
Hatching Overheated

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Lyra came slowly to consciousness. She was lying on her back in the sand. What had happened? Her confusion brought her more fully awake. The sun was shining full and hot on her face. Her skin felt prickly, stretched and dry. Her mouth felt like it was full of cloth. She needed water desperately! Her eyes fluttered, and then opened. The sky above her was clear and blue, and the sun was high.

Around her there seemed to be some commotion, the sounds of a crowd. Where was she? What was going on? Then she remembered.

The Hatching!

She'd fainted in the heat, but the Hatching had gone on without her.

She leaned on one elbow to sit up, and hissed when the gritty sand scratched her sensitive, sun-burnt skin. As she sat up, she felt increasingly light-headed, so she stopped and put her head between her knees. There was a line of candidates in front of her -- and as she glanced up, she thought she could see green hide advancing on them.

The dragonet trotted forward, and then looked up at one of the candidates, who sank with a gasp to her knees. Arlynn, one of the Benden candidates, Lyra registered.

With that, Lyra let her head sink between her knees. She hurt, she thirsted, she was hot... and she was ready for this long Hatching to be over. She desperately wanted to return to the comfort of the Dragon Infirmary.

But it wasn't to be... at least, not yet.

"Lyra!" Her sister Nori looked as sunburnt as Lyra felt. Nori wrapped an arm around Lyra's shoulders. The scrape of her sister's robe against her bare arms made Lyra hiss. "Goodness..." Nori said, pulling away. Lyra heard her sister whisper, "Look at those blisters..." Then, "Lyra, we need to get you out of the sun right away. Can you walk?"

Blearily, Lyra nodded, and with her sister's help, stood... but the world swayed around her. She stumbled with vertigo, and quickly forced down a sudden urge to retch.

"Lorelli, help me," she heard Nori say, and then another pair of arms supported her on her right side, and the two of them walked her underneath the canopy and off the Hatching grounds. Then there were others around them, and other arms were supporting her -- Lyra lost track of who was speaking, but could make out Nori telling someone, "Her skin is dry and hot, and she's stopped sweating... we need to cool her off right away..." Her sister's voice had a tinge of panic to it. Lyra wanted to tell her it was all right, but her mouth was too dry and she couldn't make a sound.

"Here we go, lass," said a deep voice. Was that Journeyman Peregan? Then she was lifted up, and someone was carrying her like a child. Part of her protested that she was perfectly able to walk on her own, thank you very much, but her body would not respond. The dizziness intensified briefly, and all she could think about was how hot and thirsty she was.

Before long she recognized the walls of the Infirmary around her, and she was being laid down on a cot. Curtained walls went up around her, and she heard someone giving instructions to draw a cold bath.

"What about her sunburn?" she heard Nori ask.

"We'll get numbweed on it right away," said Journeyman Peregan's deep voice, less panicked-sounding than her sister's. "But no water yet -- not until after we get her temperature under control. She might start retching, otherwise, and that's the last thing we need..."

Someone started gently rubbing her arms and shoulders with something cool, and the prickle of her burns started fading away. Numbweed, Lyra thought. Then someone was helping Lyra undress, holding the cloth carefully away from her red and blistered skin despite the numbweed. Someone took the ribbon from her hair, the easier to get her robe off, and her red tresses fell in a cascade down her neck and scratched across the sensitive spots on her ears and neck that hadn't been covered by her robe or hair -- and that didn't have numbweed on them yet. She hissed again.

"Oooh, sorry lass," said a kind voice.

Then someone was helping her into a tub of frigid water. She gasped, and tried to command her muscles to get out, but nothing happened. Then someone dumped a bucket of water over her head and she gasped again.

"...Couldn't have picked a hotter day or more inconvenient time for a Hatching," someone was saying. "And it went so long! Those eggs sure took their dear time."

"Least they could have done was brought the poor dears water on the Sands."

"But the queens are particular, they are... Don't like people on the Sands besides the Candidates; not with the Hatching going on. They give 'em water beforehand... maybe she just didn't get enough."

"With as long as this Hatching went, it just couldn't be helped."

"Looks like young Lyra here is the worst of the lot."

Lyra felt herself trembling in the cool water... but the chill had less bite to it. She still felt dizzy and disoriented, but all she wanted now was a deep skin of water and a long nap in the cool of the Infirmary.

After several minutes, a hand felt her forehead. "There, you're almost down to a reasonable temperature now." Lyra looked up into Journeywoman Carran's face. "Shall we get you some water?" Carran asked.

Lyra nodded and shuddered with chill.

