



## VII

### Weyrman, Watch



A thin layer of dust that had already settled over the contents of E'rom's weyr. C'los sat at the table, looking at the smooth, varnished surface, and wondered if the identity of E'rom's murderer would become clear if he looked hard enough.

A'len and T'rello had done an excellent job of keeping the weyr off limits. The markers C'los placed each time he left the weyr – a fine thread stretched between door and doorframe that would break on entry, charcoal to smudge onto the curtains if someone pushed through them – had remained undisturbed. A'len and Chylth waited out there now, keeping Indioth company, while C'los sat in the dead rider's weyr and ordered his thoughts. He found it helped to come here, to where E'rom had lived and died. It sharpened his receptiveness to possibilities.

C'los had spent the time since E'rom's funeral struggling with the questions that lay at the heart of the brown rider's murder. Who had killed him? Why? He knew when, and how. But it was the reason, the motive, that frustrated C'los the most. Valrov's lessons had never involved the Weyr. Whatever drove one man to kill another in a Hold or Craft could scarcely begin to account for why somebody would murder a dragonrider in cold blood in his own weyr.

Money. Revenge. Passion. Outright insanity didn't fit – the evidence pointed to calculation, not madness. Money...E'rom had left details of how he wished his possessions to be divided, but they were modest enough, and save the spilled bottle of Jessaf brandy, the few items of value in his weyr had not been touched. C'los doubted the brown rider had been hiding a secret stash of marks, and even if he had, theft and murder were worlds apart.

Everything C'los had heard about E'rom indicated that he had been a decent, reliable, but basically dull man. On the face of it, it seemed hard to believe that anyone could have harboured either resentment or passion for him. But C'los, well knowing as he did both his own serene weyrmate and the taciturn Weyrleader, had a lifetime's experience of hidden depths. There must have been more to E'rom than there seemed.

The brown rider had held Wingsecond rank, and he had survived the changes that T'kamen had enforced where other riders had not. C'los had made arrangements to see H'ned and F'yan, E'rom's commanding Wingleaders, later in the day. He'd read every report the brown rider had written over the last two Turns, and there were names he wanted to query with the two bronze riders.

Jenavally had given C'los more information on E'rom's personal life, relating what she knew of the brown rider's affairs over a gitar session in her weyr late the previous night. Little of it seemed relevant. E'rom's relationships had been fairly mundane, with no jealous lovers or spurned former flames. He'd fathered two girls – both grown up – and possibly a son, by three

different women, none of whom had claimed more support or interest than E'rom had been willing to give. Despite the formality of his funeral, it appeared that E'rom had maintained only minimal ties with his blood relatives, and C'los doubted that Ironam would prove a useful source; interviewing him could wait.

He was more interested in speaking to K'ston, the late Wingsecond's weyrmate. There were questions he was sure the blue rider would be able to answer. C'los had arranged to see K'ston in his weyr, but he had stopped at E'rom's former quarters first to retrieve the items he needed.

With a sigh, C'los picked up the brandy bottle that had been on the floor since the day of the murder and stoppered it to prevent the spoiled dregs from spilling further. He took the piece of fighting harness off the table, and then reached up to the top shelf above for one of the five matched mugs. He'd sniffed at all of them, hoping to detect a residue of fellis juice, but without success. Still, E'rom had to have quaffed his final drink from something.

C'los placed each item carefully in the bag he'd brought to carry them, and looked around at the weyr he had taken such pains to keep undisturbed one more time. In notes and sketches, he had gleaned everything he could from the place. But he still felt an odd pang of guilt as he left the dead rider's weyr and, out of habit, he renewed the charcoal mark on the main archway that his entry had brushed out.

"Done for today?" asked A'len, as C'los stepped out onto the ledge.

The green rider nodded. "You'll stay here?"

"One of T'rello's blue riders is coming up to take over at noon," A'len replied. "Don't worry, Los, we won't let anyone in or out. Oh, and I meant to ask you: when are we next going to get the old ensemble together? I thought, now that C'mine's home...."

