

---

# Helpless

by Smitty

Ninth Pass: 2432.12.27

Printed in FTA #22 (2005)

This story is printed by Kadanzer Weyr ([www.kadanzer.org](http://www.kadanzer.org)), a fan club approved by Anne McCaffrey in 1995. Kadanzer Weyr is a non-profit group -- all materials pertaining to Ms. McCaffrey's works displayed on this website may only be accessed for personal, non-commercial purposes. Please do not reproduce without permission. All references to worlds and characters based on Anne McCaffrey's fiction are copyright© Anne McCaffrey 1967, 2005, all rights reserved, and used by permission of the author. The Dragonriders of Pern® is registered U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, by Anne McCaffrey, used here with permission. Use or reproduction without a license is strictly prohibited.

---

"It's a girl!"

An infant's wail cut through Enasha's exhaustion, ending the brief, blissful moment in which she had felt nothing but a glorious *absence* of the pressure that had seemed determined to tear her in two. Opening her eyes, she frowned slightly as she saw Ginera, the midwife, passing a squirming, screaming bundle to a delighted J'hanos.

'Was supposed to be a boy,' she wanted to say, 'was meant to be another son, not a girl,' but it all seemed like too much effort and her weyrmate did not look displeased with his new daughter. Another contraction rippled through her body and Enasha gasped as she passed the afterbirth into the waiting hands of one of Ginera's assistants. "Is it over?" she whispered.

A gentle hand pushed her dark hair back from her sweat-soaked forehead and she looked up to see J'hanos sitting by the birthing bed, his brown eyes reflecting a love and concern that Enasha would have counted for a victory had she been in any state to appreciate it. "She's beautiful," he said softly, "just like her mother."

"Don't feel too beautiful right now," Enasha murmured in response, but she could feel herself smile as she looked at the wailing baby in his arms, her face blotched and squashed and red from her birth. "She's big...."

"She certainly is," Ginera said, crouching by the new mother's side. "It was a very long labour and we had to cut you to get her out. You've lost quite a bit of blood. You probably can't feel it right now, but once the birth-rush has worn off, you will." She stroked Enasha's hand, drawing her attention back as her gaze drifted towards the baby. "Wenras is going to sew you up now -- you shouldn't be able to feel anything through the numbweed."

"Can't you give her fellis?"

Enasha frowned a little, her attention caught between her weyrmate's voice and the cool touch of something foreign between her legs, taking away a pain that she had barely registered as existing. She hadn't felt this weak after Jeshan's birth, she was certain she hadn't....

"Fellis can affect the milk." Ginera's reply seemed to come from a great distance. "Better if she can feed the child herself than rely on a milkmother, especially in the first sevenday or two."

"She's hungry," Enasha said suddenly, reaching for her child. J'hanos handed the squalling bundle over promptly, helping his daughter to find a nipple when his weyrmate proved to have too few hands to manage the task. Enasha felt herself relax as the baby started to suckle. "There," she murmured. "Better, much better."

"When can they come home?"

"Two, maybe three days," Ginera said in reply to J'hanos's question. "We'll want to make sure she's healing up properly. She had a hard time of this one -- she needs to rest a while to get her strength back."

There was a pause. "Of course."

Enasha smiled a little to hear the worry in the bronzerider's voice, finally satisfied that she had kept him in spite of Vhauth's pursuits, in spite of their second child not being a son. Looking down at her suckling daughter, she let the rest of the world fade into the background, ignoring the concerned voices of Ginera and J'hanos, the curiously painless sense of prick-and-pull further down her body as the journeyman healer repaired her birth-ravaged flesh. Before long she would be back where she belonged, with her children and her weyrmate, and her life would feel less blurred at the edges.

Closing her eyes, Enasha let herself drift....



2432.13.02

"I wish I could give you better news," Weyrhealer Reilen told J'hanos, "but she's no stronger today than she was yesterday." The older man's gaze was sympathetic as he looked at the bronzerider. "Your weyrmate started to run a temperature in the night and there's some discharge --"

"An infection?" J'hanos fought down the sudden sense of panic that has arrived with Reilen's words. "How?"

