When Dragons Fall

Posted originally on the fanfiction.lol at https://fanfiction.lol/works/1614.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Real Person Fiction (RPF)
Category:	Slash (M/M)
Fandoms:	Dragonriders of Pern - Anne McCaffrey, NCT | Neo Culture Technology (KPop)
Relationship:	Jeong Yuno|Jaehyun/Nakamoto Yuta
Characters:	Johnny Suh, Lee Taeyong, Nakamoto Yuta, Jeong Yuno|Jaehyun
Additional Tags:	Science Fiction, Dragonriders, Dragons, Canon-Typical Violence, War, PTSD, Additional Tags To Be Added
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-11-10 Words: 8,016 Chapters: 1/?

When Dragons Fall

by Wylde

Summary

"Something happened," Sion says.

It isn't a question, but Jaehyun nods anyway. "Where's Yushi?"

Sion doesn't answer for a moment. On the crest of the weyr, Ideun and Taiyo are relaxing, though Jaehyun can feel their eyes on him, curious. Jaehyun hasn't been here without Yuta or his dragon, which would be something of an answer in itself. Finally, Sion sighs. "In bed. Something happened yesterday—he's had a migraine since, but we couldn't figure out why there was such a burst of noise."

"I need to tell both of you," Jaehyun says, fingers curling into fists. The fact that the dragons' combined fury reached even this far—That Yushi heard something, even if he couldn't parse the individual words to understand the reason for it.

"It's Yuta."

Notes

Crossposted from AO3 and superlove! Welcome to labour of love between me and a friend combining our dual obsession with kpop and Dragonriders of Pern book series.

Chapter 1: Chapter 1

The mighty bronze dragon wings flare wide over the rocky platform, Jaehyun sitting back in his seat as three ant sized dots became recognisable as humans while Kyo sweeps his wings in reverse and hovers slowly downwards. Claws hit the dirt seconds later, and Jaehyun swings his leg over to dismount, sliding down the beast's shoulder.

The bronze rider doesn't like the expressions on the three weyr folk waiting for him. There's a tension in the air hanging over them as they wait at a careful distance, safe from the turbulence of the dragons' wings.

How long have they been here? How urgent must it be?

"My skin itches...it needs oil." Kyo's voice breaks into his thoughts and Jaehyun shoves the dragon's leg. He doesn't move an inch.

"*I oiled you last night; are you a hatchling going through a growth spurt? I need to handle whatever they need to talk to me about, then I can deal with your itchy skin"*

The great head, with its gleaming teeth and swirling brown eyes swings around to make eye contact. *"I am no hatchling."* Kyo sounds offended even at the suggestion and Jaehyun grins, unrepentant *"Do not take too long."*

"Ask Yosei to scratch it better for you if it's that bad, Yuta's patrol should be back in a few minutes"

Jaehyun walked off the landing platform while he stripped off his gloves and shoved them in his belt. Kyo could wait. Behind him, the bronze dragon took flight again, sending the image of his cavernous nest and the impression of reluctance. Jaehyun turned his head to watch him leave with a grin and shook his head before reaching those waiting.

Jaehyun's gaze took in the three weyrfolk; a sturdy man he knew well as a master of the storage caverns and the two ladies with him were two of the kitchen leaders. All three wore sombre, serious looks.

"What's happened for you to look this way?"

"Forgive the interruption, rider, but there has been an incident when going to collect the seasons tithes."

Jaehyun frowned. This is not the first time he has heard of a difficulty occurring of late within the weyrs, and it's becoming a growing concern with no clear way to fix the matter.

"Did anyone get injured?"

The three shook their heads.

"No," the man replied, "Luckily the presence of the two riders and their dragons sent with us prevented them from being so bold."

One of the women spoke up sharply, “But they did not give us the full tithe owed. They refused. We know how much they average per season for each item. It was less than two thirds the normal amount there and there was no shortage made known to us. That was what caused the conflict, we asked why there was so little compared to the past.”

The man grimaced, weariness lined his face. “They told us to tell you riders that with there being so little thread, you have the time now to farm your own supplies. a The holders refuse to continue to be taken advantage of. They don’t need the dragons once the thread is gone, and it will end soon, they said.”

Jaehyun drew his hands over his face, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Where do they suppose we would farm? On the rocky mountain sides? Or maybe the dragons’ sunning cliffs?”

It is not a surprise to Jaehyun. Hoping for things to continue as they always had was naïve. Whispers of resentment had been spreading for multiple turns, even more so recently. The hold folk did have one thing right; thread was falling less, the charts predicted little change in it for some time. But the weyrfolk knew with the intimacy that only those who lived it daily, the reprieve was likely short lived.

The thread would return eventually, and with more frequency. This lull was a long one, many years long. Hold folk were growing resentful of the dragonmen when their need for them was low, but the tithes still continued.

“As long as no one was hurt, then it’s not so bad.”

“But the supplies! We need them!”

Jaehyun nodded, “I know. It is a serious matter. I’ll need to bring it up with our Weyrleaders. They’ll be returning from a meeting with Benden shortly. Nobody is to return to the Holders, or to try convincing them to give up the rest of the tithes. It will only worsen their opinion of us.”

