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# Bearer of Bad News

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V'lar hated to bring Resla bad news. She always looked up with a warm smile that said he'd done her a favor by coming by, the way she greeted him every time he came by. When he was finally able to break the news about this recent graduate failing to appear from *between*, or that new bluerider being burnt in a flaming drill accident just days after joining his Wing, her face would fall and he couldn't help but realize that he'd just ripped a little piece of her heart out.

There wasn't anyone she didn't look that way for - even spoiled Tezza, who nobody had liked and everyone teased and who tried even the headsecond's patience with her tantrums. No matter how much a weyrling may have managed to try her patience, she always seemed to feel the same deep pain when they died. It showed in the tilt of her broad shoulders, and her face would suddenly look old. She usually still smiled - a funny, wistful twist of the lips - but the lines around her eyes wouldn't look like laughter anymore.

Worst of all, then she would thank him, and act as if he'd just done something kind for her; not every Wing even bothered to bring her news once her charges graduated, and it was sometimes an unpleasant shock for her to find out in a more roundabout way.

It gave V'lar a moment of hope when her look to the news the time was only a blank look. Did she even remember the greenrider who hadn't returned from 'Thread that evening? The young woman had graduated almost a Turn before - perhaps she had been filed away from Resla's immediate memory. Perhaps, this time, bad news wouldn't be so badly taken. V'lar chanced a glance at her lap - he couldn't help it. He could count her cycles as well as she could, and it had been a good two months since she had begged off for lady reasons. He couldn't help consider the possibility of her condition, and it made him want to shelter her from hurt more than ever. Maybe *this* time, the news wouldn't cause her so much pain.

The moment of hope was short-lived.

She closed her eyes, put a hand gingerly to temple as if a headache had descended on her, and V'lar saw that her jaw was trembling.

She realized her own reaction almost as V'lar did, and gave a breathless, apologetic laugh. "I'm sorry," she said, as if she'd done something wrong. "It was just a shock, this time. After they graduate, there's this awful month or two, but after a while you feel like you've gotten past the worst of it, and you stop expecting the news." She was still shaking,

a little, but visibly trying to control it. She took a deep breath and wiped away the tears she hadn't been able to keep from her eyes and stood up, pushing the chair behind her. "Don't look so guilty," she told V'lar, coming around the desk to him. She put out her palms for him, and clasped his hands tightly when he took them. "I'm sure you did everything you could."

V'lar shrugged helplessly, not wanting to admit he didn't really care one way or another for the greenrider.

"It was a stupid accident," V'lar told her. "Zusath called a clump, and Tejath got in her path. Dragon and rider were both badly flamed when they went *between*, it's probably best they didn't come out." Sometimes the cold details of an accident helped Resla pull together her control again, but this time, it didn't do any good.

"I hate this," he told her, when she continued to look as if she'd been caught *between* herself. "Resla, sweetheart, you shouldn't have to go through this."

Resla smiled at him - that horrible, forced 'thank you' smile that didn't really mean 'thank you' at all. "It comes with the job," she said lightly.

"Maybe it's the job that should go, then."

The idea startled her visibly. "Give up my job?" she asked in disbelief. "What else would I do?"

"Anything," V'lar said desperately. "Whatever you wanted. Be Varla's mother full-time, if you want. Foster other children. Work in the laundry - anything but this."

The smile had vanished, and a dozen expressions replaced it - fear, surprise, longing - before her face finally settled in anger. "This is my *job*," she said fiercely. "I love what I do."

"There are other jobs," V'lar insisted. "Jobs without so much loss. It will make you crazy, if you keep going through this."

Too late, he remembered Resla's sensitivity to being 'crazy' - her father had suffered a long and painful dementia, and one of the woman's deepest fears was to suffer the same fate. "Not crazy," he hastened to add - "just..." - he fumbled for a replacement and found none. "I hate to see you so sad. I can't stand what this job does to you."

Her face had settled into something flinty; V'lar hadn't guessed that those warm brown eyes could look so cold. "I've been handling this job just fine," she said firmly. "They need me here."

V'lar wasn't quite prepared to give up yet. "Ellya could do it," he said. "This isn't the Hold - people here don't have to stay in the same job for Turn after Turn because it's what they're born to. You've been the weyrling Headsecond for five Turns - maybe you'd like to do something else for a while. You could always come back to it..."

"Should I ask you to give up being a wingsecond?" Resla demanded. "You've been in that job more than five Turns."

"That's different," V'lar protested. "My job doesn't make me *cry* several times a month."

"Maybe it should," Resla flung back. "Maybe it *would*, if you gave a crack about the good people graduating into your Wing!"

All the steam went out of the headsecond at once, as if she'd just let all the air in her out with her words and her shoulders fell. As quickly as it had started, the argument

was over. Resla's temper almost always flared and burnt out quickly; she didn't have the stomach for a prolonged fight. V'lar had no desire to continue it either, so he accepted her hand when she offered it. "I'm sorry," he said warmly, putting an arm around her shoulders and pulling her close.

She repeated it back to him. "*I'm* sorry." She buried her face in his collar and cried like a child.

Resla was almost always in the role of the comforter - if V'lar offered her a hug when she was feeling down, she would generally accept it, but it was always with the slight implication that she was doing it to make *him* feel better, and she would escape from it quickly. 'Stoic,' some people called her. Vulnerability sat strangely on her, but V'lar found himself liking it. He steered her towards her couch, and let her sob herself out. Hope did circles around her ankles, keening, before jumping into her lap and crowding into their embrace. Sunrise voiced her grief from the rafters; V'lar thought she sounded more irritated than sympathetic.

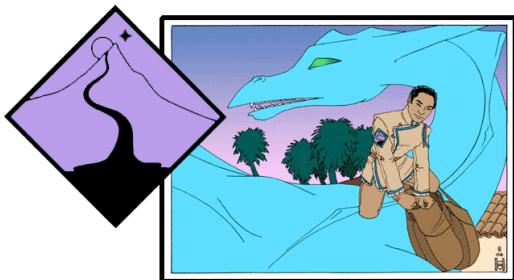
"Resla?" V'lar had to ask. He'd been trying not to press the matter for more than a sevenday now, and he had to know. "Are you pregnant?"

Resla stiffened under his arm. "I don't know," she said, in a very small voice. "Maybe." She pulled Hope into her arms, drawing away from the bronzerider's embrace. "Probably," she confessed. She didn't sound particularly happy about it and V'lar had to wrestle down the feeling of hurt that mixed with the happiness of the confirmation. Perhaps it was only bruised feelings, leftover from their argument.

"I'm glad," he said, and he couldn't keep the pride and warmth from his voice.

Resla looked at him, and smiled again - and if it was a very sad, strained smile, it was probably only because of the bad news he'd brought with him.

END



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