"The what?" C'los frowned. "Oh, that. Kamen's too busy. I'll maybe speak to Jenavally about taking over."

"Yes sir," A'len teased. "When you're ready."

C'los walked to Indioth, settling the strap of his bag more comfortably over his shoulder. The green had been snuggling against A'len's dragon. Chylth had mated Indioth in her last flight, six sevendays ago, and in several before that, and there was an affectionate bond between the pair.

"Come on, girl," he said, controlling his impatience. "Tear yourself away."

Yes, C'los.

Indioth stood small enough to make mounting easy. C'los had always found that that suited him, particularly during weyrling training, when some of the brown and bronze riders had made amusing fools of themselves struggling to climb to their dragons' neck ridges. There were many advantages to riding a green. But Indioth had been reserved of late; uncharacteristically quiet for a normally bright and cheerful personality. C'los knew it was because of the barrier he had placed



between them since beginning the murder investigation. It must have seemed cruel to her, but he couldn't bear the thought of gentle, trusting Indioth knowing the worst of what man could do. So he paused to make a fuss of her, rubbing her eye ridges and scratching under her chin until her eyelids slipped shut and she sighed with pleasure.

That done, C'los thumped Indioth's shoulder, and swung up to her neck. "Bronth's weyr, then."

Indioth waited for him to settle in place and then sprang from the ledge, spread her wings, and rose with ease, angling away from the cliff face with the lift of a Bowl thermal.

K'ston weyred in the southeast corner of the Bowl, not far from the tunnel that provided ground access into Madellon. On the ledge, Bronth was enjoying the autumn sun afforded by the clear sky. He looked in good colour for a dragon with a rider in mourning, his hide a vibrant deep blue. Indioth landed in the space Bronth vacated for her, humming thanks as she folded her wings.

"You'll be all right here, girl?" C'los asked as he dismounted.

*Will you be long?*

"I'm not sure. It's sunny, though, you can enjoy that."

Indioth looked morose as she settled her chin to her forearms.

"Bronth, is that C'los?"

The voice belonged to the sandy-haired man who had just appeared at the entrance to the weyr. C'los stepped around Indioth's masking bulk, and extended his hand to the blue rider. "It is, K'ston."

K'ston grasped his wrist in a strong grip, and then let it go. C'los looked up at the taller rider, making a quick assessment. Before he had begun investigating E'rom's death he had known this man only by name and face. K'ston was in his mid forties but looked much younger, an impression born of his open features and boyishly tousled blonde hair, receding only slightly at the temples. The lines of recent grief, and the dark shadows under his unusual green eyes, seemed out of place on his youthful face. "Bronth said Indioth was here. Will you come in and sit down?"

C'los followed the blue rider into his weyr. "Thank you for agreeing to talk to me."

"I just want to know what happened." K'ston sounded as tired as he looked.

"I hope I won't have to keep you too long. You probably know that the Weyrleader's asked me to look into the circumstances of E'rom's death."

K'ston turned away as he replied. "I'd thought he would."

C'los let that pass. He'd taken too high-profile a part in T'kamen's popularity campaign for the Weyr to forget his allegiance. It didn't hurt. Any association with the Weyrleader lent C'los a substance that belied the colour of his dragon.

K'ston's weyr was a modest affair, the standard single-room accommodation off the larger dragon chamber that constituted living quarters for most riders. The bed, clothes chest, table and chairs made up the furnishings; a curtained corner presumably concealed basic toilet facilities.



K'ston picked up several abandoned items of clothes, rolling them up and throwing them onto the bed. "Sorry about the mess. Half my clothes are still in E'rom's weyr."

C'los waited while K'ston removed a shirt from the back of one of the chairs, then sat down. "We've almost finished with it now. You'll be able to take them back."

"Was there that much to find?"

