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# Flying Through the Water

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## ***Why do you encourage that.....thing?***

Z'haq repressed a smile at the obvious jealous tone in Eorawth's mind-speech. It struck him as amusing that his mighty, bronze dragon could take such exception to his showing a little affection to a playful pup.

*Really Eorawth, he's only a frisky puppy. Nothing to get so bent out of shape over.*

The dragon didn't deign to reply as Z'haq continued to wrestle and play with Spar, the faithful pet and companion to Harbormaster Yosmen. To call Spar a "frisky puppy" was a bit of an understatement. The dog was only slightly smaller than some of the Weyr's draft animals, but still loved to play and cuddle. In attitude he was a puppy, in sheer bulk he was somewhat closer to a stout mule. Eorawth observed his lifemate at play with the animal for a bit but eventually couldn't suppress himself any longer.

***You said we would swim***, he finally complained.

Sensing that he had about reached the end of his dragon's patience, Z'haq stepped away from the enormous hound who began then to whine in the most pitiful manner.

*You're right. I'm sorry. Let me talk to Yosmen and we can be on our way.*

This seemed to mollify the dragon a bit as he lay down upon the dock to await the end of Z'haq's errand. As he did so though, they were both distracted by a commotion above the Weyr. From their vantage point they could see a graceful green form hurtling skyward. As she did so, they both felt the familiar emotional effects that emanated from a green dragon in her mating frenzy.

***Sannath rises...*** Eorawth said in a dreamy tone. It had been all Z'haq could do to convince his dragon to stay out of this particular mating flight.

*I know....and I appreciate your leaving her to other suitors. We need to save your strength for Nioranth.*

***But she won't rise for days and days yet. I would have plenty of strength for her.***

Eorawth's tone was now almost petulant but Z'haq was insistent.

*I know....but I don't want to take any chances.*

Things had been so unsettled between he and Dunia since her disappearance and then return. So much had happened for her while it had only been a few days for him. He could still remember how he felt when he thought she was dead. Now he felt like he was dead to her and he wasn't sure what to do about it. Maybe, if Eorawth could fly Nioranth again it would give him the chance to make his

peace with Dunia. Maybe in the heat of the mating flight, they could get past the uncomfortable feeling that had come between them and make a new start. At least, that was what he hoped for.

With a sigh he eventually turned his eyes away from the graceful figure that the green was cutting through the sky. In her wake several male dragons tried in vain to catch her but thus far she was evading them. Green flights, though, didn't tend to last long and he realized Eorawth was already cranky not to be participating. Best to finish his business here and then find a way to distract his dragon or there would be no living with him.

Stepping away from Eorawth and past Spar, he entered Yosmen's office. The harbormaster sat at a desk inside with diagrams of ships laid out before him. He had a somewhat bemused expression as he looked up and saw Z'haq enter.

"You again, bronzerider Z'haq? I would have thought you had better things to do than visit the harbor. Or did you come to see me while your mount gives chase to that green squawking out there?"

Z'haq ignored the playful jibe. He and Yosmen got along fairly well so he knew when the older man was being sarcastic and when he had actually out-lived his welcome and was getting on the other man's nerves. Z'haq visited the harbor fairly regularly due to his especial love of the sea and his willingness to do errands for Yosmen. The harbormaster was getting along in Turns, though, and might be retiring soon. He didn't have as much patience as he once did for constant interruptions.

"No, he's sulking because I asked him not to give chase. I was hoping maybe you had a moment to discuss a project I was thinking about?"

Yosmen sighed to himself and laid aside his charts. He then waited patiently for Z'haq to continue.

"Well, I was just thinking... I would really like to find a way to get a ship of my own to sail. I miss being on the water sometimes."

Z'haq's expression took on a dreamy, far away quality as he reminisced about his time sailing as a youth.

"Maybe I could even ...."

His voice trailed off as he saw the expression on Yosmen's face. Even as he was saying it he realized how unlikely this dream was. If he had taken the time to think it through he would have remembered how hard ships were to acquire. While trying to think of a way to keep Eorawth busy they had come to the shore, which Z'haq did anyway when he was agitated or uncertain. From there the offer to take his dragon swimming had evolved into the sudden urge to bring his dream to the attention of his friend the harbormaster.

"Z'haq, I wish I could help you with that... but do you have any idea how much a ship would cost? And how much time it would take to maintain? You wouldn't have the time to tend both a ship and your dragon."

Upon hearing the words, Z'haq at first wanted to object, but after a moment or two for it to sink in he had no recourse but to admit that Yosmen was correct. Though he didn't really know how much it would be to buy or build a ship, he did remember how hard they were to replace should one be

lost. That didn't even factor in the time and energy needed to man and maintain such a vessel. Both the funds and the time necessary would be well beyond his means.

"I guess you are right, Yosmen. It just seemed worth a try."

Yosmen's expression seemed to soften a bit as he listened to Z'haq. After a few moments thought he finally spoke.

"It was worth a try, but you have to ask yourself something, Z'haq. What exactly do you want a ship for? Just to take out for the occasional afternoon cruises? I could lend you a small sailboat for that."

Z'haq smiled a bit at the offer. It was true that he would love to spend the occasional afternoon just sailing peacefully.

"Well, there is that, and yes, I'd dearly love to borrow one occasionally if I might. I've always had a dream since I was a young lad serving on my father's ship. Growing up I always wanted to have my own ship. You're right though, I could never tend it properly and still be a dragonrider. It's been awhile since I've done it, but there is an awful lot of work that goes into tending a vessel of any size."

