

Dragons of Woolpren

Prologue

“Ruskya, hurry; you're going to be late,” the middle aged woman called to the towheaded boy.

“I'm coming, Mom,” he called back as he struggled into a dark tunic with baby blue trim.

It was a special day, and he couldn't be late for the procession. He really doubted that he would be chosen, but one never knew with dragons. The hatchlings had seen two winters today. At their coming of age, all the younglings of ten winters of Woolpren village would parade before them. It was up to the dragons to decide if any of the children were worthy enough to become riders. Ruskya smiled at the thought. Every child of Woolpren dreamed of becoming a dragon rider, but in reality only a select few were ever chosen. No one from his family had ever been chosen.

He turned to survey himself in the mirror. What he saw was not impressive. He was short for his 10 winters and skinny. Many people said he would blow away like a tumbleweed in the winter wind; yet he had managed somehow to survive for 10 winters without being blown away. His sister, Dusky, was just the opposite, tall, dark, and slender—not too pudgy and not too skinny. She wasn't skin and bones like him. How they could be twins still mystified him.

“Are you going to stand there and admire yourself all day, or are we going to go see the hatchlings?” Dusky demanded. “I know we won't have a chance at being picked, but we can at least say that we saw them,” she added in a softer tone.

She too dreamed of becoming a dragon rider, but knew it was beyond them. Although the dragons were the ones who were said to choose the riders, it often appeared that they only chose the wealthy and the rulers children. It was said they chose them because of their elegant gowns. With this in mind, Dusky and Ruskya's mother had carefully chosen the wool for the past 10 winters. She had then cleaned it and spun it and then woven it into cloth and created the matching tunics for the twins to wear for their one chance of becoming dragon riders. Dusky took one last look at herself and her twin in the mirror and then turned.

“Let's go make Mother proud of us,” she stated and climbed down the ladder.

Ruskya followed behind her. They found their mother observing from the doorway. She turned when she heard their soft footsteps.

“It is almost too late; you have dilly-dallied too long. You must run if you're going to make it. Go!” She urged them out the door and down the lane of the canyon to the procession grounds.

The twins ran down the canyon passing without seeing the familiar windows and doors of their neighbors and friends. All the doors were shut and no lights shone from the windows; for everyone was at the procession grounds. Even those who had no children were there to see who of the younglings would be chosen. There were five dragons who were of age and who had not chosen a rider yet. With that many dragons available, the children were hopeful this year; nevertheless, they all knew that the dragons did not have to choose a child each winter. There were two dragons that were now as old as Ruskya and Dusky who had not chosen any rider. They had been part of the procession for the last 8 winters. Many believed that the two would never choose a rider. Others thought that they were waiting for just the right riders.

The twins soon found themselves at the procession grounds. The crowd was not as thick as one would expect, for many people were up in their houses looking down from the windows of their homes, 2-4 stories off of the canyon floor. They had a better view from up there. Dusky took the lead and started to push her way closer to the front where they could see. As she pushed past one adult, he grabbed her by the shoulder and pulled her around.

“Look here,” he started to scold and then stopped. “Dusky and Rusky!” he exclaimed. “Why are you not up there yet? Come with me. There are two who have not chosen and will not go away. It is as if they are waiting for some more 10 year olds to materialize. The rider is trying to tell them that there are no more choices. He will be surprised to see you two.”

So saying, the man started to clear the way to the front with shouts of “make way” or “clear the way, prospective dragon riders coming through.” Rusky wanted to hide and run. He hated this type of attention, but Dusky basked in the attention. Neither of the twins really thought for a moment that anything would happen when they reached the front, but Dusky felt proud and important that for at least a little while she could let the dream be real. With the man's help, they were soon up front. There the man stopped and pushed the twins forward. They had to walk the rest of the way on their own.

Both of the twins halted for a heart beat while they realized the enormosity of the moment. Before them was a line of 10 year olds and in front of them would be the dragons. Neither of the two could see the dragons yet. Then Rusky heard a male's voice call to him. He looked around but couldn't see the person who was talking.

“Rusky, come. I have been waiting for you. Please, just come forward.”

Rusky looked around but couldn't see anyone, but the voice was a calm comfort that seemed to give him the courage to take Dusky's hand and move forward to the line of children.

“Rusky, thank you. You cannot imagine how long it has seemed as my sister and I have waited for you and your sister.”

“You have a sister, too?” Rusky asked.

“I do, and soon you will meet her, but first you must come be with the other children.”

As the voice said it, Rusky and Dusky arrived at the line. Rusky looked around, but still couldn't seem to see who was talking to him. Then he looked forward and caught sight of the two dragons. His breath caught in his throat and his heart seemed to skip a beat. Standing before him were three dragons. One seemed enormous; he had a rider sitting atop him surveying the scene. The other two were large but not as big as the royal blue dragon with the warrior dragon rider. The smaller dragons were both blue, but of a lighter shade than the older and larger dragon. The one was a baby blue with streaks of ice blue showing through. The other was sky blue with silver streaks spreading throughout its body. These two stepped forward. Just as Rusky was about to step back, the voice called to him again.