"A few things," C'los said, deliberately evasive. Then, because he was there to ask questions, not answer them, he said, "I've been trying to build up a picture of what sort of man E'rom was. Can you tell me about your relationship with him?"

K'ston sat heavily in the second chair, leaning his head against one hand. "Everyone said he was boring," he said, after a moment. "I used to tease him about it. He didn't care what people thought, but the teasing wound him up, even though he knew I didn't mean it." The blue rider stared at nothing, his green eyes going vague. "I suppose he was, really," he said. "But I'd had my share of excitement, getting Bronth to chase half the greens in the Weyr and seeing what I could make of it afterwards." He smiled ruefully. "That's how we met. Bronth and Sigith had both been going after a green; I forget whose. They both lost, anyway. E'rom and I went to drown our sorrows. I didn't know he was a brown rider – or a Wingsecond. It didn't matter, anyway. I felt like I knew him. It felt right."

"How long were you weyrmated?" C'los asked.

"Never, not technically." K'ston made a face. "I never moved in. He didn't ask, and he was the one with the big weyr. Anyway, there wouldn't have been room for Bronth. But we were together from...late '96. Nearly four Turns."

"You must have known all his habits, then," said C'los.

K'ston smiled briefly. "That only took about a sevenday. Yeah, he had habits, and routines, and Faranth forbid I should disturb the order of things." He shrugged. "It was all based around his being a Wingsecond. He took that very seriously. Next to Sigith, it was the most important part of his life. More important than me, even. I tried to help at first, but he used to get so agitated when I put things in the wrong place."

"That drives me crazy, too," C'los agreed. He could well believe that E'rom would have found K'ston's efforts irritating, based on the state of the blue rider's weyr. "Did E'rom ever drink?"

K'ston looked truly distraught for the first time. "All around the Weyr, people are saying that he got drunk and fell off his ledge. He wouldn't have – I just can't... I told you, he was boring. And he had a Wing meeting that evening – he'd never have had a drink before one of those, never."

"All right." C'los paused again and then reached down to his bag. He took out the almost empty bottle of Jessaf brandy, and set it on the table between them. "Do you recognise this?"

K'ston looked at the bottle. "Yes," he replied, more softly. "That's five-Turn-old Jessaf Hold brandy."

C'los couldn't help wincing at the waste. "Whose was it?"

The blue rider hesitated for a long moment, as if reluctant to reply. "It was E'rom's," he said finally. "I gave it to him at Turn's End. That was the day he celebrated Impressing Sigith, too." K'ston looked at C'los, pleading with his eyes. "It doesn't mean he was a drunk, C'los. He loved a drink in the evenings, but he savoured it. He wouldn't have wasted brandy like this."

The green rider nodded. It only confirmed what he and Isnan had deduced, and Tomsung's tests had concluded. E'rom hadn't been drinking on the evening of his death. Nor did it seem likely that the Wingsecond could have accidentally spilled such a rare brandy on himself. C'los reached into his bag again and took out the mug from E'rom's weyr. "What can you tell me about this?"

"That's one of his everyday cups," said K'ston, eyeing the vessel uneasily, as if he wasn't sure what to make of it. "He wouldn't have drunk brandy out of that."

"What would he have drunk out of it?"

K'ston looked briefly alarmed. "Well, klah, I suppose. He used to have ten, enough for his whole Wing, but I've broken about four over the Turns. It drove him mad."

C'los looked at the mug for a long moment and then put it and the bottle away. "Did you argue with him very much?" he asked, deliberately changing tack.

K'ston looked surprised at the question. "What do you mean? We disagreed, sometimes, but arguments? No, not really."

"What did you disagree about?" C'los asked intently.

The blue rider frowned. "Little things, silly things. His family, sometimes."

"His family?" C'los prompted.

K'ston shrugged, seeming to relax slightly. "His brothers never liked me. Just one of those things. It caused some tensions."

