
More Than Friends

by Jen Bro & Sass Collard

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Sovar squinted and turned his gaze upward, watching a dragon's aerial display. Her wings were vibrant slashes of green against the sky's cloud-softened blue. She writhed in a sensual tease at the flock of males that followed her, a myriad of blues and browns – no larger bronze males. The candidate half-smiled to himself; while not as painfully mortifying now as they'd once been for him, green flights still never failed to be horribly distracting. A number of farmhands had been drafted that morning to help replace a section of feeding grounds fencing that had rotted, himself among them.

They were near the end of their task when the flight started, thankfully, but 'distracting' didn't even begin to cover it. Usually, after blooding their kills and flooding everyone nearby with their desires, greens would take their lust to the skies, where distance could muffle it. But this young female just kept circling around, leading her males in a frustrating chase back and forth over the Weyr proper. Whether for fun or familiarity Sovar could only guess, but her male pursuers certainly weren't the only ones frustrated by it.

The huddled knot of participating riders was visible from where they worked, as were the flight cots, but Sovar carefully kept his eyes from them, following instead some of the straggling male dragons. One of the blues screamed his frustration and dropped from the flight. His slim proportions made Sovar wonder idly if lack of age or stamina had been his downfall.

Tasyr passed, carrying the last post to be sunk, a thick log longer than he was tall with pre-hewn slots for vertical boards and holes for securing pegs. Sovar, startled back to the task at hand, hoisted a long-handled hammer in his hands onto his shoulder and followed...the faster they got this done, the better. They caught one another's gaze by accident, and exchanged discomfited smiles – both could feel the dragons' want, and knew the other could as well. Such knowledge made small talk more awkward than it was worth.

The green called to her remaining pursuers, and Sovar felt his senses and emotions sharpen in response. There was no overwhelming impulse, but his blood seemed to heat, his pulse quickening. The rutting green's lust was like intoxication in how it stirred the desires he could no longer deny he had, and most wanted to ignore. He watched Tasyr from a few paces behind, swallowing hard – mixed emotions aside, ignoring his desires was getting harder and harder.

More than that, his reasons for ignoring them were getting thinner by the day, worn down by the logical awareness of his own double standard. Having accepted Tasyr's sexual preference, his anxiety about his own was foolish...but like a bad habit he couldn't break himself of it, and he couldn't find the courage to consider, let alone face, his own reasons. Lingered doubt about Tasyr's interest in him in the first place, and a distinct fear of repercussion in the form of Tanyer, were enough to keep him from pushing his own boundaries.

Yet unready to make her choice, the dragon flashed her wings at her suitors and continued the flight, her hunger settled briefly by the amusement of teasing them.

Tasyr slid the log's tapered end into the last sinkhole, making sure the slots faced the direction they were supposed to. As he did it, Sovar saw the corners of his mouth twitch, as though he were withholding a not-quite desire to laugh. The lanky candidate gave him a suspiciously inquisitive look. "What's funny?"

"Just..." Tasyr gestured at the post, then vaguely at the sky. "It's a good thing I'm not the type for cracking bad jokes." When Sovar's expression didn't resolve, he added, "Think about it and you'll know what I mean."

Sovar frowned for a moment, but eventually the possible implications of sticking posts into holes during a green flight caused him to hang his head in a laugh that was half groan. Predictably, he could feel himself blushing. "Don't – yes, I know what you mean. Don't even say it."

Tasyr chuckled, stepping back a pace to make room for the swing of the mallet. "Thought you'd say that."

A few solid whacks shortened the post more than a hand-length; after a quick inspection of their handiwork they walked side-by-side to where more hands were fitting the fence's vertical slats, some posts down. Tanyer was among them, but half-ducked behind Mato and Morres, and thankfully too occupied to notice his brother. Marshall, overseeing the project and the only one looking completely unperturbed by the flight overhead, looked up as they approached. "Finished?"

"Yes, sir," Tasyr answered for both of them.

"Good." Marshall pointed to an empty, two-wheeled cart and a nearby pile of unneeded tools and leftovers like the rope that had held the heavy posts to their cart. "We've unloaded the last of what we need, so gather what's left and haul it back up to the Herders' Complex. Shouldn't take you much longer than it will these boys to finish up here."

"Yes, sir." They spoke in unison this time, and at Marshall's curt nod, Sovar jumped to collect and wrap the rough-fibered ropes while Tasyr loaded up the cart with spare mallets, pegs, measuring tools and the like. Then they each grasped one of its forward-jutting handles and, lifting it from its front supports, headed south. Conversation remained elusive with the heat of dragon lust still flushed beneath their skin.

