
Mating Flights Don't Count

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Fashine was like a wher with a sore head this morning, and Pelagrath had a temper to match. The greenrider was aware of her own irritability and cantankerousness, and would mutter an apology after she had snapped at someone, or slammed something down on a table too hard, but couldn't shake the mood or the pounding headache that went with it.

Yesterday... now, yesterday she'd *expected* to have a headache. Yesterday had been the morning after her Weyrling Class had officially graduated, and the day before there had been a celebratory drink or three with all her classmates, and then another few with her husband, and finally a cup or two with her new wingmates in FlameWind Wing. Yesterday she had been anticipating a killer hangover and had been surprised to find a relatively mild headache. It was grossly unfair that her hangover waited until today to ambush her!

She knew she wasn't making a good impression with her new Wing. She had snapped at two of the other greenriders, and was now struggling to be anything but surly during Wingleader R'mal's briefing on sweeprider assignments. Maybe her courses were conspiring to come early. She was always headachy and out of sorts for a few days when that happened, but not usually to this extent.

After all, what else could it be apart from...?

Fashine suddenly sat up straight, R'mal's words on weather conditions and sweeps tumbling from her thoughts. Pelagrath! Her green's restlessness and irritability loomed large in her mind. Her green was of an age to... "Oh, sweet Faranth!"

She turned crimson as she realised everyone was now staring at her, and bit back the urge to snarl at them. "I'm sorry," she said to R'mal. "But I think that Pelagrath might be... might be, er, rising... Sometime soon. Today, maybe."

Wingleader R'mal nodded sympathetically. "A few of the male dragons had already made that observation, dear," he said with a kindly smile.

Some of the other riders grinned and Fashine felt her blush deepen further still. "Sorry," she muttered again.

"Don't apologise — it is all perfectly natural," said R'mal. "Anyway, we are all but done here, so I think we can finish up now." He went through a final detail or two, but the information refused to stay in Fashine's mind. Today. Today was when what she and her husband Jardlen had been anticipating and dreading would happen — Pelagrath would rise to mate and Fashine would end up in the furs with another man... or woman...

Despite all the lectures and lessons stressing that this was perfectly normal and necessary for the dragons — that mating flights didn't count — Fashine's holder upbringing quailed at the thought. She wanted Pelagrath to be happy. She wanted Pelagrath to do all the things dragons had to do, including mating. But at the same time, she wished she could develop a memory like her green and would forget all about it after a sevenday...

No, that wasn't quite right. She wanted to share in what Pelagrath did, but she wanted it to be with Jardlen. Or for Jardlen to forget. He would try to understand — she knew he would. They had talked about things like this several times since Pelagrath hatched. How they would cope, how they would react. But talking was not doing, and Fashine bit her lip in worry about what the day's end might bring.

I am hungry! Fashine was trailing the last of her wingmates out of the lecture room when the call came. It had a ravenous intensity that Fashine had not felt since her green had first hatched. Yet within that hunger lurked something else — something that she had never felt in her dragon's mind before. Excitement and trepidation gripped her.

Are you sure? she asked, but Pelagrath was already winging her way towards the Feeding Grounds. A trio of interested males — all blues — followed her. A brown launched himself into the sky to join them. Two other males already waited on the Feeding Grounds.

The Feeding Grounds— she should head for the Feeding Grounds. Fashine walked a few paces and then stopped and shook her head, disoriented by the feelings of hunger and need that Pelagrath was broadcasting. She felt a thrill of triumph as Pelagrath made a kill.

"This way, my dear greenrider."

She looked up as she felt someone take her arm and start to guide her gently outside Wingleader R'mal. His bronze Udoth was just alighting in the open space beyond the doorway.

"Is Udoth...?" she asked. In the back of her mind, the *something* lurking within Pelagrath's hunger began to push to the fore.

R'mal patted her hand reassuringly. "No, dear, not this time," said R'mal and gave her a gentle push toward his bronze. "We're just here to offer you a lift to the Feeding Grounds."