C'los mentally revised his decision to omit Ironam from his investigation. E'rom's brother might be able to shed some light on that enmity.

Something that had been niggling him since he had asked K'ston about the brandy suddenly blossomed into a question. "E'rom didn't have a poor sense of taste, did he?"

Bronth's rider looked perplexed. "Taste? No, his sense of taste was fine."

"What about his health generally? Any problems?"

For a fraction of an instant, K'ston's face clouded over. The expression had gone again by the time C'los blinked, and he wondered if he had imagined it. "No, nothing."

"You're sure?" C'los pressed, feeling instinctively that he was on to something. "What about you – any illnesses or injuries recently?"

"E'rom was completely healthy. And my brother, Katel, he's a journeyman in the infirmary."

"A Healer?" At K'ston's nod, C'los asked, "How did E'rom and Katel get on?"

"Fine, I suppose," K'ston said. "They hardly knew each other. Katel's only been here a few months."

C'los nodded slowly. "When was the last time you saw E'rom?"

"The morning of the...the morning he died."

"I remember you got to the scene very quickly. Where had you been that afternoon?"

The blue rider's expression changed again, but this time he made no attempt to hide the signs of remembered grief. "I was at the lake."

C'los asked, carefully, "On your own?"

K'ston looked at him, as if trying to ascertain the motive behind his questioning. "With Bronth."

"Had you argued that morning?"

"Argued? No, we didn't...what...?"

"I just want to know what sort of frame of mind he was in," C'los said. "If he was upset, or depressed."

K'ston shook his head, clearly confused. "I don't know." Then, as an almost reluctant afterthought, he added, "It was hard to tell, sometimes. He didn't talk about his feelings, much."

C'los reviewed his list of questions rapidly in his mind and then stood up. "All right, K'ston, that's all for now. I'm sorry I had to put you through this."

"I know you're just trying to find out what happened, C'los," the blue rider replied, getting to his feet, evidently relieved. "If there's anything else I can help you with...."

"I'll let you know," C'los promised.

K'ston nodded. "I'll show you out."

As they passed through Bronth's sleeping chamber, something caught C'los' eye. The blue's fighting harness hung from a peg above the couch. The green rider looked more closely at the leatherwork. White thread had been used as a contrast to the dark brown wherhide, but it was the pattern, not the colour, that had made him stop. "Did you make these?" he asked K'ston.

"I make harness for a few people," the blue rider replied, with the hint of a shy smile.

"Beautiful work." C'los studied the riding straps for a moment longer. "Unusual stitch."

"It's what the Jessaf Tanners use to sew runner harness."

"Ah," C'los agreed, but he didn't need to know the origin of the pattern to know that it matched the stitching on the piece of E'rom's harness he had in his bag.

Indioth raised her head when C'los and K'ston emerged into the bright sunlight. C'los turned to the blue rider. "Thanks for your help, K'ston. You've given me a lot to think about."

Bronth's rider clasped his wrist. "Best of luck, C'los."

The blue rider stepped back, out of the way, as C'los remounted Indioth. But C'los could see him still standing there, watching, as the green shook out her wings and bounded off the ledge.

K'ston was hiding something. There was no doubt in C'los' mind about that. The blue rider had had the opportunity, and through his brother the Healer, access to the fellis juice that had clearly been the intended method. Only a motive was still unclear. C'los liked K'ston: there was a warmth and vulnerability to his manner that appealed to the green rider, but that same openness had betrayed the fact that Bronth's rider was definitely keeping something back. The piece of

fighting strap alone suggested that he had been in E'rom's weyr later than the morning of the sixth; a compulsively tidy man wouldn't tolerate half-finished work being left lying around for very long.

*Where do you want to go?* Indioth asked, breaking through C'los' concentration.

*Oh – sorry, girl.* C'los thought quickly. He had to talk to F'yan, but his interview with K'ston had raised some issues he wanted to clarify first. *The infirmary, Indy.*

The green obediently tilted on a wing. C'los leaned back against the shift, wondering if Isnan was busy. He could use the Weyr Healer's expertise.

