
Professional Detachment,

pt. 1

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“What do we have here and what needs to be done?” Craftmaster Giselle asked the small cluster of apprentices facing the injured blue dragon.

“Wing scoring on the first sail and further scoring along the flanks” said Meiriel, leaning forward eagerly to see the extent of the damage. “Some of these wounds are deep, but since Thread partially cauterizes the wound, there isn’t too much blood loss right now.”

Giselle looked at Lyra, urging her to continue Meiriel’s assessment.

“Well, Kenith has been treated with numbweed and his vitals have been stabilized. What should be done now is to repair the wingsail, because the tissue there is the most delicate and more likely to tear and be damaged by any movement,” Lyra said evenly, giving Br’dyl a reassuring half-smile. The bluerider, hovering anxiously next to Kenith’s head, was too distracted to make much of her kind gesture, though.

Giselle nodded curtly at Lyra’s appropriate answers and moved to rinse her hands in the bowl of redwort on the operations table. “Anything else? How does this wing damage qualify?”

“It isn’t that serious,” Beltas said. “The wing fingers and joints are very much intact, and if we can repair the wingsail properly and minimize scarring on the flanks, Kenith should fly again.”

“Yes, I think we should be able to manage that.” Giselle eased into place beside the blue’s wing. “Tallah? Anything else to add?”

Tallah, the seniormost apprentice, looked up from where she was sanitizing and organizing the instruments Giselle would need to stitch up the blue’s wing membrane. She had not spoken earlier, but had been watching the other apprentices and the patient with a critical eye. “Beltas is correct in saying the wing injury is not as serious as it could be—but the lack of free-flowing ichor could be an issue with wing membrane repair so we will have to rough the raw edges of the wound that can still be stitched together.” She pointed with her free hand—which was already stained from the redwort—to indicate the area she was interested in on the Blue’s wing. “It looks like the original scoring extended here, and some of the wing membrane was burned away completely, leaving a void. We won’t be able to stitch those

areas together without creating an uneven flexibility in the healed wing. We have to hold them together so they don’t tear, which means stitching a backing on the wing to support it.” Giselle nodded when Tallah looked up at her and she continued, handing Giselle one of the needlethorns she had prepared for the task. “Also, because the sensitive wing membrane is likely to necrotize without immediate care, we fix that first if there are no other urgent injuries.”

Giselle nodded, and began to stitch the innermost part of the wing membrane, where it had torn from the stress of trying to fly on a scored wing. “And how would you judge which injuries are so urgent in the first place? What comes first?” Giselle asked, cutting Tallah’s automatic reply short in favor of giving the other apprentices a chance. “Lyra?”

Tallah’s eyes snapped up, catching Lyra’s gaze, which had been on her while she was speaking. The sudden attention, Tallah thought, made Lyra appear even more flustered. Still, after a pause, Lyra’s answer came competently enough: “Save the dragon’s life first. Then its mobility—flight before ground if possible. This means making sure the injuries are as superficial as they might look.”

“Good,” Giselle said. “Well done, all of you.”

Tallah bent, without being asked, to smear more numbweed over the ragged edge of the wingsail as Giselle stitched, the craftmaster continuing her dialogue with the other apprentices. Tallah knew that if she had answered Lyra’s question she would have elaborated—the vital signs had to be checked, you had to check the body cavity when there were any gaping wounds, not to discount fragile veins and nerves when doing an assessment of a dragon’s injuries... then again, she was a more practiced apprentice than any of the others.