A pity. R'mal was a fine looking man: tall, elegant and muscular. Fashine felt scandalized in an almost detached way as these thoughts wandered through her head. What

would Jardlen think? She let R'mal solicitously assist her to mount Udoth, and concentrated on keeping her hands to herself as the bronze winged across the short distance to the Feeding Grounds.

As Udoth landed, R'mal pointed to a cluster of riders by the Flight Rooms. "That's where you need to be. Good flight, greenrider Fashine."

She slid down Udoth's shoulder, and turned to call her thanks.

Abruptly all that ceased to matter. Lust raced through her as Pelagrath tired of her kill and gave a mighty downstroke of her wings, powering aloft. The cluster of riders turned to face her as their dragons leaped after her twisting, darting green. Pelagrath zig-zagged through the air, flirting joyously with the seven males who pursued her. Fashine plunged into the middle of the group, on one level registering the presence of her former class mate V'dalin, as well as M'cail, W'ldo, B'nyu and W'hulf, but on the other, seeing only males to coquettishly touch and then draw back from, as Pelagrath darted close to one pursuer and then away to flick her tail at another.

She giggled in delight as B'baer and L'rosh joined the throng, reaching for her. Her former class mate V'dalin tried to kiss her as Pelagrath dipped and soared in front of his blue Benturinth. M'cail shouldered him aside and fondled one of her breasts. Eagerly Fashine pressed herself against him, as his Azurath briefly caught Pelagrath's attention... and then arched her back as W'hulf ran his hand down her spine. A bronze! A bronze, a brown and five fine blues chased her across the sky. All these males were hers alone as long as she teased and darted just out of reach!

Pelagrath led her suitors in a short, energetic and acrobatic aerial dance, criss-crossing the skies above the Weyr, until the green's delight at her flirtatious game began to be overrun by the burning need to mate. The green folded her wings and dropped between the nearest two males. A blue body snaked out to entwine with her own and blue wings spread to break their fall...



Fashine awoke from a dream of deliciously energetic sex and rolled over to nibble at Jardlen's ear and whisper some of the details to him. But the man dozing in the bed beside her was not Jardlen! She gave a squeak of surprise at the sight of large muscle bound arms and dark skin decorated with tattoos. The interloper was bluerider B'nyu, who blinked sleepily and began to come slowly awake. Memories of the flight came flooding back, and Fashine blushed at the sudden knowledge that her dream had been nothing of the sort.

What is wrong? A sleepy query from Pelagrath entered her mind.

Nothing, sweetie, she hastened to reassure her dragon. I was just surprised to see B'nyu, that's all.

Why would you be surprised? asked the green. ***Keveth is here with me, so his rider is with you. Everything is as it should be.***

Fashine doubted that her husband would think all was as it should be at this precise moment in time. She grabbed at the sheets, pulling them up to cover her bare breasts and smiled sheepishly at B'nyu. "Er... hello."

The bluerider looked as embarrassed about the whole affair as she did. "Keveth caught Pelagrath," he said unnecessarily.

She nodded. "Um, yes." There was an awkward silence.

"I should, uh, go," said B'nyu, with a glance over to where his clothing was discarded. Or some of his clothing at any rate – the flight cot was liberally strewn with crumpled garments. Fashine felt her face redden as she recalled how they had been removed.

The blush deepened as B'nyu threw back his share of the light sheet that covered them, and rolled out of bed to reach for his clothes. Fashine looked away as he pulled on underthings and trous. This was all so awkward and confusing! Pelagrath was radiating smug contentment, and she was quite sure Keveth would be too. B'nyu wasn't coming over all possessive or flyboy cocky about the flight, which was about as good an outcome as Fashine could have dreamed of. She suddenly felt guilty that she was being rude and un-dragonrider-like.

"Thank you, bluerider," she said. "It was... nice."

B'nyu looked over from where he was pulling on his pants, and gave a shy smile. "Thank you too, greenrider."



As she headed back to her weycot, Fashine ran through what she knew of bluerider B'nyu, which wasn't much. Still, from what she did recall, he did not seem to be the sort to boast to all and sundry of mating flight conquests. That eased her anxieties a little.