“Rusky, don't be afraid. I want to meet you. Please, just come forward.”

Rusky paused still looking around dazedly wondering where the voice was coming from, yet willing to go meet this person who could inspire courage in him. So, he took Dusky's hand and stepped forward.

The dragon rider surveyed the scene from the top of his perch on his dragon. He had tried to talk sense into the two dragons, but they were insistent that there were more children yet to come. Then out of the blue two children appeared. They both wore the

black wool of the choosing, but each had a different shade of blue trim on their tunics. The boy wore a baby blue trim that matched the dragon Wyeth. The girl wore a sky blue trim that was identical to Wyeth's sister, Wryn. He wondered at the mother who would have the knowledge to choose those colors for her children.

As he pondered these things, he noticed the boy take the girl's hand and step forward. The surprised look on the girl's face caused the rider to look closer. What was happening here? Often after a choosing, a person would gain courage that wasn't ordinarily there. Yet, this one had not been chosen yet. Could that be what was going on now? Had Wyeth and Wryn known about these two children somehow? One never really knew with dragons and especially these two dragons. He watched as the boy walked confidently up to Wyeth, pause, and then give Wyeth's leg a hug. The girl had let go of her brother's hand and proceeded to give Wryn's leg a hug.

The rider urged his dragon forward and then called out to the people around, "Behold, the dragons have chosen. Blessed be those who were chosen, and blessed be the village of their birth."

The people responded, "Blessed be the dragons and those who have been chosen," and then slowly dispersed back to their homes.

Ruskya was oblivious to the others around him. He was just basking in the sound of the dragon's voice. He had learned the dragon's name, when a hand was placed on his shoulder. Ruskya looked up into the dragon rider's face. Dark blue eyes gazed down at him examining him and weighing his worth. Ruskya at first felt shy and unworthy, then he heard Wyeth give him encouragement. He was sure that the rider also heard Wyeth's words, but the rider didn't respond to Wyeth. He continued to look at Ruskya. The rider took in Ruskya's skinny form and short stature. Again, Ruskya felt that he wasn't worthy to be a rider. This time he felt a warm breath of air, and smelled rosemary and pine needles. He recognized that smell from his childhood. When he would sit on his father's lap, he would smell that. It made him feel safe and secure. Ruskya straightened his back and took a step toward the dragon rider. He bowed to the rider and then straightened not waiting for the traditional response back. He knew he was on equal footing with this rider, even though he was a child. The rider's face broke into a large, friendly smile. He bowed in return and turned to Dusky.

Dusky came forward and immediately bowed to the rider. She, too, however did not wait for the rider to bow before standing back up. She stared right back at the rider and took in his gaze and seemed to give it right back. Ruskya was amazed at the forwardness of his twin. Dusky always had been the courageous one, but this almost seemed rude. The rider, however, didn't seem to mind. He allowed Dusky to weigh him. When both the young and old rider had finished weighing each other and seemed to find what they sought, the older rider stepped back.

"May I introduce myself to the newest riders?" he queried. Upon receiving nods from both of the twins he continued. "My name is Glendyn. This is my dragon, Wyden."

The twins looked up at the royal blue dragon, who up close seemed enormous to them, especially compared to Wyeth and Wryn. Ruskya heard Dusky greet the dragon. If he wasn't looking directly at her, he would have sworn she had talked, but her lips did not move. He gazed at her in amazement, until he heard Wyeth call to him.

"Do not be surprised, or show your astonishment. You, too, can talk with me without using your voice. Try greeting Wyden. He is waiting for you. If you wait much longer, he will consider you just an ordinary youngling."

Ruskya looked back at Wyeth and from a slight nod from the dragon, he looked back

at Wyden and bowed. While he bowed he thought, "Greetings, honored dragon. May your flight be blessed."

Wyden seemed pleased as he answered, "And you, respected rider. May your dragon bring you fortune."

Then Ruskyia straightened up and looked at Wyden's eyes. They seemed to sparkle. He also noticed they were the same color blue as Glendyn's. Ruskyia then remembered Glendyn standing waiting for his attention. He turned around coloring slightly.

"Honored rider, may your dragon bring you fortune," Ruskyia said with a slight bow.

Ruskyia saw the shock that quickly passed across Glendyn's face before he could conceal it. Ruskyia also heard the chuckle of approval from Wyeth and stood up taller.

"Well I see you have been trained well, young one. Whom do I have the privilege of meeting?"

Duskya stepped forward, "Honored rider, I am Duskya, and this is my brother, Ruskyia."

"I am honored to meet such younglings. Will you please take me to your parents so that I can receive the final approval for dragon riders?" Glendyn requested.