Lyra was nice enough—and she was learning the craft. But there were certain aspects about her fellow apprentice that irked Tallah. She had first noticed Lyra’s tendency towards emotional displays when the foolish Faydra had succeeded in killing her gold queen. When they had gone to examine the blooded Yttrith’s body, Lyra had been distraught to the point that Tallah had been surprised she had been able to pull herself together and watch the dissection. The recent firelizard plague and the subsequent illness of Lyra’s flitter had also visibly upset her. Tallah understood *why* she was upset, but rationally she had no reason to be *so* upset. If Solanth was ever injured in a ‘Fall, Tallah fully expected that she would be able to keep a clear head, even though she would be upset. The girl had proven to be overemotional—likely to get attached to her charges in a way that Tallah knew would inevitably interfere when an emergency presented itself. When the work got dirty, Tallah expected Lyra to crumple under the pressure. Tallah’s attention towards her was more intense than it was with the other apprentices—Tallah felt she had to be prepared to pick up the girl’s slack if she did break down. ‘Detach from your patients, connect with the healing’, Tallah mentally recited, continuing to assist Giselle.

The Fall is over. The wing returns, brown Solanth informed Tallah.

Solanth was outside in the late morning sun basking and listening in on the fighting dragons for the dragonhealers' benefit. He had become quite useful to the healers when Tallah was on duty and not flying Thread herself.

Are there any more minor injuries, Solanth? Tallah asked, knowing that a dragon with a minor sprain or scoring might push themselves to the end of the 'Fall.

There was a pause as Solanth checked with the wingleaders before answering. *No more injuries—everyone flew well.*

Tallah looked up at the surrounding infirmary, which held only three injured dragons from this Threadfall. Other dragons with minor injuries had come in to be treated and either sent to their own wallows or back into the fighting if they were fit. Blue Kenith had come in last, with his flanks and wing scored. The first two, a brown and a green, had injuries that were ugly and painful, but not serious—their Threadscoring was shallow and would only need to be bathed, medicated and watched for infection over the next couple of days.

I will inform the Craftmaster that all is well, then, Solanth.

And Green Layketh asks you to tell Giselle that another small group of weyrings are going to be brought over to see Threadscoring, Solanth added. *I'm sorry for not telling you sooner. Layketh says they have to come down from the sack-tossing point.*

That's fine, Solanth, Tallah said, looking up to see Giselle watching her expectantly: she must have seen Tallah's expression and know that she was conversing with her dragon.

"Threadfall is over." Tallah said. There was a murmur of relief from the other apprentices. "No more injuries. But Weyringssecond Shahara is going to be bringing over another group of weyrings to see the injuries, Giselle."

"I expected that." Giselle said with a sigh, turning back to Kenith's wingsail.

"Shall I tell them to wait?"

"No. No, it isn't too hectic up here at the moment. But I do need to finish this wingsail while the ichor is flowing."

"Shall I ask Dawn or..." Tallah began, more interested in assisting her mentor than watching a pack of weyrings goggle at commonplace injuries.

Giselle's eyes flicked up and held her senior apprentice's for a moment before returning to the task at hand. "I'll let you front this task, Tallah. Perhaps you can give them proper insight, being a dragonrider yourself?"

"Of course," Tallah said, feeling the jab of Giselle's remark—she knew that Giselle regretted her Impression of Solanth even if Tallah had never neglected her craft after graduation into the Queen's Wing. Solanth certainly enjoyed the extra responsibility behind helping the dragonhealers.

"And I don't need all of you hanging about—this is fairly straightforward. Lyra? You've seen a wing repair like this before. Go assist Tallah."

Tallah moved away from the injured blue dragon, irritated by the assignment but unwilling to show it in front of her mentor. Lyra followed her from around Kenith and joined her as they washed their hands. Anticipating the need

to reapply numbweed to the other patients in the infirmary barn, Tallah went to the supply cupboard to get a fresh jar with Lyra hovering behind her.

"Here," Tallah said, handing the jar to Lyra. "Solanth says they should be here any moment."

"Ah. Good," Lyra said, giving a hesitant smile that Tallah acknowledged with a nod.

"We will need to shock them," Tallah said to Lyra, "it is important that they know firsthand what Thread does to a dragon's body. It's fortunate that they will be able to see a damaged wingsail." Lyra frowned at that remark, though Tallah could not fathom why. It was as important for a dragonrider to become professionally detached like a healer had to be—if their wingmates or their own dragon were injured they had to be able to keep their heads.