Yosmen nodded, but a question remained.

"There's something else to it, isn't there? You could have come by any time to borrow a small sailboat. You've something else in mind as well?"

Z'haq blushed a bit and nodded. In a way, Yosmen reminded him of his own father. They were similar in that both were salty old sea dogs who could see right through whatever mischief he was considering.

"Well, yes, just a little thing. I was hoping one day to take my Wing out on the water for a party just like the ones we had in my old seahold."

Yosmen winced a bit and Z'haq realized that the harbor master knew full well FireStorm's reputation for partying. It appeared that he was having some serious misgivings. On the other hand, for whatever reason, he seemed willing to help. Maybe they could reach an accommodation. Z'haq held his breath in anticipation as the older man began to speak.

"Look, we have some ships that are assigned to the harbor here. You've been good to do us favors so maybe I can do one for you. The occasional joy ride is one thing....a FireStorm party is another. Do you think you can take a barge out and bring it back without your rowdy friends destroying the ship or the crew? I know full well that you'd be too far into your cups before it was all said and done to be of much help in manning the ship."

"Absolutely," Z'haq agreed. "I'd treat her as if she was my own!"

Yosmen sighed heavily as Z'haq held his breath in anticipation. The older man seemed to be struggling with the well earned reputation that the dragon riders had. Eventually though, he relented.

"Well, I could let you use one of the older barges, if you like, for the party. You would want to have it cleaned out before you used it and I'd want you to make sure none of those dragons were landing on it. It should be able to hold a

few dozen people with ease. One clumsy dragon though could capsize the thing."

Z'haq readily agreed to these terms. He would have to wait a couple of sevendays till the barge was available from its normal duties. Once it was, though, he was sure that he could get it properly cleaned out and give FireStorm a party experience that they wouldn't soon forget. Naturally he had to agree to do a few more favors for the old harbor master but with the basic agreement in place, Z'haq took his leave of Yosmen's office to give the other man some peace.

Outside on the dock he found Eorawth just where he had left him; lazing on the dock and glaring menacingly at Spar who was trying real hard to avoid the dragon's gaze by hiding inside his doghouse. The dragon also seemed to be taking perverse delight in blocking all work on the docks as none of the workers could get around his great bulk. Seeing Z'haq's return, Eorawth's expression became more relaxed as he turned to look at his rider.

***That went well***, Eorawth said with only a hint of sarcasm. ***I still don't understand why you want to sail though. Flying is so much better.***

Z'haq chuckled at the dragon's comment.

*Aye, flying is better, but sometimes I miss being on the sea. It is sort of like....flying in the water I guess. Not as good as flying with you but still enjoyable.*

As he said this he could feel the contentment and pleasure his words elicited from the dragon. From the first moment of Impression they were bonded in a powerful way he never could have imagined possible. Eorawth was the best thing that had ever happened to him.

Suddenly, they were distracted again and their gaze turned skyward. A young brown had caught Sannath. They watched for a few moments as the two twined in the sky to complete the mating flight. Now, in the place of the contentment that was so recently in Eorawth's mind there was frustration and confusion.

***I could have caught her***, he said simply.

*I know, and I'm sorry. It's very important though that you rest up and catch Nioranth. Is there any way I can make it up to you?*

Much to Z'haq's surprise, Eorawth lifted one of his fore paws and poked him in the chest. Not hard enough to hurt him, but enough to make him tumble backwards off the dock and into the deep water beneath it. Recovering from his surprise, Z'haq regained his composure and began to tread water. He could already hear the mental laughter in his mind coming from his dragon mount.

*What did you do that for?* he sputtered as he swam out a few feet from under the dock to get a better look at his tormentor.

***You said we could swim. Now we will fly through the water, as you say it.***

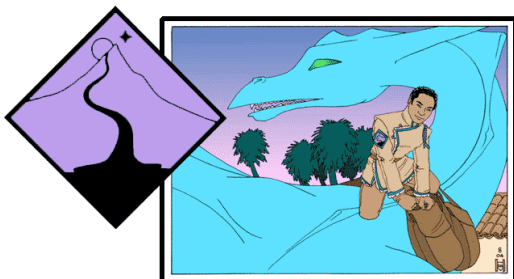
With that, the great bronze dragon raised himself from the dock and took to the sky like a dart. A few yards out, over the deeper water, he executed a graceful dive, submerging himself beneath the waves. If he was aware of the panic this caused in the nearby dockhands as the wave he created caused the ships moored close at hand to list and sway, he didn't show it. Z'haq, seeing that he might likewise

be washed away or slammed into one of the ships, swam for all he was worth and rode out the wave as best he could. Seconds later, Eorawth's head broke the surface as the dragon tread water and paddled closer to him.

*That's better. You don't smell like dog slobber anymore.*

Despite himself Z'haq couldn't help but laugh. Eorawth took this as a sign that play time had begun and amused himself by swimming around the area near to the dock. Soon though, at Z'haq's request, he swam out a short distance away before the dockhands could become too alarmed by their sport. The last thing he wanted now was for Yosmen to become convinced that they were a menace and rescind his offer of the use of a barge.

They spent the rest of the afternoon playing in the water till it was time to eat and then rest for the night. Nioranth would rise in a few days to be sure, but before that happened there would still be thread to fight and the small matter of a party to plan for. All seemed right in Z'haq and Eorawth's world and they were going to enjoy it as much as they possibly could.



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