"I don't know if you hate me now, but if you do, I know that someday you'll understand." With those last words Linetta left the room, leaving Consetta with only Polo to offer her solace.



2860.05.23- Porlian Seahold in Ierne Island Hold

"Get it out! Get it out!" Renna's words echoed throughout the infirmary as her body twisted in agony from the pains of labor.

Renna's mother, Meriel, quickly took her hand and attempted to soothe her daughter, but the tears from Renna's eyes made it clear it did little good. "It'll be all right Ren," her mother whispered to her as she combed back the damp curls of blond hair, but her daughter roared out once more as another contraction pierced her abdomen, and the unbearable pressure of the incoming infant began to build in her pelvis.

"Your mother's right Ren," Consetta added to ease her friend's distress. "Everything will be all right. Mother just stepped out for a moment, but I've already sent Polo out to call her back." Consetta turned to the other two midwife assistants who were setting up the infant table and birth tray for delivery, but then looked back to Renna when the laboring woman took her hand tightly for support.

"Please Consetta," Renna panted after the contraction ceased. "I just want it over with."

Consetta blotted the sweat that had collected on her friend's brow. "I know, I know."

"Consetta?" Linetta came marching into the room with a third assistant.

Consetta lifted her eyes at the call of her name. "She's completely dilated, and she is feeling a lot of pressure," Consetta quickly reported to her mother.

Linetta reached down and inspected the situation with Renna before she turned back up to Consetta and the other assistants, and flipped the sheets back. "The head is in the canal. Brinedette," she called out to one of the midwife assistants. "I need you to help Consetta prop her legs. Renna, when I say 'push' I need you to push."

"I need to push now!" Renna screamed out as another contraction grasped hold of her. "By the egg!"

"All right." Linetta's eyes turned back to Renna once her legs were in position. "Push, Renna, push."

Renna did so, letting out a howl of frustration and torture, until her body released and she breathed heavily in exhaustion. Her breath was labored, but she tried again, her body clenching as she pushed once more to free herself from the growing burden that forced its way out of her.

Consetta offered words of encouragement through the chaos. "You're doing good, Ren. Just keep pushing." Polo added his humming song of birth from his corner of the room.

"The baby's crowning," Linetta added. "Give me another good push, Renna."

Renna did as she was told, and thrust her energy downward while Consetta held tightly to her friend. She watched as Renna struggled, but her friend did not relent. She could see the determination spread across Renna's face.

"The head is out!" Linetta called out to her assistants.

"Come on, Renna. You're so close. Just one more push." Consetta attempted to spur Renna onward. "You can do this."

Renna cried out once more, her fingers digging into the sheets around her to find the energy she needed, but once the shoulders were out the rest of the baby slipped through.

The infant let out its first life-giving cries, assuring those around it that it was very much alive.

"Good work, Ren," Consetta murmured proudly to her exhausted friend.

"I did it," Renna replied as her eyes looked to the new life that she had made.

Linetta turned to Meriel and gave the old woman her new grandchild before she turned proudly back to the new mother. "Congratulations, Renna, it's a boy."

While Meriel swore that she had known the child was going to be a boy, Consetta only smiled back, if not enviously, at Renna. Her best friend was a mother now, and only had more children to look forward to. *'But so will I,'* Consetta realized, before her mother gave the command to push once more for the afterbirth. Consetta's attention shifted back to her job, but it was not as difficult as delivering the infant himself, and once it was done, Renna was given her son for the first time.

Consetta watched as Renna began to nurse the little infant boy. There was a warmth in her friend's eyes, a warmth that Consetta only saw in new mothers. Would this be her some day? She wondered as she watched the young child in awe.

"Is it safe for me to come in now?" Trelin spoke from the entrance. The child's father slipped his head through the crack in the door before a wide grin carved into his face. It was a grin that was similar to his deceased brother, Taldin, and for a moment Consetta thought she was looking at a ghost until she knew better.

"Renna," Trelin spoke with complete jubilation. He placed a kiss on his wife's forehead before Consetta saw him become mesmerized by his new infant son.