“Maybe we just don’t fly the next time thread falls there, they’ll learn then,” a familiar voice piped up behind Jaehyun, and the bronze rider turned.

“Yuta...”

The green rider strode over to a stop at Jaehyun’s shoulder.

“That’s not a plan Taeyong would approve.” Jaehyun drawled, fondly exasperated.

Yuta grinned, red cheeked from the wind of his flight and eyes glittering with mirth “No, but it would sure remind them they need us.”

Jaehyun felt himself smiling despite the stressful news. Yuta had that gift of wit to lighten almost any person's mood.

“You’re not wrong.” Jaehyun chuckled, “But no, we’ll figure something out. Thank you, all three of you, for letting me know. We’ll inform you of the solution as quickly as we can. In the meantime, we’re not going to be starving, right?”

The kitchen leaders shook their heads. “No, plenty for the next couple months at least. Longer, maybe three or almost four months if we ration strictly.”

“Then we’re ok for now, we have time. Try not to worry yourselves too much, we will get what is needed. On my honour as a rider.”

The weyrfolk dipped their heads in acknowledgement and took their leave. Jaeyun sagged, weary. The confidence he wore in front of the weyrfolk vanishing, leaving him deflated.

“What are we to do about these supplies, I know why they think the way they do, but it’s not supported by logic.”

“If anyone knows about illogical beliefs, it’s me.” Yuta elbowed Jaehyun playfully with a sparkling grin.

Jaehyun snorted, “At least your illogical beliefs don’t threaten to starve people.”

“Ok, you may have a point there.” Yuta shrugged, then turned more serious. “I think they’re just looking for hope, but they’re getting ahead of themselves. Nobody wants to live with Thread, the idea that it could be ending after so many years of so little makes sense. They don’t live like we do; they don’t see it how we do – of course they’re desperate, it’s just led to some stupid decisions being made.”

“You’re not wrong...very stupid decisions, but we need to figure out how to convince them we can’t just start being farmers and we’re not trying to be lazy when we ask for tithes.”

“I still say we should let them fight thread next time without us.”

Jaehyun threw an arm over Yuta’s shoulders as they started the walk to Jaehyun’s quarters that Yuta shared with him, he sighed.

“Never change Yuta.”



Yuta wakes warm and sated, Jaehyun a furnace behind him, one arm slung over his waist. Slipping back into the cosy nest of blankets and furs is the first thing on his mind, until he realises what woke him. Yosei gently touches his mind.

“Mireu and Namu returned to the caverns several hours ago. You want to meet their riders before they become busy, correct?”

“Too early,” Yuta grumbles.

Yosei’s voice is an airy whisper compared to Kyo's rumbling bass that follows next, *“The sun is almost covering the hatching grounds, it is not too early.”*

“It is.”

Yuta sighs, and flops back into the nice cosy space that is Jaehyun's bare chest and arms. Even in his sleep, Jaehyun wraps him back up and Yuta lets himself drift, determined to sleep longer.

"WAKE UP PETULANT HATCHLING!!!"

Yuta wails, rocketing upwards clutching his head as Kyo telepathically shouts at him. Jaehyun startles awake mid snore, hand fumbling for his blade under the pillow.

"What, what is it?" The bronze rider twists left and right trying to spot the threat.

Yuta hisses, a feral thing of anger. "Your damned dragon *yelled* at me"

Jaehyun looks at him, puzzled and then he laughs and sheathes his blade. "We did tell them to wake us up remember."

"Not this early!"

Jaehyun gets up, padding barefoot to the curtains and looking outside. "Not too early, the sun is almost over the edge of the horizon. Aren't you usually the one up at the ass crack of dawn?"

Yuta rolls his eyes, stubborn and rubbing his temples, feeling as if the booming voice of Kyo still echoes in his head. "I was *comfortable* I can change my habits sometimes. We fucked like three times before bed! I earned my sleep in"

Jaehyun snorts, though the edges of his ears turned a soft pink. "Duty calls, let's clean up and go find our beloved Weyrleaders. I'll even bargain for some honey to sweeten your klah."

Yuta debates for a moment, if it was fresh honeyed klah then maybe...

"F*resh* Klah and I'll take it; I don't want a cup from a lukewarm pot." Yuta throws aside the blankets and moodily stalks off to shower. He can feel Jaehyun's eyes on him as he walks, and looks back over his shoulder, snorting as he collects his riding leathers.

"Did you not get enough of my ass last night?"

Jaehyun laughs, rubbing at the back of his neck. "You've got a very nice one, am I meant to say sorry for looking?"

"Turn your eyes towards the kitchen, Jae." Yuta laughs and is even more amused when he hears Jaehyun's whine. The words said afterwards are lost to the sound of the water through the pipes, but he entertains himself imagining several colourful things Jaehyun might have said.

By the time he's grabbing his towel, the scent of rich klah with a hint of sweetness is wafting through the bedroom. Yuta heads for the cup straight as an arrow, ignoring Jaehyun's amused chuckle as he cradles the warm vessel and savours the scent before the first sip.

Jaehyun is showered and dressed in the time it takes for Yuta to finish his cup and snaps a towel at Yuta's bare thigh to hurry him along into getting dressed.

"We're not going to catch Taeyong and Johnny before they get busy at this rate, get your ass covered."

