
Hangovers and Hang-Ups

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T'yan opened his eyelids the merest slit, and the light in his cot took the opportunity to maliciously assault his eyeballs and make a pretty good attempt at boring its way right through to the back of his skull. He must have forgotten to close the shutters last night. The young bronzerider screwed his eyes tight shut with a groan, and buried his head under the sleeping furs, but the damage was done. It felt like the harpers had been using his head as a drum. And tunnelsnakes had definitely been nesting in his mouth.

You are not well. Jugurth's worried comment intruded into his misery. Very LOUDLY into his misery. How could he not have noticed until now how loud his dragon sounded?

I think... T'yan managed in reply. *I think... I had too much to drink last night.* There had been wine. And beer. And some sort of rough local spirit that seared like dragon's breath as it went down your throat. It had been the first gather he had been allowed to attend since A'nar had grounded him for his little jaunt back to Spiderclaw Seahold. There had been holder girls and dancing and alcohol. Lots and lots of alcohol.

You feel all muddled and painful. Do you need a healer to come? Jugurth asked.

No! T'yan sent vehemently, and winced as his headache ratcheted up another notch. *No healer. I just need to stay quiet for a while.* Maybe he ought to drink some water? That was supposed to help, wasn't it? That thought, practical though it was, had the unexpected effect that it roused his bladder, which decided to inform him that it was very, very full and he needed to grab the chamberpot Right Now. With another groan, T'yan threw off the blankets and staggered to his feet, discovering to his bemusement that he was still wearing his boots.



A shower and downing a pint of water had pushed T'yan a smidgen towards feeling less like a herdbeast carcass after a queen dragon had blooded her kill. But he'd decided to skip breakfast to see if he could manage another doze and sleep off some of his headache before tackling any of the tasks of the day. He had some new harness leather from the tanners and needed to do some repairs before tomorrow's Threadfall, and Jugurth was due for an oiling.

Both of those felt way beyond his physical or mental ability at the moment.

His bronze was, for once, not agitating about needing oil to make his hide handsome for all the golds to admire. Instead, he issued a cryptic comment or two about how strong and handsome he already looked this morning, to which T'yan gave a mumbled agreement. If his bronze was prepared to forego an oiling for another few hours, then that was fine by him. Jugurth had, thankfully, positioned himself so that his bulk blocked out what little sunlight filtered through the - now firmly closed - shutters. The bronze made a random statement now and then, usually along the lines of 'such-and-such a dragon is awake, but he is not as handsome as me'. T'yan didn't care who was awake, or how handsome they were - he just wished that *he* could be asleep.

Maybe if he thought pleasant thoughts it would take his mind off his headache and he could doze? Like what fun the Cathay Spring Livestock Gather had been. Andryce and Shyla from his Wing had been there, and he and E'darin had danced with both of them. And then there had been that holder girl... She'd been all pretty curls and curves, he mused. She'd had very nice breasts... breasts that jiggled in a fascinating way as she skipped around the dance square. Long tresses of red hair that she flicked this way and that as she giggled and twirled. Lovely green wings that...

Green wings? Wait a minute, that wasn't *his* thought...

Blyth will rise soon, Jugurth informed him. And Kith. I am very strong. I could chase both of them!

Oh shards, Jugurth wanted to chase a green! Of all the days to choose! But on the other hand, maybe dragon-lust was just what he needed to escape his still pounding head. He could be Jugurth for a while, and leave hung over and miserable T'yan behind for a while. *Who did you say was rising?*

Blyth will rise very, very soon. Kith will rise later today. I will catch them both! Jugurth boasted.

T'yan struggled to focus his thoughts. Kith was ridden by Jeri of FireStorm, wasn't she? And Blyth? Wasn't she Crista of FireStar's? Crista was rather cute. *Yeah, all right. Let's chase Blyth.* He closed his eyes again.

It seemed merely an instant later that Jugurth's excited call came bursting into his head: **Wake up, rider! Wake up! Blyth bloods her kill!** The bronze was in the air and winging his way towards the Feeding Grounds before T'yan had done more than sit upright.

Aaah! Wait for me you useless great watchwher! Stupid bloody dragon gone off without him... Now he was going to have to walk to the flight cots, and today they seemed very far away. Grumbling, T'yan pulled on trousers and boots and staggered out into the sunshine.

It was appallingly bright. He pined briefly for Ierne Island's often dour and cloudy skies. Maybe if he walked to the flight cots very, very slowly and carefully, and concentrated on Jugurth-thoughts rather than T'yan-thoughts, it wouldn't hurt so much...?

