
First Blush

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Tasyr trotted from the Weyrhall, toting a nearly-overflowing basket of food along with him. His long morning on the Weyrfarm -- and his sprint to the Weyrhall -- had left him starved. He was sure Sovar would be, too.

They worked together now and then on Weyrfarm projects, and they'd become close -- as friends, he thought hastily. Sovar clammed up and blushed if anyone even *hinted* anything more. Tasyr was alright with that. Sovar was holdbred, just as he was. The chances of Sovar seeking out *that* kind of relationship with him was pretty slim, anyway. Besides, Tasyr didn't want anything more, either... by all accounts, with his adolescent spots and general greasy look, Sovar wasn't particularly attractive.

'But it's not his fault,' Tasyr thought to himself. Then he shoved the thought away. He was *fond* of Sovar. He enjoyed Sovar's company, now that he was finally opening up to him. That was all.

Tasyr had received well-meaning advice from weyrbred man-loving candidates, suggesting that Sovar might bend given the opportunity. ("Some just don't know which way they lean," Julian had told him once.) They all laughed at Tasyr's flustered, blushing responses. Not that Tasyr had been asking... but the time he and Sovar spent together had not gone unnoticed.

'I just don't *think* about Sovar that way,' Tasyr hurriedly told himself.

Tasyr passed a group of fellow candidates heading to the Weyrhall. "Where're you going?" called Julian. "Decided to eat by yourself today?"

"What better company could there be?" Tasyr laughed back. He trotted towards the Candidate barracks. Tasyr had run all the way in from his Weyrfarm shift just to put together the picnic lunch, hoping to catch Sovar before he left for lunch.

And there was Sovar, just changing out of his grape and vine-stained farming clothes. Out of habit, Tasyr squelched his appreciation of his friend's shirtless frame as he approached, and instead eyed the swath of pale scars along Sovar's shoulders and back. Tasyr had seen the scars before, and had wondered at their cause. Sovar hadn't completely opened up enough to talk about his past, yet. Tasyr could imagine that it was quite the story... and that Sovar was probably really lucky to be at the Weyr at all.

"Hey!" Tasyr said as he got closer.

Sovar jumped a little, then looked at Tasyr sheepishly, and pulled the tunic over his head. "Why do you do that all the time?"

"Because it makes you jump, and it makes me laugh," Tasyr replied with a grin. "I thought you might like to join me on the beach for lunch." He lifted the basket and swung it back and forth in his hand.

Sovar eyed the basket, and then looked up at Tasyr. Sovar's face seemed to flush. Tasyr ignored it. He held the basket out enticingly. "I picked some of the best slices of wherry. I got to it before most of the wingriders." He gave Sovar his winningest grin.

Sovar finally cracked a reluctant but genuine smile. "Why not," he said. "Weather's nice, anyway, and it's not too hot..."

As soon as Sovar was dressed again, they set off... the opposite way from the Weyrhall, which earned them some looks from other candidates. 'Let them look,' Tasyr thought, though he kept an eye out for Tanyer. Whether or not there was anything between himself and Sovar, his brother jumped to conclusions whenever Tasyr so much as breathed the same air as another male candidate. Not that it was any of his brother's business anyway...

As they walked, Tasyr did his best to strike up conversation with Sovar -- and as usual, found his best subject to be one close to Sovar's heart: grapes.

"The Ista cuttings sure are looking good," Tasyr said, thinking of the vines he'd watched Sovar prune some sevendays ago. "How is the fruit so far?"

Sovar brightened, and launched into an account of everything he'd done over the past weeks to nurture the experimental strain. The grapes were nearly ready to harvest, and he was helping Master Raidun with preparations for the pressing. Tasyr, who had never attended a wine pressing but had heard stories, tried to imagine Sovar with his trousers tied up around his knees, stomping through a large basin of grapes. Maybe that wasn't how it worked... but the thought made him smile.

The subject kept Sovar talking all the way to the beach. Once there, Tasyr found a spot about half-way between the end of the sand and the high-tide mark, and plopped down in the sand, crossing his legs underneath him. He put the basket beside him and pulled a cloth out of the top to spread in front of him. Sovar sat hesitantly on the other side of the basket, while Tasyr pulled out several cloth bundles -- one held some bread rolls, a juice-stained one held several choice slices of wherry ("I told you I got the best!" Tasyr said) and another held a pair of still-warm pastries. Tasyr pulled out a wine skin, tossed a redfruit to Sovar, and then tucked in.

