
Keeping it in the Family

by Smitty

2860.03.04

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2859.13.04

Broad bronze wings cut through the air, catching the afternoon sunlight as strong hearts beat a fierce tattoo of lust and need. An emerald form danced above, ahead, twisting through the air with deceptive ease and taunting her pursuers with her agility. Two blues, a brown, but all were unworthy compared to *his* size, *his* majesty, so much larger, so much more....

The green turned on a wingtip, then folded her pinions and dove, dropping beneath her suitors with a teasing cry. He followed her... but the other males were faster and he growled his frustration as he once again found himself at the rear of the pack, wings pumping hard to make up the distance as the darker of the blues rolled and reached for the green, who evaded his talons easily. Her moment of triumph was brief, however, as the pale-nosed brown took advantage of her distraction, spilling air from his wings to intercept her path. Startled, the green attempted to drop away from him, but it was too late for evasion and she surrendered the flight with a croon as the young male twisted himself around her and they –

Bh'ruk jerked back into himself with a gasp as Kaivuth's lust gave way to boiling frustration. Another flight attempted and another flight lost, the greens of the Weyr evidently less impressed by Kaivuth's size and colour than Kaivuth himself was. Bh'ruk knew that experience would come with time, and that success would come with experience, but Kaivuth, as ever, couldn't see it that way.

Of course, the bronzerider thought to himself, glancing towards the frantic tangle of limbs on the flight cot's bed, it didn't really help that this time he'd been beaten out by his own younger brother.

A hand grasped his arm, fingers biting roughly, and Bh'ruk grinned as he found himself facing H'keo, whose Ulith was no doubt feeling just as sorry for himself as Kaivuth was. Stumbling off to a neighbouring cot with his bluerider wingmate, he closed himself off from his dragon's furious disappointment and set about enthusiastically claiming his consolation prize.



"Don't worry, Bh'ruk. You know, they *do* say that practice makes perfect," Tildy said cheerfully as she set her dinner plate down on the FireStorm table. "Nobody makes journeyman without learning the tricks of the trade."

"Journeyman?" Naralion snorted. "He'll have to make apprentice first...."

Rubi laughed. "And his rider a reputed master of the craft!"

"Now, now, ladies." B'tai leaned forward on his elbows, his expression amused, and wagged an admonishing finger. "It's all right for you greenriders – *you* never have to worry about losing a flight."

"And don't I know it?" Bh'ruk stabbed at a piece of spiced fish – Kaivuth's frequent and unsuccessful pursuits were well on the way to becoming a FireStorm legend. He was doing his best to ignore the wagers that he knew were riding on his bronze's determined efforts. "He's... getting there."

"Slowly," smirked A'rori.

"Blue, brown or bronze, they all have to learn the ropes one flight at a time," B'tai said sympathetically. He paused. "Of course, Sannath *did* at least let you keep it in the family...."

Laughter rang around the table. Bh'ruk groaned at the pointed reminder of K'zuan's success and let his wingmates' amusement roll over him, knowing that the ribbing would only get worse if he protested too loudly. Kaivuth had been a competitive beast from the moment he broke shell, his fierce conviction of his superiority as a bronze too often betrayed by his growing form. Draconic memory might not recall the desperate frustrations that came with his first attempts at flight but his rider did, all too well. With Kaivuth's maturity had come a new challenge and one that he was utterly determined to excel at.

Bh'ruk wasn't certain if his own eager pursuits were reflected in Kaivuth's approach to mating flights or if it was just another aspect of his dragon's innate ambition. The bronze had calmed considerably since joining a Wing and leaving the tight familiarity of his clutch behind, accepting the lead of his elders without complaint. But in this....

In this, it was just like being a weyrling again.

"Give him a few more goes and he'll catch one," N'dren said, reaching for the water jug. "And once he's done that, there'll be no stopping him! You'll be winning golds before you –"

"Thank you, N'dren," B'tai said dryly as the others jeered good-naturedly and threw bits of bread – N'dren's bronze Jeth had recently caught his first queen, in an open flight at Landing Weyr. "But he's right, Bh'ruk – experience *will* pay off in the end. You have to let him have his head every so often and work it out for himself. Just make sure it doesn't get in the way of drills or 'Fall."

