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# A Pleasant Interlude

by Nastassja Alfonso;

character portraits by Nastassja Alfonso

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After a day of intense drilling, F'lco could not prevent the dull pain of his afternoon abuse from invading his muscles. No Turns of experience could spare his body's protest over the hours spent on dragon back. For too long, F'lco fought against the violent pulls of Uleth's twists and turns as he and Skysoaring Wing tested the new flight formations that Wingleader B'deras came up with. Even worse, after D'camron and F'lco led the Wing through the brutality of what F'lco realized could be a very efficient Wing formation, B'deras made them repeat the grueling formation twice more until they met his ever-changing standards of perfection.



*Rath says we are going to try again tomorrow*, Uleth informed F'lco with just as much enthusiasm as the bronzerider felt.

All F'lco could muster in return was a highly sarcastic *How wonderful*.

Once on the ground, F'lco felt the awkwardness in his gait as though his legs had been remolded to the wide curve of Uleth's neck. Somewhere in the back of his mind, he could hear the bronze privately laughing at his rider, mocking him affectionately.

F'lco would have remarked back at Uleth's amusement, but he felt too exhausted to do anything other than rest in the wooden chair that stood on his porch. He took a moment to remove his well worn wherhide jacket, and hung it on the back of the chair before he managed to finally take a leisurely seat. Never had that wooden chair felt so luxurious to the bronzerider as he sunk into it and sprawled his long legs out in front of him. Only briefly did he wish he had the energy to do anything else but lounge, such as work on that gather vest he owed C'prio after their latest round of dragon poker. Unfortunately, the strength to tailor that vest eluded F'lco, and instead he found his thoughts drifting to his Wing, how he might lead them, and improve upon B'deras's latest flight experiment.

*'For the love of Faranth.'* After Turns under that wingleader, F'lco realized he was finally reaching his limits with that man. If F'lco was to maintain any semblance of sanity, either Uleth would have to finally catch the ever elusive Ihyanith, or he would have to request a transfer to some other Wing.

*Someone's coming*, Uleth casually informed his rider out of habit as he stretched out in his sandy wallow.

F'lco chuckled, but to be honest he did not give a wherry's arse about who it was, even if it was B'deras himself. He had just about enough with people today, and unless it was...

...an attractive young woman...

She had already passed by his cot when he finally spotted her, giving him only a back view of her, but already a smile pulled at the corners of F'lco's thin mouth as he watched the girl make her way onward to a destination that she seemed unsure of. Of course, it was too soon for F'lco to know just exactly what he thought of her when it was only her backside that he spotted, though he had to admit it was a lovely backside.

A small part of him that still clung to his holdbred morals called him a lecherous dog as he stood back to his feet, but F'lco paid that voice little heed. He felt weyrbred now more than anything else, which only made him more in tune with his needs.

The first thing he noticed was the way her spring green dress clung to her frame, perfectly accenting her hourglass build. She wore a long evergreen vest that hugged her narrow waist, while the light green fabric of her dress flowed out from under the vest and over what F'lco imagined to be a generous, round rump that he felt was too rare amongst the women of Kadanzer.

She appeared lost as she wandered up the path that led deep into Sky Complex. So consumed with whomever or

whatever it was she was searching for, neither she nor the blue firelizard that adorned her shoulder noticed F'lco as he calmly approached.

His muscles felt more at ease now as he made his way, though with the way the muscles of his inner thighs ached, it was difficult for him not to limp. Once within ear reach, he spoke the line he rehearsed in the short time between this moment and the moment when he first spotted her. "You look lost," he began. He offered her a kind smile when she turned to face him for the first time. With her klah brown hair pulled back into a long braid that led down the front of her shoulder, F'lco already found himself scrutinizing her features and measuring the worth of her beauty.

"Oh," she replied, her tone suggesting that she was startled by his approach. "Am I that obvious?"

