
To Be A Dragonrider

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Tasyr and Tanyer stood side by side on the Hatching Sands, their first time facing a clutch. The Hatching was a blur, gale-forced emotions tugging at them from all directions; anticipation, excitement, and Impression. But it quickly turned to disaster.

Orisan's heart-rending scream as Kaiyith died in his arms blended with the keening of the dragons. The wave of sound horrified Tasyr. Then a brown hatchling, still half in its shell, spasmed and died, and the dragons keened again.

Tasyr remembered the dragonhealer apprentices describing two dead eggs in gruesome detail for anyone who would listen. He felt panic rising. What was wrong with these hatchlings? He glanced around him. The other new candidates seemed as bewildered as he was, but those who had stood many times before looked downright terrified. That frightened Tasyr more.

This hatching was wrong.

He glanced at his brother. Tanyer's look was stony. He'd worn the same expression the day he'd set out on a slasher hunt for the first time with the rest of the men back at the cothold; a tight look of barely-contained fear.

Orisan's sobs persisted as the hatching continued unrelenting. With two dead hatchlings on the sands, others creeling in search of their life partners, and the remaining eggs rocking fitfully, the thought of Impressing and immediately losing his dragon made Tasyr feel sick.

As each hatchling passed him by, he felt a wash of guilty relief. Who knew if all the dragons in this clutch were flawed? Even the hatchlings seemed on the verge of panic. But they found their partners, one by one. All the while, Orisan rocked back and forth, cradling the dead bronze's head in his arms, oblivious to everything around him.

Tasyr's stomach churned. He *really* shouldn't have grabbed that meat roll on his way out of the kitchens when everything started. He glanced at the stands, and all the people watching. His parents were up there, somewhere. He swallowed again, determined not to embarrass himself.

Then a bronze hatched practically at Tasyr's feet; it tumbled to the sands right in front of him... and lay there. Its breath rasped in and out audibly. Tasyr and Tanyer shared a horrified glance. It stood shakily. It looked up at Tanyer.

Tanyer's face was bald panic, and he stepped back, shaking his head.

The gasping hatchling turned its orange-red gaze on Tasyr. He froze, and his panic doubled, warring with his pity for the bronze's obvious distress. The bronze regarded him for a long moment, and then moved laboriously away. Tasyr sagged and let out a breath he hadn't realized he was holding. He swallowed against his nausea.

Around him, the flurry of the Hatching continued. The hatchlings found their partners; even the weak bronze. When Nioranth quit the Hatching Sands, three eggs still lay unhatched. Tasyr stared at the muck oozing out of one. Then he stared at the dead brown hatchling, draping obscenely out of his egg. From the corner of his eye, Tasyr saw the healers coming to Orisan's aid; as they tended him, the dead bronze's head lolled back onto the ground.

Tasyr's stomach suddenly didn't care about the crowd any more. He turned past Tanyer (who put out a hand, but didn't stop him), staggered to the edge of the grounds, and was noisily sick.

He knelt there for a while, urging his stomach to calm. Then with a clunk, a bucket and shovel landed next to his left knee. He looked up to see Weyrlingmaster D'zan.

"Take care of that yourself," the Weyrlingmaster said. He glanced at the Hatching sands, then back at Tasyr. "You think this was bad? At least Orisan's still got his guts on the inside. Incane wasn't so lucky. And if you keep standing and ever Impress, you'll see far worse in Threadfall."

Tasyr could almost hear sympathy in the Weyrlingmaster's voice, but the man's stern face seemed to say, "What kind of pathetic dragonrider would you make?" He shrank, and D'zan stalked back to the new weyrlings and their cages.

Tasyr's sour belly filled with shame, and anger, that anyone could doubt he had what it takes to be a dragonrider. He was Searched, wasn't he? He grabbed the shovel, stood, and began scooping the soiled sand into the bucket. When he felt a hand on his shoulder, he jerked away. He glared, but softened his expression when he saw it was Tanyer.

"Let me help," his brother said, but Tasyr shook his head.

"I'll take care of this myself," he said. "Go enjoy the feast. I'll just... go back to my bunk and lie down for a while." He gave a half-smile that he didn't really feel.

"Mother will worry," Tanyer said.

"I know. Tell her I'll be fine. Maybe..." Tasyr sighed, thinking of his mother's disappointment, having not seen them for sevendays. "I'll come to see them. I just need a moment."

'I WILL be fine,' he thought as Tanyer left, 'and I'll be a GREAT dragonrider.' He shoveled one last scoop into the bucket.



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