

## Chapter 3



“*C*WING TO THE MODE of our last communication, it is quite impossible Mr. Laurence and I should have any intercourse. —I hope I may not be thought difficult,” Rankin said, his crisp and aristocratic vowels carrying quite clearly, over the deck of the *Allegiance*; his transport the *Beatrice* had already gone away again, with no more news for the colony: she had left only two months after the *Allegiance* herself, and the news of the rebellion had not yet reached Government. “But it is generally accepted, I believe, that the dragondeck is reserved for officers of the Corps; and if the gentleman is quartered towards the stern, I see no reason why any inconvenient scenes should arise.”

“I see no reason why I shouldn’t push his nose in for him,” Granby said, under his breath, joining Laurence on the leeward side of the quarterdeck, where passengers were ordinarily allowed liberty. “The worst of it,” he added, “is I can’t see any way clear to refusing him: the orders are plain black on white, he is to be put to Wringe’s egg. What a damned waste.”

Laurence nodded a little; he, too, had had a letter, if not in an official capacity. . . . *though nothing would I like better than if he should get himself sunk in the Ocean on his way to you*, Jane had written.

*. . . but his damnd Family have been squalling at their Lordships for nigh on Five Years now, and he had the infernal Bad Luck—mine, that is—of finding himself in Scotland, lately, when we were so overset: went up with one of the Ferals out of Arkady’s pack, saw a little fighting, and managed to get himself wounded again.*

*So I must give him a Beast, or at least a Chance of one,*

*and Someone must put up with him thereafter; as I am about to have twenty-six hatchlings to feed and likely enough a War in Spain, I don't scruple to say, Better You Than Me.*

This last was emphatically full of capitals, and underlined.

*I have made the Excuse, that this is the first Egg we have had out of the Ferals, and his having Experience of them in the field, should be an Advantage in its Training.*

*I was tolrably transparent, I think, but a Title does wonderful things, Laurence: I should have contrived one much sooner if I had known its Use. Gentlemen who swore at me like fishwives sixmonth ago are become sweet as milk, all because the Regent has signed some scrap of paper for me, and nod their Heads and say Yes, Very Good, when before they would have argued to Doomsday if I should say, It is coming on to rain. Also it is a great benefit they none of them know whether to say Milady or Sir, and as soon as they have arrived at a Decision, they change it again. I only hope they may not make me a Duchess to make themselves easy by saying Your Grace; it would not suit half so well.*

*I am very obligd to your Mother, by the bye: she wrote, when she saw my name had come out in Debrett's—as J. Roland, very discreet—and had me to a nice, sociable little Dinner, with every Cabinet Minister she could contrive to lay hands on, I gather: all very shocked, as they had brought their Wives, but they could not say so much as Boo with Her Ladyship at the foot of the Table as if Butter would not Melt in her mouth, and the Ladies did not mind inn the Least, when they understood I was an Officer, and not some Vauxhall Comedienne. I found them sensible Creatures all of them, and I think perhaps I have got quite the wrong Notion about them, as a Class; I expect I ought to be cultivating them. I don't mind Society half so much if I may wear Trousers, and they were very kind, and left me their Cards.*

*We are trundling along well enough otherwise and getting back into some Order: feeding dragons on Mash and Mutton Stew is a damn'd site cheaper, Thank God, if the older ones do complain; Excidium is all Sighs and loud Reminiscences of*

*fresh Cattle, and Temeraire's name is not much lov'd among them, for having given us the Technique.*

*I will say a word in your Ear for him: I am uneasy about this Business in Spain. Bonaparte ain't a Fool, and why he should wreck a dozen cities, on the southern Coast, fresh from the ruin of his Invasion, I cannot understand. Mulgrave thinks he means to take Spain and to stop us from supplying them from the Sea, but for that, he ought to be burning them in Portugal, instead.*

*If Temeraire should think it some Stratagem of Lien's, I would be glad to know of it, even late as the Intelligence must come: it is very strange to think, Laurence, that I cannot hope for an Answer in under ten Months and a year and a half the more likely. Now we have lost the Capetown port to those African fellows, the couriers cannot even go to India, and meet your letter halfway.*