He stepped closer to her, allowing himself to not only be heard better by her, but also to have a closer look at her appearance. Immediately he noticed her long nose whose strong characteristic nearly matched his own. But past that, he found himself drawn to her widened gray eyes and delicately curved lips. "Somewhat," he answered her casually, still smiling at her. "I saw you from my cot, and thought you might need some assistance."

Bashfully she looked down to her small toes that protruded from her dress before she looked back to him once more. "Well, maybe you can help me. I'm looking for my cousin. Her name is Nidanna, and I'm told she's a wingrider in Fireblaze Wing."

Though he knew Nidanna and thought of her as a friend, he was not thinking of the bluerider so much as he was thinking of girl standing before him. The lining of her face was remarkably elegant and sharp with high, defined cheek bones, and a refined chin, while her pale coloring seemed to glow when the sun hit it just right. Unfortunately, her light skin seemed to be taking on too much of the warm sun, which was apparent in the burn that crept across not only her face, but across the exposed skin of her very inviting breasts. Hopefully, before she could notice that his invading glance had dipped below her chin, he looked up from the very full feature, and met her gray gaze once more as he quietly concluded that she was indeed pretty.

"Nidanna," he uttered the name while his mind rummaged quickly for a response before he gave himself away. She did not seem to notice his intentions as he managed a smooth reply. "Well, if you're looking for Fireblaze, I believe you may have taken a wrong turn." He took the opportunity to slip a hand onto the back of the shoulder that her firelizard did not occupy, and gently turned her towards the direction of the Fire Complex.

The small blue scrutinized his hand, and glanced up at him with whirling yellowish green eyes. He flicked a tongue at F'lco, which was enough for the bronzerider to retract his hand, though F'lco still smiled down at the girl as he continued. "If your cousin were in Fire Complex she would be that way, but as fortune may have it, you're actually in the right area." Rather than guide her physically once more, he motioned towards the southern end of the complex. "Whoever told you that Nidanna was in Fireblaze misinformed you. She is actually in my Wing, Skysoaring,

and her cot is just beyond the tree-line there." He pointed to the cot just past the thick foliage.

"Your Wing?" the girl asked as if she were surprised. It was then that he noticed her glance to his shoulder, and then looked back to him with an apologetic gaze. "I'm sorry. I didn't know you were a wingleader."

F'lco chuckled at her misinterpretation of his shoulder knots. "Wingsecond, actually." He made a glance of his own to her shoulder, noting the simplicity of her knots that marked her as an apprentice. Yet she was new here, and something of her told him that she was more than just an apprentice at Kadanzer. "And you? A candidate? I figured as much." When he spotted her slight embarrassment, he felt himself ease more with her. The blush in her cheeks was giving her away, and F'lco began to realize she might have an attraction for him as well. "I haven't seen you around here before. I'm assuming you're recently Searched. Holdbred, no doubt."

She rewarded his obvious guesses with a bright smile while her eyes sparkled with inner mirth. "Yes."



"Which Hold?" The inner gambler in him decided to make a last minute guess. With her fair skin, he knew she was from somewhere further south where the sun was more hidden during this time of Turn. "Dawn Sisters?"

"Ierne," she replied.

The answer was a pleasant surprise. "Ierne. I wouldn't have guessed."

“So I’ve heard. From my understanding, not many candidates come from there.” It was difficult for F’lco not to catch the tone of disappointment in her voice.

“There are not many, but there are some,” he replied to ease any tensions she might have felt. And then before she could respond he continued on. “But that only makes me more grateful that you accepted the Search.” Before the words were completely out of his mouth, he realized he was trying too hard to flatter her, and that he sounded desperate.

The girl covered her mouth as she tried to hide her girlish giggle, but when she looked up to him, he saw that his compliment had succeeded. Even the firelizard on her shoulder projected her own inner amusement as he looked to F’lco with calm blue faceted eyes. The girl tried to give F’lco a response, but it seemed her bashful nature robbed her of speech, giving F’lco another opportunity to flatter her once again.