Sovar kept his head ducked as they walked, watching his own feet, and breathed a private sigh of relief when they reached the big tool shed. He knew what would show in his eyes if Tasyr caught him staring, and he didn't intend to let it happen. They lowered the cart's handles to the ground, and he grabbed for the neatly coiled rope. He went in and hung it on an appropriate hook; Tasyr entered as he left, his

hands full, and said as they passed, "There's only a few more left, if you don't mind?"

"Got it," Sovar said, nodding.

He gathered what remained and went to put them away. The inside of the shed was cooler and dimmer than outside, and he paused to take a steadying breath. When he turned to leave, he almost yelped – Tasyr was behind him, right behind, close enough that Sovar almost walked into him without thinking. He took a sharp step back, unable to handle being so close with want not his own poking holes in his self-control. He bumped up against the shelves in a rattle of tools.

"Sorry," Tasyr said hastily, dropping the hand he'd presumably raised, too late, to touch the other boy's shoulder from behind. "Didn't mean to scare you that time."

"It's all right." Sovar remained where he was, wood digging hard and firm into his back.

Tasyr held up his other hand in explanation; a spare bag of the wooden pegs they used to secure fence slats dangled from his fingertips. "Forgot these." He paused a moment, then moved forward, reaching up carefully to place the pouch on one of the shelves above Sovar's head.

Sovar couldn't move. They were so close he could feel the brush of Tasyr's clothing, though a small space maintained between them kept them from touching. He gripped a lower shelf with both hands, though whether to hold himself up or to keep them occupied he couldn't honestly say. He and Tasyr were friends. Friends. Moreover, Tanyer wouldn't react well at all. Tasyr's brother had already made it perfectly clear what he thought of his sibling's preferences, though he hadn't yet been faced with his brother actually *doing* the manloving he so loudly protested against. He wasn't likely to hand Sovar a bouquet for being the first to lay hands on Tasyr...

A dragon's roar – so loud, why did she have to be so close? – was a second warning come too late. They never could agree later who kissed whom, both grasping with the sudden surge of need that couldn't help but take advantage of bodies already so close and so strung with want for one another. Sovar found himself pulling Tasyr closer, his hands on hips that were definitely male, parting his lips under the demanding first kiss. His conscience, for once, was silent.



The ending of such a close-proximity flight caused a ripple of response across the Weyr, and in the Feeding Grounds, Netheril was the first to speak up. "Ugh...you think she'd at least go *away* before doing that."

Kesyrr next to him laughed. "I think she's got more on her mind than your comfort."

"Obviously," Julian chimed in from nearby, grinning. "Hey, Kesyrr, toss me some pegs, will you?"

"Hold on..." Kesyrr's hands were occupied with fitting a slat, but Tanyer chose that moment to pass by with his own board. "Hey, Tanyer, can you grab some pegs for Julian? The bag's just by my foot."

"Sure." Tanyer propped his burden against a fencepost. He crouched and rifled through the peg bag. "I think we're going to need more of these – a bunch of them are split and can't be used. I'll go see if Marshall has any more."

But the herder shook his head when asked. "No, I think the extras got sent along to be put away. Better run for it if we're to get this done before lunch." Work seemed to become brisker at the mere words – for those who wanted to spend lunch satisfying other hungers, the idea of being stuck finishing chores was an unappealing one.

Tanyer nodded and set off towards the Herders' Complex at a fast jog. He was out of breath by the time he got to the shed, sweat prickling down his back under his tunic. He slowed to a walk, eyeing the empty cart outside – the shed door was also partly open, and he rolled his eyes. Lazy whers.

He pushed the door the rest of the way open, walked in – and stopped dead.

His shock for a moment delayed all response. Tasyr had his arms around Sovar's waist, the lanky candidate's hands tangled in Tasyr's hair, their mouths locked in a kiss. Then disgust rolled over Tanyer like storm clouds, black with anger. There was no thought behind his actions, only the residual flight-lust in his veins flaring to aggression like a torch touched to black water – he shouldered Tasyr hard, breaking them apart and throwing his brother to the side.

"What are you doing?" he yelled at Tasyr, advancing first on his off-balance sibling. Abruptly his focus changed, snapping a hot glare onto Sovar, who held himself like a terrified animal ready to bolt. Tanyer didn't let him, grabbing him roughly by the front of his shirt and half-lifting, half-slamming him against the shelf behind him. His voice came out like a snarl. "And you. Don't you ever touch him again."

Suddenly there were hands on his shoulders, dragging him back and breaking his grip. His prey did bolt then, vanishing out the door of the shed, but the hands swung him around before he could follow. He found himself face-to-face with an infuriated Tasyr.