*For Consolation, if you should find yourself overcome with Passion and happen to accidentally drop Rankin down a Cliff, or by some Mischance run him through, at least I will not hear of it for as long, and anyway you are already transportd, which I must call a great Convenience for Murder. But I do not mean to Hint, although it is a great Pity to waste an Egg upon him, even one of our poor unwanted Stepchildren.*

*I hope Emily has not got into too many Scrapes; tho she cannot officially be your Ensign, I am sure you will oblige me by keeping her from any really reckless Behaviour, and do not let Rankin come the Scrub over her, if he have the Gall: I have seen enough to know he is just the sort of Rotter who would try off Airs of False Pity for her Sacrifice and other non Sense.*

The three eggs which had been sent with them to begin the experiment were not, by the lights of Britain's breeders, any great prizes: one a dirt-common Yellow Reaper, sent over because there were seventeen such eggs in the breeding grounds waiting; the second a disappointing and extremely stunted little thing which had unaccountably been produced out of a Parnassian and a Chequered Nettle, both heavy-weights. The last and most promising of the three, large and hand-

somely mottled and striated, was the offspring of Arkady, the feral leader, and Wringe, the best fighter of his pack.

There was no great enthusiasm for this egg in Britain, where the breeders for the most part viewed the newly recruited ferals as demons sent to wreak havoc and destruction upon their carefully designed lines; so it had been sent away. But it had quickly become the settled thing among the aviators who had been sent along as candidates for the new hatchlings to anticipate great things of the egg. "It stands to reason," Laurence had overheard more than one officer say to another, "if that Wringe one should have got so big out in the wild, this one should do a good deal better with proper feeding, and training; and no one could complain of the ferals' fighting spirit."

Those young officers were now in something of a quandary, which Laurence was not above grimly enjoying, a little: they had been firm and united in their disdain, both for his personal treason and for what they saw as his failure to manage Temeraire properly. But now Rankin had come to supplant one of them, and claim the best egg for himself; he was their most bitter enemy, and Temeraire's recalcitrance their best hope of denying him.

"He mayn't have it at all," Temeraire had said at once, when he had been informed of the proposed arrangement, "and if he likes, he can come up here and try and take it; I should be very pleased to discuss it with him," darkly, in a way which bade fair to answer all of Jane's hopes.

"My dear," Laurence said, having lowered his letter, "I like the prospect as little as you; but if he should be denied even the chance, and return to England thwarted, we have only deferred the evil: he will certainly be put to another egg, there, where you may be certain the poor hatchling will have less opportunity to refuse. And the blame will certainly devolve upon Granby: the orders are for him, and the responsibility to carry them out."

"I am certainly not having Granby take the blame for anything," Iskierka said, raising her head, "and I do not see what the problem is, anyway; the egg will be hatched, by then, and why should it be any business of ours what it does after that? It can take him or not, as it pleases."

Iskierka herself had hatched already breathing fire, and with all the disobliging and determined character anyone could have imagined; she

would certainly have had no difficulty in rejecting any unworthy candidate. Most hatchlings did not come from the shell with quite the same mettle, however, and the Aerial Corps had developed many a technique and lure to ensure the successful harnessing of the beasts. Rankin had certainly prepared himself well: he had come over from the *Beatrice* with not only his two chests of personal baggage, but a pile of leather harness, some chainmail netting, and a sort of heavy leather hood.

“You throw it over the hatchling’s head as it comes out of the shell, if you are out of doors,” Granby said, when Laurence now inquired, “and then it cannot fly away; when you take it off, the light dazzles their eyes, and then if you lay some meat in front of them, they are pretty sure to let you put the harness on, if you will only let them eat. And some fellows like it, because they say it makes them easier to handle; if you ask me,” he added, bitterly, “all it makes them is shy: they are never certain of their ground, after.”

“I wonder if you might be able to put me in the way of some cattle-merchant,” Rankin was saying, to Riley and Lord Purbeck. “I intend to provide for the hatchling’s first meal from my personal funds.”