“You have a very lovely smile. You shouldn’t try to hide it.” He meant every word as he looked to her, unable to hide his own attraction for her. He did not exactly expect the holdbred girl to join him back in his cot, though he did inwardly hope she would consider it even if he might receive an ear full for it later from his superiors. Yet despite whatever her decision would undoubtedly be, F’lco enjoyed the way she responded to him as they interacted. It was difficult for him not to compliment her, for her response was never short of rewarding to him. “What’s your name?” he finally asked.

Hesitant at first, she gave him a smile through her coy glance and answered him timidly. “Consetta.”

“Consetta,” he tested the name, and liked the way it flowed off his tongue. Rather than extend his hand for a friendly shake, he reached out, taking her hand in his own and kissed the soft skin on the back of her hand like he had seen hold nobles do so many times before at Gathers. “I’m F’lco.”

“Fal-co?” she asked, struggling with the pronunciation of his name.

F’lco chuckled at her attempt. “Falco was my name before I Impressed, actually. But now it’s Fl-co,” he tried once more, this time putting emphasis on the syllables of his name.

She still struggled, but F’lco remained understanding of her situation, and if anything, he found her attempts entertaining.

“I know. Sometimes dragonrider names are difficult,” he responded to her.

“I’m sorry,” she replied, her embarrassment returning not only in her tone, but in her cheek.

“Don’t be. I’m sure you’ll get it someday.” To be honest he did not mind. If her beauty was not enough for him to forgive her, the fact that she seemed to actually care and try was.

For the first time, she did not give him a coy response. Instead, she looked at him intriguingly while she bit down on her lower lip. This surprised him, considering how she had been so bashful with him, and he found himself looking at her hopefully. It seemed he was finally breaking through that shy layer she originally possessed. But rather than make

him the offer he hoped to hear, or tease him in return, she buried any wishful thoughts he might have owned. “My cousin,” she began, almost as though she were reminding not only F’lco, but also herself of the reason why she was in Sky Complex to begin with. “I really should try and find her.”

“Of course,” he answered back. It was then that he finally remembered to give Consetta her hand back, though she seemed just as sad as he was that he had to let go. He motioned for her to follow him. “I’ll show you to her weyr.”

When she followed, it seemed his lame gait did not go unnoticed by her. “Are you all right?” she asked in concern.

“Long day on dragon back,” he happily responded while she walked rather close alongside him. She seemed to purposely slow her pace down to match his own while he continued. “When you ride a bronze dragon for six hours straight, you tend to feel the ache.”

“I can imagine. So you’re a bronzerider too?”

He paused in his step, and looked to her. “Yes.”

“How long have you been a dragonrider?” she asked in a tone of genuine interest. She cocked her head up at him and brushed back the loose tendrils that escaped her braid, which was remarkably a shade of bronze that was brilliant as Uleth’s hide now that they stood in full sunlight.

“Almost nine Turns,” he replied happily to her. He stood there watching her reactions to his subtle advances.

Her eyes were evading his playfully now, glancing here and there before she looked back up to him with a sensual smile and moistened her lips. It was almost as though she were tempting him to act in some way towards her, which only made his excitement rise. But before he could move to do anything, she stepped away and motioned for him to continue leading her to Nidanna. “I’m assuming you have no regrets?”

“Not one,” he honestly answered as he took the opportunity to place a hand on her waist to direct her around the corner. The move of her hip swayed up her back teasingly under his long fingers as she stepped. Did she do that purposely? Or was that how she naturally moved? F’lco found himself deliberating as Nidanna’s cot came into full view now. “That’s her cot,” he pointed out, much to Consetta’s dismay.

There were two dragons resting in the wallow, both of them blue. The first was the teal shade of Nidanna’s own beast, Astenith, while the second was the familiar even ocean blue tone of Lafazane’s dragon, Jesareth.