A group of weyrings marched into the infirmary in various states of exhaustion. Tallah remembered all too well the days when she tossed firestone sacks to the wingriders during Threadfall—and she sympathized with these weyrings enough to give them a terse smile before greeting Weyringssecond Shahara in her brusque manner.

"Weyringssecond, Giselle has given me the task of showing these weyrings the various scorings we have today."

"And if you have any questions," Lyra piped up for the weyrings' benefit, "don't be afraid to ask."

"Very well," Shahara said. "Class, the purpose of this experience is to see what can—and will—happen if you come into contact with Thread, be it through poor teamwork or a fault of your own. You risk the lives of your dragon and your wingmates every time you make a choice during combat. Be sure you make the right choice."

Tallah swept her eyes over the group as Shahara stepped back, giving her the floor. *Solanth, are you listening?* Tallah asked her dragon.

Always, Solanth answered. *Some of the dragons are unhappy that they are not with their riders.*

Tallah knew he meant that some of these weyrings must be upset at the prospect of what they were about to see. That was fine—better they be upset than dead. She would have to push that point home. It would be what Giselle and Shahara would want.

"I am Dragonhealing Apprentice Tallah," she said, leading them over to the first injured dragon—a brown with ugly but superficial scoring twisted up and down his flanks and hind limbs.

"You're a brownrider," said a girl with a long braid of reddish-blond hair, looking curious and impressed. Solanth, always happy to be involved, identified her as Sapherlin, rider of green Lorseenth.

"Yes, I am Solanth's rider." Tallah answered, "But that does not factor in to what you will see today."

The injured brown Hazeroth was asleep—a forced state to keep him from panicking, Tallah explained to the group. His rider J'tael had been injured and was in the human infirmary—they might see him later if they were also viewing rider injuries today.

"From what I can tell, this pair miscalculated a duck and got a back full of Thread," Tallah continued, ignoring the

shocked intakes of breath and whispers among the weyrings as they looked on at the bubbled and charred flanks of the patient. The smell, though it was masked somewhat by the numbweed, was distinctive. But charred flesh did not turn Tallah's stomach.

"But..." a girl with brown hair spoke up nervously, "will he be all right?"

"Yes. These injuries are not bad—made dangerous only by the sheer surface area of the scoring, making a greater chance of infection."

The response to the fact that these gruesome scorings were not bad was a buzz of frightened whispering among the group.

"Don't worry," Lyra cut in, smiling at the weyrings. "They aren't bad because this pair probably ducked *between* right away—if you can't prevent injuries, you can certainly prevent them from getting worse if you are alert and..." Lyra's voice trailed off when she noticed Tallah's cold attention.

The girl who had spoken out shyly looked troubled—rightly so, Tallah thought, still annoyed by Lyra's apparent attempts to trivialize the injuries. Another girl, who Tallah remembered as Cybris, the rider of green Sujath, nudged the shy brown-haired girl from behind. "Don't worry, Byalla. Aleoth is good at ducking and dodging—you two will be fine."

"Of course," Tallah continued, cutting the nervous whispering short, "in this climate infection is quite common. Once the danger of excessive blood loss is dealt with, then you have to watch any wounds carefully for signs of infection. Infection could mean grounding for life, or death, so even minor scoring needs to be looked after immediately." Tallah could tell by the nervous apprehension on some of the weyrings' faces that she was getting her point across. Several of the girls would not look at the scoring or at Tallah at all.

"And that's why we are here—to care for your dragons," Lyra said, her voice managing to be cheerful, even over the soft moans of blue Kenith.

"If you are quick enough to get them to us when there is a problem," Tallah cut across her. Lyra wasn't giving these weyrings enough credit—she was coddling them. Not all of the weyrings looked shocked or frightened. Bronzerider T'syr, with his black hair tied back, had a pragmatic look on his face, and the tall girl, Cybris seemed to have a curious but detached air to her.

Yengarth is very proper—he spoke to me when they entered, Solanth informed her.

