
Running

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2860.02.09

Cybris was aware that something wasn't right—that someone must have stepped out of line—because Sujath's temper flared hot and sudden in her mind. She grabbed mentally for control, but Sujath had already screamed a challenge and lunged at Aleoth, Byalla's green. Sujath's teeth snapped shut near her sister's foreleg as Aleoth cried in indignation, scuttling backwards into a blue and his rider and dissolving the pattern into chaos in moments.

Sujath, come here this instant! Cybris commanded, swallowing the guilt that rose like bile into her stomach. She was half aware, through touching Sujath's resistant mind, that Layketh was ordering the others back into their places. Aleoth needed some whispered reassurance from Byalla because the green dragon was still warily regarding Sujath, who sat, glowering, beside Cybris. Byalla wasn't looking at either of them.

"Cybris, come forward!"

'Here we go again', Cybris thought, as she moved to stand in front of Weyrlingsecond Shahara. She tried not to think of the extra chores she would be assigned to do during her free time for this upset.

"What happened, weyrling?" Shahara asked.

Cybris couldn't help but square her shoulders at the clear annoyance in the weyrlingassistant's voice. "Aleoth was moving into Sujath's space, Weyrlingsecond. And Sujath reacted badly."

"And if you had been in the air and your dragon had pulled an unnecessary maneuver like that during Threadfall, you could have killed half your wing," Shahara said, her voice rising so that the other weyrlings could hear her. "You could have asked Aleoth yourself, or relayed the incongruence to your wingleader—whose part is being played by T'syr today."

Cybris glanced at the bronzerider, with whom she had been on terse terms lately because of Sujath's misbehavior. From the expression on his face, T'syr wasn't at all happy for being called out for her mistake.

"I didn't notice Aleoth was out of line," T'syr said, the tone of his voice making it clear that *he* didn't think Aleoth had been out of place at all, and that the entire blame fell on Cybris and Sujath. "And Sujath reacted too suddenly for Yengarth to order her away."

"Nevertheless, after the rider, it is up to the wingleader or wingsecond to correct and order the formation on an individual level."

"Yes, weyrlingsecond," T'syr answered.

"And Cybris—"

"Please," Cybris said, "I think that Sujath—she just gets so wound up that she can't focus and..."

"Enough," Shahara snapped. "You will help clean up in the kitchen after all meals in which you eat for a sevenday. And two days of middens duty. Two days *after* your current middens punishment is over, weyrling." Her lips formed a very thin line of displeasure, and she continued in a softer tone, "It is your problem, weyrling, *yours*. It is up to you to control Sujath, not for her to suddenly be well-behaved. Figure it out or get left behind. Now back in line!"

Cybris moved quickly back into her space with Sujath, avoiding the eyes of her classmates. She already knew that T'syr would be remonstrating, her friends sympathetic—she had walked this walk dozens of times already.

Sujath, behave, Cybris scolded her dragon, *I'm in trouble again, which means less time I get to spend with you.*

Yengarth is telling me that I will behave, too. I do not like him! I will let him know how stupid he is.

No, Sujath! Cybris grabbed the green's neckridge forcefully as her head snaked in the bronze's direction. Thankfully, the touch brought Sujath back to her, focusing the green's short attention span on the drill again. Still, Cybris, now hyper-aware and anxious, found herself working hard to keep Sujath in line and move at a steady pace as they learned wing formations on the ground. The green dragon was constantly on the edge of leaping forward out of line, her boundless energy making it difficult for her to focus. Cybris flushed with shame when Yengarth corrected her dragon's placing, but thankfully, Sujath obeyed him, even though her orange eyes whirled a little faster at his commands.

By the time the drill was over and they were excused for the evening, Cybris was worn out and frustrated. Tonight she would be helping wash up in the kitchen—something that tempted her not to go into the hall to eat at all tonight. But Cybris knew T'syr would call her out on that, and she was hungry. Resigned to her punishment duty, Cybris trudged to the barracks to change before eating. Beside her, still humming with pent-up energy, Sujath darted this way and that, sticking her nose in everything she passed with her mind alight with curiosity. Something had to be done to help Sujath focus. What Cybris had told Shahara was true—she really did think that Sujath had more energy than was good for her at this point in training. Yes, she tended to use that energy to cause mischief, and that was Cybris' fault, but...