“A bluerider?” she seemed to ask in astonishment. She shifted, turning to him now, his hand never leaving her waist.

F’lco was surprised by Consetta’s response. “Yes. Did you not know?”

“I, well...” she paused. “No, I didn’t.” Her gray gaze evaded him for a moment before she dared to look back up at him again. “I’ve actually never met my cousin before. I just assumed she rode a green.”

“You’ve never met her?” he asked with some astonishment of his own.

She seemed embarrassed by this fact. “I know, it sounds strange. It’s just that-“ she pressed her lips together, moistening them once more before she continued- “She’s the

only family I have here, and I don't know anyone at Kadanzer. I was just hoping I could find some sort of tie here."

"You found me," he found himself responding before he fully had a chance to think about it. Perhaps if he said "You know me" or "Well, now you've met me" or something along those lines, he would not have felt the heat in his own cheeks, but it was too late now.

The gaffe did not go unnoticed. Consetta looked up to him, surprised by his directness, and took a step away from him.

'Shards' F'lco cursed to himself. Not wanting to scare her away, F'lco did his best to recover. "So how is it that you never saw your cousin until now?" he asked, attempting to just move on so that they could forget his recent remark.

"I just, well, she left on Search before I ever had the chance to meet her," she began, but then she seemed to ramble on now nervously. "My family moved to Porlian Seahold shortly after she left on Search, and I had never been to Porlian Seahold before that. And, well, under the circumstances that I left my hold, I just hoped to find some sort of connection that--"

F'lco stopped her. "It's all right. You don't need to explain anymore," he answered her simply. He glanced back to the cot before he looked back to her. He was beginning to realize now that her anxiety was not so much because of him as it was about Nidanna, but he had no doubt his advance did not help. In an attempt to offer an indirect apology for his careless remark from earlier F'lco made an offer to help her. "If you want I can introduce you to Nidanna."

As if she caught his apology, she smiled back to him, before she shook her head and declined. "Thank you very much for the offer, but I think I need to do this by myself." She paused for a moment, looking to him now as if attempting to discover his motives, which he felt were very obvious. "I really appreciate your help though."

F'lco could respect that, and he was only happy that he saw that glimmer of warmth return to her eyes again. "You're welcome." He had to admire her dedication. If it were him, he would have left his cousin alone to avoid the awkwardness.

Silence. It was not uncomfortable, though F'lco felt the need to fill the quiet gap with something, but Consetta beat him to it.

"Thank you for your help. I really appreciate it."

He grinned back at her, as he noticed how she was nervously only repeating herself. "It was my pleasure," he

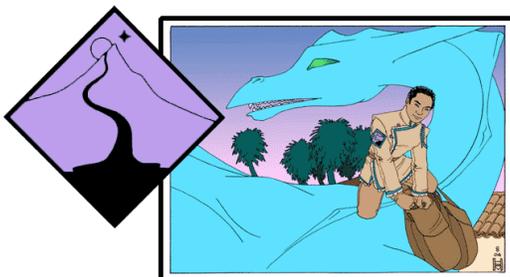
replied. "Good luck with your cousin, Consetta."

She brushed a loose strand of hair back, and nodded. "Thanks again, F'lco."

He found himself smiling at the sound of his name. "You're welcome, Consetta," he replied back, and then before he could thoroughly think of his next words, he found them spill from his mouth once again. "Don't be shy about coming to visit me."

At first he cringed at his choice of words, but she seemed to accept them this time. "I won't," she grinned back, and then her smile softened.

Rather than speak and shatter the moment between them, furthering his own embarrassment, F'lco decided to leave it at that. Turning around, and making his way back slowly to his weyr, F'lco found that he could not get rid of the grin that dominated him, and even as thoughts of B'deras began to trickle once more into his mind, he could not help but smile when he thought of Consetta. And as he found his thoughts dwelling on her, he wondered just what might come of their next meeting together.



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