

Journal Entry Day 7005.

My night was filled with sadness. In my dreams, I pictured myself becoming a widowmama only to have my daughter dissolve as I held her. Then I dreamed that even my hopes for finding a suitable wild orchid faded as all the wild ones were gelded. I awoke with cheeks wet with tears and a terrible emptiness.

Widowmama saw my distress and tried to comfort me, but nothing she could say would alter the dismal reality that I might never become a widowmama. To distract me, Widowmama will take me tomorrow to watch two recently captured wild orchids being tested by combat against each other to determine which of them has the greatest life force within it. The one that prevails will inseminate a widowmama's daughter and then be rendered for its meat and hide. If the other one survives, it will be gelded and put to good use in the work gangs.

I know whichever of the two wild orchids is vanquished probably isn't worthy of being siphoned and so must be gelded, but I cannot help but feel a little jealous of the widowmama's daughter who will be inseminated by the victor. If that is a selfish thought, I am sorry, but I can't help feeling the way I do. Widowmama has often said it is very important always to be honest, especially with oneself. Pretending to feel differently than how one really feels is just like lying, and Widowmama says lying is always wrong.

Journal Entry Day 7006.

No one could ever have expected what happened today.

After a very restless night, I was glad for the opportunity to go and watch the combat even though neither of the wild orchids would ever be chosen to inseminate me. I had never actually seen a wild orchid before it was gelded so the prospect

of watching two of them in combat was quite thrilling. On our way to the testing pit, I was able to stop thinking about my situation for a little while at least.

The first one brought to the testing pit was violently wild. It took four strong grown daughter overseers to wrangle it by long leather restraints strapped around its neck. Even with the four of them, the wild thing put up quite a struggle before a grown daughter overseer was able to topple it into the pit with a sharp blow of a cudgel to its back. It roared with fury and nearly pulled one of the grown daughter overseers into the pit with it before she let go of the tether.

The second one was much less fierce and maybe a little more cunning. It was being directed toward the pit when the first one was sent tumbling. Seeing that, it seemed to understand it was destined for the pit and it didn't wait to be struck but just jumped in.

Each of them was a very impressive specimen, standing much taller and broader than even the most robust grown daughter. To judge by their conformation, either one would have provided a good amount of meat and a good tough hide.

Initially, they didn't engage with each other, but circled around in the pit. It seemed they were looking for a way to get out, which of course no wild orchied had ever been able to do. One of the widowmamas from the Council Committee on Food Processing went to the edge of the pit and tried taunting them to get them riled up enough to start the combat, but they just stood looking up at her with the oddest looks on their faces. Then the most amazing things happened. They made vocal sounds which seemed they were actually able to speak to each other and, a moment later, they removed the tethers from around each other's necks.

That brought a gasp from everyone.

Then somehow they managed to join several of the tethers to form a sort of loop. One of them, the one that had

been so violent, began swinging it above its head. The loop grew bigger and bigger, nearly equal to the span of the pit. I think all of us thought the orchied swinging the loop was going to lash the other one, but instead, it threw the loop way up out of the pit and got it around the widowmama from the COFP and tried to drag her down into the pit with them.

Right away, a whole group of grown daughters surrounded the widowmama and held her fast all the while trying to remove the tether. But before they could free her, the two wild orchieds actually climbed up out of the pit using the tether and swiftly ran farther than the surrounding brick hills, disappearing from sight before the grown daughter overseers were able to mount a pursuit.

Well, we were all just dumbfounded. The widowmama's daughter that was to have been inseminated was inconsolable, something I can fully understand.

Widowmama immediately summoned the full Council and spent the rest of the day closeted with them.

Journal Entry Day 7007.

Widowmama awakened me with some very serious news. Before too many more days go by, I am to be presented to the Council Committee on Assignments. She didn't say it in so many words, but deep inside me I know the reason I am going to the Committee is that none of the domestic orchieds is right for me to be inseminated. Everyone in the Community has to do something useful. I understand that. Widowmama has often reminded me of our duty to the Community, that we each must earn our station in life. There isn't any place for anyone to be a feckless layabout. I just wish I could have been a widowmama. Without that possibility for me, I have to do something else. But what?

I wanted to ask Widowmama if there was any way I could either choose or refuse an assignment, but I didn't ask. I was