'Would Daret be like Trelin if we had a child?' she caught herself wondering as she saw Trelin wrap an arm around his wife and brush a finger lightly against the baby's cheek. *'Was that what my child would have looked like if I had actually had one with Taldin? Would Taldin have been loving as his brother?'* But it was not right to put too much attention on the past and the what ifs. At that point, she stopped herself from recalling painful memories. It was behind her now, and Daret was her future. In an attempt to put Taldin behind her, she tried to put her attention on Renna and Trelin's moment. "What are you going to name him?" Consetta asked after the two parents shared their congratulations with each other.

Trelin glanced up to Consetta with his hauntingly familiar eyes and gave her a rueful, sympathetic smile. "Taldin," he answered in memory of his brother and her lost love.



2860.05.27- Porlian Seahold in Ierne Island Hold

The sun was just starting to set over Porlian Seahold when Consetta was finally able to escape from the healer hall and retreat to the peaks above the hold. At least tomorrow would be a rest day, Consetta thought pleasantly, for she wanted nothing more than to have some time to herself, time that she desperately needed to have. Consetta already had a hike planned for herself tomorrow on the beach, and

she was looking forward to some pipe playing and beach combing.

Polo added a chatter to Consetta's last thought and gave an image of him flying alongside her on a dark sandy beach with an occasional treat thrown his way.

A treat? Consetta laughed. Sometimes she thought food was all Polo ever cared about. Consetta took a bit of dried meat from her pocket and tossed it into the air for the little beast, who looped around and caught the morsel in his mouth. He chattered contentedly once he finished the small treat, which was his way of kindly asking for more.

"You greedy little beast!" But Consetta was more than happy to oblige his request. This time she threw the piece out over the sea.

Polo dove down skillfully and caught the treat before it hit the water. He loved this game and wanted more. Once he ate the morsel, he flew a tight circle around Consetta before she tossed another piece of dry meat into the sky and he shot off after it. He daintily picked it out of the air, and gobbled it up with haste. His emotions projected to her that he wanted more as he chattered wildly and swooped excitedly around her. He back-looped before his eyes settled on her eagerly, but then his attention was drawn away.

An image flashed into Consetta's thoughts of a man approaching on the trail that led to where she was. When she glanced over her shoulder, she saw an older man, weathered down by hard labor and his time out at sea. It took a moment, but after she studied his rough features, Consetta recognized the man as Daret. Out of respect, Consetta called Polo to her shoulder, and awaited her betrothed. "Good evening, Daret," Consetta gave a proper, submissive nod before she looked back to the man.

He smelled strongly of salt water and musk, while his head of dark blond hair was a mess of wet tangles on his head. His clothes were clean too, Consetta noted, which told her that he had time to prepare to meet with her. She had an internal urge to simply make conversation, if anything so she could break the awkwardness she felt around him. After a quick deliberation, however, she decided to let him speak first.

"I came to speak with you. Your mother said I would find you here," he replied with a kind smile.

"What did you want to talk to me about?" she asked.

"The wedding."

It was the last thing that Consetta wanted to speak about, and she nearly let out a groan in irritation, but caught herself before she did. "What about the wedding?"

"I spoke with your mother," he began.

Oh no, Consetta thought. What did her mother tell him? She was about to ask, especially when she caught his hesitation, but he spoke before she could say anything.

"She said that things have been difficult for you," he began. "She also said that you're unsure about the wedding."

"Did she really say that?" Consetta asked in astonishment. She would have expected the complete opposite out of her mother's mouth. After their last conversation, Consetta thought Linetta was through considering Consetta's feelings when it came to marriage. Now, Consetta felt even more guilt for thinking so low of her mother.

"Yes, she did," he replied with a smile. "You sound surprised."

"I am," she admitted while she internally thanked her mother.

"Honestly, I couldn't understand why you were so reluctant to get married," he continued on. "I mean, I know there are some hesitations when it comes to our age difference."

"That did come to mind," Consetta carefully acknowledged. She watched him, attempting to read his emotions about the whole thing.

There was something gentle and kind about him as he grinned at her response. He gave a light chuckle. "I can't imagine why," he humorously added. "I mean, I am twice your age."

