
Would You Like Some Flies With That?

by Smitty

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Bh'ruk opened his eyes, frowning into the darkness of the sleeping Weyrling Barracks as he tried to place the sudden sense of unease that had woken him. Everything seemed to be as it should, the silence of night broken only by the usual collection of snores and incoherent mumbles, underlaid by the soft, hypnotic murmur of leaves beyond the wooden walls. No Thread was falling, no females obviously rising, and yet...

Shaking his head at imagined dangers, Bh'ruk rolled over in his bed, closing his eyes for a brief moment... and then yelping and clutching at his skull as a flood of pain and panic exploded into his barely-shielded mind, the empathic rush accompanied by an ear-splitting scream from Kaivuth as the little bronze jerked awake. ***It hurts, it hurts! I am dying! Make it stop hurting! Make it stop NOW!***

Other dragonets began to sound off in response to Kaivuth's pain, the racket drawing sleepy protests from the other weyrlings. Swinging his legs quickly over the edge of his bunk, Bh'ruk dropped down to where his bronze was thrashing and howling in his wallow, to the evident dismay of his blue neighbour. Forcing down his own panic, the young rider ducked past a flailing wing and grabbed for the dragonet's muzzle. *Kaivuth? What's wrong?*

It hurts! Make it stop hurting!

"What's happening?" an irritated male voice called from across the room. "It's not time for First Bell yet."

"Who is it?"

"Don't you know what hour of the sharded night it is?"

"Is anybody hurt?"

"Keep it down, some of us are trying to sleep!"

Glowbaskets were being opened around the barracks as unhappy weyrlings rolled from their beds to try to calm their own dragons, most of them casting looks towards the young bronze that ranged from annoyance to concern. "Can't you shut him up?" grumbled J'rald from the bunk beside Kaivuth's wallow as he crawled out to comfort his brown Kelimath. "He's setting them all off."

"I know, I know!" Bh'ruk hissed back, stroking his hands over his dragon's head as he tried to soothe him. *What's wrong, Kaivuth? You have to tell me what's wrong!*

It hurts! It HURTS!

WHAT hurts?

My tail and my belly, the little bronze wailed. They hurt! Make them stop hurting!

Bh'ruk swore and ran his hands down and over Kaivuth's tail, finding it suspiciously thickened beneath his touch. *Oh shards, Kaivuth, I told you not to eat so much...*

The bronze threw his head back and shrieked, the sound almost drowning out the sound of the nearest barracks' door crashing open to reveal a rather rumpled-looking E'zok. "What is going *on* in here?"

A dozen fingers pointed accusingly towards Bh'ruk, who sighed and tried, semi-successfully, to clamp his dragon's mouth shut against another howl. "Kaivuth has indigestion, sir," he reported miserably. "I think he ate too much at his last meal."

It HURTS! moaned Kaivuth, thrashing his tail and broadcasting his upset to every dragon in the vicinity. ***Make it stop, make it stop!***

E'zok shook his head at the dragonet's theatrics. "That would seem to be a rather safe assumption, Bronzerider – it looks as though it's not only *your* appetites that you need to work on controlling." He glanced across to one of the calmer pairs. "N'kalo, go tell the dragonhealers that we have a bronze needing a purge; I'm sure they'll be just *thrilled* to come sort him out. And be quick about it – maybe we can get some more sleep before breakfast if we're lucky."

Bh'ruk groaned and clung to Kaivuth's neck as the bronze let loose another agonized cry. *That's the last time you polish off everyone else's leftovers, Kaivuth, and I don't care HOW hungry you say you are!* Looking up at E'zok, he muttered, "I'm sorry, sir."

The dark-skinned brownrider gazed back at him and Bh'ruk could have sworn he looked almost amused. "Oh, believe me, Bronzerider, I'm not the one you should be apologizing to...."



"Indigestion?" Aretei sighed and ran a hand back through her short black hair. "Fine, I'll just round up Rilam and he can –"

"I've already seen Rilam, ma'am," panted the weyrling before her. "He said that he was doing something really important and ran off."

Aretei frowned – she would be having words with *that* young man later. "In that case, Meirial should –"

"She overheard me telling Rilam and went in the other direction," the boy told her, his tone holding an edge of desperation. "Please come – Kaivuth sounds *really* bad. He's howling the place down!"

