
Almost

by Ellen Million
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'Almost,' Resla thought to herself, and she wrapped her arms around herself and squeezed, not sure if she should smile or cry. 'Almost.' She decided to smile, and ruffled Faylinda's blonde hair. The holdless candidate girl didn't look too crushed not to have Impressed - she flashed Resla a brilliant smile and ran to catch up with her older sister Elline, who had also left the sands with no dragon.

'Almost,' Resla thought, even as she pointed another candidate towards the hall to help with the feast preparations, and called to another to cease the horseplay and attend his chores. It was a good Hatching, full of unexpected developments, and spirits were high, even among the candidates left standing. Resla sorted them into groups and allotted chores automatically, offering kind, if somewhat dazed, smiles where they seemed to be needed, but not really taking more notice of her charges than was absolutely necessary.

"I lost a mark on you, Resla," a rider she couldn't remember later told her cheerfully.

"Me too! I thought for sure you'd walk off with that gold," another chimed in.

"Almost," she told them, grinning widely, and she walked away humming to follow her charges to the kitchens.

"Resla!"

Resla stepped away from the flow of candidates to let V'lar catch up. "Did you see?" she asked.

"I'm so sorry..." V'lar put his arms around her, and Resla felt her smile falter. Almost also meant not quite. She was suddenly more aware of the people around them than she had been, and was unexpectedly embarrassed by his affectionate embrace.

"I'm fine," she insisted, tentatively returning the embrace. "It was..." It was amazing. Unexpected. Drowning. She had looked into dragon eyes before - she had been puked on by dragons that were now full adults, and been implored by the mates of disobedient weyrlings and even put drops on irritated eye membranes - but she'd never looked into dragon eyes quite like this before. Had she imagined the whisper in her mind? Had the little gold spent moments looking at her, or the lifetime it had seemed like?

"I know how much you wanted that," V'lar said, backing away to arm's length, but keeping his hands on her shoulders. "To Impress a gold, I mean."

Resla laughed. The crowd was thinning, flocking towards the Weyrhall and the promise of food and cold drinks after a very long, hot Hatching. "Not gold," she

insisted. "I'm sure I wasn't meant for gold. It was enough that she stopped and thought about it a little."

"More than a little!" V'lar said proudly. "You should have heard the betting in the stands when she stopped in front of you. Probably if you hadn't been..."

It took Resla a moment to follow his trailed off thought and significant look. "Pregnant! Oh!" She flushed and shook her head. "No," she said reluctantly. "It... wasn't that."

"Sure it was," V'lar said encouragingly - clearly he thought that she was still disappointed, and was attempting to cheer her. "You're everything a gold could want. You don't think you're too old, do you? Candidates are young for human reasons - dragons have impressed older than you before. It's probably for the best though; training would have been fairly difficult in your state."

"I'm not pregnant." Resla had planned to tell him gently, but faced with the moment, she wasn't sure how. "I'm sorry," it was her turn to say. "I know how much you wanted it, but I got my courses this morning."

V'lar was quiet a long moment. "Did you lose...?" He couldn't quite complete the thought.

Resla shook her head, and was glad for the oppressive heat that had sent everyone scurrying for the Weyrhall and afforded a moment of precious privacy, there by the sands. A few people remained, but out of earshot - picking through the dragon egg shells, or retrieving forgotten items from the stands. "I think I just was wrong about it," she said quietly. "There's no real way to tell."

He was disappointed. It came off of him like waves, and Resla could not help but want to comfort him. "It's not so bad," she said encouragingly. "A class like this is going to be a handful anyway! I'll need all my attention on dealing with a class with two queens!"

V'lar smiled reluctantly at her, and Resla could tell he wasn't consoled. This had meant more to him even than she'd guessed, she realized, and it gave her a little quaver of doubt. "You aren't disappointed?" he asked slowly.

Resla laughed it off. "Not really," she said, and she told herself it was true - if something of a simplification of the matter. "Maybe next time," she said optimistically. "Come," she said kindly, "I'm dying of thirst." She put her arm on his elbow and prodded him to start walking. "It's been an exciting day," she reminded him. "I almost Impressed a gold dragon!"

She remembered all over again that almost also meant not quite.



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