They helped her out of the bath and soon had her laying face-down in a bed, wearing a loose-fitting linen shift. They set Nori to applying an aloe salve to Lyra's sunburned neck, legs and arms, and once the healers were convinced that Lyra's body temperature had settled, she received a skin of water -- which she drained in several long gulps.

"I'm so glad you're all right," Nori said when the sisters were finally alone. "Didn't you drink anything before we

went out on the Sands? They were handing out water. I got some."

"Too excited," Lyra said.

Nori made a "tsk" sound. "I'm finished here," she said. "You can get some rest now."

"Good," Lyra said. Her eyes felt so heavy, they were closing of their own accord. She scarcely heard what Nori said next, and soon she was fully asleep.



"Lyra."

She came awake slowly, and blinked. She was still lying on her stomach... but the scent permeating the air was far tastier-smelling than numbweed. She pushed herself up. Nori stood in the doorway with a bright-red sunburnt face, food-laden tray and a broad smile.

"Rest well?" Nori asked.

"Yes... What time is it? And that sure smells good!" Lyra replied. Her stomach gurgled in emphasis, and the two girls giggled.

"It's evening," Nori answered, "the feast is over, and I'm sure you're hungry since you haven't had anything to eat since before the Hatching." With one foot, Nori edged a side table over to Lyra's bedside. She then set the tray down. There were bowls of chunky fish stew, a round loaf of bread, fruit pastries, and an extra cup of broth. Nori pulled a chair up to the other side of the table and tore a hunk from the bread loaf.

"Have the broth first," Nori said. "You need to replace the salt you lost sweating out there in the sun."

Lyra grabbed the mug obediently and drank deep. Then she tucked into the food, and her thoughts turned to the Hatching itself. "Who... who got the second queen? I didn't quite see."

"It was Deza," Nori said, her eyes wide.

"Deza!" Lyra gasped. "But... she wasn't even a candidate! And how can she be a dragonrider, since she's deaf?"

"Can't argue with a dragon's choice," Nori said philosophically, tearing a piece off her bread and dipping it in the soup.

"No, I suppose not."

"And I heard," Nori continued, "that the Benden Weyrleaders whisked her away before the Hatching Feast was over!"

"Benden? So she's at Benden now!" Lyra breathed. Then she sighed. "Two queens, and neither of them chose us..."

"It's just as well," Nori said. "One of us might have been sent off to Benden too, if we'd Impressed gold from

this clutch. Besides, what do you think a dragonet would have done if you'd fainted on it? 'Specially one like Arohath..."

"Which one was that?" Lyra asked.

"Dwayana's. Demanding thing. Dwayana will have her hands full."

"She'll be fine; she's her mother's daughter," said a new voice from the doorway. Lyra looked over to see their sister Luka, holding the curtain back, clad still in her riding leathers, holding her helmet in the crook of her arm. Her face looked worried, despite her smile.

"Luka!" Lyra said. "I thought you had Threadfall today!"

"I did," her sister replied. "It's over... and I came straight here as soon as I heard where you were."

Lyra felt her face flush, and wondered if her blush showed up under the sunburn. So embarrassing, to faint during a Hatching. "It was no big deal," she said.

"Yes, it was!" Nori said. "You got sunstroke! That is really dangerous. You could have died!"

"But I just fainted," Lyra said, trying to play it down. She could have died? "I wish I wouldn't have done it in front of all those people."

"I'm just glad the healers were on hand," Luka said, sitting on Lyra's bunk.

"We got her away as soon as we could," Nori said.

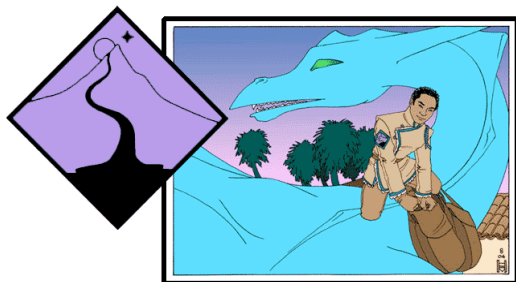
Lyra sighed. "I hope I didn't miss my chance," she said softly.

Luka pursed her lips. "If one of those hatchlings had been meant for you, there would have been much more trouble than there was... Can you just imagine a new, confused dragonet trying to bond with someone in a dead faint?"

Lyra said nothing.

"So," Luka added, "I've heard about the Hatching second- and third-hand... Tell me everything that happened!"

"Well, as much as I remember, anyway," Lyra said with a wry smile. "It was... unforgettable."



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