"I've yet to see a bronze die of overeating," the dragonhealer journeywoman told the boy sharply, trying to work out where the on-duty apprentices might be hiding. The last thing she wanted to do was to flush out some greedy dragonet in the middle of the night but, with the rest of her staff forewarned and gone to ground, it was starting to look as though she had no choice. "Great," she muttered, "this is the last time I swap bloody shifts with Kieran...."

"Ma'am?"

"I'm coming." Pushing the inventories she had been working on aside with a groan, Aretei stood and stalked across to the cupboard that held supplies for occasions such as these. A pressure-bag, a length of fine, flexible hose, and a large bottle of Giselle's finest purging mix. There was always one weyrling in every clutch who over-ate and suffered the consequences, but there were ways and means to ensure that their mistake would not be repeated until the next clutch came along.

And *when* that next clutch came along, certain apprentices would be taking their turn on purge-duty, even if it meant that she had to turn them out of their beds herself....

Following the relieved youngster along the tree-lined route to the Weyrling Complex, Aretei could hear the wails of the stricken dragonet long before she reached the barracks building – whatever the state of his gut, there was absolutely nothing wrong with the bronze's lungs. A few shadowy forms emerged from the darkness to follow her in and she almost smiled as she recognized D'zan and his various 'seconds, all dressed as though for sailing in full waterproofs and flight goggles. Apparently she and Class 24 were going to be providing the evening's entertainment for the Weyrling staff, whether Class 24 knew it yet or not.

"All right," she announced as she pushed through the door that her young guide indicated, "where's the patient?"

A drawn-out howl of pain answered her question and she turned towards the young bronze thrashing around in his wallow, apparently oblivious to his rider's pleas to calm down. The dragonhealer rolled her eyes – bronzes were always the biggest babies about this sort of thing. The young man clinging to the dragonet's neck at least had the decency to look embarrassed about his situation, alternately talking to his dragon and throwing apologetic glances at his classmates, who sat on the surrounding beds with thunderous expressions on their faces. Aretei snorted as she recognized the bronze's rider as Bh'ruk, the oversexed tanner lad who had beaten the odds at the last Hatching – she suspected that more than a few disgruntled gamblers would consider this to be just reward for the marks they'd lost on the bronze's choice.

One way or another, they'd be getting their money's worth tonight.

"I'm Dragonhealer Aretei – try to hold him steady for me if you can. How long has he been like this?" the dragonhealer asked curtly as she crouched beside the wailing bronze, brown hands moving quickly and professionally across the distended stomach and tailbase. The flesh was solid beneath her palm, the young digestive system locked by its oversized meal. Left alone, the blockage would clear naturally, but it would be a miserable few days for everyone in the barracks....

"Half an hour, maybe more," Bh'ruk told her miserably. "He just woke up screaming!"

"Told you he was still hungry, did he?"

The bronzerider nodded, ducking to avoid a faceful of wing membrane, and looked up at her wretchedly. "Can you help him, ma'am?"

"I think so." Aretei smiled reassuringly at the weyrling and patted the trembling bronze flank beneath her hand. The tail was packed, the lower bowel full to bursting, but its contents too dense to take the usual path out of the body. She almost felt sorry for the boy. Almost. "We're going to need to get him outside though...."

Getting the writhing bronze out of his wallow and into the cool night air was a task achieved with much coaxing, some pushing, and a considerable amount of swearing from most of the members of Class 24. E'zok sent one of the girls off for a bucket as Aretei settled her patient against one of the outside walls of the Weyrling Barracks, positioning the glowbaskets that the Weyrlingsecond almost gleefully provided so that the dragonet was illuminated as fully as possible given the hour. Kaivuth's vocalizations had died down to pathetic whimpers, though his mental protests were continuing unabated if the pained expression on his rider's face were anything to go by.

"Do you have everything you need?" asked a rough voice from behind her.

"I think so." Aretei held up her bag of supplies to D'zan. "Aside from a pair of apprentices who seem to have better things to do, I'm set. Are you ready to enjoy the show?"

"Just as soon as the others get back from settling their own classes," the Weyrlingmaster told her in a distinctly satisfied tone – evidently one of the rewards of teaching was the ability to enjoy your charges' misery. Aretei thought for a moment about Rilam and Meirial and decided that she could understand the appeal. "Anytime you're ready, dragonhealer."

There was the sound of running footsteps and a large wooden pail was deposited at Aretei's feet. She lifted the bucket and looked at it thoughtfully for a few moments before turning to the gathered – and somewhat irritable -- ranks of Weyrling Class 24.

"So," she asked, raising her voice to carry over the bronze's moans, "does everybody have a good view of young Kaivuth here?"