Well at least some of the new weyrings aren't frivolous, Tallah answered him.

"So how often do you see this kind of injury?" one tall, lanky boy asked quietly. He seemed interested in what she had to say and not entirely put-off by the wound, but his face was apprehensive.

"Often enough," Tallah said, "though typically the most common scores cover a smaller surface area and have much less risk as far as infection is concerned."

"Why would the scores usually be smaller?"

"Incomplete flaming. Also, smaller strands are harder to see and dodge. Experienced fighters will also go *between* when the Thread first makes contact, lessening the spread of the wound."

"And I'm guessing you see more young pairs..." The boy said, his eyes drawn to blue Kenith across the infirmary floor.

T'syr laid a hand on the boy's shoulder—and the boy's resulting blush caught Tallah's attention so that he heard what the bronzerider whispered to the boy next: "Duhonth will be fine, S'var. You both will be fine."

"Actually, S'var is right," Tallah said, making no attempt to pretend she hadn't heard. "Injuries are very common among the inexperienced weyrings flying in the Queens' Wing, or new wingriders."

"I don't understand. How difficult can that be? You watch the wound and keep it clean," another girl with mousy brown hair cut in. "Aren't the dragonhealers supposed to worry about that?"

Lyra opened her mouth to reply but Tallah cut across her. "And you are, weyring?"

"Vershya, rider of green Shoaliant. From Benden." The girl said proudly.

"Well, Vershya, I imagine it will take Shoaliant getting an infection that tears through her body, crippling her and grounding her for life for you to understand. Or if you're quick on your feet and put trust in your *superiors* you might never have an injury at all. Sometimes all we can do is control how bad they are—and even then they can get out of hand for many reasons," Tallah said. The girl, abashed, backed off. Lyra's brows were knitted in annoyance but she didn't speak up.

Tallah was satisfied that she had given them a thorough rundown. Her coldness was for their good—better to thrust reality home and make a lasting impression than to have them go down in their first fight. She continued on, leading the small cluster of weyrings towards blue Kenith, with whom Giselle seemed to be finishing. "Now I will show you how delicate dragon wingsail really is..."



Her shift ending, Tallah lingered at the supply cupboards in the dragon infirmary. The glows were being checked and covered as the sun rose and flooded open-sided barn with natural light. The patients from the night's Threadfall seemed comfortable, and Tallah began to go around and check to make sure that this was the case. She took numbweed, needlethorn, bandages and tinctures of redwort with her so that the patients' bedside supplies could be updated and cleaned as she went. There was no excuse to not have such things on hand, Giselle always said. Especially if there is a lull in activity, check that your on-hand tools are ready for work.

She paused an extra moment alongside blue Kenith to admire Giselle's stitching. The craftmaster had backed the dragon's wing with a light sheet of cloth and sewn it, with a few well-placed stitches, to the wingsail itself. Tallah knew

that the cloth could be cleaned better than leather, which would have mimicked the dragon's wingsail more appropriately. Kenith's color was good. Tallah placed fresh supplies on the surgical table beside the Br'dyl's cot and moved on.

The other apprentices, cleaning duties done, were clustered in a knot in the center of the infirmary floor, discussing that night's shift. Their laughter irritated Tallah, and she suspected it was the reaction to another one of Lyra's jokes. That put her off joining the group—they were clearly not discussing anything serious—and there were still things that could be done. There was always *something* to be done. Meiriel's giggling was giving her hiccups that Lyra was trying to pat away; journeywoman Dawn moved in to shoo them out.

"Go on now and get some breakfast and sleep! I'll expect you all back this evening for rounds," Dawn said, effectively breaking up their group.

"Lyra!" Nori called to her sister, entering the dragon infirmary.

"Hey. Ready for food?" asked Lyra cheerfully. "I sure am."

Lyra caught Tallah's eye as she hurried to join her sister and looked away quickly. They left, heading toward the Weyrhall and breakfast.

"Tallah! Didn't you hear me? Now off with you too—no exceptions."