The healer sighed. "It's hard to say -- Wenras did a fine job with the stitches, but it was a long, hard labour and she lost more blood than I'd like. She's weak and she has wounds, and between that and the heat and humidity we've been having, the odds were not in her favour."

"But Enasha will recover?" the bronzerider pressed. He could feel the gentle touch of Vhauth's presence in his mind, the dragon not fully understanding the situation but wanting to comfort his rider regardless. "This isn't her first child -- she birthed Jeshan easily."

"I know. And it's true that complications are more common in first births than in later pregnancies," Reilen told him. "But young Elhana is a large one, almost half again as heavy as her brother was, and her mother is a slender thing by nature --"

"But she will recover?" J'hanos repeated, unwilling to let the healer dodge that question.

Reilen spread his hands helplessly. "I hope so," he said gently. "We'll do our very best for her, but I can make you no promises."

J'hanos took a deep breath, pushing down the urge to beg the Weyrhealer for reassurance and burying it beneath

the calm veneer of duty, the political training of his youth coming to the fore as he said, "And Elhana?"

"There, at least, I can give you some good news." Reilen offered the bronzerider a small smile. "Your daughter is thriving, although I'm afraid she will be needing a milkmother. Enasha is really too weak to provide for her right now."

J'hanos nodded. "I think I may know someone willing." In truth, he had had several offers already from friends of Enasha's who were nursing infants of their own, offers that he had not allowed himself to consider until this moment. He wanted, he *needed* Enasha to recover from this.... "May I see them?"

"Of course." The Weyrhealer pushed himself to his feet and led the way out of his office and into the main body of the Infirmary. Early in the Pass, J'hanos knew, long before his own Search, the Infirmary had been a part of the Weyrhall, sitting alongside the kitchens. As Southern Weyr had expanded, however, it had been acknowledged that the arrangement was hygienic for neither the hurt nor the hungry and a large, purpose-built Infirmary had been built, with its twin at Southern's West Complex, where the injured from the Northern Weyr were treated. Most of the space on the ground floor was taken up by a single large ward, with light, moveable screens shielding the patients -- mostly Threadscored riders -- where necessary. Towards the back of the building, however, lay the women's ward, where the female Weyr staff and the rare female dragonriders were treated... although goldriders were generally given a private room or attendance in their weyrs.

J'hanos knew where Reilen was leading him -- he had spent much of the last two days sitting at his weyrmate's side, leaving only when duty or hunger demanded. He and Vhauth had flown 'Fall the day before, brushing aside Wingleader D'ralt's concerns and finding some respite in the fierce aerial dance, some purpose other than merely sitting helplessly and waiting for Enasha to recover.

Only now, he realised, it might be more a matter of *if* she recovered, rather than of *when*.

To J'hanos's eye, Enasha looked much the same as she had after delivering Elhana -- flushed and sweat-beaded and exhausted as she lay propped on her pillows at the far end of the women's ward. She opened her eyes and smiled weakly as he reached her bed. "Wondered where you were."

"I was just speaking with the Weyrhealer," the bronzerider said with a nod towards Reilen as he seated himself by her bedside. The older man watched them for a few moments, then quietly slipped away to give them some privacy. "Where's Elhana."

"Needed feeding," Enasha said sadly. "Berria took her - be back soon. I miss her."

J'hanos took her hand, finding it too warm and pushing down his worry at that fact. The bed smelt of medicinal herbs and dried blood, and the bronzerider could only imagine the pain that the poultice would be causing her still-raw wounds. "Is there anything you want?" he asked.

"Water," she replied, and J'hanos turned to locate the covered pitcher, pausing as he found two on the low table beside the white-painted wall. "The larger one," Enasha told him. "Fellised wine in the smaller -- not like I can feed her anyway. Would have taken some earlier but I wanted to see you...."

The bronzerider forced himself to keep his composure as he poured water into a cup and handed it to his weyrmate. In the end he had to help her to hold it as she drank, as her shaking hands threatened to spill the liquid across her sheets. When she had finished, she lay back and whispered, "I hate this! I hate feeling so weak and so useless!"