“Surely he can be restrained in some way,” Laurence said, low. He was not yet beyond the heat of righteous anger kindled all those years before, when they had been unwilling witness to the cruelty of Rankin’s treatment of his first dragon. Rankin was the sort of aviator beloved of the Navy Board: in his estimation as in theirs, dragons were merely a resource and a dangerous one, to be managed and restrained and used to their limits; it was the same philosophy which had rendered it not only tolerable but desirable to contemplate destroying ten thousand of the French beasts through the underhanded sneaking method of infection.

Where Rankin might have been kind to Levitas, he had been indifferent; where indifferent, deliberately cruel, all in the name of keeping his poor beast so downtrodden as to have no spirit to object to any demands made upon him. When Levitas had with desperate courage brought them back the warning of Napoleon’s first attempt to cross the Channel, in the year ’five, and been mortally wounded in that effort, Rankin had left his dragon alone and slowly dying in a small and miserable clearing, while he sought comfort for his own lesser injuries.

It was a mode of service which had gone thoroughly out of fashion

in the last century among most aviators, who increasingly preferred to better preserve the spirit of their partners; the Government did not always agree, however, and Rankin was of an ancient dragon-keeping family, who had preserved their own habits and methods and passed these along to the scions sent into the Corps, at an age sufficiently delayed for these to be impressed upon them firmly, along with a conviction of their own superiority to the general run of aviators.

“He cannot be permitted to ruin the creature,” Laurence said. “We might at least bar him from use of the hood—”

“Interfere with a hatching?” Granby cried, looking at Laurence sidelong and dismayed. “No: he has a right to make the best go of it he can, however he likes. Though if he can’t manage it in fifteen minutes, someone else can have a try,” he added, an attempt at consolation, “and you may be sure fifteen minutes is all the time he will have; that is all I can do.”

“That is not all that *I* can do,” Temeraire said, mantling, “and I am not going to sit about letting him throw nets and chains and hoods on the hatchling; I do not care if it is not in the shell anymore. In my opinion, it is still quite *near* being an egg.”

He realized this was an irregular way of looking at the matter, but after all, if the hatchling had not yet eaten anything, and if perhaps a bit of egg were still stuck to its hide, one could not be *sure* that it was ready to manage on its own, and so it was still one’s responsibility. “Anyway,” he added, “I do not like him at all, and I don’t see that he has any right to be a captain again; just let him try and come here, and I will knock him down for it.”

“You are not doing anything which Granby would not like!” Iskierka said, jetting out a bit of steam.

“As though you had anything to say to it,” Temeraire said, coolly. “Anyway, you do things which Granby does not like every day.”

“Only,” Iskierka said, “when it is particularly important,” a monstrous lie, “and anyway, that is quite different. You might think of Granby, since you are always on about how I do not take proper care of him: I am not having *him* made not a captain, like you have done with Laurence, only because you are being absurd again and worrying about hatched dragons,” she added, which thrust hit home quite successfully; Temeraire flinched involuntarily, and put back his ruff.

“Why,” Iskierka continued, “I have seen this Rankin person: he is smaller than a pony, even. I could have burnt him up to a cinder as soon as I cracked the shell.”

“If he wanted *you*,” Temeraire said, “he might have you, and welcome,” but this was only a feeble bit of quarreling, and not really a just argument; he put his head down and stared at the eggs unhappily.

“And,” he said to Laurence, a little later, “if the egg does not take him, I suppose he will want to try the second, and then the third; I am sure he will not just go, when he has come all this way where no-one wants him, only to be difficult.”

“Only to have another dragon; but so far as that goes, I am afraid you may be right,” Laurence said, low. “But there is not much we can do about it, my dear, if we do not care to put Granby in a very awkward position; and make our own the worse. The eggs are not formally in our care at all, but his.”

“But Arkady charged me with *his*,” Temeraire said, “and I gave my word; surely that makes me interested.”

Laurence paused and agreed somberly, “That does put another complexion on the matter,” but it did not offer any other solution, except squashing Rankin, which would have been quite unfair, as a matter of relative size, and which Laurence insisted was not to be contemplated, despite Admiral Roland’s letter.

