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# Focus

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Lina awoke before the first weyring bell. She felt groggy and her mouth was parched, although she dimly remembered drinking what seemed like bucket-loads of water the day before. Feeling as though she ought to slosh as she walked had seemed preferable to dehydration after the long wait on the Hatching Sands.

She rolled over to look along the line of bunks stretching away down the long building, sleeping dragonets curled or laying at length beside each. She tried to guess the number, it seemed as though there were considerably more than just those who'd staggered giddy and hot from the Sands yesterday.

The Hatching feast itself was a blur. She could barely remember which of the candidates (or weyrings now, some of them) whose names she'd managed to retain, had also Impressed, although she knew she'd sat talking to several of them for some hours, and at least one of them was also from Calendryl.

The Hatching itself was little clearer; she distantly remembered the heat and the noise and the crowds of spectators. Overriding it all was the dreamlike moment Tayath had chosen her. The adoring gaze and indescribable wash of feeling. Certain other moments stood out like hilltops from mist -- the first hatching, the queen leaping at Dwayana, the candidate beside Lina swooning clean away in the heat.

Apart from that, the entire past few days were a blur when she really thought about it. She had a confused idea of the history and notoriety of this clutch, pieced together from story and ballad and muddled further by rumours and stories once she reached the Weyr. The lessons and lectures she'd had since she arrived bled together with the reality and unexpected confusion on the Hatching Sands.

Before that had been the confusion of finding herself standing before Master Gian at Calendryl, trying to take in the idea that she'd been Searched. That dragons wanted to take her to the Weyr. Her mother's puzzled, anxious expression. Her father's pride even as he assured her that it was her own choice and no one else's.

Even earlier she'd been in chaos -- nearly missed the message about the Search dragons and gone sprinting, almost tumbling down the stairs and out into the courtyard to tag herself, flustered and panting, onto the end of the line of young people awaiting the dragonriders' attention.

Lina shook her head and sleepily sat up. As she swung her legs over the side of the bed and ducked her head to be sure of clearing the bunk above her a more minor confusion

stopped her. She was in a different bunk now, of course, her things had been moved from the Candidate Barracks last night.

She came fully awake all at once as she gazed down at the sleeping green dragonet curled in her wallow. She stirred as Lina watched and the girl wondered whether she'd made some sound or if it was her own wakefulness that had disturbed the infant dragon.

Almost before she'd finished the thought, Tayath's eyes flew open, whirling red, and Lina felt her own stomach churn with instant hunger. She almost fell out of bed in her hurry to comfort the dragonet, and all the chaos and confusion of the past few days was swept away by the one all-important fact of her presence and her need.

*I am hungry!* Tayath clambered to her feet. *Where is the food?*

Lina was amazed the mental cry didn't wake half the room, but quickly answered in a whisper, still not used to the idea of talking directly with the dragon in her own head.

"I'll find out, don't worry, we'll get something for you right now."

Lina opened the chest at the foot of the bunk as quickly and quietly as possible, murmuring reassurances and promises to be quick, and threw on some clothes. She reached out to lay a guiding hand on Tayath's neck.

*Let's not wake up all your sleepy brothers and sisters shall we?*

*I expect their bellies will wake them.* Tayath said, unconcerned about anything but her hunger. *My belly woke me!*

She sounded quite indignant and Lina stifled a laugh -- acutely aware that rumbling bellies or not, they seemed to be the only pair up and about so far.

Lina came to a halt a few steps from her bunk and looked at the imposing door. Tayath butted her impatiently in the back of the knees and her whirling eyes gave Lina the impetus to tackle it. It swung open surprisingly easily and in near silence and she was able to lead Tayath outside.

The shadows were still long in the early morning light but there was already movement and activity around the weyring complex where several members of the staff were preparing buckets of meat. Tayath raised her head and quickly spotting them -- and her breakfast.

Lina and Tayath had clearly already been spotted in return and a tall woman strode briskly towards them, picking up a full bowl as she came.