It hurts, it hurts, it hurts, it HURTS!!!

I know it does, Kaivuth, but the healer is going to make it better for you, you'll see. Bh'ruk hugged his dragon's neck tightly, trying to fight down his own apprehension about what was to come next. He was weyrbred, he'd heard the stories, but he couldn't let the bronze catch those concerns or else they'd never be rid of the pain. *It'll all be better soon and you won't even remember any of this in a few days, just wait and –*

I do not want to wait! I want it to stop hurting NOW!!! Kaivuth lashed his swollen tail for emphasis and howled again at the pain the movement caused. ***It hurts!!!***

Bh'ruk winced. *I know, I know it does....* Shaking his head to clear it, he looked up at the dragonhealer desperately and found her talking to his classmates as though they were

in a lecture hall and not standing barefoot in the open air at some unhealthy hour of the night. Her words seemed to be echoing as though from some great distance and it took him a few moments to filter past the waves of pain and protest he was receiving from Kaivuth.

“...compacting the rear gut and the upper and lower bowels and causing, as you can no doubt see, a tremendous amount of pain. An adult dragon can digest almost anything it chooses to eat long before reaching this situation, but at this age, a dragonet simply doesn't have the body mass or length of gut to clear an oversized meal. If you don't want them to end up with a blockage, have a care for what you feed them. Any questions so far?”

Kaivuth dredged up another howl, as if in answer, but the other weyrings all shook their heads, some casting worried glances back towards the barracks and their own dragonets. Bh'ruk pressed himself against the broad bronze chest. *Hush, now, hush....*

It HURTS!!!

“Contrary to the belief of our bronze friend here,” Aretei continued, “indigestion is *not* usually a fatal condition, although after two days, the affected pair might wish that it were. It can also be cured fairly quickly and effectively, but the procedure is not an easy one and so I will need everybody to watch carefully. Why don't you all come closer and see what I do?”

There were sounds of shuffling and Bh'ruk closed his eyes – the stories *were* true, he knew they were true, he couldn't –

What are true?

Nothing, Kaivuth, nothing! The bronzerider quickly shielded his traitorous thoughts, no simple task with Turns of rumour suddenly running rampant through his skull. *The dragonhealer is going to make you stop hurting, so you have to do exactly what I tell you, understand?*

Yes, came the sulky reply. It hurts!!!

I know, I know, I know....

“...the purging solution into the lower bowel, from where it will work its way back to the upper bowel and so on up. Once the bulk of the blockage has softened, it should proceed to leave the body in the usual fashion, at which point, Bh'ruk here can get Kaivuth to deposit it in this bucket for easy removal.”

“How do you get it *into* the, er, lower bowel, ma'am?” asked Tyleta, her tone somewhat nervous. Behind her, Bh'ruk could see some of the weyrbred weyrings trying to back away slowly, but one of the weyrings – he thought it was K'bort but it was hard to see beyond the circle of glowbaskets – quickly herded them back into position.

Various items were being removed from the dragonhealer's carrisac – a leather bag with a stopper at one end and a nozzle at the other, to which a long flexible pipe was being attached. “The pressure bag here is used to force the purging solution down the hose and into the gut against the usual flow of bodily functions. A dragon's tail is equipped with valves that prevent back-flow under normal

circumstances, although in ‘Fall you will find that your dragon may use the movement of waste into and out of the tail to adjust and fine-tune their balance in the air.’” A large glass bottle of red-tinted liquid was produced and the lecture shifted towards the important ingredients used in purging solution. Bh'ruk bit back a groan as Kaivuth whimpered and tried to bury his head under his rider's arm, distracting him from the dragonhealer's words. This was going to be bad....

It is already bad, Kaivuth corrected him miserably. It hurts! I am dying! I am –

The bronze broke off with a squeal of surprise, swinging his head around with enough force to dump his rider on his backside. Ignoring the laughter of the classmates, Bh'ruk looked up to see Kaivuth glaring at Aretei, who gazed levelly back at the dragonet. “Rider, please have your dragon hold steady – I can't get this down his tail if he insists on dancing about like an incontinent puppy.”

She pushed something into my –

I know she did, Kaivuth, Bh'ruk soothed, scrambling back to his feet and trying not to find Kaivuth's outrage amusing. She has to, to make it stop hurting.

