
Something for Me

by Juniper

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2860.04.16

Once the brief examination was over, Ismarra returned to sit in the wooden chair, looking up at the healer. “So when can I start flying again?”

Almost two sevendays had passed since she'd lost the baby. Now that the first shock and grief were over and now that she was recovering from the infection and fever that had followed the miscarriage, she was finding that having little to do could be a heavy burden. She was at that awkward stage of being too unwell to do very much, and not ill enough to want to do nothing. Her health was normally robust, and this was a new and unpleasant experience – and it gave her far too much time alone with her thoughts and memories. The healer had only just agreed that she could be allowed to *help* bathe Hadriath if she felt well enough. Thank the Egg for kind wingmates in the Queens' Wing! As for all the things she had to decide – no, the one thing, the inevitable decision about her return to StrongWind – it was simply too much to think about.

Journeywoman Carran gave her an appraising look. “No further than the beach,” she conceded. “I don't want you out of the Weyr until I know you're not going to pass out. After that, if you're managing all right with looking after Hadriath, try some short walks, and build up the distance. And you may as well get used to the idea that you won't be going back to StrongWind for a few more sevendays, too. You need to build your strength up before you'll be ready for that sort of regime.”

“Walks!” She was used to long runs and strenuous exercises.

“Short walks,” Carran confirmed. “I don't like how long it's taken for the bleeding to stop.”

“I can't believe it's taken me so long to get better. I thought, if you lost a baby early on, it was all over in a few hours.”

“Which shows why *I'm* the healer in this room,” Carran said dryly. “Besides, it wasn't that early. Keep on with the willowsalic for the headaches and and come back in two days.”

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Choosing the cool of the early morning for her first “short” walk along the seashore was definitely a good idea, Ismarra thought. The West Beach was in shade at this time of day, but she was starting to feel hot and flushed again despite a cool breeze. She'd gone perhaps half a mile along the sands in total, starting at the docks and heading for the river, with Hadriath accompanying her in a series of hops and glides that allowed him to stay close. They'd stopped once for her to rest and Hadriath to take a quick dip in the sea, but that had meant removing the dragon's straps, so the stop hadn't in fact been that restful. Now that they were moving again, he was already telling her that she didn't feel well.

I'd noticed! This is stupid: I'm going to have to turn back. I dread to think what Carran's going to say.

It is not stupid to stop when walking makes you feel bad.

The blue landed a few yards away and lay down. Ismarra went over and folded herself onto the sand in front of him, then leaned back gratefully against his solid chest and closed her eyes, ignoring the dampness of his warm hide.

After what seemed like a couple of minutes, she opened her eyes again. Her head had stopped spinning, but she felt quite warm. The light was much brighter. She hadn't dozed off, had she? But she must have done: the sun was much higher in the sky, over the cliff top and beating down on most of the beach, though clouds were gathering to the northwest. She'd missed breakfast, then.

You slept, Hadriath confirmed. ***It was good for you.***

As she levered herself to a more upright position, she discovered that she'd been asleep long enough to become stiff. There were more people on the beach, including a group of weyrings apparently out for some exercise. They were running back towards the docks and the Weyrling Complex: they must have passed her on their way out, unless they'd got onto to the beach at its southern end. She got to her feet, brushed sand from her trousers – and immediately felt dizzy again.

Hadriath shifted uneasily as she steadied herself with a hand on his chest. ***I am telling Takarth to tell his rider that you are not well.*** He sounded alarmed.

No, don't! I've just got up too quickly. Takarth? She hadn't seen G'nán for months, or not to speak to.

He comes.

Ismarra shook her head, but sat down again and lowered her head between her knees. She was right, in fact: the dizziness subsided almost immediately, but by the time she looked up again, G'nán was walking towards her, and the weyrings were running back on their own.

“It's all right,” she said. “Hadriath shouldn't have bothered Takarth.”

“He said you weren't well,” G'nán replied, hunkering down next to her. “It's no trouble.”

“He fusses too much. I've had a bit of a fever, that's all, but I'm over it now – I just felt a little queer when I stood up.”



"I'll walk back with you," the weyrlingassistant said. "Or will you fly?" He glanced up at Hadriath, and frowned. "No straps."

"I'd better walk," she concluded, though the thought of flying straight home was tempting. "I don't think I'm going to feel faint again, but it wouldn't do to fall off. Anyway, his straps are back along the beach, where he went in the sea. I need to pick them up."