"I know." Bh'ruk poked at his food, his mind reaching for his dragon and finding him sleeping soundly. Kaivuth wouldn't remember this latest failure for long, not in any detail, but there was a pervasive sense of frustration that was beginning to colour his moods even when he wasn't focussed on rising.... "I keep telling him that, but *you* try making him listen!"

"Come on, Bh'ruk," Tildy chided. "Stop looking so glum – I've known you too long. Just because a dragon loses doesn't mean that his rider has to...."

Bh'ruk glanced down the table to where H'keo was talking to Y'su. He grinned, feeling his mood lighten as he recalled the latest flight's aftermath, recalled the dozen others

that had preceded it, each shared with a different partner. "True – lost flights *do* have their charms. Don't think Kaivuth quite believes me, though."

"Have patience," B'tai told him. "He'll catch himself a mate soon enough and then some lucky boy or girl will be able to claim to have deflowered you, which is, let's be honest, no small boast..."

More laughter, but this time Bh'ruk let himself join in. The others were right – it was just a matter of time before Kaivuth's pursuits paid off. He just had to be patient.

And hope that his dragon could at least attempt to be the same.



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Green wings flashed enticingly above, slicing swiftly through the sky and daring the pursuing males to follow. A trio of blues fought to out-manoeuvre one another, but *he* had no time for their games, was focussed only on the sleek green form ahead as she carolled her lust with voice and mind. The wind filled his wingsails and he shaped it to his ends, pushing onwards as the smaller, faster beasts squabbled amongst themselves. She was his, she was *his*, and this time there would be no –

Another bronze form curved into view ahead and he hissed, this brassy, Thread-touched rival only half-remembered from the launch, lost in the burning intensity of the flight. The blues abruptly veered apart, as if seeing their larger challengers for the first time, and the green... the green backwinged hard, twisting in midair and screaming her desire as she dove back towards the pack. He adjusted his angle of attack, curving his wings to match her descent... but it was the other bronze that she swung close to, teasing and taunting and making no effort to resist as he snatched her from the air and drew her in with neck and tail and grasping claws –

Bh'ruk blinked and stumbled back as Kaivuth's furious disappointment drove him back into his own senses. He reached out blindly for support and his hand found the firm roundness of a breast, warm and enticing and attached to an older bluerider who swiftly pinned him to the cot's wall. He laughed and returned her attentions eagerly, pushing his bronze's emotions from his mind. Their dragons might be frustrated, but that didn't mean that *they* had to be....



2860.01.17

Two blues, three browns, and he *would* have her this time, would catch her and twine with her and satisfy the demand pounding through his heated blood. She was sweeping close, darting away, teasing each of her suitors in turn, forcing them to try to follow her lead. Every sense was tuned to her, only to her, every thought, every movement calculating and reacting to –

He twisted, snarling, and the blue that had attempted to foul him fell away with a squawk, flight rhythms disrupted in the backwash of bronze wings. He felt a surge of

triumph, the glory of this one small victory almost as thrilling as the one yet to come – a lesson learned, a precious skill acquired – and powered onwards, bugging his prowess. He had the way of it now, and he could see her tactics as she swept in once more, could predict her moves....

As, it seemed, could the solidly built brown who flexed his long pinions just *so* and intercepted the green as she swung in to tease the remaining blue. Startled, she tried to drop away, but the brown matched her movements, tangling her wings with his and wrapping himself tight around her as they tumbled towards –

Bh'ruk gasped and almost tripped over something at his feet. Kicking his way free of Kadja's discarded tunic, he pushed Kaivuth's familiar fury out of his thoughts and reached for the nearest warm and wanting body. Another little bit of experience gained... and it looked as though B'tai was right about experience paying off if the way he and Kadja were enthusiastically consummating the flight were any indication.