“You could just go alone, you know,” Yuta snips back, but there is no bite to his words, so he only gets a subtle yet fond eye roll in response.

Yuta flips him off but does as he’s been asked. Clearly his usual slow start to the morning was not happening.

At least he has his klah.

Jaehyun approaches their leaders in the dining hall, clapping both on the shoulder he leans down to look them in the eyes before voicing a soft request, “Do you have a few minutes? We have a problem to bring to your attention”

Both Johnny and Taeyong nod, quickly shovelling down the rest of their breakfast and scooping up their cups of klah as they lead the way into the meeting room.

Taeyong eyes the pair with a guarded curiosity from the head of the table, no doubt already worrying. Johnny sits to Taeyong’s left at the carved wooden table, his right as the second in command. Jaehyun sits himself down on Taeyong’s other side and feels the burden of yesterday's revelation sit heavier suddenly on his shoulders.

He doesn’t want to share this news, but he must.

“What’s the problem, Jaehyun?” Taeyong asks, opening the conversation while Yuta wanders to a window to observe the weyrlings washing their hatchlings in the distance.

“Yesterday, the kitchen mistresses and the master of the cellars went to collect the tithes for this season.”

Taeyong nods. This is normal, but already Jaehyun can see the pinch in his brow forming. The Weyrleader’s worry taking shape in his mind already no doubt. Taeyong is always fretful, and while it keeps him alert, the stress is a heavy burden for him to bear. It wears him down, and Jaehyun wishes he could shield him from this.

“Nobody is hurt; I want to get that out of the way. But....” Jaehyun sighs, frustrated. “There was a lot less given this season to what they expected to get. The season has been good this year, so far as we knew. Nothing that would result in a poor harvest was ever brought to our attention. So naturally they asked why there was so little.”

Johnny’s face mirrors Taeyong’s at this point, both no doubt can see where this story is heading. It is the first time the holders have been responsible for a direct loss of supplies for the weyr in Jaehyun's memory, since he arrived here so many turns ago. Usually it was Thread, or poor weather, a bug or rot of some sort.

“According to the master of the cellars and the kitchen mistresses, the Holders said we don’t need to steal so much from them with less Thread, that we should be farming our own now we have

more time. They believe Thread is coming to an end and soon dragon riders and dragons won't be needed at all." The weariness in his tone tells everyone what he thinks of this opinion. "They won't give us more supplies than they have already. We're short a third of our expected amount."

The silence that follows is heavy with tension. Jaehyun feels the weight of Taeyong's anxiety and sees Johnny's hands tighten in perceived anger. This isn't the news he was hoping to give them. Unreasonable guilt rises within his chest, that somehow the situation has come to this. Should he have known things were this bad earlier? Rumblings of discontent were normal, giving up part of the harvest they worked hard to provide was never an easy thing. So, what has come along to change their minds?

Taeyong draws his hands over his face, his teeth worrying at his lip. "Short a *third*," The Weyrleader whispers, dropping his head to stare at the table. "How do we fix this? Can we convince them? I know Thread's fallen less, and sometimes we have long periods with none. But to think that it's leaving forever is just...."

"Hopeful thinking," Yuta breaks into the conversation bluntly, dropping into the seat on Jaehyun's other side with a brazen confidence. "They're not going to believe more Thread will come eventually just because we tell them it will. We gave them the charts, the charts say even less will come in the next turn. And they've been correct so far, so what reason do they have to believe us?"

Johnny pinches the bridge of his nose, tilting his head back to stare at the ceiling. "You're right, and if we're short this much, the weyrfolk will starve when the winter hits."

"Can we get supplies from somewhere else? Maybe from Ista? High Reaches? Last I heard Benden is having similar issues, though they've yet to be denied outright. This isn't isolated to just us," Taeyong says.

"Their memories are proving short – not long ago we were the saviours of Pern," Jaehyun adds.

"How about we refresh them then and let them get through the next fall without a single dragon or rider bothering to help" Yuta cut in. Jaehyun nudges him with an elbow in warning; Taeyong when stressed is not the same. He's always tried to do things properly, even at great cost to himself.

"Yuta..." Taeyong's face went through several changes of expression from frustration to irritation. Jaehyun understands the feeling. Sometimes Yuta was almost *too* honest.

"That is NOT an option, Yuta, are you insane?" Taeyong finally finds the words he needs to express himself. Taeyong's eyes are sharp with anger. "Could you take something seriously for once!?"

"Not insane, just logical about how to convince them," Yuta says, shrugging. Jaehyun knows Yuta would never go through with it, but Taeyong's always been a little rigid and naive. "And I am serious, Taeyong, it would only take once."

"You are entirely to blasé about completely destroying what trust the Holders have in us. We are here *serve* the people of Pern, and if you don't have a proper solution, then please keep your mouth shut." Taeyong's easy going nature is a cover for a man with a core of steel, Jaehyun knows Yuta is well aware of this. It's resulted in more than one clash between the two friends who are so very different, yet both so deeply caring. The tension is thick in the air and not for the first time, Jaehyun wonders if he should simply throw Yuta over his shoulder and walk out of the meeting to save everyone's fragile state of mind.

Of course, Yuta doesn't have the ability to read his mind, and promptly ruins what chance there was of redeeming the conversation peacefully.