Initially stunned by the sudden interruption, Tasyr had recovered quickly when his brother's anger turned on his friend. Tanyer's frame was stiff, and he drew himself up to his full height. Tasyr suppressed the urge to punch his brother in the face and purposefully unclenched his fist. Instead, he jabbed a finger at his brother's chest.

"You leave Sovar alone," he hissed. "Don't blame him for this. I'm the one you're mad at."

Tanyer batted his finger away and pointed back at him. "You can't do something like that without help," he said. "I'd keep anyone away from you if I could, especially..." He made an inarticulate noise and clenched his fists. "If it weren't for the rules, I'd *pound* that greasy bag of—"

"Oh, grow up! It wasn't his fault—"

"Course not; he just slobbered all over you for no good reason."

"With a green dragon getting caught right over our heads?" Tasyr countered. "No, it's not his fault! No more than it would be yours, if you found yourself alone with some girl and *that* going on mere dragonlengths above your head..."

"That's different."

"No, it's *not*! Hasn't our time at the Weyr taught you *anything*? What'll you do after Impression, the first time you end up in a mating flight with a male greenrider? It'd happen sometime, you know; what'll you do then?"

Tanyer said nothing, but his fists remained clenched.

"It's something you've gotta deal with sometime, if you're going to stay here," Tasyr continued. "If you want to blame anyone, blame me. It's who I am, and I'm not going to change myself to suit you."

Tanyer's face scrunched up and he shook his head. Instead of answering, he stomped out without saying a word.

Tasyr kicked the wall of the shed hard, and kicked it again for good measure, letting loose a string of expletives he'd held back until he was alone. The shelves along the wall rattled, and several tools fell with a clatter to the ground. Tasyr didn't care, he was so furious. He couldn't tell who he was more furious *at*, though...himself, for losing his self control? Tanyer, for walking in on their kiss? Or Sovar...?

No, he couldn't be mad at Sovar.

He'd often wondered, since their picnic lunch several sevendays ago, if he'd seen more in Sovar's earnest words and touch than had really been there, because the quiet boy had stayed carefully restrained all those days – until now. Tasyr had let it be, not wanting to lose the friendship he had.

Now...

Tasyr leaned his elbows against the wall and ran his fingers through his hair. The broadcast lust of the mating dragons had faded, yet he could still feel the ghosts of hands in his hair and on his waist. And his lips still tingled from the interrupted kiss. There had been need in Sovar's eyes, desire written clearly on his face...had he really known what he was doing, or had the green's lust driven him?

Sovar's face gave way to Tanyer's, distorted with anger and disgust. Tanyer, pushing Sovar against the wall, and threatening him. Sovar, looking like a hen facing a tunnelsnake.

Tasyr straightened himself and kicked the shed wall again. It wasn't Sovar's fault that he was caught between two brothers. And if there really was potential for something more than friendship... had Tanyer just squashed it flat?

Stupid luck that it was Tanyer who walked in, and not someone else. Any of the other lads, and it would have been... well, embarrassing, but fine. Until Tanyer heard about it. Which he would have, the way gossip spread around here...

Anger gave way to something more despondent, and he sighed and began cleaning up the mess he'd made. He even remembered to stow away the forgotten wagon before heading out after Tanyer and Sovar. The first, he would have to face. The other, he needed to find... to let Sovar know that he understood what the heightened emotions of a green flight would do. Tasyr's stomach twisted a little at the possibility that he'd drastically misjudged things, and Sovar had been acting on something he didn't really feel...he couldn't fault the other boy, if that was the case. But to find out, he would not only have to find him, but actually get him to talk.

Despite the mangled thing his day had become, the corner of Tasyr's mouth lifted just a little at the thought. This was going to be awkward.



Sovar was hard to find.

He wasn't in the Weyrhall at lunch. When he didn't show up for the afternoon shift, either, Tasyr volunteered to look for him, genuinely concerned – the other candidate was a stickler about his work ethic, and the move was very unlike him. Weyrfarmer Raidun sent him off with a curt "Hurry back, or you'll have punishment duty with him."

Tasyr finally found him on the bench in the herb garden behind the Infirmary.

His back to Tasyr, he had his elbows on his knees, and was fiddling with a leaf he'd plucked from the nearest shrub.

Tasyr slowed as he approached. Sovar heard his footsteps and looked up – his expression turned wide-eyed and he flushed beet red. He looked away and seemed to fold in on himself. Tasyr's heart sank a bit, but he had to try.

"...hey?" he said as he approached.

"Hey." Sovar glanced up, but there was nervous wariness in his eyes. "Did Raidun send you?"