Soon, Bh'ruk told his disgruntled bronze as he staggered off in search of privacy with a FireStar brownrider. *It WILL be our turn soon....*



2860.02.21

She danced, exulting in her flight, a flash of green against the heavy grey of rainclouds. He watched her movement, seeking patterns, even as he tracked his rivals – four blues, a brown, a second bronze – and *knew* that she would be his. Hearts pounding fiercely, he powered after her, not allowing himself to be distracted by his smaller, more agile rivals until the brown drew too close and then snapping out broad wings to churn the air into broken vortices that left the other male floundering. He swung away, the brown forgotten as he fell from the race, and *she* angled her wings to swing close, neatly avoiding the other bronze's attempt to ensnare her with reaching talons.

He crooned and followed her, excitement and determination burning through his veins. A blue charged in, trying his luck, but the green backwinged, carolling brightly as the interloper overshot. She twisted, rolling enticingly as she invited him closer... then darted off once more with a flick of her wings. He was ready, though, every sense singing as he matched her move for move, sliding into her slipstream, half-aware of another of the blues shadowing their flight as the green arched her neck and warbled as she –

A flash of blue and the green screamed her surprise and fury as a third, unnoticed blue slammed into her from above, an all or nothing manoeuvre that carried her down, carried her away, carried her –

Bh'ruk came back to himself with Kaivuth's bitter fury pounding through his own thoughts. He clamped down on the surging emotions instantly, turning away from the pair writhing on the furs as he fought for control, pulling himself free from his dragon with an effort.

So close, so *close....*

And *that* gave him the anchor he needed. Kaivuth had flown a good flight, a tactical flight, had impressed his

potential mate. He hadn't won this time... but the pieces were coming together, the skills finally in place after a near-Turn of fruitless pursuits. Next time, or maybe the one after....

Bh'ruk laughed and turned on his heel, grabbing for one of his recent bluerider rivals and getting quite thoroughly grabbed in return, hands and mouths exploring eagerly. Kaivuth's frustration formed a familiar backdrop but it didn't matter, not this time, not given how close they had come to victory.

Nearly there, so very *nearly* there....

Next time, Bh'ruk promised himself as he dragged his partner into a convenient corner. Next time would be *different*.



2860.03.04

She rises! I will catch her!

"Wha'?" Bh'ruk woke with a start and blinked, trying to work out just where he was. It took him a few moments to process the sounds and scents of the darkened cubicle, the identity of the softly-rounded form beside him. *Kaivuth, it's the middle of the night!*

It is morning, came the insistent response, ***and I WILL catch her!***

The bronzerider tugged the furs up over his head, trying to cling to the remnants of sleep... and then snapped awake as the familiar excitement began to pulse through his thoughts. Kaivuth was ready, more than ready, and they'd not flown 'Fall in over a sevenday – if victory was to come any day, this would be the day....

"What's the matter?" mumbled a voice from beside him.

"Green's rising," Bh'ruk breathed. "Kaivuth wants to chase her."

"Another one?" Gwira chuckled softly against his shoulder. "Shouldn't you be getting down to the flight cots?"

Bh'ruk nodded and pushed the covers aside, sliding out of the kitchen worker's bed. The wooden floor was cool beneath his feet as he scabbled after his clothes, feeling Kaivuth's thoughts focus with an intensity that put all previous flights to shame. *Yes*, he told himself as he scrambled out of the waking barracks building, *this one, THIS one is ours. This time....*

The bronze's only response was a wash of agreement near-lost in a blaze of lust. Bh'ruk laughed and pushed through the door into the grey light of dawn, tugging his tunic into place as he turned towards the Feeding Grounds... and stopped dead as a searing metallic rush swamped his senses.

Kaivuth was bleeding. Kaivuth *never* bled for a –

This wasn't a green flight.

No, Kaivuth responded, exultant, hot blood sharpening his resolve and burning fire through his veins. ***Not green.***

Bh'ruk swore and broke into a run. Kaivuth had never risen for a queen before, had always been somewhat intimidated by the Weyr's adult golds. That he was rising for one at all was a sign of his increasing maturity, but both Hyanith and Nioranth were out of bounds and carrying eggs

besides, and neither Amisseth and Savukath were long from the Hatching Grounds. Which left....

Orylath. It *had* to be Orylath.