"What makes you think they'll give the next tithe to us if they get away with skimping us this time? They're the ones saying they don't need us. Your ways will let them think they can get away with it, you're too gentle. I'm not saying let them die, but if we don't stop this now, *our* people starve."

Taeyong's eyes light up with a fury rarely seen and Jaehyun debates the merit of tossing Yuta out the nearest window. The Weyrleader's jaw works as he stares at his friend – this was one of the reasons Yuta was so rarely involved in meetings like this.

Truly, Yuta had little interest in such things to begin with. When he did attend, he certainly kept things moving. He was, however, an unpredictable force; sometimes a genius, sometimes a nuisance for the sake of being one, and always with resentment at being forced into responsibility for things he wanted nothing to do with. He'd never asked to be the one all dragons could speak to, but the talent alone made him a political piece on the board whether he wanted it or not.

"We'll work on a solution that doesn't include giving up on our morals and oaths as dragon riders. And you will not bring up this up again." Taeyong lays down the law with a tense jaw and barely hidden fury in his gaze, grabbing his cup of klah to take a long draught.

Yuta slouches, leaning into Jaehyun's side with a sigh. "You're too soft, Yong."

Johnny kicks Yuta's leg under the table. "Stop pushing his buttons, Yuta,"

He looks to Jaehyun with a semi-serious expression "Can't you give him something to play with while we figure this out, Jae? Like paper and paints?"

"I am not five years old!" Yuta defends himself. "How are you going to convince these idiots that Thread isn't ending when they don't want to believe you to begin with?! They have the charts, they can see it's continuing and still they did this!"

"He has a point," Jaehyun says, his eyes aimed well away from anyone else at the table.

Taeyong rubs at his temples with his fingertips, a clear sign of a headache brewing. "I'll try sit down with the Lord Holder and see if I can convince him this is just a lull, not an ending."

"The Holders shouldn't be counting their eggs before they hatch to begin with," Yuta points out plainly. "Since when has Thread been so kind to us? I know they wish it to be gone, but they can't just hope their way to no Thread."

"If it was that easy, we would have done it long ago," Jaehyun says slowly, his mind clearly elsewhere. "I've been hearing rumours the Holders have been saying we can fly to the Red Star, but we won't because then what would dragonmen do?"

"Is that something you heard in passing, or-?" Johnny asks Jaehyun, frowning. "Us dragonmen wish more than any Holder that thread was gone. But we can't fly to the Red Star, we have no idea what it looks like well enough to give the dragons a visual to go Between too even if we wanted"

"Tell that to them, they think we can use far seers," Taeyong mumbles into the tabletop where his face lay buried in his arms. "I know we have them, but none are powerful enough to actually *see* the Red Star in detail to be of use like they think."

“Do you think the Ancient Ones tried?” Yuta asks, more serious.

Taeyong shrugs, calming down slowly. “I don’t know. I’ve never seen record of it or heard of it. But with so many records lost, I can’t say they haven’t for certain. Maybe they did and it failed.”

“What were you at Benden for?” Jaehyun asks, coming back from wherever his head had been moments ago, “You didn’t say before you left.”

“Bang Chan has arranged with the Master Harper to explore some abandoned parts of Benden Weyr. You know those old tunnels nobody has been down in decades, maybe centuries, It’s like a maze there. Same as here, maybe worse, I’m not sure. He and Master Minho think there might be some Old Timer's artifacts that could help us.”

“What’s that got to do with us?” Yuta says.

“He plans to share any findings with us, but we’re to keep it to ourselves.” Taeyong eyes them meaningfully, tone deeply serious. “I know the ones loyal to the south supposedly are long gone to join them, but we’ve spotted them on patrols too often to trust they’re just sitting idly down there. If they find anything important at Benden, we have to be careful about who knows. The fights over who got the charts for Thread fall were bad enough until we managed to get copies made, and the Southerners tried to destroy what they could on their way out.”

“Fair point. We keep what Benden’s doing to ourselves then.” All of them nodded, in agreement.

“So, to summarise, Taeyong and I will talk to the Lord Holder about the tithe issues. Benden’s exploring for lost artifacts and we’re keeping it to ourselves for now. There’s possibly rumours circulating we’re avoiding taking out all Thread forever and we’re basically now the scum of the earth in some people’s minds...did I miss anything?” Johnny finishes with a sarcastic grin.

Taeyong grimaces. “No, I think you summed it up perfectly. I’ll get Ten to send a runner with a message to the Lord Holder to arrange a meeting – he’s good with words.” His gaze burns into Yuta as he spoke pointedly, and Yuta wisely pretends not to notice. “You two keep an ear out for anything else troubling.”

Yuta and Jaehyun nod as one, and the green dragon rider stands and stretches, “I’ll ask the dragons too. They don’t like this either.”

“You haven’t heard anything worrying from the dragons lately, have you Yuta?” Johnny asks genuinely.

“No, I’d tell you if I had. There’s some complaining, some are bored by the lack of things to do, but nothing troubling beyond that. Might be time to send more patrols out, group exercises – southern riders keep being spotted, some have been seen around our weyrs as you know.”