"I'm in no hurry," Tallah said, hoping to linger as long as possible.

"No exceptions," Dawn said firmly. "Giselle's orders, Tallah. You know you need to be well-rested for your next shift. Even Giselle is off resting. And you are flying Thread in two days!"

Tallah scowled but complied, hating how everyone used her position in the Queens' Wing as a leverage point. As if she needed to be reminded that Thread fell soon, and she was to fight in it! Solanth was fine—in the best shape he'd ever been and practically glowing with health. But breakfast for both of them couldn't hurt...

Tallah saw with some resignation that she wasn't far behind Lyra and her sister Nori, who had hung back from the other apprentices to speak more privately. It was impossible not to overhear some of their conversation, and Tallah's interest was piqued by the fact that Lyra sounded a little upset even though she had been laughing with Meiriel not long before.

"She makes me all jumpy—the way she watches everyone, like she's waiting for us to make a mistake so she can swoop in. Especially me! I can't figure out if she hates me or if that's just the way she is..."

"I think you should just ignore it," Nori said, wrapping a comforting arm around her sister's back. "I mean, she's the most experienced apprentice, and from what you say she sounds like she's in Giselle's pocket." Tallah felt her stomach swoop as she realized they were talking about her.

"She is. Shards, she won't talk to anyone unless it is business, and when Giselle asks a question she just won't shut up! Even when I get something right she always has something to add," Lyra said bitterly.

"Well, I don't get why she is so uptight," Nori said, "I mean, as long as you do your job..."

"She seems to think that having *feelings* and worrying about your patients makes you a bad healer or something. I don't know. She just *stared* at me when I tried to comfort the weyrings today—I don't see why she had to be so short with them! Will that really help them learn?"

Nori shrugged, "Who cares about what she thinks? You shouldn't have to live detached from your emotions. Personally I think your methods are better. Goodness knows, on my side of healing a kind word or even just holding someone's hand really seems to help them."

"But it's true that she never hesitates or seems fazed at all by any injury that comes in...she is always hands-deep in things before I can even start."

"That's *silly*, Lyra," said Nori staunchly. "You care about people and their dragons—how can that hurt your healing? It's important to know how everyone is feeling and give them emotional support. Otherwise they panic!"

"You're right," Lyra said, her voice more cheerful.

Tallah slowed her step as the girls started chattering about something else. She wasn't quite as hungry as she had thought she had been. Not that what Lyra was saying *bothered* her. In fact, Lyra was absolutely right in some respects. Tallah knew that being emotional clouded judgment—hadn't she seen how cool Giselle was in the worst of situations? Lyra would never be anything but a second-rate healer. Tallah wished she would Impress. The wings had room for second-rate fighters, especially if the girl had a dragon to compensate for her faults, but the dragon infirmary couldn't afford to have someone that would go to pieces in a real crisis.

The welcome touch of Solanth's mindvoice interrupted her thoughts. *Trith's rider wants to know if he should bring you some food. He noticed you weren't coming in with the other apprentices.*

Tallah smiled. Her brother T'vellen was quick to take advantage of any opportunity. Yes, he would bring her food at her cot, but he would also bring his riding harness for her to look after and repair if she got the chance. Or perhaps he had a pair of trousers that needed mending. She wouldn't complain—T'vellen was the best company she had, other than Solanth.

Why don't you tell Trith that I'll just meet him at his cot? Tallah told her dragon.

He says that is a very good idea, Solanth said, sounding somewhat confused. Why is that a very good idea?

Because then my brother won't have to lug his harness all the way to our home. And I can get breakfast outside the Weyrhall. Tallah smiled to herself. And if you like T'vellen and I can oil you and Trith together.

Yes, I see, that is very good, Solanth approved. Tallah smiled as she watched Solanth swoop down towards T'vellen's weycot, on the ocean side of the grounds and she hurried to catch up. Ever the intellectual, Solanth liked to believe that he understood the workings of his human partner's mind—she wouldn't bother correcting him.

To Be Continued...