The road to the Feeding Grounds had never felt so long, the wagon-marked path threatening to trip him as he ran, his dragon's passions twisting through his own thoughts and the borrowed taste of blood heavy on his tongue. Kaivuth was ready, *so* ready, and there were others now – bronze wings carving the air and eager male bodies all around, the sound of shrieking herdbeasts rending the air. It was getting harder to think, harder to separate himself from his dragon... and harder in places that he would feel more comfortable about if he could just *know*.... He turned, looking for Revanne and seeing only other bronzeriders, some ignoring him utterly and others, more familiar, looking at him with a mixture of shock and disgust, and –

She comes!

Bh'ruk felt another part of himself dissolve into Kaivuth as the bronze crouched, his thoughts determined, reverent, *hungry*. A great golden form dropped down amongst her eager, blood-splashed suitors, screaming her contempt, and Bh'ruk couldn't tear his eyes from her rich, darkly-shaded form, so different to the pale, pearly queen he had so hoped and so needed to see....

Kaivuth, you can't chase her!

I can and I shall! I shall chase her and catch her and twine with her and –

NO! Bh'ruk blazed back, but it was so hard to think, so hard to separate his desires from his dragon's.... *You cannot chase her! Not HER!*

A wave of defiance crashed over him in response, Kaivuth too lost in the rut to heed his rider's protests. Bh'ruk wanted to scream, barely able to comprehend how he had ended up in this place, in this situation, hemmed in and jostled by riders from every Weyr on Pern as the queen fought her rider for dominance over the twitching corpse of a wherry. He gasped, focusing, trying and failing to force Kaivuth to understand just *why* they couldn't do this, not this time, not with –

Not with *her* rider.

Not Velcroth's rider.

Not Zherra.

Not with his own little sister.

The queen trumpeted angrily, then bent her head to drink down the wherry's blood, throwing the drained beast aside as she launched after another. Bh'ruk could feel his resolve weakening with each kill, could feel Kaivuth swamping his senses even as he fought against the bond. He couldn't, he mustn't... he had to....

She launched.



This time was his, only his. The others jostled and hissed, straining for the prize, but this one was HIS, the knowledge running through his very being, a promise he could barely remember carrying him on –

– caught in the crush, fighting for, fighting against –

– cutting hard in front of an unknown rival, snarling as another slipped past his reaching wings. She raced on ahead, never looking back as she left the pack in her wake –

no teasing, no taunting, no regard for her suitors as they battled to reach her –

– sweat and sex and... he couldn't, not this one, but he couldn't remember why, couldn't see beyond the blinding promise of gold –

– wind cutting hard over seeking wings, fire burning through corded muscle, and now they started to fall away, fall behind, dropping from the flight. He felt a thrill of triumph as each of his rivals dropped from contention, even as the agonies of exertion raked across his chest and –

– bodies brushing against his own, each touch dancing flame across his nerves and leaving him desperate for –

– clouds obscuring sight and then there, THERE, gleaming and golden and she would be his, she WOULD be his, if he had to claw his way through all the bronze bodies between them –

– a careless foot, a shard of pain from a trodden toe, a sudden, searing moment of clarity. Her head was thrown back, sightless eyes wide as she revelled in her power and she.... She was his sister. That was why he couldn't –

– digging deep, finding reserves of strength as yet untapped to drive cramping wings to ever-greater effort –

– and he couldn't be here, he had to stop this –

Gritting his teeth, Bh'ruk pulled as much of himself back as he could and threw himself on the bronzerider beside him, letting his body lead the way as the other man responded to the sudden physical trigger with savage enthusiasm. The pressure in his mind blazed with fury... then faltered as human instinct battled with draconic and the actuality of one act overrode the potential of the other. Faint with relief, Bh'ruk lost himself anew in the slide of skin on skin, hissing as fingers gripped hard enough to bruise and he was dragged away from the remaining pack and out into daylight....

Somewhere over the forests of Windsong, two bronzes spiralled out of contention and began the slow flight home.



Bh'ruk woke with a start, dreams of flight evaporating as memory crashed in. Shoving furs aside, he turned to see who –

"Welcome back, sleepyhead," Tildy said, smiling as she reached to stroke his arm. "Relax, it's just you and me here."

"Er...." Bh'ruk blinked at his greenrider wingmate. "How...?"