"I know," J'hanos said, taking her hand in both of his. "I know, but the healers are doing their best and you'll be up and about in no time."

Enasha frowned. "The Weyrhealer told you that?"

"No," the bronzerider admitted, "but I know it, I just *know* it!"

"Good." His weyrmate smiled. "I'd like to see Jeshan. Where is he?"

"He's with Sharenne, remember? I'll bring him over here later. He's been asking where you are."

"Should think so too," Enasha said, then winced and gave a short cry. "Oh, that hurts...."

J'hanos squeezed her hand. "Do you want me to fetch a healer?"

Enasha shook her head. "No, no, but... some of the fellis would be very good...."

After the drug had done its work and Enasha was sleeping safely beyond the reach of the pain, J'hanos sat at her bedside and tried to imagine his life without her as a part of it, barely looking up when Berria returned Elhana to the cot at her mother's side. It wasn't fair, Enasha was still so young, and she had so *wanted* this child. And now, even if she did recover, there would be no certainty that she would be able to give Jeshan and Elhana more siblings.

J'hanos realised that that thought didn't disturb him as much as it might. He also realised that it would utterly destroy his weyrmate.

Leaning in, he pressed a gentle kiss against her temple, took her hand and, with Vhauth a solid, dependable presence in his mind, he waited.



2432.13.03

D'ralt settled at his desk, casting an eye over the charts and weather reports relating to his Wing's next Threadfall. The morning had been spent drilling over the newly settled regions south of the Island River falls, dragons and riders familiarising themselves with the air currents and the new fields before they needed to visit them with Thread claiming their attention. More than one pair had been lost to the vagaries of unfamiliar terrain and he had no desire to lose any of his men to such avoidable threats.

*They come*, Nalth reported sleepily from his wallow, and the Wingleader looked up as the door swung open to

admit his 'seconds. L'myr, his light hair still damp from his shower, nodded a greeting and took his usual chair, his gaze falling immediately to the charts before him. The younger J'hanos, however, barely seemed to notice the 'Fall preparations laid out on the desk, his expression closed and preoccupied as he sat beside his fellow wingsecond.

"This morning went well," D'ralt started. "The holders are expanding their lands faster than we were led to believe, but there's nothing that the Weyr can't deal with. The windshear in the valleys just east of the main holding may cause some problems for the queens, especially in night 'Falls, so we may be without low-level cover there. The area is fully grubbed so there shouldn't be any problem with that -- it won't suffer too much damage if anything does get past the Wings."

L'myr snorted. "Can't see the golds liking that idea. *Or* the holders!"

"Better to feed the grubs than to lose a queen," D'ralt opined. Southern Weyr met each 'Fall, the dragons demanding the fight even with the ground grubbed, but the Queens' Wing was held back from all but the settled and cultivated regions, their dragons too precious to risk unless absolutely necessary. "The holders will just have deal with it. Is there anything else we need to report about the lay of the land there?"

"There were some stray gusts coming up off the ridgelines," J'hanos said. "Some of the greens and blues were having difficulties in the lower level when the wind picked up -- nothing they couldn't recover from but it could be a different story in 'Fall."

D'ralt nodded, making a note on his slate. "We may have to pull them higher as we cross that region, make sure it's the bronzes and browns that mop up anything that gets through the upper stacks." He shook his head and quirked a small smile. "I don't know why the holders insist on choosing to settle where it'll give us the most problems...."

Nalth touched his rider's mind once more. ***Toth's rider comes.***

*Thank you, D'ralt sent back to his bronze. Have Toth tell A'zelen to come in when he gets here.*

"-- first to complain when Thread gets in amongst their orchards," L'myr was saying as D'ralt returned his attention to the other men. "But they've not trained grubs to climb yet and they just don't have enough firelizards to fight off a 'Fall."

