

## A Forgotten Meeting

By A.D. Trosper

Emmaleen climbed the rocks with the sure-footed grace of a mountain goat. Fingerless leather gloves covered her hands and kept the sharp rocks from biting into them. She paused and turned to look at Galdrilene from the greater height of the mountain she scaled. Below in the distance, the rim of the Dragon Hold stood against the dark blue of the bay's water. The lake sparkled in the sun, looking like nothing more than a puddle from this distance.

The shape of a dragon lifted off from the rim. At only fourteen, it would be at least two years before an egg called her. *If* one called her. Everyone said her magic was already more than strong enough for her to bond with a dragon, but nothing was certain until she heard the song.

There was only one silver egg in the Hatching Chamber. Surely, it was meant for her. Of course, another could be laid by the time she was old enough to be called. It was doubtful though. There were already three silvers; the world really didn't need another breeding pair. Since the battle that finally ended the Shadow Dragons, each silver had laid a large clutch. Galdrilene's dragon population had grown nicely and would continue to do so without another Silver. Maybe because of that something would shift, and she wouldn't need a shield or a bondmate. Wishing thinking, but she could hope.

If only she was like Loki. He remained the only Dragon Rider called so young. None before and none since had been called before their sixteenth year and most not until a year or two later.

A grunt turned her attention to the boy who matched her skill in climbing with ease. He glanced over, a grin spreading across his face. "You're going to lose if you keep staring at the hold and daydreaming."

"I wasn't daydreaming. Just checking where we are." Emmaleen pushed herself up and forward, grabbing for the next rock.

He chuckled. "Sure you weren't, Em."

Amusement rolled off him, and she stuck her tongue out. “Laugh all you want now, Bael, because you won’t be when I reach the top ahead of you.”

His next two movements put him a full pace ahead. She reached for the next handhold and couldn’t find one. After glancing at her competition to make sure he wasn’t looking, Emmaleen focused her secondary magic and smiled when the rock responded, giving the perfect place to grip.

Within a few moves, she was level with him again. Grunting and straining with effort, the two of them continued to climb until they reached the top of the nearly vertical cliff face. Emmaleen gave him a friendly glower as they sat down beside each other, legs dangling over the side. “You were supposed to lose.”

“Ha! Like I’m going to make it easy on you.” A teasing light filled his deep-green eyes. “To *let* you win would be a lie,” he said with a solemn voice.

“Oh please.” She laughed at the absurdity of his statement. “Like you never lie, Baellinar.”

He chuckled with her. “Well, not about important things. You know how my father is.”

Emmaleen nodded. Kellinar could be fun and indulgent, and she thought of him as her uncle though he really wasn’t. But he also had a stern and serious side that demanded nothing less than complete honesty, even when it would get them in trouble. It didn’t help that both Baellinar’s mother and her own could tell whether they were lying or not. Sometimes that could get annoying. Although she too could tell if someone was being untruthful with her.

Emmaleen didn’t mind her ability to read people too much. Everyone was careful not to touch her except her parents. Their touch never bothered her, probably because she was a product of both of them. She never felt any overflow of emotions from Marda either, even when the old woman hugged her. If her magic continued to grow, she would require a dragon’s bond as well as a bondmate to shield her from the onslaught of people’s emotions. Sometimes Emmaleen thought it might be nice if she’d inherited only her father’s Earth magic.

A cool breeze blew across her skin and whispered a soft sigh as it moved through the trees below them. Fluffy white clouds drifted across the rich blue sky. Several strands of her black hair had escaped the braid that hung to the middle of her back and plastered themselves to her sweaty

face. Emmaleen wiped the perspiration away and tried to tuck the damp strands behind her ears with minimal success.

Baellinar raked a hand through his short blond hair, the sweat making it stand up in odd directions. He leaned back on his hands and closed his eyes, face tilted toward the sun. Emmaleen studied him. Sometimes her friend seemed to possess more patience than anyone else she knew that was their age, including herself. At twelve, he was never one to chomp at the bit for adulthood or the possibility of hatching.

“Do you really never think about hatching a dragon, or do you just pretend to have no concern one way or the other?”

“I think about it sometimes.” He shrugged. “Not in the obsessive way you do and not in the way a lot of others do. I figure if the Fates choose to weave a dragon for me, they will. If not, well then there is nothing I can do about that.”

Emmaleen frowned. “Do you ever get the feeling that the Fates are losing control of their weavings?”

Baellinar opened his eyes and stared at her with a mix of surprise and wariness. It wasn't a look that was completely unfounded. Although she had yet to have visions like her mother, but Emmaleen did feel things in the world. It was like sensing when someone was sad or happy. More than once she had felt when something was going to happen before it did. No wonder he was looking at her as if she'd just suggested the sea would swallow Galdrilene.

“It isn't a ‘feeling’ or anything,” she rushed to assure him. Emmaleen could have kicked herself. This is something she should have discussed with her mother before anyone else. “Forget I said anything.”

“You want me to forget that?” His look turned incredulous. “You ask me if I think the Fates are losing control of their weaves and then ask me to pretend you didn't ask it.”

Baellinar shifted to face her more fully. “Em, do you have any idea what would happen to this world, to all of the worlds on the strand, if the Fates can no longer control the weavings. Everything would fall apart!”

“Bael, calm down. I didn’t say I felt they were losing control. I just asked if you ever thought they were.”

“Why would you ask that?”

Emmaleen shook her head. “I don’t know. Never mind.”

Without giving him a chance to say anything else she slipped over the edge, found her first foothold, and began the climb down.

Baellinar followed her. “What is wrong with you?”

“Nothing. You need to get back to the hold though. You did promise Lenya you would help her clean the Records Room.” Emmaleen hoped he would take the change in topic.

