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# Birth

by Amanda Kear

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Dunia went into labour in the dead of the night and her baby was birthed several hours later, just as the sun was rising.

"A girl!" Master Reilen announced happily as he cut the cord. He handed the squalling infant to Dunia, who cradled her new daughter gently and looked up at Corsan with love in her eye.

"Look at our daughter, Corsan – isn't she beautiful? Little baby Farnya."

Her werymate nodded in a slightly bemused fashion. He reached to touch the crying child. "She's so small... and so red..."

**And very noisy**, put in Nioranth who had been crowding close to the weycot throughout Dunia's labour. Now her silhouetted head blocked the dawn light as she attempted to peer into the building. **I like hatchlings better than babies – they are not so noisy.**

"Hush, hush," said Dunia, as much to her dragon as to her baby, as she rocked the child gently and then offered her a breast. The crying settled down into gurgling and then silence as the child found the nipple and began to feed.

Corsan gave her a half smile. "So, ah, those things you yelled during the labour? About it all being my fault and you'd never forgive me--?"

Dunia smiled. "I just needed to shout and scream a bit."

Master Reilen gave a broad grin as he washed his hands and towelled them dry. "That's why I like the husband to be present at the birth. That way the mother yells at him and not at me or my healers!"

"Well I'm glad to have been of service," said Corsan.

Dunia sighed happily. A baby daughter, a devoted weymate and a gold dragon – what more could she possibly need to make her life perfect? She pushed aside thoughts of Kadanzer and the Tenth Pass. It would be months yet until little Farnya was old enough to be taken *between*. Plenty of time later to think of her trip forward. For the time being she, Farnya and Corsan could be content to live in the here and now.

The all pervasive humming of dragons awoke Dunia from a pleasant nap. She sat up abruptly, her gaze automatically going to where six day old Farnya slept peacefully in her crib, even as she reached out mentally to her gold. *Nioranth! Are they--*

**Yes! My eggs are ready to hatch**, the queen regally informed her. **You must come at once.**

Dunia scurried to the clothes press and shucked out of the loose shift she was wearing. *I shall be there as soon as I can, dear one.*

**But I want you here now!** Nioranth's tone turned petulant.

*Well, if you want me in my night clothes, looking like some addle-witted drudge in front of the other goldriders and the Lord Holder...* As Nioranth reluctantly agreed that her rider should look her best to reflect the her rank and position, Dunia took out attire more suitable for a goldrider attending her own queen's hatching.

Since she had arrived in the past with nothing but her riding leathers, the Weyr had provided new clothing for her. She took out a fine blue linen dress that she had not been able to wear in the advanced stages of her pregnancy and smiled at the thought of wearing it once more. But would her milk heavy breasts cause a problem? Well no matter – she could drape a shawl over her to hide any milk stains that might develop if the hatching proved to be a prolonged affair. After all, it wasn't as if the guests would never have seen a nursing mother before.

She slipped into the dress and smoothed its fabric over her body, then began to give her hair a quick brush. Now where was Corsan? She'd have thought he'd be over here like a shot as soon as he heard the dragons humming. The pair of them had agreed that he would take charge of little Farnya so that Dunia could meet and greet arriving guests in Nioranth's name. Then, when the first shells cracked and the gold – as was her normal routine during her hatchings – stopped fussing at her rider and became focussed on the new hatchlings, they would do a quick handover and Corsan would scoot off to join the dragonhealers in case of accidents.

Dunia was already considering options for fostering out the baby for at least part of the time. Goldriders and the demands of small children did not mix, and under normal circumstances she would find a milk-mother for Farnya or arrange to foster her as soon as she was weaned. But Dunia was reluctant to give up her child completely – she wanted to take her daughter back to the Tenth Pass with her when she left, and it would be unfair to whisk her away from a foster mother in a few short months, when the baby would be old enough to take *between*. Corsan's sister might be able to take little Farnya on, and that looked as if it could potentially suit everyone. Weyrwoman Genna was happy to accept that Dunia had fewer duties than a typical goldrider, and so could dedicate some of her time to the baby. After all, she was expected to return to the 10<sup>th</sup> Pass in a few months, so her status was more akin to that of a

convalescent dragonrider here to heal, than to that of a ranking queenrider at Southern.

Where *was* Corsan? It was at times like these that Dunia mourned for poor blue Balt, left behind at Kadanzer Weyr. He might have been a food-stealing little thief at times, but she could do with a firelizard to carry messages or prod errant weyrmates into action.

Her hair sorted to her satisfaction, Dunia selected a shawl that complimented her dress and arranged it over her shoulders.

"I can't have you going out like that." Corsan's voice in the doorway made her turn her head. "Some bronzerider will decide that you are too pretty to be weyrmated to a mere dragonhealer, and spirit you away to his weyr."

"Well I hope he enjoys listening to a hungry baby demanding her midnight feed." She smiled and crossed the room to give Corsan a quick kiss.

***Rider, I need you here now!*** Nioranth's insistent call ruined the moment and Dunia sighed. ***Suloth and his rider are here. Why can you not be here too?***

"Her Ladyship getting fractious?" surmised Corsan.

"And then some..." She gave him a brief, affectionate squeeze and hurried out the door. *All right, all right! I'm on my way!*



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