Laurence did not dissuade Temeraire with much enthusiasm; he would not have greatly minded Rankin’s being squashed under other circumstances, and the present situation would have rendered the event not only painless but highly desirable. His sentiments in the matter were only the more exacerbated the following morning, when Riley called upon them: Laurence had preferred to pass another irregular night up on the promontory in his small tent, still more comfortable a berth than remaining aboard ship, when he now must be careful only to visit the quarterdeck, and not go forward.

For Rankin was of course perfectly correct in the point of etiquette, and they were both barred from the field of honor, which was the only other suitable redress Rankin could have demanded for Laurence’s actions in their last meeting. Laurence could not be sorry in the least for having handled Rankin so violently, but neither could he force himself

into Rankin's presence, nor pursue the quarrel to which Rankin could not make answer, and retain any pretensions to the character of a gentleman.

"And I cannot blame you for it, either," Riley said, "but it left me in an awkward position. I had to have him to dinner, and Bligh, too, or look rather shabby; and I am wretchedly sorry, Laurence: is this egg likely to be something out of the common way? Because what must the cawker do ten minutes after we are at table but declare Bligh has been monstrous used by a pack of mutinous dogs, and it ought not be borne."

"Oh, damn him," Laurence said, unguarded in savage exasperation. "No, Tom, so far as the egg goes; not if you mean of an order to pick a quarrel with Temeraire; but that has nothing to do with the case. We cannot set upon a British dragon, if it is as small as a Winchester. Are we to have a pitched battle in the harbor? I cannot conceive what he is thinking."

"Oh, I will tell you *that*," Riley said. "He is thinking he means to have the beast, will-you, nill-you. I beg you to imagine how our passenger took it: Bligh at once informed me he considers it my duty to ensure the Admiralty's orders as regards the egg are carried out; and that he will be sure to write their Lordships to express his opinion, and convey that he has made me so aware."

And the very last thing desirable to Riley at the present date was any suggestion of disobedience or recalcitrance, and all the more so if there were any sign it should be provoked by Laurence or even amenable to him. Their connection had already injured Riley's credit with their Lordships to a severe extent, and he served now, as did all Laurence's former associates, under a veil of suspicion. Bligh might not carry his point so far as his re-establishment in the colony, and his ill-management might invite the scorn rather than the sympathy of the Admiralty; that did not mean the Navy Board would not accept with the other hand any charges Bligh laid at Riley's door.

All the more so, Laurence knew, that they had been given fresh cause to regard Temeraire, and any personage even remotely associated with him, with suspicion: Temeraire had received a letter also, in the post carried by the *Beatrice*; from Perscitia, who had evidently somehow acquired a scribe.

*We have finished the Pavilion already—*

“Oh!” Temeraire said sadly, “and I am not there to see it.”

*—and begun on a second; we were puzzled where we should get the funds, as it is amazing how quickly Money goes. The Government tried to persuade us all to go back to the Breeding Grounds and leave off building: when we were almost quite finished, if you can imagine it. So the promised Supply has been very late and slow, and when they do send us any Cattle they are thin and not tasty, so we have had to buy Food of our own, and it is very dear at present; also Requiescat will eat like A Glutton, of course.*

*But we contrived: Majestatis suggested we should send Lloyd to Dover, to inquire after carting work, and we have worked out that men will pay a great deal just for us to carry things to London, and other Towns, as we can do it much more quickly than Horses; and I have worked out a very nice Method by which one can calculate the most efficient Way to go among all of them, taking on some goods and leaving off others; only it grows quite tiresome to calculate if one wishes to go to more than five or six Places.*

*There was a little noise about our coming and going—nobody much minded when it was just the Winchesters, or even the Reapers; but of course, Requiescat can carry so very much more—even if he is too lazy to go further than Dover to London and back—and Ballista and Majestatis and the other Heavy-weights, and after all, it is not as though we do not fit into the Coverts, so we really saw no reason they should not go, too. But then Government grew upset—when they might have given us proper Food, to begin with, and we should never have needed to trouble ourselves!—and they tried to make a Quarrel, and set some harnessed dragons in the Covert and told them to keep us out of it.*