“I’ve been meaning to bring that up next time us Weyrleaders meet. We don’t know what their purpose is for doing that.” Taeyong looks troubled. “There’s nothing we can do but watch out for them for now. So, keep it up, send some younger riders out for the close patrols, Jaehyun, and let the more experienced ones fly further afield. See what they can find out about these southern rider's flights. But no fights, monitoring for intelligence only.”

Jaehyun nods, “Got it. The weyrlings could use some flight time. Mireu’s most recent clutch are old enough to start taking to the skies for some practice.”

Yuta’s already halfway out the room when Jaehyun catches up to him to ask him something more. “You want to check in with the other weyrs about these tithe problems? See how widespread it is?”

Yuta hums in thought, “Yeah. Might be wise. At least then we can let Yong know to bring it up urgently next meeting with the leaders. Why is everyone so damn ungrateful? By the First Egg I swear it’s like they forgot the only reason they have farms is because of us risking our hides and our dragons to fight Thread.”

“It will pass.” Jaehyun soothes Yuta’s fractious temper with his easy-going nature and guides his partner out the door. “Let's go get these weyrlings in the sky, forget about it for a bit.” Jaehyun circles his arm around Yuta’s shoulders and tugs him into his side, "The brats are driving Doyoung insane I bet.”

“He loves them, though, those are all his children in his mind,” Yuta reminds Jaehyun with a grin. “They’re cute to watch, so let’s go wear them out for him and he can owe us later!” He took off with a run, and Jaehyun lets him go with a grin, watching him as he takes his own time to head there. Things would come right soon enough. He was sure of it.



Yushi wakes to a hand in his hair, calloused fingers caressing the nape of his neck and then back up into his hair. He lets out a soft sigh and buries his face in Sion’s neck. “It’s early.”

“It is not,” Taiyo chides softly. *“The sun is high in the sky*.”

“Do not tease,” Ideun cuts in, tone gentle. Yushi’s chest tightens with appreciation. *“The sun is still low.”*

Yushi huffed a soft laugh. It was easier to focus on the two dragons resting in their nest than it was to acknowledge the gentle hum in the background of his mind.

“Focus on here,” Sion says quietly, lips brushing the top of Yushi’s head.

Yushi hums, refusing to open his eyes. Instead, he leans into the touches, contemplates getting up for some klah. He’s never appreciated the taste the same way his brother has, preferring water to the bitter taste, but he still needs one to get him through the day. “Yuta will be here later.”

“I know.” Sion’s fingers stop, resting instead on Yushi’s shoulder. “Are you up for a visit?”

“Yes,” Yushi says, certain. It’s easy to tell when days will be bad versus mildly irritating. For now, his mind is a comfortable hum, and he hopes it stays that way. It’s also been a while since he’s seen his brother, something in the Weyr always coming up last minute. Yuta’s also seen him at his worst, and Yushi knows if things get bad, Yuta will see the signs.

Sion sighs, tilting Yushi's head up for a proper kiss. Yushi melts into his hold, painfully aware how lucky he is. "Come on, then," he says, when they part. "We better get up."

"I need scratches," Taiyo tells him plaintively. "You promised."

"I know I did." Yushi assures her he will be out promptly. Though not before spending a *little* more time cuddling with Sion.

Later, with Taiyo and Ideun both comfortable and dozing in the sunshin, Yushi steps onto the roof of the weyrhold, leaning against the defensive wall and breathing in the sea air. It should be refreshing, though Yushi rarely feels refreshed, even all the way out from the main weyr. Still, he appreciates the smell; mineral rich and briny, the sound of waves crashing against the sand always welcome over the usual crush of noise in his head.

"You're brooding again," Sion says, coming to stand next to him. He's slightly taller than Yushi, light brown hair rustling with the wind. His profile is always breathtaking, and Yushi finds himself staring for a moment. When Sion turns to look at him, Yushi affects an expression that could wither plants, but Sion just huffs a laugh, wrapping an arm around Yushi's shoulders. "You have a headache."

It's never stopped being surprising, the ways in which Sion can read him, but Yushi appreciates that he isn't misunderstood. There *is* a dull ache behind his right eye, a constant that's become easy to ignore. Well. Acclimatise to.

"You are in pain," Taiyo tells him in her soft tone. It's not always been that way; when she first hatched, her voice was high and shrill—*"It was not!"*—but she quickly learned to soften it when she became aware of Yushi's *condition*. *"It is a gift, not a* condition.*"*

"*Of course, dear heart,*" Yushi says. Then, with a sigh, he continues out loud. "We spent a long time at the Weyr yesterday. It's bound to cause problems."

Clearly he had been a little too optimistic that morning.

Sion runs a hand through Yushi's hair, rubbing soothing circles into his right temple. "I wish we could find a way you didn't have to suffer."

"You always do," Yushi points out, reaching up to kiss Sion's cheek. Sion turns, draws Yushi into a kiss that steals his breath. "I'll always have Taiyo," Yushi continues. "And Ideun." He pokes Sion in the side. "It's something I'll learn to deal with."

Not that he's managed to thus far, even with Yuta's help.

Speaking of.

There's a green shape on the horizon growing ever larger. Next to the smaller green is one of the largest Fort bronzes, and Yushi snorts. "He's finally bringing Jaehyun."

Following his gaze, Sion grins. "Be nice, won't you?"