J'hanos nodded mutely, obviously not listening as the brownrider started to rattle off a familiar list of complaints. D'ralt could guess the cause of his junior wingsecond's distraction all too easily -- for all that J'hanos had been focused enough in both 'Fall and drills, his weyrmate's illness was obviously weighing heavy on his mind. And much as D'ralt knew that J'hanos would protest the necessity, he couldn't risk the man becoming distracted when it mattered most --

A knock at the door interrupted both D'ralt's thoughts and L'myr's tirade. Setting his slate aside, the Wingleader called, "Come in, A'zelen."

J'hanos frowned as the brownrider entered the office that D'ralt had partitioned off from the rest of his weyrcot, but L'myr threw his Wingleader a knowing glance. A'zelen nodded to the three men as he paused by the desk, his expression no less confused than that of the wingsecond. "Sir?" he said cautiously. "Toth said that you wanted to see me."

D'ralt sighed and nodded, looking at the new arrival as he waved to a free seat. "I do. Please, sit -- this shouldn't take long."

The Wingleader watched as A'zelen sat, the brownrider moving with the not-quite-clumsy lack of grace that D'ralt always associated with him. A'zelen had been a clutchmate of J'hanos's, the pair coming into the Wing at the same time and each bringing with them their own share of fierce arrogance in their abilities. A'zelen lacked the bronzerider's ambition and social awareness, however, and his looks were softer and more rounded than the angular J'hanos, his build stockier. But what A'zelen did possess was a sharp mind and a willingness to rise to any challenge with a single-minded concentration and a focus that the bronzerider was currently lacking. Which, of course, was why D'ralt had called him into this meeting.

"J'hanos," D'ralt began, meeting the bronzerider's brown gaze directly, "I feel it would be for the best if you and Vhauth were released from the Wings until your weyrmate has recovered."

"What?" J'hanos stared at him in shock, then recovered his composure. "Sir, you can't; we're still able to --"

D'ralt shook his head. "J'hanos, I know that you feel you can still do your job, and you're probably right. But I *can't* take the risk of having one of my wingseconds distracted in 'Fall -- I'd be risking more lives than just yours if I did. I need you to be able to concentrate up there... and Enasha needs you to concentrate on her."

J'hanos set his jaw stubbornly, then slid a look at A'zelen, who was nodding at D'ralt's last comment. Guessing that the other bronzerider had already worked out what was coming next, the Wingleader continued, "You've been itching to get out of here since you arrived and don't even bother trying to deny it. You need to be with your weyrmate right now and so I am *temporarily* relieving you of your position as my junior wingsecond and from all duties until the situation with Enasha's health is resolved. In the meantime, A'zelen here will be covering your position in the Wing."

A'zelen blinked at the mention of his name. "I will?"

"Why else would you *be* here?" J'hanos muttered under his breath.

"You're the most promising of the possible choices," D'ralt said, glancing towards L'myr, who nodded. "And while this position is intended to be temporary, the experience may serve you well in the future. You do have the option to refuse the request, of course, brownrider."

"No! No," A'zelen said, throwing an apologetic look at J'hanos. "I'm honoured, sir."

"Good." D'ralt opened a drawer beneath his desk, pulling out a set of brown wingsecond cords and handing them to A'zelen. "Congratulations, Wingsecond. L'myr here will fill you in on what you need to know for the next 'Fall."

J'hanos remained seated as L'myr led the new junior wingsecond from the cot, his features unreadable as he watched them go. D'ralt sighed. "It won't be for long, J'hanos. Enasha needs you more than I do, right now."

"So you said." The younger bronzerider closed his eyes and rubbed briefly at his temples with one hand. "I am still capable."

"I know. And *you* know that I can't risk it," D'ralt told him. "I've been there, J'hanos. Almost lost my Awana to firehead soon after we transferred here -- it took her months to recover and even now she's half deaf from it. You *want* to cope... but in the end the best that you can do is be with them, for both their sake and your own."

J'hanos looked at him for a long moment. "May I go now, sir?"

D'ralt nodded. "Of course."