*Will you be long this time?* Indioth asked plaintively.

*No, I don't think so. Just a few quick questions and then we'll go and see F'yan.*

Indioth heaved a sigh.

Madellon's infirmary was home to the busiest craft population of the Weyr. Eight journeymen, of widely differing seniorities, and twenty apprentices worked under Master Isnan. The numbers were swollen by the unranked personnel; mostly midwives and nurses from among the lower caverns women, experienced in their tasks, but lacking formal Craft training. There were always at least two journeymen on duty, even in the dead of night, but during the day the turnover of crafters and patients was brisk.

Midday seemed to have brought a lull, and C'los had no trouble attracting the attention of one of the duty journeymen. "Journeyman Lante," he greeted her.

"Hello, C'los," the journeyman replied pleasantly. "What can I do for you? Worried about C'mine again?"

C'los shook his head. "I just wanted to see Master Isnan for a moment, if he has the time."

"He's in his office," Lante told him. "Go on through."

C'los was no more than half a dozen steps past the journeyman Healer when he frowned and turned back. "Should I be worried about C'mine?"

Lante looked surprised. "No. It's just that he's in for his final check-up tomorrow, to clear him for returning to active duties."

"Already?" C'los queried, walking back towards her. "Are you sure?"

"It's been over fourteen sevendays, C'los. He won't have to strain himself, and he'll still be coming in for checks every fortnight, but he's fit to fly." Lante waved him away. "Get on with you. The Master has patients to see after lunch."

C'los sighed and resumed the trek to Isnan's office. Fourteen sevendays – had it really been that long?

The Weyr Healer's office was at the end of a long, twisting corridor. C'los passed the teaching room, where apprentices squirmed under the frosty gaze of their instructing journeyman; the pharmacy, where more journeymen laboured to create the infusions and tinctures and decoctions that made up such a large part of their craft; and several storerooms, locked, but pungent with the scents of dried herbs and roots.

The green rider knocked politely on Isnan's door, and entered at the muffled, "Come!"

The long-faced Master Healer sat at his desk, with the platter holding his noon meal perched precariously atop a stack of slates. Isnan looked up from the case notes he was reading, and beckoned C'los to sit. "A moment while I mark my place, Los," he said, in the calm voice that had the power to inspire instant trust in his patients.

C'los had always liked the Weyr Healer. Turns ago, as a young green rider recovering from his dragon's first mating flight, C'los had gone tentatively to the infirmary, knotted up with fear and embarrassment. Isnan had been completely unruffled. He had, as he'd said to C'los much later, seen it all before. A Weyr Healer had to be well acquainted with the complaints specific to dragonriders, and after nearly thirty Turns as Madellon's Master Healer, very little remained to surprise him.

Isnan looked weary, and C'los wondered how much of that could be attributed to overwork, and how much to the burden of knowing the real cause of E'rom's death. But the Healer smiled as he clasped his hands, stained faintly pink from redwort, together on the desk in front of him. "What can I do for you, C'los?"

"I just had a long chat with K'ston," the green rider said.

The Master nodded, his smile fading. "E'rom's weyrmate."

C'los chewed on his lip for a moment, thinking. "Master, if someone wanted to get hold of a quantity of fellis juice, what would be the best way?"

"I've thought about that," Isnan said gravely. He leaned back in his chair, looking up into space. "Someone who had been prescribed fellis would have it to hand, of course."

"Do you have a record of recent prescriptions?"

"Yes, I do. I'd have looked it out for you already, but those records are being re-filed." Isnan picked up the steaming cup of tea from his desk, sipping pensively. "The most obvious source of fellis is right here." He jerked his head towards the medicine cabinet behind him.

"How much would E'rom have to have taken for it to be a fatal dose?" the green rider asked.