She rises! Jugurth gave a screech of pure lust. **I fly! I fly!**

T'yan started to run.



Blyth was a serious flirt. She darted to and fro, teasing the males who surged in her wake. A pair of blues had already tumbled out of the chase after one too many swift changes of direction had resulted in a collision. But he was bronze! He was no mere blue to let a bump or a scrape put him off! He could bank and swerve in pursuit of the tantalising green shape in front of him. He could duck and weave to avoid the flailing wings or thrashing tails of his rivals when this most desirable of greens zigzagged across the sky. He could crash forward, making them swerve to avoid *him!*

He was bronze! He was the only worthy one here. Not a scrawny brown or diminutive blue. He was sleek and handsome and strong. He spiralled up, up, up into the choppy air left by her passage. Snarled at a brown who got too close, then twisted in mid-air as the enticing green switched direction once again, heading directly into the sun's glare.

He was bronze! He was cunning. He was smarter than a brown, brighter than a blue. He burned with lust and anticipation, sure that any moment now the gleaming green would reverse course and dive out of the sun and into the middle of her suitors. He would be ready. He would be ready to jack-knife in the air, crash his wings into hers and twine necks and tails together, as his wings took the weight of both of them.

He was bronze! She was green! They were one!



T'yan's first thought was a pleasant recognition that his headache was three-quarters gone. His second was that there was someone in his bed, as he had his face stuck in their hair and one of his arms draped over their naked back. No, it wasn't his bed - this rumbled pile of bedding was the flight cot. He had a vague memory of tripping and stumbling his way across the Weyr and crashing into a knot of riders, knocking several of them over. He didn't remember Crista there, so hopefully she hadn't been one of the victims. Actually, he couldn't remember anything about Crista at all. None of the flashbacks of hands grabbing at clothing and flesh seemed quite... right. Crista was short like he was, but he recalled someone taller than him leaning over and kissing him vigorously.

Someone who had broad shoulders, and a muscular chest. Someone very, very male!

T'yan gave a yip of surprise and alarm and jerked away from the person in the bed with him. He fumbled around for the glowbasket and flipped it open.

A'rori rolled over, blinking at him sleepily. "Good flight, bronzerider," he said with a smile.

Crista, T'yan now remembered with horrible clarity, rode a dragon called Lyth. Not Blyth. Definitely not Blyth.

What is wrong, rider? Even as he asked, Jugurth could not manage to keep the smugness out of his tone. ***I flew well. I caught Blyth. She thinks that I am very handsome.*** The

bronze projected a mental image of himself curled together in his wallow with the green in question.

Why didn't you tell me Blyth's rider was a man? T'yan wailed. The flashbacks of exactly who had done what to whom were coming thick and fast now, making his stomach knot and his cheeks burn. Mating flights don't count!

Jugurth's tone shifted to surprise. ***You did not ask. You said I should chase Blyth and I did. I was the best and I caught her!*** His bronze had started to detail exactly how clever and strong and handsome he was, and how he was sure he would catch Blyth every time she rose.

Jugurth, will you shut UP! T'yan's headache was back with a vengeance.

"Is something the matter, bronzerider?" A'rori asked blandly. There was a flicker of a smile on his lips.

"Yes. No." Mating flights don't count! Mating flights don't count! Mating flights don't count! "Hangover," he added lamely, but couldn't help but scoot backwards a couple of paces as A'rori sat up.

The greenrider rolled his eyes. "Holderbreds!" he muttered in mock exasperation. He got up and started to retrieve his own clothing from the discarded garments that littered the floor. T'yan became very conscious of his own nakedness and froze in place, wanting to grab his own clothes but not wanting to get an inch closer to the man whom he remembered kissing and licking and... doing other things with.

A'rori paused and cocked his head to one side, a mischievous gleam in his eyes. "You were very good. Natural talent, I'd say. Are you sure you don't want to go again?"

"No!" T'yan barked out the word.

The greenrider laughed. "Just checking. Let me know if you change your mind." He pulled on his shorts and sauntered out the door, sandals dangling from one hand and the rest of his clothes flung over his shoulder.

"Oh sweet Faranth!" T'yan sank to the floor. What had he *done?*



T'yan slunk back to his weycot, avoiding contact with anyone. He halted as he came in sight of the cot, seeing the bronze and green forms entwined in the wallow. *Aaargh!* Did they have to come *here?* He'd been half hoping that his wingmates might take a while to realise what had occurred. Fat chance of that happening with A'rori's dragon snuggling up to his.