His calm laugh soothed Consetta enough for her to open up to him. "Daret, I know you want a wife. But what I don't understand is why you want to marry me. Any woman could look after your children, and tend your house, but I'm so young and inexperienced. And you need an experienced woman to help you." In fact, Consetta knew several women who were widowed and were older than her that could do the job. Consetta was confident that she could fulfill the role of a wife to someone younger, but there were older women who had developed the skills necessary to raise Daret's five children, five children who were nearly Consetta's age. His reasons for wanting a young woman who was barely out of childhood herself baffled Consetta. She only had experience with infants fresh from the womb, not fifteen and twelve Turn olds who could talk back, act rebellious, and needed guidance that she did not know how to give. By the egg, half the guidance those children needed Consetta felt she still needed herself. This knowledge made her wary about Daret and his motives, so she asked the question that was rattling the most in her mind. "Out of all the women at Porlian Seahold, why me?"

"You mean besides the obvious?" Consetta was startled at first when he took her hands. He had more affection for her than she realized, she thought with concern as his rough hands gently cupped her own.

Consetta was unsure how to proceed, and began to feel a surge of discomfort. What was the obvious? She wanted to ask, but the look he gave her when he eyed her all over made his intentions too clear. She was youthful, energetic, and pretty, and he was man. He was a man who had been alone for too long, and it was clear that he was not going to live his life in the shadow of solitude.

"I," her voice was shaking now. "I don't know what to say." She honestly was at a loss of words. After all, what was she supposed to say to something like that? Part of Consetta became angered that her life was going to be nothing more than a need he wanted to be met.

If Daret saw Consetta's distress, he did not indicate it. "What do you expect? You're a beautiful, vibrant young woman." He placed a hand on the side of her face, his dry thumb stroked the side of her face, while his eyes hinted that he wanted to kiss her.

Consetta quickly became rigid.

The emotions flaring from Consetta caused Polo to hiss out warningly at Daret. His forked eyes whirled into a dangerous tone of red, his forked tongue flicked out disapprovingly, his wings rustled, and his tail tightened

around Consetta's neck. If Daret did not see Consetta's distress, Polo made sure that he did now.

"I'm sorry," Daret apologized. He stepped back and gave Consetta some space.

Her eyes averted to the ground, while she placed a calming hand on Polo. "It's all right," she accepted the apology, though she was more cautious now.

There was a long drawn out silence between the two of them.

After what felt like an eternity, Daret was the first to speak. "I can't and I won't call off the wedding," he spoke with a firm voice, one that was firmer than any tone she had heard from him so far.

His words caused her to look up at him pleadingly. "I just-" she began, but he stopped her with a raised hand.

"Part of me just wants to get the wedding over with. You, my children, and I, we all need to move on with our lives." Slowly his eyes gave way to a softer expression. "But if you're not ready, and you're not willing, I won't force anything upon you. I'll give you the time you need."

Consetta's head cocked with just as much surprise as her firelizard's. "Seriously? You really would do that for me?"

"I'd like to think that I'm doing this for all of us." Daret no longer smiled at her like he did before. There was something more serious about him now. "I need you to be ready because it's not just you and me. It's my boys, and my little girl. I want them to have the best mother they can have."

Again the question surfaced in her thoughts. "Then why me?"

"I'm going to push the wedding to midsummer. That will give you more than enough time to adjust, and it will give us some time to get to know each other. Maybe I can even court you."

Consetta wanted to smile back at Daret's last comment, but she did not. As far as Consetta was concerned, it was too late for courting now. She could no longer see the gentleness in his eyes, or the welcoming smile that was etched onto his face. Instead, she saw the man behind the mask that he put up to her, and she knew what kind of man Daret truly was. He was not the caring father that he led everyone on to believe, and their marriage had nothing to do with his children. Instead the only thing he cared about was his own lust, and he expected Consetta to satisfy it.

Once he placed a farewell kiss on her hand and left, Consetta felt the tears of outrage and despair spring into her eyes. Any hope she had left was shattered now at the realization of what their marriage would really be like. The marriage was now her prison, a prison she had little if any hope of ever escaping.

(To be continued)



Kadanzer Weyr
Alternate Tenth Pass Dragonriders of Pern® Fanclub
www.kadanzer.org