As the door swung shut behind the younger man, D'ralt found himself hoping that Enasha would recover and recover soon. J'hanos was a talented wingsecond, his ambition more than matched by his political skill and his ability in the air, and D'ralt had few doubts that the man would be the one to take the Wing when age or fate demanded that he and Nalth surrender their position. This would be a blow to J'hanos's pride, no doubt, but bruised pride had yet to kill anyone and, one way or another, he would be grateful for this break when he did finally return to the Wings.

Shaking his head, D'ralt pushed his concerns for Enasha's future aside and turned back to his 'Fall charts.



***Toth's rider wishes to know if you desire company.***

J'hanos opened his eyes to find that full dark had fallen, the last blue shadings of twilight gone from the sky outside his weycot windows. Carefully, not wanting to disturb the sleeping child in his lap, he reached to open the glowbasket that sat on the sidetable, squinting a little as his eyes adjusted to the light. He could see Vhauth's dark bulk in the wallow outside and, as he watched, the dragon raised his head to peer through the open window at his rider with one great, gleaming eye. A wave of silent comfort washed through the bronzerider's mind and he smiled despite himself, grateful that he had Vhauth's calm, imperturbable presence to anchor himself to, even when all else seemed to be going so wrong. In truth he was in no fit mood for company, but A'zelen had seemed as startled as he himself had been by D'ralt's reshuffling earlier in the day, and so he sent, *Tell Toth to tell his rider that the door is open.*

A few minutes later, the weycot door creaked open and the brownrider stepped cautiously inside. J'hanos looked up,

not bothering to rise from the padded chair he'd settled in hours earlier. "Good evening, Wingsecond."

A'zelen winced at the title. "Look, I'm sorry about that. I really didn't know D'ralt was going to do that until he sprang it on us."

"I know." The bronzerider sighed and pitched his voice low so as not to disturb his son. "What brings you here?"

"Sharenne said that you'd taken Jeshan. I looked for you at the Infirmary but you'd already gone. We were worried."

"There's not much use in my being at the Infirmary right now," J'hanos told him. Jeshan stirred sleepily and the bronzerider soothed the two Turn old child, stroking his dark hair until he settled once more. "Enasha has so much fellis in her that she won't wake before morning and that's only a kindness given the pain she's in when she's awake...." He trailed off, uncomfortable with this sudden display of emotion even in front of one of the few he called friend, and gestured to the chair opposite. "Sit down, please? You'll give me a cricked neck if you just stand by the door like that."

"I thought that Ves might be here," A'zelen said as he seated himself. "It doesn't seem like him to leave you on your own at a time like this."

"He was here earlier," J'hanos admitted. "I told him that I needed time to myself. He's trying, but he and Enasha have never been close and I don't think he quite knows what to say right now. And there is little in this world that is quite so disturbing as seeing Vesoz lost for words."

A'zelen hesitated a moment, then nodded. "It's rare that he doesn't have *something* to say for himself."

"Yes," J'hanos said simply. "And now that I don't...." He paused, clearing his throat and refusing to accept that the tightness there might be from unshed tears. "Now that I don't have 'Fall to keep my mind occupied, I'm finding that it's hard to stay focused on anything other than what might happen if she --"

Vhauth rumbled from outside, his thoughts seeping *love* and *comfort* into his rider's once more. Lan, who always took to the rafters when Jeshan was around, chirped his own small encouragements from overhead. J'hanos let their silent support flow through him for a few moments before speaking again. "I wish that D'ralt hadn't cut me loose. I know why he did it and I know that I would probably have done the same in his position, but I'm going to go insane before this is over! I'm just sitting and staring at the walls and *waiting*...."

"The healers are doing their very best," A'zelen assured him earnestly, leaning forward in his seat. "Enasha will be back with you in no time, I'm sure of it."

J'hanos looked at the brownrider for a long moment, then stood and carried the sleeping Jeshan past the screen that divided the weycot, tucking the boy into bed before slowly making his way back to his seat. Taking a deep breath, he looked at A'zelen and said, "I don't think she's coming back to me. I think she's dying."

"No, the healers --"

"The healers can only do so much, and I know that Sharenne has seen her, even if you haven't. She's your weyrmate -- ask her." J'hanos ran his hands across his face, feeling stubble scratch roughly against his palms. "They've done what they can and she just gets worse by the day, by the hour. The infection is eating her from the inside."

