
Diagnosis

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Journeyman Dragonhealer Corsan became the rock to which Dunia clung, washed up on this shore so far from home. He was loving, steadfast and exasperating in turn, but always forgiving of the strange pauses in conversations brought about by her determination not to talk about the future. Corsan was a fixed point about which the goldrider could orient her life and her thoughts. He made her feel like an inhabitant of the Ninth Pass rather than just a fleeting visitor.

Dunia found herself adoring the quirky dragonhealer. She felt comfortable around him, and at the same time his chatter and teasing always surprised her. She did for a time feel a twinge of guilt for poor Z'haq, accidentally abandoned in the Tenth Pass, and unaware that his lover had found a new bedmate. No, more than a bedmate – when one of Southern's goldriders referred to Corsan as Dunia's weyrmate, she acknowledged the fact without blinking. They were lovers, they were weyrmates, they were friends. Dunia surprised herself at the intensity of feeling that she had developed for this man whom she would never have met if not for that fateful mis-jump...

So it was to Corsan that Dunia first confessed her dread of going *between* again. That appalling blackness that went on and on still invaded her dreams, and brought chills even in daylight. Anxiety about between made her increasingly nervous that she would make another mistake when Nioranth was well enough to fly again. And that was a vicious circle, of course – nervous riders being far more likely to commit such an error.

It was Corsan who suggested that she take a few trips with his brownrider brother R'nesan, and thus have months to get used to the sensation of *between* as a passenger, long before Nioranth was likely to take to the air again. He even accompanied her on a few of the jaunts on board brown Berumith's broad neck, clasping her tightly around the waist and chattering away about what a sight various Southern landmarks were from the air.

That broke the spell that black, cold *between* had on her. Dunia began to relax and enjoy the outings and the chance to memorise new coordinates. Going *between* became routine, not something to wake up in a cold sweat about.

Nioranth, or course, got terribly huffy about her rider travelling about without her, so the trips were of necessity, few in number. ***I need you here!*** was the queen's constant refrain when Dunia briefly departed on one of these ventures.

By the fourth or fifth trip the complaint had built up to: ***I need you AND that dragonhealer here! He must make my wing better so you can fly with ME!*** Nioranth had accepted Corsan into Dunia's life, even if it was just as ammunition for another bout of indignation at being left out.

And a gold's word on anything was final.



"Well the diagnosis is startlingly easy, my love, even for a mere dragonhealer like me – I'd say you're pregnant."

"Pregnant?" Dunia stared at Corsan a moment, her brows furrowing. Although she had no doubts about his diagnosis, it seemed out of place somehow, as if pregnancy was something that was still to be invented at some point between the Ninth and Tenth Pass. Not an event that had jumped into her life from *between*, the way she and Nioranth had jumped into Corsan's. "But..."

The dragonhealer gave her a stern look. "If the next word out of your mouth is 'how?', then I am going to have serious words with you about our relationship!"

"Oh, you!" Dunia gave her lover a gentle slap across the arm – a mocking admonishment. Corsan's mouth quirked into a smile, but Dunia could see a certain wariness around his eyes.

Pregnant. A child. Unconsciously her hand went to her belly, although there would be no visible signs for months yet. Her child... Corsan's child. And there, in that thought, was the source of his wariness – the reason that Corsan largely had his concerned dragonhealer persona to the fore.

He was waiting for her to decide.

He was weyrbred. He knew all the ins and outs of queenriders' and the newer – to him at any rate – female greenriders' choices and actions when pregnancy arose. He'd doubtless heard women riders chatting about when to utilise *between* to rid themselves of an unwanted pregnancy, or how much *betweening* they could safely do if they wished to keep the baby... or even how to assist when something went wrong. He was watching... and he was waiting for her to decide.

Well, goldrider, make a decision!

If she had this baby – this boy, this girl – she couldn't leave them here at Southern. She couldn't condemn them to a few short Turns and then oblivion in the fury of the tsunami. But equally she couldn't take a tiny baby with her when she travelled forward... When she went *between*... Dunia pulled Corsan close to her, suddenly wanting warmth and reassurance. His arms encircled her, and Nioranth's anxious presence pushed itself into her mind.

What is wrong, rider?

Nothing is wrong, she soothed. *Corsan just surprised me with some news. It's—I have to think about it a moment,*

love. Steadfastly she pushed away all thoughts of endless, lightless *between*. Nioranth would be strong enough to fly in a few sevendays, and she did not want to inhibit the queen with any qualms about jumping *between*.

But she'd have to go *between* to kill this foetus, would she not? On Nioranth, or ask another goldrider to assist her in the task. Use that cold, cold, dark to erase the pregnancy. And in that instant, Dunia knew that she couldn't. Her child, Corsan's child - Ninth and Tenth Pass inheritance, all mixed together. A living being whose history started with her at *this* moment in time. No dislocation from the future, no unshared memories from the past – this child was *now*.

This child would anchor her here in the Ninth Pass for a time – the pregnancy and then the seven to nine months before the baby was big enough to safely take *between*. That cold darkness was not kind to human children too young to even shiver at its intensity. No, this child would grow up in warmth and light, and Dunia would take him or her forward later. She had turns yet until the tsunami was a threat.

She lifted her head to lightly kiss Corsan on the cheek. He met her gaze – still waiting.

"If it is a girl," she said, "I'd like to call her Farnya, after my mother, Farnya."

His anxious wariness vanished into a broad grin, and he gave her an affectionate squeeze. Then a more mischievous twinkle entered his eyes. "Farnya...? Hmm, that's nice enough I suppose. But I was hoping to name her after one of my own esteemed relatives – say my aunt Tesserelindy."

"Tesserelindy? You're making that up!" Dunia pulled away a little to frown up at him.

"Well, actually yes, we just shortened it to Tesserelindy. Her full name was Tesserelindy-anna-reeny-nora-venia – ouch!" Corsan stopped adding random syllables to his aunt's name when Dunia reached to tweak his nose.

"Farnya," she said firmly.

"Farnya it is then," he said and cuddled in closer and nuzzled at her neck. "Ah, but if it is a boy now..." he muttered into her ear. "Did I ever tell you about my uncle Ash? He became a dragonrider and had to shorten his name to Sh. Ever such a quiet fellow he was..."

Dunia relaxed into Corsan's arms and let him ramble on about his fictitious relatives and their increasingly ridiculous names, prompting him with an "Oh really?" or "Uh huh" now and then. Warmth soaked into her from his body, banishing the memories of the icy nothingness of *between* for a while.



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