“Ugh, why did you have to remind me?”

She breathed a sigh of relief. “Because your father will have your skin right taken right off if you break a promise. And if he didn’t, Lenya would. She’s as skilled as her mother with the zahri.”

Baellinar grumbled under his breath for several minutes as they continued to work their way back down the cliff face. When they finally reached the base, he dusted his hands off on his pants. “I don’t know why I promised to do this. Lenya is so protective of all those dusty scrolls and the Fates forbid I lay a single finger on the Kor’ti.”

Emmaleen chuckled at the memory of Lenya chasing her friend down because he’d accidentally caused a small rip in one of the book’s pages. If Lenya’s mother, Kirynn, and Kellinar hadn’t interfered it was possible Baellinar wouldn’t be standing there with her. “You will be fine. It’s not as if you’re an eight-year-old anymore. I’m sure you have enough sense to be careful now. Why you didn’t have it then, I don’t know. But my mother says boys mature slower than girls, so maybe that’s why.”

He glowered at her then started down the path that would eventually lead to the main road into the city of Galdrilene. When she didn’t follow, he stopped and turned back. “Aren’t you coming?”

Emmaleen snorted. “You’re the one that made the promise, not me. I’m not ready to go back yet. I’d rather climb stay out here until it’s time for my lesson with Kirynn and Vaddoc.”

“Fine, stay out here by yourself and get eaten by a bear.”

“If I need help, I’m perfectly capable of reaching out to Mother’s dragon. Nydara would be here before a bear could lay a single claw on me.”

Baellinar stared at her briefly, and she could sense his indecision. Emmaleen waved in the direction of Galdrilene. “It’s your hide if you don’t hurry up.”

Grumbling under his breath again, Baellinar walked away. She watched him go with amusement. As if she would ever be in danger in Galdrilene. Even if Nydara and Paki were both out of Galdrilene at the same time, Emmaleen could communicate with any of the others. Not to mention she’d trained with Kirynn since she was three and was hardly defenseless.

Emmaleen started down a different trail, one that wound over rocks and fallen logs and crisscrossed a narrow stream. She loved the challenge of these trails. Mostly forgotten and unmaintained, they gave her the solitude she wanted and the physical exertion she needed. Tonight, she would sleep well. And maybe she wouldn’t dream of the silver-eyed young man.

Why was he interrupting her sleep? And why did it feel as if she knew him? Was it because he was such a constant visitor in her dreams? First he appeared as a small child, then a gangly boy, and now a young man—it was almost as if they’d grown up together in some strange way. Her mother would probably know or could find out who he was if she’d bothered to ask. Several times Emmaleen had approached her mother with that very intent only to find herself unable to say the words. Something within her wanted to keep it a secret.

There were more important things to worry about. She hadn’t been completely honest with Baellinar. Her question about the Fates losing control was more than a passing thought. It hadn’t evolved into a full-fledged feeling, and yet at the same time she sensed the balance of the world slowly tipping out of control. Growing up the pattern of the world had always felt stable. Lately that stability seemed to be slipping, although not in a tangible way that allowed her to say *this is what I’m talking about*.

Instead it was subtle—so subtle she could barely sense it herself—yet it felt wrong. Almost as if something were out of tune with the world: Like someone striking the wrong chord every few notes during a song while everyone else continued to play well. Not noticeable enough that it would bother most people; only those listening closely would notice. Emmaleen had been listening closely all her life.

She ducked under the trunk of a tree that leaned on its neighbor. “Burn it all, why can’t these shadow-blasted senses just come out and flaming tell me what’s wrong?” Three more steps, and she sensed magic. A weave forming.

“My, you have grown. Still, such language for one so young.”

Startled, Emmaleen spun toward the voice, bracing herself for whatever might come at her. A flash of Spirit magic crossed the intervening space. Instinctively, she reached for the dragons and came up against a wall.

“I can’t have you shouting for the dragons or riders. Though I am not exactly an enemy, neither am I welcome here.”

Emmaleen eyed the strange woman whose black-edged green irises stared at her. A cascade of hair the color of cold blood fell over the woman’s shoulder. How had this woman created a mental block that would hold? “Who are you?”

“My name is of no matter for now,” the stranger said as she walked closer. “You’re already so strong in your magic; I can feel you trying to break past my block, and quite lovely. And...dual powers?” Laughter broke past the woman’s lips. “Oh how the Fates weave. This is going to be an interesting match.”

“What match?” Emmaleen tried to understand what the woman was talking about. When no answer came, she pulled herself up straight and lifted her chin in a pose she’d learned from Taela. “I am Emmaleen Mandarran, Daughter of Maleena and Mckale, the Heads of Galdrilene. I ask you again, who are you?”

“And no shrinking violet either, I see. Very good. However, there was no need to announce your name. I know who you are.” The woman smiled. “As far as who am I? No one you will remember.”

Before Emmaleen could react, the woman reached out and touched a finger to her forehead.

Blinking, Emmaleen looked around. Why was she standing here? Something tickled the back of her mind but it fled before she could grasp it. A glance at the sun showed she hadn't been standing there long, even so, she needed to hurry and finish this trail if she was going to get back in time for her lesson with Kirynn and Vaddoc. Neither would accept her being tardy.

She pushed on, making it to the main trail that led back to Galdrilene Road in record time. As Emmaleen neared the road, she paused and looked back. Had something happened on that isolated trail? She struggled to remember. When nothing came, she shrugged and moved onto the road. This was no time to lose her focus. Kirynn was stepping up her training today, and the redheaded warrior would not go easy on her.

Red hair...something about dark red hair like the color of cold blood. The thought flitted away almost as soon as it occurred.