Can't you go to Blyth's wallow? T'yan asked plaintively.

My wallow is bigger than Blyth's wallow, said Jugurth. There is more room here. We fit better.

The young bronzerider muttered curses under his breath and retreated inside. He threw himself into harness repairs with gusto, trying to use the activity to block out memories of the flight. But random images kept intruding and making him squirm with embarrassment. Did his mother know? What would she think when she found out? Or his sisters?

Maybe he could ask for a transfer to another Weyr. On another continent. Or get Jugurth to jump *between* to one of the moons and never come back.

After the third time he accidentally stabbed his fingers with the needle, T'yan gave up.



It was hunger that drove him out of the weyrcot in the end. He'd skipped breakfast because of his hangover, and missed lunch due to the flight. Missing supper, his stomach informed him, was not an option. Jugurth agreed. ***You are hungry. You should feed. Food is good.***

Reluctantly T'yan agreed, though he delayed his trip to the Weyrhall until he hoped the worst of the rush would be over. He walked there slowly, convinced that everyone he passed on the way was staring at him as he went by or talking about him behind his back.

When he finally reached the hall, it was not as quiet as he had hoped. A weyrling class was noisily demolishing their dessert, and some harpers were tuning their instruments and calling out for requests. T'yan glanced across at the table where a group of FireStormers sat, and accidentally caught A'rori's eye. The greenrider gave him a grin and a friendly wave. T'yan felt his cheeks turn crimson and hastily turned away to shovel some food onto a plate.

He joined a few members of his own Wing on the far side of the hall from A'rori, mumbling a half-hearted greeting to Taine, E'darin and Eilsa as he plonked down beside them.

E'darin peered in curiosity at the enormous mound threatening to spill from T'yan's plate. "Beef, beef and more beef. Sure you couldn't get any more on that plate?"

T'yan shrugged. "I like beef." He sliced off a hunk and began to chew.

"Oh yes, of course, you missed lunch, didn't you?" said Eilsa brightly. "Good flight?"

T'yan choked on his mouthful and had to be rescued by vigorous pounding on the back from E'darin and a cupful of water from Taine. "Don't want to talk about it," he eventually managed to gasp.

"Oh, you're not going to go all holderbred on us, are you?" said Eilsa in a tone of exasperation.

"Ignore her," said E'darin. Eilsa stuck out her tongue at him, and flounced off to appropriate some dessert.

T'yan looked sideways at E'darin. The greenrider was from the Ninth Pass – a time when female dragonriders had been few and far between. When his Nyth rose it would have been unlikely that there was a female brownrider around to

catch her.

E'darin had obviously followed his train of thought. "Mating flights don't count," he said.

"I know," said T'yan. He did know, but it was just that at this moment in time it felt as if they counted very much. How could it not count that he'd slept with another man?

"Well," said Taine. "If it bothers you, think of it this way – at least you won't get pregnant!"



His huge meal demolished and the conversation having thankfully turned to topics other than mating flights, T'yan was almost feeling relaxed by the time he exited from the Hall. That feeling abruptly evaporated when he heard his name called and turned around to see his mother heading in his direction. He tensed, suddenly more nervous than he had been on his first Threadfall or his first flight *between*. Had she found out? What did she think?

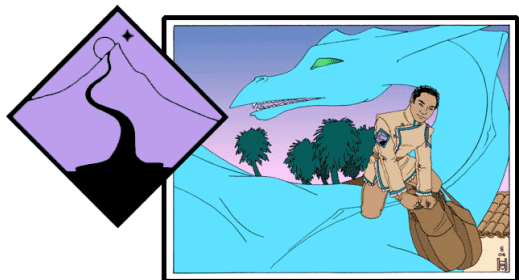
"Ma," he said hoarsely, as she stopped beside him.

Ellya patted him on the shoulder. "You're a good boy, T'yan," she said. "You ride a dragon and you protect us from Thread, and you make me proud. Nothing else matters." She stared into his eyes and gave his shoulder a squeeze. "Nothing else matters." And with that his Ma turned round and headed back inside the Main Hall, where the last few stragglers were still picking at their food.

T'yan stood there for a moment, hoping the ground would open up and swallow him. She knew! His *Ma* knew what he had done. That was... that was... almost worse than having slept with A'rori. In fact, now that he thought about it, it *was* worse.

Perversely, at that thought, T'yan felt some of the tension drain out of him. Maybe it was true. Maybe mating flights didn't count.

It was your mother finding out about them that was the real killer!



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