Isnan twisted in his chair and, taking a key from the ring he wore buckled securely inside his tunic, unlocked the medicine cabinet. He removed a glass jar of the pale green liquid that C'los recognised as fellis juice. "A standard dose of fellis, and we use it for any affliction too severe for willowsalic, is between five and ten drops, depending on body weight, every four hours. That's about half a spoonful to a spoonful. If you want to knock a man out where he stands you're looking at barely twice that – perhaps twenty drops, and you go carefully because it puts strain on the heart. And if you're prescribing any kind of dose on a regular basis, then you also start administering this." He took a ceramic jar from the cabinet and handed it to C'los.

The green rider opened the jar, shaking it to examine the contents: dried leaves, brown and brittle, with a sweetish smell. "What is it?"

"The herb has several names, but it's often called fellisbane. Wherever you find fellis growing, you'll find this nearby, and a good thing too. Fellis has addictive properties, and an

infusion of fellisbane taken regularly helps to overcome dependency.” Isnan replaced the jar in the cupboard, and turned his attention back to the fellis juice. “The Healerhall teaches that any dosage above twenty five drops is fatal. That may be a conservative estimate, but I wouldn’t like to test the theory. Thirty drops – three spoonfuls – would almost certainly stop a man’s heart.”

“Potent,” C’los murmured.

“It’s dangerous,” Isnan agreed.

C’los frowned. “You lock the store cupboards, don’t you?”

“Of course. But security isn’t as rigorous as I’d like, not with eight journeymen around the place.” Isnan sighed. “I’ve found the storerooms left unlocked before. I gave them all a good bollocking about that. Naturally they didn’t understand why.”

“Anywhere else?”

The Healer raised his shoulders slightly. “A rider could source fellis from any Hold or Hall on Pern, I suppose, although it would raise questions. And technically, anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of distillation and a home-made still could refine fellis juice from the plant, although the quality wouldn’t be up to standard.”

“What about the taste?” C’los asked. “Could someone with a still do something to mask the flavour?”

“You’re wondering why E’rom didn’t taste the fellis?” Isnan shook his head. “I’ve been wondering that myself. It’s so bitter, even wine doesn’t hide the flavour. Unless E’rom’s sense of taste was poor....”

“I already asked K’ston that,” said C’los. “He said not.”

Isnan’s brows contracted. “He could be lying, C’los.”

The green rider exhaled heavily. “I’ve thought about that,” he admitted. He brooded for a moment. “What about K’ston’s brother, Katel? He could have supplied the fellis, couldn’t he?”

“He could,” Isnan conceded, “but I don’t see why he would. Katel’s still on probation. He’s only been here two months, and he seems eager to prove himself. Actually, I like him. Good practical Healer. He’ll never have the academic drive to make his Mastery, but he’s well trained otherwise, and he’ll learn plenty at the Weyr to round out his skills.”

“Can you bring him in here?”

“Certainly.” Isnan got up and yanked open the door, looking back and forth down the corridor until he spotted a stray apprentice. “Habbert! Kindly go and find journeyman Katel and ask him to come to my office immediately.”

C’los grinned. “Good service.”

“There have to be some advantages to running a department of thirty.” Isnan sat down again with a wince. “Although there are days when I wish there was another Master. I tell you, C’los, I can’t win. Every time I train a journeyman up the way I like him, he goes and takes his Mastery exams and gets recalled to the Hall for reassignment.”

“You could request provision for a second Master,” C’los suggested.

“Every Weyr Master is asking for extra staff,” said Isnan. “The Weyrleader has enough on his hands keeping them happy. No. I have a good team here. I’d only get territorial with another Master about the place. Ah, journeyman, come in.”

C’los twisted in his seat to look at the newcomer. Katel was slighter and darker than his brother, and looked a few Turns older, though it was hard to tell. He was wearing the all-purpose white smock of a duty Healer. “You wanted to see me, Master?”