*They were out of Scotland, I think; we did not know them, particularly, but Ballista said to them it was no sense squabbling over something so silly: for look, the Government had just put them in the Covert, because they did not want us in the Covert, even though they were just as big; and anyway there was plenty of Room, and we were only passing through. They all thought that was quite sensible, once she gave them a*

*few of our Cows to be friendly; it seems Cows are very dear in the coverts, too, and nobody gets them very often anymore, even the harnessed beasts.*

There was besides this communiqué a good deal of gossip about the relations among the dragons, which Laurence read to Temeraire only half-attending; between Percitia's lines he could easily read the frantic reports racing through Whitehall: unharnessed heavy-weights descending as they wished into every great city of Britain, terrifying the populace and wrecking the business of ordinary carters to boot; and bribing their harnessed fellows with the greatest of ease, despite all the certain persuasions and efforts of those dragons' captains.

"That is a great pity about Gladius and Cantarella having a falling-out," Temeraire said, "for I was sure they would have made a splendid egg; also I do not like Queritoris very much, for he was always making a fuss about carrying soldiers, when we all had to do it; so very tiresome, for everyone, but complaining did not make it any better. Laurence, do you suppose we might carry things for people, here, and so be paid? Only, no," he interrupted his own thought, rather downcast, "for there is only this one town, and no other to carry things to; how I wish we were home!"

Laurence had wished it, too, but silently folded away the letter which killed his hopes of return aborning; it yet crackled in his coat pocket now, as he answered Riley, "I am sorry you should have had the unpleasantness of his threats; we will of course not ask you to interfere, Tom; nor, I hope, put you in any awkward position."

"Well, I hope I am not so much a scrub as to come here and ask you out of the side of my mouth to have a care, for my own sake," Riley said. "I am pretty well found in prize-money, after all, and if I am set ashore, at least I can take my little fellow home, and not worry my life away wondering what absurd thing Catherine is doing with him." This, a little bitterly: he had *not* received a letter from Captain Harcourt.

"But this could easily grow to be a more serious matter than a mere quarrel," Laurence said soberly to Temeraire, after Riley had left, "if Bligh chooses to make it a charge of disobedience, and their Lordships pleased to have an excuse for a court-martial; I can easily imagine it."

"I can, too," Temeraire said, "and I am sure we oughtn't let him hurt Riley, or Granby, either; but we cannot let Rankin hurt the egg,

either. Laurence, I have made Roland and Demane bring the egg out, just long enough so I might look at it, and I think it is going to hatch very soon; can we not take it away?"

"Away?" Laurence said; there was nowhere to go.

"Oh, into the countryside," Temeraire said, "only until it has hatched, I mean; and then we can come back again, and it may choose among the officers if it likes. Or if you thought better," he added, "we might take one or two of the best of them, instead, so it might choose among them directly: but no-one who would mean to try and use a *hood*, or a *net*."

It was a scheme which Laurence ought at once have rejected, but he surprised himself by thinking soberly that so blatant a maneuver would, at least, be a stroke bold enough to ensure blame could be set only to their own much-overdrawn account. Granby and Riley, left behind and unable to trace their whereabouts, could not so easily be complained of as Granby and Riley standing idly by, in the face of some interference carried out immediately before them.

It was scarcely calculated to win him approval from their Lordships; certainly none from Bligh, but there was, Laurence with a little dark humor acknowledged, something liberating in having nothing whatsoever of which he might be robbed by the law: not even hope. He looked at the egg, himself: he did not hold himself up as an expert, but the shell was certainly harder than it had been, aboard ship, and with that same brittle, slightly thinning quality which he remembered a little from Temeraire's hatching, and Iskierka's.

"We could take no one else with us," Laurence said, "at least, not consenting; and there would be something curious in abducting an aviator to make him a captain: the fellow could not help but be doubted, afterwards."

"Well, to be perfectly honest I think it just as well not to take any of them," Temeraire said. "I do not think much of the lot: they were all quite unpleasant, on the ship, and they *will* think they have a right to the eggs, even though they had nothing to do with making them, and I have been taking care of them all this while. They have nothing to recommend them, any more than Rankin does: I don't suppose the hatching will want any of them."