Even though she was expecting it, it was startling to see two dragons in Pelagrath's wallow – green and blue necks entwined as the pair dozed in the sun. *Keveth has decided to stay?* she asked cautiously.

Pelagrath opened an eye lazily. ***We mated. I like Keveth. Why should he not stay?***

Why indeed? But it would be very hard for her or Jardlen to make light of the mating flight if there was a hulking great blue dragon outside their cot, snuggling up to Pelagrath all night. *Is there room in your wallow for both of you?* she asked solicitously.

Yes, said the green. Neither Keveth nor I are large like bronzes. So we fit very well. We would need a bigger wallow if he were a bronze or if I were a gold. She sounded pleased at her deduction, and closed her eyes again with a contented sigh. Fashine smiled. Pelagrath had a very high opinion of her own intellect. At times it was like having a very articulate but naïve child around.

The greenrider quickly entered the cot to collect towels and clean clothing, and then hurried to the showers to sluice away the aftereffects of the mating flight. The water soothed a few muscles that were stiffening up – those memories of energetic sex had not been exaggeration! She felt herself blushing again.

Washed and refreshed, Fashine returned to her cot and tidied things away, brushed her hair a while, and fiddled with the blankets on the bed until she realised that she was just putting off the inevitable – she had to go and see Jardlen. She had to break the news to him – if he hadn't heard already through the Weyr's gossip channels. Even if he had, he'd need to hear it from her in person. And then she had to get back to her duties. Her life as a wingrider didn't just end because Pelagrath had mated!



Fashine found her husband in the depths of the wood workshop, practically covered from head to foot with shavings and sawdust from hefty chunk of timber he was turning on the lathe. Two apprentices were trimming down other pieces of wood nearby, ready to take their own turn at wood turning. From the way these two lads fell silent and wouldn't look her way, Fashine guessed news of Pelagrath's rising had already reached the smiths.

"Jardlen." She gave him a warm smile as he stepped away from the lathe. Without waiting for him to brush any of the sawdust from his clothes, Fashine embraced her husband.

With just a tiny hesitation, Jardlen hugged her back. His grip became briefly overtight and possessive, then he stepped back. "You two," he said to the apprentices. "Let's see if you can finish that preparation work by the time I get back." He raised a bushy eyebrow at Fashine, who nodded at the idea of taking the upcoming conversation somewhere more private.

Jardlen led the way through the workshop and out to where timber was seasoning under the cover of an open sided barn. He bent to examine one of the tree trunks and tsked at where some small animal appeared to have been gnawing at it. "Blasted treehoppers!" he muttered. "We'll have to re-coat the end of that with more wax."

"Forget the timber, Jardlen!" It came out sharper than she had intended, but avoiding the issue wasn't going to help. "Pelagrath rose." There – it was out in the open now.

"I know." There was a deep unhappiness in his tone.

She rushed on regardless, needing to get this all over

with. "It was B'nyu, blue Keveth's rider." Oh, this was all so confusing! Part of her felt horrified that she had just confessed to her husband that she'd slept with another man. But part of her was still wrapped up in Pelagrath's contentment and all the lectures that she'd had stating *mating flights don't count*.

"B'nyu?" Jardlen frowned, obviously trying to place the name. "The big one with the dragon tattoos? Brews that killer ale?"

Fashine nodded. She reached for Jardlen's hand and he let her take it. "He was very polite," she said. "I think he was as embarrassed as I was. Keveth is still at our cot. Pelagrath seems quite taken with him."

"B'nyu," Jardlen repeated. Again his grip became tight, almost painful.

She nodded again.

Abruptly he let go her hand and half turned away, then stepped back and swept her into a fierce embrace. "I will NOT be jealous!" She heard the strain in his voice as he uttered the words.

Fashine buried her face in his chest, inhaling the sawdust and sweat smells of him, pressing herself closer. "Mating flights don't count," she said quietly.

"Aye." Jardlen nuzzled his face against her hair, and Fashine felt the shudder of an almost sob go through him. His voice had a catch in it. "Mating flights don't count."



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