“Close the door behind you, Katel.” Isnan waited for the journeyman to comply, then said, “This is green rider C’los. He’s looking into the circumstances of Wingsecond E’rom’s death.”

C’los put out his hand. Katel hastily wiped his on his smock before shaking it. “Sorry, I was just making up some more of that liniment Master Vhion’s been asking for.”

“You must have known E’rom quite well, being his partner’s brother,” said C’los.

“Well, not *well*,” said Katel. “I’d met him, of course, but I’ve only been here the nine sevendays.”

“Have you seen much of K’ston since you’ve been at Madellon?” C’los asked.

The journeyman shook his head. “Not as much as I’d have liked, until recently.”

“What about as a Healer? Helped him out with any worries?”

Katel laughed. “Well, Kasto always was a terrible hypochondriac, but I’ve never treated him. Unprofessional, treating a family member.”

Isnan was nodding slowly. C’los asked, “And E’rom? Did he have any health problems?”

“Not that I knew of,” said Katel. “You’d have to look at his records.”

“All right.” The green rider glanced at Isnan. “Thanks, journeyman.”

“That’ll be all, Katel,” the Weyr Healer told his crafter.

The journeyman nodded. “I hope I could help.”

When Katel had gone, Isnan raised his eyebrows at C’los. “Well?”

“K’ston implied that he consults his brother on health issues,” C’los said thoughtfully.

“Katel was correct in saying that Healers shouldn’t treat family members,” Isnan replied.

The green rider rubbed his chin. “K’ston also said that he didn’t have any health problems, and yet Katel says that he’s a hypochondriac.”

“We can look at his records,” Isnan replied. “We’ll soon see if K’ston’s got a history of complaints.”

The record room was the next along from Isnan’s office. The details of every Weyr resident were kept there until a Turn after their deaths, at which point the records were transferred to the main Weyr Archives. “And a good thing too, or we’d have drowned under decades-old hides,” said Isnan. “Not to mention the trouble we’d have with snakes.”

The Weyr Healer turned to the first row of shelves. “Dragonriders nearest the door, you notice,” he said dryly. He ran a finger along the edge of the shelf until he reached ‘E’. “Here,” he said, pulling down a thick tube, “this is E’rom’s file. Go over to the table there while I find K’ston’s.”

C'los took the heavy wherhide cylinder over to the reading desk and pulled a glow basket closer so he could see. He noticed that the tube had obviously been reused: E'rom's name was written beneath two others that had been crossed out. On closer examination, C'los realised that the second was Eiromell, E'rom's birth name.

The green rider opened the leather case and shook the roll of thin hides out into his hand. Flattening them out on the desk, he leafed quickly through the early documents, well acquainted with the Weyr's filing system from the hours he'd spent in the Archives.

"Here's K'ston's," said Isnan, dropping a second tube on the desk. "What have you got there?"

C'los had flipped to the most recent additions to E'rom's record. "Nothing since the twelfth month of last Turn," he said. "He dislocated his shoulder in Wing drill."

"Let's see." The Healer bent closer. "Relocation, cold compression, and a seven-day's rest. That's standard. What does it say about analgesics?"

"Fellis juice!" C'los exclaimed.

"Hmm, yes, but only a single dose to make him comfortable during the relocation of his shoulder. Have you ever dislocated your shoulder, C'los?" When the green rider shook his head, Isnan chuckled darkly. "I don't recommend it. Willow bark tea for the residual pain. That's normal, too. And there's nothing for him since? What about before?"

C'los checked back through E'rom's file. "A tussilago infusion for a cough. Anise for indigestion. Months apart."

"Let's have a look at K'ston's notes."

The second leather cylinder yielded a thicker sheaf of hides. Isnan thumbed rapidly through them. "Well, Katel wasn't joking. Indigestion. Migraine. Lower back pain. Sore throat. It looks like K'ston's been in here fussing about one thing or another about once a seven-day."

"No fellis, though," C'los observed. Then he noticed something else, turning to the last record. "And nothing since Turn's End."