Duskya did not miss a beat before she answered, "Our father is no longer with us; it is just our mother, but come, I will take you to her."

Ruskyia called to Wyeth, "Will that be okay with you, Wyeth? I don't want to leave you here alone."

"Go on, young one," Wyeth assured him. "I will be fine. Greet your mother for me; assure her I will take care of you."

Ruskyia smiled and turned to Duskya who also had paused before moving on. He nodded to her and they moved out with Glendyn following.

Glendyn noticed the ice blue sparkles that still lingered on the boy. He still couldn't believe that Wyeth had sprayed the boy with a small amount of dragon fire. Glendyn knew it was what had given the boy courage to step forward, but he still wondered about how these two knew the proper greeting of a dragon rider.

As they tread down the well worn trail, Glendyn thought back to his trip back to his home to get his own mother's approval. He remembered the excitement and the trepidation that accompanied it. He wondered at the twins confidence. He wondered what else strange was going on with these two young dragon riders.

Before he knew it, they had stopped in front of a wool tapestry covered doorway. Glendyn looked around with shock and wonder. It had been a very long time since he had been here. Besides Ardyn had been gone for seven years. There was no reason for his family to still live here. It had to be someone else's home. The girl pushed the tapestry to the side and entered the small dwelling. She and the boy rushed to their mother and started to tell their tale. Glendyn stared at the simple surroundings avoiding looking at the mother, not wanting to hear that Ardyn's twins were the children that Wyeth and Wryn had chosen. Finally, he heard her voice give some commands to the children.

"Alright, I want you two to go upstairs and gather your things into two piles on the bed. You don't need to worry about tunics or trousers, but underthings, and anything that you want to remind you of home. I will go through it all and put it into a rusk sack for you. Now go on."

She patted them both on the head and pushed them toward the ladder. Then she turned to the fire and pushed the iron that held the kettle out of the fire. She reached up into the nook and withdrew a mug and a small tin. From the tin she gathered some tea leaves and dropped them into the mug. Before sitting down, she poured water into the

mug and set it in front of Glendyn along with a crock of sugar.

They both sat in silence for a few minutes listening to the twins chattering upstairs. Glendyn just wondered at fate. How did the dragons know that Ardyn's twins would be there today? How did they know to wait? How did Ardyn's widow know the colors to add to the trim of the tunics? Glendyn shook his head. There was no way of knowing. He looked up into her eyes and saw the pain that had been hidden along with the hope.

"Meredyth," Glendyn spoke in a whisper, "I will fully understand if you decline the honor," he began, but Meredyth cut him short.

Still in a whisper, she said, "No, rider. I accept with joy the honor of a dragon rider in my family. Even though my husband cannot join in the joy, it was his hope that both of the twins would be chosen as riders."

Glendyn nodded. He knew of Ardyn's wild dreams, but it seemed as if those dreams were coming true before Glendyn's eyes. If only, Ardyn would have been here to see it. Glendyn blinked the moisture from his eyes and looked at Meredyth.

"I will take responsibility for them as if they were my own," he pledged. At Meredyth's look of surprise, he added, "I vow it. Upon Wyden my dragon, I will do all in my power to train these two to be the best dragon riders that they can be so that they will bring honor to the memory of their father."

Meredyth reached for Glendyn's hand and squeezed it, unable to say anything through the tears streaming down her cheeks. She nodded at Glendyn, then released his hand and stood. Wiping her cheeks with her apron, she headed up the ladder to sort her children's belongings.

Glendyn sat and stared into the fire.

"Wyden," he called to his dragon, "I don't know if it was a good thing or not, but I just swore to protect these two."

"It was a good thing," the dragons gravely voice came to him. "They are different than most younglings. They were already communicating between each other and their dragons."

"They were?" Glendyn said with surprise. "How did they do that?"

"I am not sure, but the girl and Wryn had it figured out before the boy, but the boy caught on without any training. The girl spoke to me and he heard and wondered. Wyeth explained that he could do so also. He greeted me in the old manner. Who are they?"

"Their father was, well, it is difficult to explain his relationship to the riders. His name was Ardyn."

"Ardyn," Wyden seemed to mull the name through his mind. "That would explain a lot."

Glendyn didn't need to comment anything else. He just gazed into the fire until Meredyth returned with the twins. He stood and she started to speak.

"Honored rider, I entrust you with the training and upbringing of my children. May they fly true and brave."

Glendyn admired her courage and replied back, "Respected mother, I will endeavor to bring them up and to train them to be honored riders. May your home know peace and fulfillment from your sacrifice. I will hold true to what I said earlier," he added, and received a warm smile of thanks from Meredyth. He turned to the twins and add, "Come, younglings, you have a lot to learn. I hear you are already learning many things. I believe great things are in store for you both."

Thus saying, after a final hug from their mother, he led the twins from their home and into the life of a dragon rider.