Yushi shrugs, though he *does* make an internal promise to be nice. "I've always been nice to him."

It's a lie and they both know it.

Yuta is all Yushi knew for so long. He wants the best for him, just as Yuta has always wanted the best for Yushi. When he was younger, when his ability first started to show itself, it was obvious quickly that Yushi's gift was different from his brother's. Where Yuta could talk to all dragons, Yushi could *hear* all dragons. All the time. There was no way to stop it, to shut them out. He spent the first few months bedridden, the healers doing their best to find a remedy, but the migraines caused vicious auras that stole his sight. It continued for years, with Yushi mostly acclimatising, but often folding beneath the pressure of the voices and he would spend most of his time in pain.

Eventually Yuta refused to stay in the Weyr if it meant Yushi's suffering, but he'd already impressed Yosei. Yushi couldn't steal his happiness away, not when he could see the friends Yuta had made, the *home* that Yuta was crafting for himself. Something that had been stolen from him all those years ago with the attack on Ruatha and Yushi couldn't be the one to take away what small hope and happiness he'd found.

"Hey," Sion says, brushing a kiss to Yushi's forehead. "Where you'd go?"

"I was thinking about Yuta," Yushi admits. "About leaving the main Weyr."

It was Sion, one of the few friends Yushi had been able to make, who had come to Yuta with a solution. He and Riku had spent time travelling outside the main Weyr—without adult supervision and against Weyr rules—and they'd found a smaller weyrhold closer to the coastline. It was uninhabited and needed a bit of care and attention, but it had seemed like the perfect place for Yushi to reside.

At the time, the Weyrleaders, Minseok and Luhan, had been furious with the weyrlings. That had given way to pride when they realised what it could mean; they would keep the politically advantageous Yushi within their Weyr (and Yushi hates, hates, *hates* that he thinks like that) and solve the issue of healing resources continually being spent on someone who couldn't contribute. Negotiations about a move to the weyrhold had begun in earnest.

"It was good decision," Sion says. "For you and for me."

Yushi's never dared ask whether Sion regrets it, despite his words. Most of their friends and family reside in the main Weyr, and it's often just the two of them and their hatchlings, though Doyoung brings the newly Impressed riders out to them three times a sevenday. It gives them flying practice and stops Yushi from overwhelming himself amongst the Weyr population.

"It was," Yushi eventually agrees. He appreciates what Sion's done for him but doesn't think he can ever put into words just how deep the depth of his regard goes.

"*We are also with you always,"* Taiyo says, and Yushi looks over. Gold and bronze hides gleam in the sun, and their tails are entwined as always. *"Besides, I like the smell of the sea."*

Ideun's eye focuses on Yushi. *"It is sunny and warm here."*

Yushi laughs gently. "It seems our dragons enjoy the sun."

"As do I," Sion says with a grin and another kiss.

"Come on. We better get the food finished before they get here."

Yushi can hear them before they land; both Kyo and Yosei's excitement is obvious, despite Yuta's attempts to get them to quieten down.

"It's fine," Yushi says, when they finally touch down in the courtyard. "I can handle a few dragons."

The words have been said many, many times.

Yuta shakes his head. "They could stand to be a little quieter."

Yushi gets the impression Kyo often yells in Yuta's head despite Yuta's protests. Not that he can *ask* Kyo in the same way Yuta can. Yushi's gifts are one-way. He'd tried, once, yelling back in his head for a long time, enough that he scared Yuta when he zoned out, but it was futile. None of them could hear him. Instead, he'd given himself a headache and a nosebleed, and spent the night reassuring Yuta that he'd done it to himself.

"I'm glad you're here," Sion says, speaking to Jaehyun. "Yushi's as competent as Yuta in the kitchen and I know you're better—"

"I'm standing right here." Yushi raises his eyebrows, but Sion just blows a kiss and leads Jaehyun back into the weyr.

Yuta watches them leave quietly. "He's good for you."

Yushi shifts uncomfortably. "He doesn't have much choice. He made himself responsible for me."

Looking unimpressed, Yuta shakes his head. "You know that's not true. Minseok's word doesn't hold as much weight as it once did; if Sion wanted to return home, then he could. He wants to be here, Yushi."

There's a tight feeling in Yushi's chest and he looks away.

"I would be too," Yuta continues. "If I knew you wouldn't kick me out."

"Obviously," Yushi says immediately. "You'd bring Jaehyun, Kyo and your friends. I'd never know a moment's peace."

My mind wouldn't, he doesn't say, but they both hear it.

Before Yuta can apologise *again* for something he's not responsible for, Yushi tugs on his arm. "Come on. Let's go see if we can help in the kitchen."

Throughout the dinner, it becomes clear just how involved Yuta and Jaehyun have become. Yushi *knew* they were partnered, that Kyo exclusively flew Yosei when she rose to mate, but it was something else to see it. They'd softened in some areas but kept up their usual ridiculous banter in others. They had made space for each other to exist the way they needed to, and it made something in Yushi hurt with happiness. Yuta spent so much time sacrificing for Yushi, trying to make sure that Yushi grew up happy and loved, that Yushi worried he would never build a life for himself.

"You look happy," Yushi says, at the tail end of dinner, when things are winding down. "Settled."

Yuta nods. "I am."