Kaivuth growled unhappily, but held still as the dragonhealer caught the end of his tail once more and began to slowly and carefully feed the hose through the opening at the tip. Bh'ruk held the bronze head, stroking the warm eyeridges, aware of the slight discomfort of the procedure through the bond he shared with Kaivuth, for all that the sensation was almost smothered by the waves of pain emanating from the bronze's gut. The movement of the hose finally stopped and there was a cool bloom of *something* deep within the dragonet's body, spreading and soothing and leaching away some of the agony of fullness – evidently there was numbweed somewhere in the mix. Kaivuth shuddered slightly, then sighed in relief. ***It does not hurt so much now.***

Good. Bh'ruk sagged against the bronze's neck as the pain eased – he hadn't realized how much of Kaivuth's suffering he had been sharing, but he felt as though a knot had loosened somewhere behind his eyes. It felt good, so good, and for a moment he forgot his surroundings, forgot anything but the absence of pain....

Aretei tapped him on the shoulder, and he blinked at her and at the empty bag and coiled hose in her other hand. “Look sharp, Weyrling – you're going to need to help him discharge that lot into the bucket. You're not done yet.”

Bh'ruk stared at her, and relief gave way to a sudden sense of dread. He licked his lips and cast a look towards his curious classmates and the shadowy row of Weyrling Wing staff beyond them. “Oh, I, er –”

The dragonhealer's smile was wicked. “Get to it, Bh'ruk. You never know, you *might* be able to hold him....”

The bronzerider watched her rapidly retreating back, then glanced around Kaivuth's body to observe the gently

twitching tail and the wooden pail. *Er, Kaivuth? How are you feeling?*

Feels good, the bronze purred, content to be out of pain at last. ***I think I will be able to sleep now. I think I... oh!***

Bh'ruk didn't ask for an explanation. Darting under a half-furled wing, he grabbed the tip of the bronze tail and pushed it into the bucket, feeling the muscles jump and spasm beneath his hands. Kaivuth's head swung around, eyes wide and panicked as he whimpered on a rising note. "Kaivuth!" Bh'ruk begged aloud, "you have to hold still, you have to keep your tail *in the bucket!*"

It feels strange! It burns!

"I know it does!" He could feel the borrowed sensation, churning and bubbling through the dragon's gut, the solid mass turning to liquid and gas as the chemical onslaught took effect. The tail jerked convulsively in his grasp, jerking to the side and almost knocking the pail over. *Please, Kaivuth, please keep your tail still! I'm begging – you HAVE to keep your –*

For a brief moment, he almost thought that the bronze would obey him... and then nature took over with a vengeance. The bronze tail twisted, coiled, slapping the bucket aside as Kaivuth howled in surprised discomfort and a hot liquid torrent hit his rider full in the face and sent him flying. Bh'ruk hit the ground, coughing and spluttering and all too aware of the shrieks that rent the air around him – shrieks of pained confusion from Kaivuth as he spun around, trying to escape this new torment; of horror from his too-close classmates caught in the spurting flow; and of hysterical laughter from the dragonhealer and the collective Weyrling staff.

It feels better now, Kaivuth finally announced. ***But I need a bath.***

Wiping the worst of the cooling mess from his eyes, Bh'ruk dared a look around. Kaivuth sat on his haunches, his bronze hide spattered liberally with the results of his over-eating, sniffing carefully at his now-empty tail. The wall behind the dragonet was coated with greenish-brown effluent... as was the rest of Weyrling Class 24, who sat glaring at him in stunned silence, the peace of the moment broken only by the occasional *plop* of dripping dragonshit, the unhappy cries of their dragonets within the barracks, and the gasping chokes of barely-coherent weyrlingseconds. "Um," Bh'ruk managed at last, trying not to get anything into his mouth. "Sorry?"

His classmates stared at him, dripping, apparently torn between the need to commit violence and the desire to be clean. Bh'ruk smiled weakly at them, not wanting to imagine what he looked like, and hoped that they wouldn't decide to just shred him on the spot. It was with relief that he finally heard D'zan choke out, "Class dismissed!"

One by one, the weyrlings slowly moved away in search of clean clothing, fresh water and enough soapsand to scour their skins off. J'rald was the last to go, standing for a long moment just watching Bh'ruk through narrowed eyes as he clenched and unclenched his fists in angry rhythm. The bronzerider sat up, not daring to take his eyes from the taller

boy until J'rald snarled something under his breath and stalked off after the others.

Bh'ruk sighed and went to lead Kaivuth off towards the bathing pier. He had the distinct feeling that he wasn't going to live this one down in a hurry....