"Caught you and C'nor as you came out; it was pretty obvious what had happened. I grabbed the pair of you, pulled you in here." She chuckled and flopped back on the wide couch – they were in another of the flight cots, the screened windows set high in the wall bright with mid-afternoon sunlight. "You're in luck – C'nor can't remember a thing, just thinks Osmuth dropped out and I got greedy. Which," she said with a wicked grin, "I guess I did...."

"Oh, shard it." Bh'ruk rolled onto his back, staring up at the ceiling. Kaivuth was a solidly-sleeping presence in the back of his mind, exhausted by his exertions, his disappointment a concern for later. "I thought... I thought he was after another green – by the time I realised, it was too

late to call him off. I swear, if I'd *known* who it was, I'd never have –"

"You stopped him," Tildy said firmly. "Took the wind right out of his sails – and Osmuth's too."

"Zherra's my sister! They're going to think I'm some kind of... of...."

"Pervert?" she suggested. "They *already* think that."

"Tildy!"

The greenrider laughed. "Don't worry – half of the kitchens saw you and C'nor emerge mauling each other like a pair of six month weyrings and that's the more interesting tale, given your... history. Besides, it was Kaivuth's first time after a gold, right?"

Bh'ruk nodded.

"So he'd never have caught her, not given the competition. Gold flights aren't the same as green, you know."

"Didn't feel that way." Bh'ruk shuddered. Looking at it now, after the event, he could see that Kaivuth's chances of success had been all but non-existent, but at the time it had felt *far* too possible, his bronze's sheer self-belief overwhelming all logic. "Shells, all this fussing about the dragons' bloodlines and I try to catch my own *sister*!"

"Well," Tildy mused, "Velcroth *is* Savukath's daughter and we all know about *her* preferences...."

"Not funny."

"So ask one of the goldriders to lock him out of Velcroth's risings. They're getting good at that."

"Velcroth." Bh'ruk sat up, resting the heels of his hands against his throbbing temples as the obvious question suddenly occurred to him. "Who flew her?"

"Rekalth, of Ista," Tildy told him. "His rider is O'wyn – he's a wingsecond, quite well thought of by all accounts. Pretty too." She smirked. "Zherra should have no complaints."

"He's cute?"

Tildy's smile spread. "Oh yes."

Bh'ruk looked at her... and snickered despite himself. "Oh, then she'll complain, all right – he's cute and he's going back to Ista!" It was suddenly hard to hold back the laughter, the absurdity of the whole situation threatening to overwhelm him. "Oh, she's going to kill me...."

"FireStorm won't *let* her kill you," Tildy assured him. "The teasing rights are far too good to lose like that."

He groaned. "You're really not helping, you know."

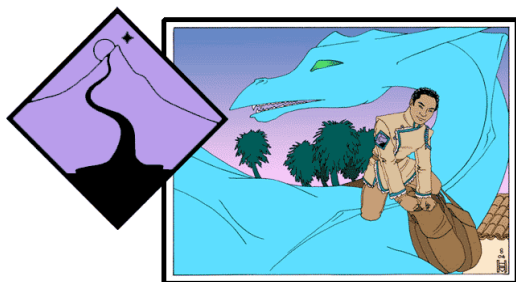
"Yes, I am." Tildy grinned and bounced – in several meanings of the word – from the flight couch. "Come on, Bh'ruk, time to put on some clothes and face the world. It won't be so bad – it's not as if Kaivuth doesn't have a reputation where flights are concerned, after all...."

"We're getting there!" Bh'ruk snapped, a familiar prickle of defensiveness flaring as he groped after his trous. "It's just –"

"Just as well you didn't do it today?" Tildy threw him his tunic. "And yes, you'll get there," she said fondly, shimmying into her skirt. "Eventually. And soon, I hope – after all, you've got *two* younger sibs who've beaten you to the end of a flight now. What are you waiting for? Young Hakel to Impress and graduate so that he can make it three?" She grinned. "Oh, we're going to have *so* much fun with this...."

Bh'ruk sighed and looked towards the door and the eager wingmates that no doubt awaited him. He *really* hoped that Kaivuth caught a green soon....

END



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