Yushi smiles, sitting back a little. “Despite Jaehyun, I mean.”

Sion snorts, taking a sip of his klah to keep from laughing properly.

“He *can* be a challenge,” Yuta says, pretending to look thoughtful. He pats Jaehyun’s hand. “I keep him well trained.”

“I am sitting right here,” Jaehyun points out with a mock pout, but his eyes are fond.

Yushi meets his eyes with a smile. “Exactly. He brought you for the brother approval. I’m still deciding.”

“I watched you grow up,” Jaehyun says, still pouting. “I looked after you.”

“I remember.” Yushi takes a sip from his drink, narrowing his eyes. “I *also* remember you telling me that you’d let Kyo eat me if I misbehaved.”

Jaehyun immediately holds up his hands. “I did not!”

Yushi pretends to think about it. “I was kicking up a fuss about vegetables. You told me Kyo would swoop down and eat me if I didn’t eat *them*.”

“Yuta,” Jaehyun says seriously, holding up his hands. “I never said that!”

It takes Jaehyun a moment to realise that Yuta is laughing, as the man hides it behind a hand, but his sparkling eyes give it away. “It’s alright,” Yuta says, “I know you didn’t.”

Yushi laughs quietly. “It was Yuta who told me that. Xinling was the dragon who was supposedly going to eat me.”

“That’s actually frightening,” Sion says with a nod. “I was terrified of that bronze.”

“I also told him Kai would rescue him,” Yuta adds, rubbing a soothing hand against Jaehyun’s back, Jaehyun reciprocating the touch with a hand on Yuta’s thigh that Yushi eyes with judgemental suspicion. “Which explains his crush on Jongin.”

“I did *not* have a crush,” Yushi says, distracted from messing with Jaehyun, feeling his cheeks heat with embarrassment. Jongin was just the coolest rider at the Weyr when Yushi was growing up. His bronze, Kai, was sleeker and more lithe than his fellow dragons. Yushi loved watching him fight Thread when he got the chance.

Sion asks a question about Jaehyun’s childhood crushes, and the conversation thankfully drifts away from Yushi’s crush *that he didn’t have*. Yushi cradles his drink, massaging his forehead as his headache comes back full force without a suitable distraction. He really spent too much time at Fort the day before, necessary for the meeting, but still inadvisable. Sion slips an arm around his waist and Yushi leans against him, dropping his head to Sion’s shoulder and closing his eyes.

“We should go,” Yuta says quietly.

“I’m sorry,” Yushi says, opening one eye to look at his brother. “I appreciate you coming. Yes, even you.”

Jaehyun smiles softly and Yushi really should give him some slack; he remembers Jaehyun more than anybody else from his childhood, always making sure Yuta didn’t slip through the cracks like he tried to, and always checking in on Yushi when he could.

One day, he’ll give Jaehyun a break.

Just not today.



It’s still early when Yosei and Kyo are disturbed from their peaceful conversation they had while waiting for their riders. Yushi's discomfort from his headache is obvious, and the chattering dragons would only make it worse.

The green and bronze dragons had flown a short distance away, to make it easier for Yushi; distance made the voices quieter, much like a normal person speaking. Meaning a short walk by their riders was needed before taking off again. Yuta waves to Yushi, leaving him at the door.

“Go rest,” he told him, the minute or two walking didn’t require him to follow.

Now Jaehyun grabs his hand and matches his pace. The bronze rider wears a slight frown on his usually calm face, as if pondering something deeply. Yuta can’t resist, “Will you share what’s on your mind? Any moment now I expect steam to start coming out of your ears from working your brain so hard.”

Yuta grins mischievously at his partner, and Jaehyun startles then gives him a sheepish smile. His charming dimples appear in a flash and then are gone again. The thought to poke them and babble nonsense at the man forms and is ignored as Jaehyun replies to the jest.

“Is it that obvious?” the man chuckles. He’s usually of mild temperament, unflustered by the world around him. “I was just thinking...”

“Always a dangerous past-time...”

Jaehyun snorts shaking his head at the all too familiar joke, but Yuta can see the smile dimpling his cheeks once again and knows he’s not actually upset. This sort of exchange is common with them, something they both enjoy. Even if they can predict what the other is going to say most of the time. There’s a comfort in the familiar banter.

“I suppose I was being a little nostalgic. Yushi’s not much older than you were when you first came to Fort Weyr. He was only something like three turns old, wasn’t he?”

Yuta nods, the time directly after the attack on Ruatha hold has always been one he’s reluctant to discuss. But so many turns later, the emotions have softened and he can bear the topic with little

distress. Jaehyun is safe, comforting, he doesn't mind talking about those times. He was right there with him after all.

"He was. A tiny thing, along with the rest of them."

"The new weyrlings?"

Yuta nods again, the latest eggs to hatch on the warm sands of Fort Weyr had been the ones chosen to present the youngest Ruathan survivors for. All four of them had been deemed worthy by the Weyr's Searchers and had proven them right, each walking off the hatching grounds with a hatchling at foot to raise and love. "Hard to believe they were once toddling fosterlings, and now, they've all Impressed dragons."

"I still can't believe Yushi Impressed a gold Queen. I knew he would do well, but still, a gold?" Yuta says, expressing his astonishment with wide eyes and dramatic gestures of his one free hand through the air. It's still so very exciting to Yuta, his brother, a rider of a golden Queen!

