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# Painful Decisions

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“You said you wanted to talk to me about the goldrider Chaurdia’s transfer in to replace Tesai?” Weyrwoman Genna smiled politely at Dunia as the junior goldrider fidgeted restlessly in her chair.

“Well, yes and no.” Dunia stared at her fingernails for a moment, gathering her thoughts. She hadn’t expected this to be so difficult... “That is... indirectly, anyway.”

“Well spit it out girl.”

“I won’t be leaving when Chaurdia arrives from Fort, after all.” That had been the initial plan – to stay until Tesai had transferred out and an older, more experienced queenrider arrive to replace her. That way the loss of Dunia back to the Tenth Pass and the departure of Kadana for Barrier Mountain a few months later would not leave Southern with too few golds.

Genna looked understandable surprised. “You won’t?”

“I’m pregnant,” Dunia said simply. There, it was said. Now came the hard bit...

“Ah,” said Genna. “And you’ve decided to keep this baby too?”

The younger goldrider nodded. Yes, she was keeping this baby. It was foolish and dangerous to do so – Master Reilen said that she was about six sevendays gone, so the child would be born early in 2440.

2440 – the Turn of the tsunami. The Turn that Southern Weyr died.

Dunia couldn’t remember exactly *when* that dread event fell: only that it was late in the turn, when spring came to the Southern Continent. If she kept this baby, he or she would not be old enough to safely take *between* until almost the end of the Turn. The disaster might arrive before then, so by all logic and sense, she should use Nioranth to skip *between* now and end this pregnancy.

But she couldn’t do it. There was no pressing urge to have another child. No feelings of motherly affection for the little scrap of life that her body barely registered was there. No, Dunia was keeping it because she couldn’t bear the thought of all the lies that would entail if she got rid of it.

She could terminate the pregnancy without telling Corsan, but he was not so dull witted that he wouldn’t notice the ill effects of the *between* induced abortion or figure out

what it meant. He’d want to know why she had decided not to have this third child.

She could lie about that. She could easily tell her lover that she just didn’t want another child. That the demands of a goldrider’s life dictated that she not have this baby. That their plans to go forward to the Tenth Pass would be complicated by this baby. But that would bring further questions and further lies...

Dunia had already run through all the innocent questions that Corsan might ask: *What’s the hurry to go forward to the Tenth Pass? You’ve already been here eight Turns – what’s another one on top of that? Why can’t we foster this child out to my sister?* She could even formulate plausible sounding answers for most of them. The trouble is that all the answers would be lies, because the real truth was one she could not utter: *I am terminating this pregnancy because we have to be able to leave before everyone dies, and a baby would just complicate that.*

Worse than lying now, would be the moment when Corsan found out about the lies. When she and he arrived safely in the Tenth Pass and he discovered about the tsunami. When he realised that she had killed the foetus not for practical goldrider needs, but as part of a cold calculation for a departure time with plenty of safety margins.

A little voice at the back of her mind told her it was stupid and cowardly and dangerous, but Dunia would rather keep this child than embroil herself in another layer of deception.

So, “Yes,” she said to Genna. “I’d like to keep this baby. So I will still be here when Chaurdia transfers in from Fort. But I’ll be leaving next Turn instead, so it would probably make sense for her to take my weyrwoman-third position until Kadana leaves, as was planned. I can drop to weyrwoman-fourth.”

“Hmm. Kadana is so wrapped up in Barrier Mountain affairs that she is weyrwoman-second here in name alone,” remarked Genna. “I think it would be to everyone’s benefit that we officially release her from Southern duties even though Barrier Mountain will not officially open for a few months yet. Chaurdia’s arrival would be a good time to do that – I shall talk to the other goldriders about it this afternoon. You can remain as third.”

Dunia gave a wan smile. “So you are all right about me staying on a bit longer?”

Genna tsked in exasperation. “My dear girl, I’d be all right about you staying forever. You and Nioranth have been an unexpected bounty that fell in our laps all those Turns ago. When you go we will sorely miss you.” Her stern expression morphed into a wicked smile. “Now if I can just persuade you to take Vivia with you when you finally leave, all would be perfect...”

That brought a sparkle to Dunia’s own eyes. “Vesoz informs me that she is on the lookout for another firelizard egg.”

Genna sighed. “When is she not? I swear that girl would clear the Weyr of dragons and fill it with flitters if she was given half a chance! No, it will work out quite nicely if

Chaurdia slots into the weyrwoman-second position when she arrives and you stay on as third for a few months more. That'll at least give Chaurdia some time to get used to Vivia before she has to deal with her on her own!"



2440.02.24

Dunia's third baby was born late in month 2 of 2440, on a day when rain lashed the coast and the wind rattled the shutters of her weyrcot. A little boy, skinnier and scrawnier than either of his sisters had been at birth, and with a fuzz of red hair that marked him as undeniably as Corsan's offspring. The happy couple named him Murgon.

After recovery from the exertions of labour, Dunia spent most of her days sitting with the baby on the edge of the Hatching Grounds, where Nioranth was fussing over her latest clutch of eggs. Dunia's anxieties about her baby and the need to return to the Tenth Pass, although not voiced as such, were communicating themselves to the queen. Nioranth's response was to become over-protective of her clutch, constantly licking them or shifting them about, and only very reluctantly letting Candidates anywhere near them.