"They haven't given up on her yet. You can't either."

J'hanos shook his head sadly. "Give up on her? A'zelen, I'd give almost anything to have her well again but right now I'd settle for it all just *stopping*. She's in such pain and the only time she's not is when they've dosed her senseless. I don't want to lose her but if that's the only way to stop it hurting...."

Silence fell between them for a moment. J'hanos, feeling far more exposed than he was comfortable with in any company but Vhauth's, swallowed past the lump in his throat and set his features as he looked up at his friend's worried face. "I think I need to be on my own right now."

"J'hanos --"

"Please."

A'zelen paused... then nodded and stood. "I'll come by tomorrow," he said, reaching out to grip the bronzerider's shoulder sympathetically. "Sharenne says to take Jeshan to her or her sisters if you need a break. Try to get some sleep."

J'hanos nodded and watched as the brownrider left, leaving him alone with his thoughts and with Vhauth's silent comfort. Curling up in his chair, he closed the glowbasket and tried not to think about what the morning might bring.



2432.13.05

Enasha's eyes were closed, her features composed. Sitting by her bed, now screened off from the rest of the women's ward, J'hanos watched her, occasionally reaching to blot sweat from her forehead with a dampened cloth. A part of him wished that she would wake, would speak to him, would let him know that she *knew* all the things he so badly needed her to hear. Another part, however, was simply grateful that she was now beyond the pain.

Reilen had sent his daughter, Bressa, to fetch the bronzerider at dawn, giving the girl no message other than to bring him quickly. Young Bressa had taken charge of the unhappy Jeshan, promising to deliver him to Sharenne, and J'hanos had sprinted to the Infirmary, expecting to hear the worst.

What he found when he reached the Weyrhealer was

almost as bad. Enasha still lived, her sweat-beaded, too-thin features looking much the same as they had when J'hanos had left the night before. Her sleep, however, was no longer fellis-induced, the healer told him gently, the drug having worked itself from her system hours earlier. Enasha's body was simply too tired, too weak, to fight the infection any more, her strength finally failing her after a week abed. There was nothing more that could be done for her other than to ensure that she didn't die alone.

And so J'hanos sat and waited, listening to her too-shallow breathing as he held her limp hand in his own. Sometimes his thoughts overflowed and he would lean close to murmur his love and need and desperation, hoping that she could hear him still even if he might never know -- Vhauth had never liked touching the minds of humans other than his rider, no matter the circumstances. A journeyman or one of the unranked nurses -- Reilen was not one who believed in the worth of female crafters even in these enlightened times -- would occasionally appear and then vanish wordlessly away again; J'hanos ignored them, focusing on Enasha with everything he had. If he had to lose her, he wanted to make sure that he didn't waste a single moment that he had left.

When the end came it was so quiet that it took a few moments for J'hanos to register that Enasha's weak breathing had stopped. Vhauth's presence in his mind, which had been a gentle background hum of comfort since the bronzerider had reached his weyrmate's bedside, suddenly expanded as he wordlessly reminded his rider that he was never alone. J'hanos accepted his dragon's touch, wrapping himself in Vhauth's unquestioning love as he reached out to stroke Enasha's face, the damp skin of her cheeks paling beneath his fingers as the flush of fever left her. "Too young," he whispered roughly. "Much, much too young...."

He would need to make arrangements for Jeshan and Elhana. His family would be glad to take them... but he found that he had no desire to send them away, to remove from sight the human evidence of Enasha's existence in his life. There were women enough in the Weyr who would be willing to foster them, who would be able to give them the attention that he could not once he returned to the Wings.

He had lost his weyrmate. He wasn't ready to lose his children as well.

His throat seized against further words, J'hanos leaned in to press a farewell kiss against Enasha's lips. Only then did he allow himself to begin to weep.



# Kadanzer Weyr

Alternate Tenth Pass *Dragonriders of Pern*® Fanclub

[www.kadanzer.org](http://www.kadanzer.org)