*Does Layketh's rider have my meat?* Tayath immediately demanded, recognising the weyringsecond before Lina did.

*Yes, Lina said, I'll get it for you now, hang on.*

Tayath's hunger was distracting and Lina groped in vain for a name to match to the dragon's. She did remember her from the candidate classes and knew she had greeted them after yesterday's confused departure from the Sands. Urged on by Tayath's grumbling stomach, she shrugged. After all, she was a dragonrider who needed to feed her dragon. What was name and rank to that?

*I have asked Layketh and she says her rider is Weyrwingsecond Shahara and she will not tell us off,* Tayath announced unprompted. *It is right that we are here together.*

*Of course it is,* Lina soothed. She blushed slightly at the realisation that Tayath had blithely informed the weyrlingsecond's dragon that Lina couldn't remember her name.

"Good morning," Shahara said, giving Lina the bowl, "Is everything all right?"

Tayath immediately had her nose in the bowl and her mouth full.

"Slowly!" Lina pulled the bowl away and held it out of reach as Tayath chewed as fast as she could. "Uh, yes," she managed to belatedly answer. "Tayath was hungry," She dealt out another handful, still keeping the bowl out of reach of the dragonet. "Really hungry!"

Shahara gave a reassuring smile, "Don't worry, they all think they're half dying of hunger when they wake up. You might want to move away a bit though -- the rest of them won't be long now, and you don't want to be between a horde of dragonets and their breakfast.

Lina nodded emphatically, and put her hand back on Tayath's neck to guide and encourage her along. This wasn't entirely easy -- now that breakfast was in front of her the dragonet was not at all interested in being anywhere else! Shahara did not follow them and, with her concentration fully on making sure Tayath didn't literally inhale her breakfast, Lina hardly noticed when the rest of the weyrlings piled out of the barracks and chatter and cries of admonishments to the creeling and hungry dragonets filled the air.

Finally Tayath slowed down a bit and Lina looked back into the large bowl as she chewed, trying to make a mental note of the correct size of the bits in preparation in case she was likely to have to do it herself. How long was it before dragonets could bite off chunks for themselves anyway? She only hoped she wouldn't end up with a couple of her own fingers mixed in. Butchery was not exactly in her set of skills, the most she'd ever wielded was a vegetable knife.

The thought brought her mind back to home. Or what *had* been home, she supposed she ought to start thinking of it. It seemed amazing that such an enormous change could have happened so quickly, with so little notice. A sevenday ago she'd been mending tunics. Now she was feeding a dragon.

Her parents had seemed nearly overwhelmed at the Hatching feast the previous night. With reflection, Lina realised it had probably all been as much as blur for them as for her.

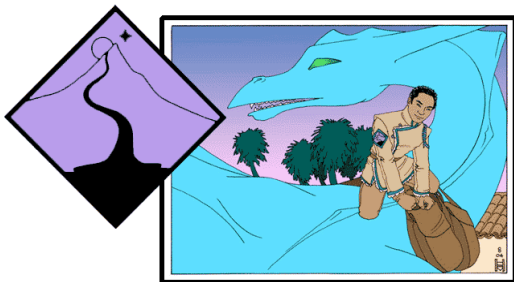
They had been hand in hand all night and her mother looked as if she'd been crying, but was all smiles and hugs and congratulations at the feast so Lina hadn't asked. It had

She thought she might know the reason for her mother's strange mixed expression, but she barely even dared touch on it in her thoughts. Not until she was more certain of shielding them from Tayath.

The memory of the scars on the Hall watchdragon and the sound she'd heard the green make once when a dragon had died, were as close as she dared come to acknowledging it.

She forced even that from her mind, stroked Tayath's head and returned her full attention to the rapidly emptying bucket. All the young dragon was concerned about was her belly. As her rider, right now, all Lina needed to worry about was making sure she was fed, watered and cared for.

Everything else could wait.



# Kadanzer Weyr

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been an emotional day all around.