"Who was the attending Healer?" Isnan followed down to the bottom of the page. "Journeyman Berro." He made a face. "Lately Master Berro. One of my fugitives."

"Do you know where he is now?" C'los asked.

"I doubt anyone does," the Weyr Healer replied. "He took a place on an expedition into the Southern rainforest, looking for new medicinal herbs. That always was his passion. I can send to the Hall for word of him, but..." Isnan shrugged, indicating the likely futility of that measure.

C'los looked down at the records of the two riders, trying to mentally fit the pieces together. Then, with a start, he remembered the time. "Shards, I'm meant to be seeing F'yan right now."

"He'll eat you alive for being late," said Isnan, evidently amused. "Go on. I'll see what else I can glean from these records. I'll prepare that list of fellis prescriptions for you, too."

"Thanks, Isnan." C'los looked down at E'rom's record: the history of a man from birth to death. "We're going to find who did this," he said, half to himself.

"Yes we are," Isnan replied. He patted the green rider on the back. "Just don't let it consume you. You've got to eat and sleep, too. Spend some time with your weyrmate and your dragon."

"You know, for a moment there, I'd forgotten you're a Healer," C'los said sardonically. "I'll see you later, Master. Thanks for your help."

Indioth was waiting patiently outside, her head turned towards the entrance of the infirmary. *You said you wouldn't be long*, she accused.

"I know, I know." C'los started to mount, and then his eyes lit on the bag he'd left looped around Indioth's harness. He stopped what he was doing and opened it, taking out the blue and red patterned cup he had brought from E'rom's weyr.

*It's a cup*, Indioth said, looking dubiously at the object of her rider's attention.

"There are five of them," C'los said thoughtfully. "Only five...."

Then he stuffed the cup back into the bag, shrugged it onto his shoulder, and started decisively towards the closest lower caverns entrance, calling back, "Stay here, Indy, I'll be five minutes, I promise!"

The green rider took a moment to orientate himself, then set off down the corridor that led, eventually, to the laundry caverns, first at a quick walk, then a jog. When he passed a woman carrying a basket of dirty clothes he knew he was nearly there, and finally he hurried into the laundry room itself.

The broad, high cavern was brightly lit with glows, but the steam that rose thickly from the thermal pools was solid and murky. It eventually seeped away through flues in the rock, but C'los wasn't interested in the engineering. Women with piles of clothes and linen were doing their washing in the naturally heated water, vague shapes through the intense steam, and the doors that punctuated the rock wall led up to individual weyrs.

C'los found the door that led to E'rom's weyr and tried the handle. It was locked, as it had been since the start of the investigation. The green rider stepped to the edge of the nearest pool and peered down into the water. It was hard to see through the suffocating steam, but...was that a flash of blue and red?

The green rider got down on hands and knees, rolled back his sleeve, and reached into the pool. He winced at the heat of the water, but that gleam of colour was too great a lure. C'los stretched until he felt himself almost fall in, then pulled his arm back. The pool was too deep; he couldn't reach.

He found a laundry hook hanging on the wall, and lowered the end of it into the pool. The water was deceptive, and it took C'los several moments to work out how to compensate for the visual distortion, but then the tip of his stick knocked against something with a thin *clunk*. Painstakingly, the green rider manoeuvred the laundry pole until he felt it catch. Then, carefully, he lifted the stick out of the pool.

When the laundry pole cleared the water, C'los seized his prize. With shaking hands, he set it down on the edge of the pool, and then fumbled in the bag for E'rom's klah mug.

The two cups, one red-on-blue, the other blue-on-red, sat innocently side by side, indisputably matched.

C'los picked up the mug he had fished out of the laundry pool, holding it tight in both hands. E'rom's murderer had made his escape through here, hastily disposing of the fellis-laced cup with which he had tried to kill the brown rider, the cup from which E'rom had taken his final drink, the cup that would surely help to find his killer.