"Anyone would think she had a gold egg on the sands," remarked Weyrwoman Genna, whose Yashelth was close to rising and therefore in an equally prickly mood. She had come to have a chat about the imminent hatching and Nioranth's likely behaviour on the day.

Dunia nodded and rocked Murgon in her arms. Compared to his sisters, he was an extremely fractious baby, prone to cry or squirm about restlessly at the slightest provocation. Even Corsia at her worst hadn't been as bad as Murgon. If it wasn't for the uncertain arrival time of the disaster, Dunia would have been tempted to find a milk mother for him. Fortunately, walking to and fro on the Hatching Grounds seemed to be one way to calm him into sleep. Nioranth was too absorbed in titivating her eggs to even notice the baby's presence.

"Perhaps, she's a little jealous of young Murgon there," said Genna, with a trace of doubt in her voice.

Dunia managed a smile and a shake of her head. "No, I don't think so. She barely notices he's here, unless he's been crying incessantly."

"Then is something worrying you, Dunia?" Genna asked.

"No, not really." Another lie to add to the tally. "It's just that what with Barrier Mountain opening and everything, I've been thinking about Tenth Pass things a lot these days."

"Ah. And some of that might upset Nioranth?"

Dunia dropped her gaze to Murgon briefly, as he twisted in her arms and made a couple of complaining whines. She cooed at the baby a moment while she gathered her thoughts. "I was born there," she said to Genna when she looked up again.

"Not at Southern?"

"No, I, uh, transferred here after I impressed Nioranth." Before the pair of them had graduated, before the eruption that destroyed Barrier Mountain, or as it was known by then – Kadanzer Weyr.

Genna snorted. "Well, all this fuss about the place and Kadana lording it over everyone could certainly put a kink in your sevenday, I'll give you that. Did you know the outcome of who would be Weyrwoman and Weyrleader before it happened?"

Again a mute nod.

"So you knew that Teshea...?"

"I thought I'd changed something. I thought me being here had messed up Kadana's chance at the Weyrwomanship. I didn't know that Teshea was named and then..." Dunia's voice trailed off into a whisper.

Genna put an arm around her, pulling her into a motherly hug. "Oh child, that's a hard one to bear. But you didn't do anything wrong. It happened the way it was supposed to happen."

"Yes, I suppose..." Happened the way the tsunami would happen. Happen the way Genna would die. The way the hatchlings from these eggs of Nioranth's would die...

She couldn't take much more of this.

Nioranth's head went up abruptly, and her eyes whirled fiercely with alarm. ***You are upset! What is upsetting you, my rider?***

*I'm fine! I'm fine!* Dunia let Nioranth's love and devotion wash over her. *I was just thinking about things in the Tenth Pass. Things I remember about the future.*

***The future has not happened yet.*** Nioranth had no recall of the Tenth Pass and Kadanzer Weyr. Her grasp of the topic was slight when Dunia talked to her of it – as much from disinterest as from lack of comprehension. If her rider understood such things, that was enough for the gold. She more pressing concerns in the here and now – bronzes to flirt with, eggs to guard, Thread to fight.

Perhaps that should be how Dunia tried to view life. Concentrate on the present. Block the future from her mind and live in the now as Nioranth and baby Murgon did. Although the consequences of carrying that too far sent a shiver down her spine.



2440.07.23

Five months and a day after Murgon was born, Nioranth rose again in an energetic and wind tossed mating flight that left L'tan's bronze Aneth the victor.

Dunia took her leave of the man and returned to her weyrcot, Nioranth's smug satisfaction blotting out all other emotions for a time. But later, when the queen slept, anxieties about the inexorable advance of the Turn began to prey on her rider's mind.

Try as she might, Dunia could still not recall the exact date of the disaster that was to befall Southern Weyr – to befall the bulk of the settled parts of the Southern continent.

Late in the Turn, when Southern was in springtime, was the only detail that she could ever bring to the forefront of her mind. So that crucial date remained an unknown.

However, other dates and timings began to encroach on that nebulous 'springtime'. The clutch from Nioranth's latest rising were due to be laid towards the end of month ten, give or take a few days. And little Murgon would not be old enough to safely take *between* until a couple of sevendays after that. Which left precious little of springtime and would ground their departure more firmly in summer. The summer would be on them with a vengeance by the time the eggs actually hatched.

So what to do? Leave early, with everyone – not least his father – wondering why she was risking her son's life? Try to make some excuse to Genna why *this* clutch could not be laid and hatched in the 9<sup>th</sup> Pass?

In the end, Dunia opted for the easy way out: she would tell no one and watch for any signs that the disaster was on its way. Surely some event or remark would finally jog her memory and give her the clues she needed as to when the calamity would befall the Southern Continent? Then all she would need would be a day or two to get Corsan used to the idea that they had to leave immediately, and they would be gone... She took to avidly listening to Weyrsinger Alstan's news of the happenings and goings on of Pern, hoping to hear some snippet that would remind her of the vital few verses of the Ballad of Southern that she had forgotten.

Faranth, but if any of her children became dragonriders, she would make them memorise every scrap of history their Weyr had, in case timing it accidents proved a family weakness!

Dunia re-packed her travel bags, adding layers of warm clothing to swaddle little Murgon in on the journey. She risked them all with the delay – risked the wave coming and destroying her and her family as surely as it would destroy Southern Weyr. But if she went now and Murgon died because of the *betweening*...

She would wait. She would wait and trust to luck to give her a sign.



# Kadanzer Weyr

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