"We are in too much disgrace, my dear, to expect to see any of them display to advantage," Laurence said, "but Lieutenant Forthing

at least is held a good officer, Granby tells me, and fought with courage at the battle of Shoeburyness.”

“Oh, he is the worst of them!” Temeraire said, immediately censorious, though Laurence did not quite know what had provoked such a degree of heat, “and I don’t care if we are in disgrace; that is no excuse for behaving like a scrub. Besides,” Temeraire added, “he is wretchedly untidy: strings coming out of his coat, and his trousers patched; even Rankin does not look *ragged*.”

“Rankin,” Laurence said, “is the third son of an earl, and can afford to be nice in his clothing; I am afraid Mr. Forthing was a foundling in the dockyards at Dover, and taken on for creeping into the coverts as a child to sleep next to the dragons: he has no kin in the world.”

“He might still *brush* his coat,” Temeraire said, obstinately. “No: I should quite prefer no-one at all, to him; I am sure Arkady would be quite disgusted with me if I should allow it.” He leaned over to look at the egg, and put out his thin forked tongue to touch the shell.

“I cannot quarrel with you on this point, if he has left the egg in your charge,” Laurence said. “The judgment must be yours. In any case, it would be difficult to manage. We must also contrive some covering, for the egg; and—”

“Oh,” Temeraire said, “oh, no, whatever are you doing?”

Laurence paused in confusion. “I beg your pardon?”

“No, Laurence; I am speaking to the egg,” Temeraire said, raising his head with an expression of consternation, his ruff flattened against his neck. “It is hatching; however are we to get it away, now?”

“Only remember, you must put up with him for a little while,” Temeraire informed the egg, as it rocked a little more, “as otherwise he can make no end of trouble for everyone, but it will only be a few minutes, and then you may choose someone else, or to have no one at all. And if he puts anything on you which you do not like, only wait a moment, and I will take it away directly. You might,” he added a little exasperated, “have waited in the shell a *little* longer, until we had gone away and you were quite safe: anyone would think you were not listening to me at all.”

“Captain Granby, if you would be so good as to remove the egg from the prospect of any more interference,” Rankin said, as he and

the party of officers came up the track and onto the promontory, "I would be grateful; if it would suit you, I should like to arrange the hatching here," indicating the place where he stood, quite near the track and a distance from the promontory's edge.

Temeraire flared out his ruff: Rankin indeed had the leather hood which Laurence had spoken of, and a heavy net with chains, such as Temeraire had once been held down with, shipboard during a typhoon; he had not liked it at all. "Remember, only a moment," he hissed at the egg, and then reluctantly let the aviators take it away: at least they were very careful, carrying it.

When it was in place, Rankin detailed a couple of the younger officers, midshipmen, to stand on the other side of the egg with the mesh netting, as though they would entangle the poor hatchling if it should try and fly away. To add insult to injury, a boy was leading a handsome sheep on a string behind him, and as soon as the first crack had appeared, Rankin nodded, and two men butchered it into a tub—a lovely hot smell of fresh blood—and brought it over. Temeraire thought it quite unfair—one was so hungry, breaking the shell; it would be so very difficult to resist—and wondered if perhaps he ought take the meat away.

"Granby," Iskierka said, pricking up her spikes as she also observed, "I do not see why we should not have bought a sheep or two, ourselves; or a cow. I am sure we have enough money."

"It wouldn't be polite, dear one," Granby said.

"I don't see why," Iskierka said. "Temeraire might have money, too, if he were as clever at taking prizes as I am; it is not my fault he shouldn't have arranged things better, and I needn't eat kangaroo to make up for it."

"Pray let's discuss it later," Granby said, hastily. "The egg is hatching, anyway."

The shell did not crack neatly, Temeraire noted with a critical eye; instead it fractured off in bits and pieces, and then the hatchling finally smashed its way out in a very messy burst, shaking itself loose. It was not very pretty, either, in his opinion: it was grey all over like Wringe, save for two very broad red streaks of color sweeping from the breastbone and under the wing-joints to trail out in spots along the backbone into its long, skinny tail.

