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# Catching Bronze

by Smitty

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Enasha sat on a log outside the flight cots, unconsciously kicking at the bark beneath her with the heel of one shoe as she stared at the wooden door. Nioranth's flight had attracted most of the Weyr's bronze population, curiosity driving their riders to Dunia's side almost as much as their dragons' lust, but most of those who had entered the cot had now left as the pursuing pack thinned. As Enasha watched, the door opened and she sat up, ready to reclaim her weyrmate... but it was young S'thal who emerged, to be led away by one of the laundry girls. Biting at her lip, Enasha settled herself once more and resumed her wait.

J'hanos hadn't said a word as Vhauth's call took him from their bed that morning; he had merely slipped into loose clothing and vanished into the dawn while his weyrmate tried to soothe their fractious child. Enasha had followed as soon as she had Jeshan settled with the kitchen aunties, telling herself that J'hanos would be back soon enough, hungrily demanding her attentions just as soon as Nioranth rejected Vhauth. Gold flights always followed the same routine, always ended with J'hanos back where he belonged. Always.

But today the flight seemed to be taking too long, and there had been too many of the disappointed emerging without J'hanos being amongst their number. Enasha didn't know how many bronzes remained in the flight but she knew that it was far too few for her tastes. If Vhauth were to win the flight, if that goldriding bitch were to lay hands on her weyrmate...

Enasha took a deep breath and willed J'hanos to stumble from the cot, aroused and eager and desperate for her touch. Around her, the ranks of other women -- and one or two men -- awaiting their weyrmates or willing strangers had thinned to almost nothing and the sun had risen above the fellis trees that surrounded the flight cots. It would not be long now before the flight ended, not long before bronze twined with gold. Enasha dug her fingernails into the bark of her seat and tried not to think about Vhauth wrapping himself around Nioranth, about his rider doing the same with Dunia. J'hanos was *hers* and, queen or no queen, she was not prepared to let another woman have him. There had been green flights before, of course, but greenriders were male and so, to Enasha's mind, no real competition.

A goldrider, however... that was another matter entirely. And the fact that Dunia was pregnant by another man did not make her any less of a threat, for Corsan was no more a rider than Enasha herself. It was *expected* that golds and bronzes would be mates and that their riders would follow suit, it was the substance of more romantic ballads than Enasha cared to think about. If Vhauth won a queen's favour, then there could be no guarantee that J'hanos would find his way home....

And Enasha could just imagine the smug look on Vesoz's face if that nightmare ever came to pass.

Something *shifted*, the faint tension that had hung in the air since Nioranth's launch suddenly clearing. Enasha caught the sound of a distant bugle from the direction of the Weyrling Barracks as she stood, her heart in her mouth, knowing beyond any doubt that the queen had been caught. Long seconds passed before the flight cot door swung open -

Enasha almost fainted with relief as J'hanos staggered out, dishevelled and panting and blinking in the bright mid-morning sunlight. Moving quickly to his side, Enasha slid an arm around his waist, raising her other hand to stroke his scarred cheek. "It's all right, it's all right, I'm here."

The bronzerider pulled her close, pressing himself tightly against her until she could feel his arousal trapped hard between them. "Suloth," he muttered roughly into her hair. "So, so close... almost had her, *almost*...."

T'del had won, then, but it had been close-fought at the end. Enasha found her relief tempered by the knowledge that the Wingleader's bronze Suloth was getting no younger while Vhauth had yet to reach his prime. Each rising gave the younger bronze more experience and more encouragement and it could only be a matter of time before J'hanos simply didn't emerge at the end of a flight. Looking up into her weyrmate's lust-darkened eyes, Enasha knew that for all that he would be spending his passion with her, *she* was not the one that he wanted to be with in that moment.

And that, as always, filled her with a fear and a fury that she could barely think beyond.

"Almost *had* her," J'hanos repeated, grinding himself against her as his touch turned possessive, insistent. He dropped his head, nipping at her throat, and Enasha pushed her angry thoughts aside as she tugged him into one of the neighbouring flight cots and proceeded to quite thoroughly distract him from his loss....

Afterwards, Enasha watched her weyrmate sleep, idly brushing back the lock of black hair that fell across his forehead as she forced herself to think logically about her situation. J'hanos was a bronzerider -- she had known that all along -- and as much as she hated to acknowledge it, queen flights were a part of what he was. If Vhauth were to sire a clutch, it would only increase J'hanos's standing in the Weyr... but his standing was meaningless to her if she could not hold his attention. To keep him, she would need to offer something that might draw him back to her, whatever the result of Vhauth's pursuits.

And *tha*\*, she reasoned, given J'hanos's background, meant the promise of another son of the Blood.

She would need to finish weaning Jeshan quickly, but the boy was a Turn of age and more than ready. With luck her cycles would return swiftly and with more she might never see a bleed -- even without the aid of a rising gold, there was little wrong with J'hanos's appetites. The bronzerider had been gratifyingly attentive when she had been carrying Jeshan and, in a Turn, she might be able to present him with a second son, a symbol of continuity that appealed to her holder soul.

Enasha smiled to herself and stroked gentle fingers across her lover's face, making him shift and mutter in his sleep. Yes, another pregnancy, another child, might just serve to distract J'hanos from the gleam of hard-won gold and act as a tether of blood to bind him to her. And if it didn't....

She pushed that thought from her mind, knowing too well that if it didn't, she had nothing more to give.



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