"Such a nice man," Ismarra reflected, as they headed back together. She'd always thought him the best of the wingleaders that StrongWind had had, but there was no chance of him flying again. Poor Takarth: the bronze had lost a wing after being injured in 'Fall, so now G'nan's experience was being put to use on the weyrlingstaff.

"So, how have you been?" G'nan asked after a minute of slow walking. "It seems a long while since StrongWind. Since I was in the Wing, I mean. You're still there, aren't you?"

"Not at the moment," she replied, and then of course she had to explain why: the miscarriage, the illness that was delaying her return to duty. "So," she finished, trying to lighten the tone. "I'm getting a well-earned break from Z'hon and all his works." Even as she spoke the words, she regretted them: she didn't know him that well nowadays. Would he take that sort of talk badly?

"I'm sorry," G'nan said. A few paces later, he added, "It sounds as if you're not so happy in StrongWind. I know it's different from how it was."

"You could say that," she replied dryly, wondering how much he'd heard about the Wing's conflicts. Probably quite a lot: there weren't many secrets in a Weyr, and the memorial when she and Br'mig and others had stood up to Z'hon had been very public – the whole Weyr would know about that. "I preferred it how it used to be." Her feet were sinking into soft dry sand that compacted under her weight with an almost silent crunching, more felt than heard. Having someone outside the situation to listen tempted her into a further confidence. "I need to decide. Maybe I should ask for a transfer to a different Wing, rather than to go back to StrongWind. I don't know. I'm not a quitter, and there are good people still there. People who are friends, as well as wingmates. I don't want to let them down." She sidestepped a patch of half-dried seaweed. "I've got a sevenday or two to make up my mind, I suppose, before I have to go back. Journeyman Carran isn't going to let me out of her clutches any sooner than that."

"Whatever you decide," G'nan said, after a few more yards in silence, "maybe what's best for you is also best for the Wing, in the long run? If you don't fit in any more, wouldn't it be better to be somewhere else? All right, you know how to put aside everything else when you're flying; but you're a good rider, you'd be an asset to any Wing. And someone else coming into StrongWind wouldn't have all the history behind them."

"You know how it's been, then."

"Some of it. I didn't feel much like keeping in touch after Takarth was grounded, but I see Q'wen and Br'mig sometimes."

She hadn't known that, and just nodded. G'nan was frowning slightly.

"It sounds to me as if you've stuck with StrongWind through a lot. There are other places you could be useful. Maybe it's time to do something for you?"

"I'll do my duty," she said mechanically, but it was easy to recover the habit of listening to this man, even if his advice was surprising. She added, "Thank you. I'll think about it."

"You do that. Those are his straps? I'll give you a hand with them, if he'll let me, then maybe you could fly back. I should get back to the weyrlings."

By the time she returned to her weycot, she was feeling a spark of hope.



'Something for me?' Sitting in her armchair that evening, with her feet propped on a stool, Ismarra thought over the morning's conversation. 'I'm not here to do something for me. What would "something for me" be, even? I'm a dragonrider. Hadriath and I have to fly Thread for the rest of our lives, or the rest of the Pass if we're lucky – or until we get too old.' The memory of Takarth prompted her to qualify that. 'Or unless something dreadful happens to stop us. Anything I want for me has to be separate from that.'

Like a family, perhaps. The baby... The grief over the lost child was still there, for all that she'd not been sure that she wanted to have it for most of her short pregnancy. 'It's only been a couple of sevendays. Give it time.' But the fact remained: out of that experience, she'd changed. She wanted a child.

She thought about that for a while. One thing was certain: making babies took two, and apart from the occasional flight, she'd slept alone for the last couple of Turns. Thinking about that, her eyes filled with tears for no reason, and she told herself that it was just because her emotions were still messed up after the miscarriage. She had Hadriath; she had friends; she didn't need anyone else. If she wanted sex, if she wanted a father for another child, even, there were plenty of people around who'd enjoy a casual encounter.

But it would be so nice to have someone to care about. Guiltily, she thought of the dear blue dragon who lay curled in sleep in the wallow outside. He was part of her, joined so deep that the thought of life without him was unbearable – but she wanted more.

'Well, that will happen if it happens,' she told herself firmly. 'What I need to decide is what to do about the Wing.'