Cybris stumbled as Sujath butted her head against her hip. *What are you thinking? Why are you worried? Why are you going so slow?* Sujath asked. *You are mine and I will make you happy!*

Cybris scratched Sujath's offered eye ridge and felt her exhaustion wane as the little green dragon pushed her head into her hand and hummed. Something occurred to Cybris as she reveled in the connection between her and the dragon. *Sujath, are you tired?*

No, Sujath answered.

Cybris closed her eyes and tested the green's fatigue as they had been taught soon after Impression. Sujath was

feeling the effect of the drills, but could have kept going—physically at least—for much longer. It was her impatience coupled with her excessive energy that seemed to be the root of the problem. It was so much harder to control Sujath when her attention was scattered. The impatience would be hard to fix. But *maybe* Cybris could help with her excess energy load...



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The cool air tore at Cybris' lungs as she ran, and her legs burned from the effort. But the pain was good—it meant that Sujath would cooperate in drills today. It meant that the pair of them wouldn't be singled out, yelled at, and given extra duties. If it led Sujath to behave and not lash out in anger when they were supposed to be learning, running with her every morning before any of her classmates were awake was well worth the aches and missed sleep.

Sujath kept pace with her, even though it was awkward for the green dragon to run in the deep sand on the weyrling beach. Every few strides the compact green launched herself into the air in an extended jump, unfurled her wings, and glided to the ground again. This maneuver mimicked the strengthening exercises they did in drills—exercises that Sujath always loathed for their repetitiveness. At the moment, though, Sujath was quite happy to be out and moving under the pale light of Belior. Her sharp head flicked here and there, following the path of a whitewing or examining a hole in the ground. Her mind felt light and cheerful, and where Cybris was beginning to feel fatigue creep into her muscles, Sujath delighted in being active.

What she was doing with Sujath wasn't exactly allowed, and she knew it. They weren't supposed to 'over-exert' their dragons, for fear they might injure themselves. Cybris wasn't worried about that, but knew that Weyrlingsecond Shahara would be quick to condemn her working Sujath outside of drills. It was a serious breach of conduct for the pair to be out in the dead of night, running up and down the beach.

Cybris glanced up at the moon again and slowed to a jog. From Belior's positioning, she guessed that their evening's disobedience should come to an end soon. *We need to head back soon, Sujath. The others will wonder where we are.* Sujath had pulled ahead of her in pursuit of a sand crab.

I spoke to the dragon on watch, like you told me to. We are not far away. Sujath's mind-voice held a distinct flavor of distaste. She didn't like having to talk to dragons she didn't already know. She launched herself into another glide, and instead of landing again, she tilted her wings and swooped in a wide semi-circle back towards her rider. Cybris' heart skipped when she saw how close Sujath's leading wing-finger came to the ground, but Sujath simply folded her wings several feet above the ground and landed easily, with knees bent.

"Be careful," Cybris said, breathing again, "If you get hurt we *will* get in trouble."

Sujath's annoyance at that thought injected orange into her swirling eyes. *They should let me fly and do more. I am*

ready. The green dragon hustled up and shoved her head under Cybris' palm to be scratched.

"Yes. You are." 'And so am I', Cybris thought. Sujath was one of the smallest dragons in Weyrling Class 37, but her shoulder reached above Cybris' hip now. The young dragon was putting on muscle rapidly, especially in the flight area. They had only been able to run at night a couple times since she had had the idea, but each time Sujath had been tractable and obedient during that day's drill. Taking the edge off her energy seemed to be helping, and if Cybris could remain discreet they might be able to keep doing this for a while. Granted, they couldn't go out every night—it exhausted Cybris too much.

Sujath wasn't built delicately—though Cybris thought her dragon had a very feminine head—but was compact, with short loins and a powerful back. She was built to be athletic. She was built to fly circles around every other dragon in the Weyr. Cybris planned on it—nothing was going to stand in her way. She would show everyone that Sujath wasn't just an angry trouble-maker. "Come on, Sujath." Cybris drew in a deep breath and began to head back to the Weyrling Barracks, walking now so that her sweat would dry before she got into the Weyrling Complex.