"You did well raising him. He didn't turn out like he did without help. Don't sell yourself short, Yuta, you're just as amazing."

Yuta must stop for a moment to look at Jaehyun; he finds his partner looking straight into his eyes with such a proud fondness in his gaze and Yuta feels his cheeks redden.

"Well...He's Ruathan, he was born to be great," Yuta states, flustered.

Jaehyun laughs, one of those rich, genuine ones. "You're to humble. You were barely a more than a kid yourself raising him."

Yuta thinks back to the days of adjusting to weyr life with a young toddler, freshly orphaned, still mourning his parents like any beloved child would. While still also mourning himself, the grief fresh and overwhelming at times. He'd clung to the only thing he had left, his baby brother Yushi, like a drowning man would to the one thing keeping him afloat.

"You could have given him to one of the weyr women to raise as a fosterling like so many riders do, it was even expected. But you kept him, you taught that kid everything you could, supported him through finding a solution to living with his ability, then fought for him to have a chance at a dragon because you knew that he was worthy. He might be a bit of an oddball towards me, but I'm trying to remember I am in a partnership with the person who was his whole world for so long."

Jaehyun's words make him strangely emotional, as he ponders how far he's come. Not just Yushi, but everything else. Adjusting to the weyr culture, defending his little brother when his ability had begun to cause problems for his young body.

Impressing Yosei and the joy of the soul bond with the gentle, energetic green.

And then, Jaehyun.

Jaehyun had always been there, a friendly face in the Weyr. Even when Yuta had tried to push him away, he'd been patiently waiting. Easy going, accepting of the emotional storms Yuta had unleashed while healing from losing his parents trying to adjust to such a drastically different world. With no parents to run to for comfort or wisdom; Yushi too young and innocent to bear the

burden of his brother's grief and anger at the world. Jaehyun had been Yuta's solace, a peaceful shelter to run to when everything got too much.

Time, healing, and maturity had stabilised all those volatile, messy emotions and the outbursts faded away into little more than another memory of what he had once been.

"I really have come a long way; a lot of it is because of you, too. I couldn't ask for anyone better at my side."

He giggles, flashing Jaehyun a toothy, smirking grin, "One day Yushi will accept you as part of our family, you'll just have to endure. That's my baby brother after all; you need to prove yourself worthy of me to him."

Jaehyun sighs and Yuta can see the good-natured amusement written all over his handsome, princely face. "I promise, I will earn his approval. I have everything else."

"Everything else?" Yuta is confused. He tilts his head squinting at the man in suspicion.

"Well, you already live with me, you eat with me, our dragons share a cave. I have your very nice ass all to myself. You love me, or I assume you do because otherwise you wouldn't be jumping on my dick every chance you get."

Yuta cackles, he can't help himself.

"Must he speak this way so close to me? I do not need to know the activities you do each night."

Yosei's voice interrupts to complain, soft but with biting judgement.

"Sorry, my lovely Yosei, but you are not so innocent yourself."

The squawk of indignant rage is everything to Yuta.

"Yes, I love you." Yuta says, pulling Jaehyun to him as they reach their dragons. His head rises, lips searching for a kiss that Jaehyun is only too eager to give with a fond squeeze of his ass, "Why else would I put up with you?"

Jaehyun chuckles, smiling wide and dimples deep on each cheek. Yuta pokes at one.

"You should stop flashing your dimples so freely, they're mine."

Jaehyun pecks the tip of his nose with his lips, soft and playful. "I'll save my dimples only for you. Now, let's get home."

They're airborne a minute later, and Yuta enjoys the feeling of the cool air rushing past. It's nearing nighttime, the sky a painting of vibrant peaches and oranges. Behind him and just below, Kyo flies lazily. Yosei sways, dipping left and right gently; it's a rare flight where they aren't flying for any other purpose than pleasure.

Yuta looks up into Pern's skies, marvelling at its vastness. It's so awe inspiring; one day they won't need to look into the sky with the vague dread that Thread might fall any moment. He hopes he lives to see such a day as he leans forward again, watching the ground rush by under Yosei's wings in mesmerising dips and waves as the hills climb upwards towards the mountainous peak where the Weyr sits high.

“We should fly like this more often, it is... calming to my soul.”

Yuta hums, sending his feeling of calm pleasure, *“I understand, we should. I forget there’s other ways to fly than for Thread.”*

He looks out in the distance. The area is barren but for rocks and dust with scattered patches of shrubs and grass. Thread made growing life here impossible except in small, pre-determined patches dragons can guard from the skies. Against the sea of browns and greens, he sees movement. Yuta squints, trying to see it in better detail.

“Yosei, do you see something moving?” He sends the image and Yosei turns her elegant head, looking with the eyes of a born predator that are so much sharper than any humans.

“I do see; it looks like people? But what would humans be doing out here?”

Yuta has the same question in mind, he almost asks Kyo to tell Jaehyun of what they’ve seen off in the distance when a sound grabs his attention.

Through the air, deep and booming, the Weyr’s drum-beats. Yuta’s heart pounds heavily in his chest as he deciphers the too familiar sounds.

Thread is falling! And it’s early!

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