They chatted more while they ate. Tasyr had long thought that once he got Sovar talking without his usual sarcasm, his voice was really quite pleasant to listen to... and he let Sovar talk as much as he wanted, until the food was gone. As they finished, a fighting wing flew overhead, taking off from the Weyr proper on drills.

"I sure hope I have my own fighting dragon soon," Tasyr said, "and then I'll..." He stopped short of saying 'truly belong'. The Weyr really was the first place he'd ever felt like he belonged. His family had been more than caring as he grew up at Twin Hills Cothold, but as he'd grown,

he'd felt as though he had to live a lie, not able to be true to himself.

"I know," Sovar said, nearly a whisper. "I hope..." but he didn't finish his thought.

Tasyr glanced over at his gawky fellow candidate and found himself looking directly into Sovar's hazel eyes.

"Tasyr," Sovar said. "I... want to thank you. I mean, ever since I came here, you've... I don't know." He flushed and looked away. "I never had friends my age, really. I never seemed to fit in with them. And since my family..." and he trailed off for a moment. "But you..." and he glanced up at Tasyr again. "You've gone out of your way to talk to me, help me feel like I belong here."

His earnestness took Tasyr by surprise. He searched Sovar's eyes for some message, and for the first time found them truly open and earnest -- not shifting, not a trace of suspicion. This sure wasn't what he was expecting when he'd invited Sovar to lunch.

"And..." Sovar seemed to lose some of his momentum, eyebrows drawing as he chose his words with difficulty. "There are some things I've had to... rethink, about... friendship." The last word came out a little false, as though hastily substituted for something else.

On an impulse, Tasyr reached over the picnic basket that separated them to take Sovar's hand. Sovar's expression seemed to change to panic, and for a moment Tasyr wondered if he had made a mistake, but Sovar didn't pull his hand away. Tasyr squeezed Sovar's hand gently. "I'm glad I'm able to be a friend," he said -- which sounded a little dumb, but he couldn't think of anything better to say. Then he let Sovar's hand go.

"Wait," Sovar said, and -- to Tasyr's utter astonishment, and surprisingly, gratification -- he took Tasyr's hand in his own. Tasyr felt a completely unexpected warm flush. He looked up at Sovar's face again -- Sovar was blushing fit to burst.

"I..." they both said at the same time. Then they both laughed nervously. Tasyr recovered first.

"I don't know what you're looking for, but..." and he gave Sovar a lopsided smile... "I'm here for you."

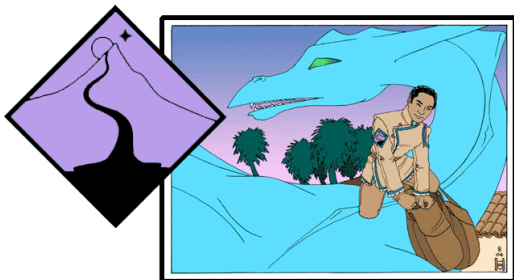
Before Sovar could respond, they heard the Weyr bell ring. They would need to sprint to get to their next shift. Tasyr pulled his hand away, and jumped up. Sovar helped him gather everything, and as they worked together, Tasyr noticed that their eyes met more often, they let their hands touch more often -- and longer -- than needed; and each time, he felt that warm flush again, from head to toe.

Once the basket was packed, Tasyr and Sovar looked at one another again. Tasyr gave his companion a thoughtful smile... and Sovar returned it. Then together they raced back to the Weyr proper.

Tasyr's mind raced, too, at the sudden possibilities that had opened up for him. He puzzled at Sovar's earnest protestations and genuine touch... but especially at his own reaction to them. Attraction was more than being attractive, he decided. It could be friendship first. He was suddenly very eager to explore this deepening friendship with Sovar in ways he'd never really considered before. And as he watched his friend run, Tasyr allowed himself to admire Sovar's lean frame -- thoughts he would have quickly suppressed not an hour ago.

He felt positively giddy.

This, he could get used to.



Kadanzer Weyr

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