"Good conformation," Granby said to Laurence, under his breath, "—blast it! Shoulders as strong as you could like."

The hatchling was quite heavily built forward, Temeraire supposed; and it had very clever snatching front claws, which it used almost at once: Rankin stepped forward with two quick steps, holding the hood; but to Temeraire's delight, the hatchling snapped out its wrists and seizing hold dragged it away from him and said, "No, I won't have any of that," and setting its teeth in the other end tore it quite apart with a slash of its talons.

It flung the pieces down on the ground, with an air of satisfaction. "There; now take it away, and give me the meat."

Rankin recovered, despite this setback, and said, "You may have it as soon as you have put on the harness."

"You needn't, at all," Temeraire put in, ignoring the looks of disapprobation which the aviators flung at him. "You can take yourself a perfectly tasty kangaroo, anytime you like."

"Well, I don't like; what I like is the smell of that meat over there," the hatchling said, and put its head over on its side consideringly. "As for you: you are an earl's son, is it?" it inquired of Rankin intently. "An especially *good* earl?"

Rankin looked a little taken aback, and said after a pause, "My father's creation dates from the twelfth century."

"Yes, but, is he rich?" the hatchling said.

"I hope," Rankin said, "that I may not be so impolite as to speak crassly of my family's circumstances."

"Well, that may be pretty-spoken, but it don't tell me anything useful," the hatchling said. "Does he have any cows?"

Rankin hesitated, visibly torn, and then said, "I believe there are some dairy farms on his estates—several hundred head among them, I imagine."

"Good, good," the dragonet said, approvingly. "Well, let us have a look at this harness, and as long as you are busy being polite, you might give me a taste while I am thinking it over; I do like your hair," it added; Temeraire did have to admit Rankin's was of a particularly appealing shade of yellow which looked a little like gold in the sunlight, "and your coat, although that fellow has nicer buttons," meaning Granby, "but I suppose you can have some like that put on?"

"But you do not want him, at all!" Temeraire said. "He is an extremely unpleasant person, and neglected Levitas dreadfully, although Levitas was forever trying to please him, and then Levitas died, and it was all his doing."

“Yes, so you have said, over and over, while I was getting ready to come out; and all I have to say is, this Levitas fellow sounds a right bore,” the dragonet said, “and I shall like to have a captain who is the son of an earl, and rich, too; I don’t aim to be eating kangaroo day-in and day-out, thank you; or hurrying about catching prizes for myself, either. But that,” he added, looking at the harness which Rankin was with a slightly uncertain air proferring, “is not nice enough by half: those buckles are dirty, it looks to me.”

“They are certainly dirty,” Temeraire put in urgently, “and so was Levitas’s harness, all the while: quite covered with dirt, and Rankin would not even let him bathe.”

“This is only a temporary harness,” Rankin said, adding tentatively, “and I shall have a nicer made for you, chased with gold,” in what Temeraire felt was a quite shameful bargaining sort of manner.

“Ah, now that sounds more like,” the dragonet said.

“And I shall give you a name, straightaway,” Rankin added, with more firmness. “We shall call you *Serenitus*—”

“I have been thinking *Conquistador*, myself,” the dragonet interrupted him, “or perhaps *Caesar*; only as I understand it, the conquistadores came out of it with a good deal more gold.”

“No-one is going to call you *Caesar*,” Temeraire said, revolted. “You are only going to be a middle-weight, anyway, if you are that big: Wringe is not even as big as a Reaper.”

“You never know,” the dragonet said, unphazed. “It is better to be prepared. I think *Caesar* will suit me very well, now I think about it a little more.”

“Well, I wash my hands of it all,” Temeraire said to Laurence, afterwards, in more than a little aggravation, watching Caesar—oh! how ridiculous—eating a *second* sheep; Rankin had sent out for it, after Caesar had eaten all the first one, down to the scraps, and suggested with a very transparent air that perhaps eating quite a lot while he was fresh-hatched would help him to grow bigger. “And I do not believe that at all,” he added.

“Well, my dear, they seem to me admirably suited,” Laurence said dryly. “Only I am damned if I know what we are to do now.”