Tasyr shook his head. "No. I came myself, to say I'm sorry. For my brother. And for what happened...green flights, you know... I know what they can do, as well as anyone... And if you don't, you know, really feel that way about me..." He'd said too much already, so he kept talking. "I don't fault you, if you were acting on something you didn't really feel. Just, please... don't let it ruin our friendship. I've really enjoyed getting to know you. And don't let Tanyer scare you... he's more mad at me than anything else."

He ran out of things to say, and stopped. After a moment, Sovar patted the bench beside him in an invitation to sit. His face was thoughtful, pained and uncertain.

Tasyr sat beside him.

Sovar was silent for a while, his mouth working like he wanted to say something and just didn't know how. Tasyr was keenly aware of their proximity, close enough to pick up the other boy's body heat and his musky, male smell. He tried not to let it distract him, but the scent brought to memory the look on Sovar's face in the shed, and Tasyr found himself wanting him more than ever. But he didn't know what to expect now, and fiercely shoved the thoughts aside.

Finally, Sovar spoke. "I've done a lot of thinking," he started. "I... always thought I shouldn't like boys, you know. But this past while... I just... I can't... I..." He looked at Tasyr, his expression tortured. "The mating flight...it didn't make me do anything I didn't already want."

Tasyr wasn't sure how to take that, the way the other boy's face looked. "And... you're ashamed."

"Ye... er, no. Well... part of me thinks I should be."

Aware that they were treading on delicate ground, Tasyr asked carefully, "Why?"

Sovar's spotty face was troubled. "It's hard to come to grips with something the dead would never forgive you for, not to mention the living."

Tasyr gave a frustrated huff. "That would imply there's something wrong with it, and... as far as the Weyr's concerned... there isn't." He considered Sovar, warring with his own frustration. Sovar's dilemma felt all too familiar. Tasyr's family was still alive to disapprove of his lifestyle, but he'd had time to come to terms with his feelings, and perhaps Sovar hadn't. Or perhaps...

More words came to mind; he hesitated, unsure if he wanted to run the risk of sounding too parental. He suppressed the firm voice of logic that some part of him wanted to use, knowing it might provoke defensiveness, before finally adding, "Besides, you're thinking like a child."

As he'd expected, Sovar glanced at him sharply; had he hackles, they would have bristled. "Pardon?"

Tasyr held up his hands, making a warding gesture. "I don't mean that the way it sounds, I swear. But...think about it. When you're little, you get told by your parents what's right and wrong. Even when you decide to be bad and not follow the rules, they're still your parents' rules." He grasped for more eloquent wording – blast it...how had the weyrlingsecond called it during the sexuality lecture? "You're still following the moral guidelines set out for you by someone else."

"You sound like G'n'an." Tasyr inclined his head, guilty as charged – Sovar's voice still had an edge, but he was listening. "What about an adult?"

"Different in two ways. First off, they learn that that life's not that simple. You can have good intentions but still make bad decisions...you can do a good thing for the wrong reason. See what I'm getting at? You have to figure out what fits where for *you*, because lumping things into two categories just isn't an option anymore."

As he spoke, Tasyr felt a touch of revelation – though he'd based many recent decisions and actions on these very opinions, he'd never fully voiced them to himself as he was to Sovar now. Momentum swept surprise and wonder away. "Secondly, an adult realizes that sometimes when they say 'right', other people say 'wrong'...and then they have to decide whether to be their own right, or someone else's. Whether or not it's...worth it."

"Worth it?" Sovar repeated, shaping the words with his mouth but almost no voice. He met Tasyr's eyes, and Tasyr saw something there – something he thought he'd seen before. Something he felt himself.

Desire.

"So now," Tasyr said, "comes the question. In spite of ourselves, you and I have become more than friends." He

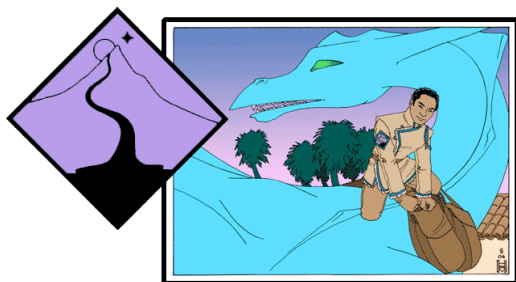
found himself grinning a little at that, and the corner of Sovar's mouth turned up as well. He held eye contact a long moment, then tilted his head, voice quiet. "Was it worth it?"

Slowly, Sovar nodded, unable to speak.

Tasyr reached over and joined one of their hands. "Is this?"

They stared at one another for a long heartbeat, then Sovar leaned over and kissed him chastely on the mouth. A brief touch of lips, but he pulled back from it looking slightly glazed, heat creeping up his collar and flushing his face. Tasyr couldn't help but laugh at the expression, and smothered the sound by pulling the other boy back and offering a second, longer kiss.

"I'll take that as a yes."



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