The dark shadow of another dragon swooping over the bluff and down onto the beach made Cybris freeze in horror. Who in the world could that be, and why were they here at this time? Sujath crowded her legs, feeding off her rider's thrill of fear at being caught. The dragon back-winged and landed on the shoreline, his rider leaping off into the sand. This was no weyrling, or even Weyrlingsecond Shahara and her green Layketh. All thoughts of her hiding were dashed as the blue dragon turned his head to gaze at her, the moonlight reflecting off his faceted eyes. The sudden — predictable—tenseness in Sujath's thoughts made Cybris turn to greet the rider with straight shoulders, forcing calm into her mind; running would only prove to Sujath that there was something to be upset about here.

It was bluerider V'dalin—easily recognizable, both because of his height and because his blue Benturith had been the first dragon she'd ridden. It felt like Turns ago. She hadn't gotten close to them since she had Impressed and she was unsure how to react when he moved down the beach to meet her. What bad luck—the only wingrider she knew personally had to be the one to come take his dragon for a night swim on the weyrling beach.

"Cybris, what a surprise to see you here now," V'dalin said, coming close. "Or, should I say, Greenrider?"

"Greenrider is fine," Cybris said. "What are you doing here?" She winced at the forcefulness in her tone. After all, he was a wingrider and could do what he pleased, whereas she *should* be asleep in the barracks with the rest of her class.

"Ben fancied an early morning rinse," V'dalin said, nonplussed, "and the view of the sunrise is so much nicer on this end of the Weyr." He was watching her closely, his light green eyes—she hadn't noticed the color before—alight with curiosity. "You are up early. When I was a weyrling I slept till I had to wake up."

He is looking at you, Sujath said, her tone a possessive warning.

"I hope that worked out for you," Cybris said, wishing she could snap her teeth shut on her snappish words as soon as they came out. Sujath's building anxiety was affecting her.

The bluerider—were they all so oblivious?—smiled and raked his bangs back from his face. "Don't worry, I'm not going to turn you in," V'dalin said, making Cybris' stomach swoop in relief, "but I'd be careful if I were you. The weyringstaff isn't that incompetent."

"I know that," Cybris answered, "I just needed to get Sujath out for some extra exercise."

"Extra exercise?"

Cybris felt her nervousness leap again, and struggled to control her expression and Sujath's growing tension. "Sujath is very energetic. I just like to take the edge off so she can concentrate in drills." 'Better to keep your explanation simple', Cybris thought, 'the fewer questions he asks the better'.

I do not like him, Sujath cut in. He is stupid and slow. He should not be talking to you, and watching us so closely.

It's all right, Sujath. He's a friend. He and Benturinth took me to the Weyr so that you could choose me. That mollified Sujath slightly.

"She looks good," V'dalin said, nodding at Sujath. He had clearly picked up on the fact that they were talking. "More fit than Benturinth was at her age, anyway."

Cybris did not respond, but could not resist the sick swoop of bitterness that filled her. That must be the first time that a well-deserved compliment hadn't been forced and awkward. The green dragon really deserved more of them—she *was* fit and athletic and clever. But people other than Cybris didn't seem to see beyond her temper and disobedient streak.

V'dalin moved closer, now frowning as he studied her face. "Is something wrong? Did I say something to upset you?"

"No. No, nothing. I'm fine," Cybris said.

"Take a look at her and say that again," V'dalin gestured at Sujath. The small green dragon was mantling her wings aggressively, her eyes a roiling orange and a deep growl rumbling from her chest as she glared at V'dalin. Cybris immediately sank to her knees and caught up Sujath's head in her arms, drawing her attention away from the bluerider. The action served to let her turn her face away from V'dalin, which gave her some relief from his concerned gaze. Still, by the way he was leaning over them, she could tell he wasn't going to leave without further explanation.