She didn't have an answer to that yet, but somehow, talking to G'nan had brought things into focus. She was concerned about leaving her friends in StrongWind – but really, she already had left them, and nobody seemed to be suffering.

She smiled as she remembered something her first wingleader had said to an arrogant young bronzerider. "If

you think you're indispensable, put your hand in a bucket of water. Then take it out, and see how much gap you'll leave." That was an exaggeration, but StrongWind must have adjusted to her absence by now.

So much for any thoughts of being needed. She would make the decision on the basis of what would let her be the best rider she could, and do her duty best to Weyr and dragon. Hadriath would be more settled if she were more settled.

Mentally reviewing her performance over the last few months, she wasn't satisfied. She hadn't been flying badly, but she sensed that her edge had gone. In the fight against Thread, where any moment of weakness could get somebody killed, that had to be decisive. G'nan was right: this was something in which looking after herself was actually the right course of action. She hoped Nivwilya and Br'mig would understand, and – she frowned. When it came down to it, Nivwilya and Br'mig were the only ones whose opinions she still really cared about. That ought to have told her something.

Well, that was that, then. All that remained was to go and see Lybelle, as her current wingleader, and request the transfer. But that could wait for a few days, until she knew when the healers would let her go back to duty. By then, too, she'd feel more able to face the chore of moving her things to another weycot: at present, she was still fighting weariness after any exercise. She hadn't even managed a walk along the beach! She had time to think about which Wing she wanted to ask for - not that she would have a free choice. But now she'd made the decision, almost anything seemed better than going back to StrongWind.

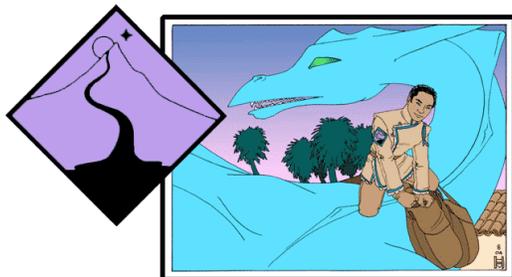
She should thank G'nan, too.



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It was early evening, almost time to go across to the Weyrhall. The rain was sheeting down, and Ismarra decided that her current location was a distinct advantage of being in the Queens' Wing. Her cottage in StrongWind's area had been twice as far from dinner. She was well enough to cover that short distance with no trouble now, and getting stronger every day. In fact, it felt as if her real recovery had started the moment she'd decided to ask not to return to StrongWind, though that was surely just a fanciful thought. Well, she wasn't going to stay any drier by waiting.

Yoseth asks me if we are here. I have told him that we are.



Yoseth? Is his rider coming here?

They land.

Why would D'zan want to see her? She stood up and slipped on her sandals, then hastily straightened her collar. When she heard movement on the porch, she went to open the door. Blocking the dull evening light was the burly figure of the Weyrlingmaster, his blond hair plastered to his head by the rain.

"Weyrlingmaster, welcome! Will you come in?" She stepped back to allow him entry.

D'zan shook his head. "I'll only be a minute; don't want to give you a floor to clean, when you're ill. It's dry enough here."

"Thank you." She motioned him towards the bench on the covered patio. "We could sit here, if you like. It's sheltered: someone made a good job of extending this cot." He lowered himself onto one end of it, extending his wooden leg straight in front of him. She stepped out of the cot and settled on the other end.

D'zan wasn't one for small-talk, it seemed. "I hear you're maybe looking for a change of Wing."

"That could be so," she agreed cautiously. "The healers haven't released me for duty yet, and I need to discuss it with Weyrwoman Lybelle." She hadn't even told anyone of her decision, in fact. Had G'nan mentioned their conversation to the Weyrlingmaster?

"That's proper," D'zan said abruptly. "And I've got her permission to talk to you. I've been hearing good things about you, so I thought I'd come and see for myself. You've got to be tough, to have stayed in StrongWind all those Turns. Now, do you think you could take on a *real* challenge?"

The Weyrling Wing? Did he want her as a weyrlingassistant, preparing new riders for the challenge of fighting Thread? It seemed a positive, constructive thing to do, and it would be the kind of change that she craved. Of course, there would still be losses to face... She wouldn't want to do it forever, she told herself, but it might be just the thing for now.

"Can you tell me more?" she asked.

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