"You just said she looks good. Well she *is* good! She's faster and cleverer..." 'and meaner,' Cybris thought. She forced her voice to come out calm and easy, even though the fears that had been hovering on the edge of her mind for the past couple sevendays were all surfacing at once. "It's just that we don't perform well in the drills. Not because we can't—I know we have the ability. I just can't seem to control her temper! I don't understand, I've never had problems with control before..."

"She is still young, Cybris. Dragons grow out of this kind of thing and you..."

"No!" Cybris heaved a great breath, wresting for control. In her arms Sujath snarled openly at V'dalin. "I've heard

stories of dragons that were impossible to control—dragons that die because their riders weren't strong enough." That was it. Her greatest fear. She had heard the stories about Yttrith and the greens whose riders would lose control of them during mating flights—all those situations had ended the dragonpair's lives, and, worse than that, everyone had known that the rider had *failed*. She felt her face growing hot with shame. How could she admit something like that to a practical stranger?

V'dalin looked surprised but not intimidated by her reaction. He took her arm and shook her gently, "Every weyring class has stand-outs, Cybris. Your girl stands out, that's all."

"Stands out because she... she..."

"She seems to be a bit... high tempered." V'dalin grinned sheepishly at Sujath, who was still snarling in defense of her rider. "But I doubt she is impossible to control." He laid a big hand on Cybris' shoulder and shook her gently. "Is that what people have been saying?"

"Not in front of me." Cybris regretted revealing so much, but she couldn't deny the release it had given her to voice her fears.

"Don't worry about that. She chose you, didn't she? I was in the stands at your Hatching, I saw it happen. She would have clawed through anything in her path to get to you, wouldn't she?"

Cybris allowed herself a small smile. That was true. "But what if she choose me because I am weak, and I can't control her?"

"Now, I don't know you very well," V'dalin said, "but couldn't it be equally possible that you were the only one on the sands that day who could control her? Maybe you were the strongest."

Cybris opened her mouth, but found she had nothing to add and shut it again.

Yes, Sujath said, sounding both perplexed and determined to be heard. Why do you worry about this? You are the strongest. The others are stupid and slow.

"I'm guessing she agrees with me," V'dalin said, smiling again.

"She does." Cybris felt relief wash over her. V'dalin was a wingrider, he had been here for much longer than she had. She should listen to him and ignore her own doubts.

"The thought must be worth something then. And, Greenrider?"

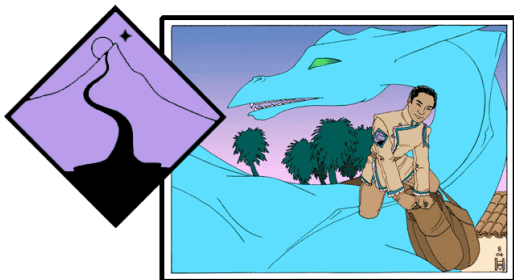
"Hmm?" Cybris intoned, looking up into V'dalin's green eyes. He had the kind of penetrating look she normally associated with the dragons.

He touched her arm lightly, making Sujath hiss. "I *would* like to get to know you better."

She swallowed hard and Sujath bumped into her from behind, still grumbling low in her throat. Looking up into his eyes, she noticed that the sky was definitely lightening now, and Belior had sunk very low in the sky. "Shards!" she yelped. "I have to go!" She took off at a dead run towards the barracks with Sujath tripping and bounding alongside her.

She allowed herself to smile as she ran. Maybe it was just a matter of her not having figured out how to control Sujath. The extra exercise was helping, but perhaps there were other things she could try. There was no doubt that

Sujath was more temperamental than her classmates, but that didn't make it a given that they were going to fail. There had been enough second-guessing herself while at Dog Creek Seahold. The life of people resenting her and her family because of her mom's inability to earn her keep was behind her now. She could stop living a lie and burying her grief over her brother's death now, couldn't she? 'No', Cybris thought, 'not just yet. I need that self-control. I need it for Sujath'. The Weyr wasn't that different when it came to keeping up appearances, but with time Cybris hoped she could relax. Maybe even enjoy *all* the benefits of being a dragonrider—including that impossibly tall bluerider.



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