

***"Desparatus Desiderium"*****(Desperate Longing)**

T H E I N F I N I T Y S E R I E S

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"Brion, pass me that spanner, the three quarter one." Val asked where he drifted in the gravity free environment in the engine room. He'd turned off the gravity field so the blood wouldn't rush to his head as he tried getting to the awkward flux grid power relay.

"Where the hell is it?" Brion grumbled trying to find the elusive wrench in a sea of weightless tools they had floating close at hand.

"There above your head."

Brion rolled his eyes and handed it over to Val.

"How you boys doing in there?" Beau's voice called over the intercom. Brion floated over to the panel.

"Another ten minutes or so and we'll have it back on-line. Just a circuit break, Val's putting the panel back on now."

"Good, dinner is almost ready and Cris is having computer withdrawals."

"When isn't my husband not having computer separation anxiety?" Val chuckled tightening the last bolt. "Done."

"Tell Cris he can fire up his network again. Power stabilized no more brown outs." Brion said as he and Val collected their tools and turned the gravity field back on.

"Yippee! Oh lovely cursor, oh how I pine when you do not blink so beguiling at me!" Cris' voice came over the speaker and Val laughed.

"I'll give you blink you idiot." Val retorted as he turned to Brion.

"You can quit ya know, we're only a few days out from Pirotaine we can take you back."

"Oh hell no." Brion grinned as they wandered up from the engine room of the "Infinity" into the main living section. He'd just turned twenty years old and while he loved his parents and grandparents and his siblings, he wanted nothing more than a change of scenery and no girls hogging every bathroom in the Homestead. Between his aunts, his mother, and his sister he rarely had a chance to breathe, let alone take a nice long bathroom visit without someone pounding on the door. Women surrounded him and children of all ages had it not been for his grandfather, father and brother he'd have gone crazy.

Not that he didn't love them all dearly, in fact that was far removed from the truth. Farin had taught him everything he knew about engineering, his mother had taught him to sing, his father taught him to draw, his grandmother to cook, he was all in all quite a well rounded young man but he needed something more, a chance to spread his wings and fly as it were.

So when Tovi had wanted to remain behind on Pirotaine with her husband Marc and start raising a family, she was almost thirty after all and as much as she loved her parents, it was time for their baby girl to leave the nest. Marc had come on board while both he and Tovi had been in their teens and they had been married almost seven years at this point. It was nice for Val and Cris to have them both close, but both men knew they'd not be able to keep their daughter close forever. So Tovi and Marc stayed behind, Val was losing his assistant and Brion jumped at the chance and vacant job opening.

Farin needed to retire soon and Brion's younger brother Roger, just out of high school would stay to take over the Salvage yard with their father Phineas so Farin could retire. The yard suited Roger more anyway; he was the most like Phineas. Laid back and easy going and had no desire to leave Rael.

Brion was definitely his mother's son. Fiery tempered, passionate, foul mouthed, and eager to take the world by storm. She and his father had a strange marriage. She flittered about the galaxy singing to throngs of people, Phineas was the stay at home dad, painting, sculpting and running the small art gallery since Ms. Renault had willed it to him in her passing and he managed to also help the aging Farin run the salvage yard. Roger spent all his time with Farin as Phineas ran back and forth between the two jobs. Valeria, an artist herself thanks to her brother's influence on her took up working full time at the gallery to allow Phineas the time to run back and forth.

The Corcoran's had become a leading family in Rael, everyone knew who they were and their contributions to the community were vast. Farin was even asked to run for mayor at one point, he respectfully declined the offer, he hadn't a head for politics, he was an old grease monkey as he put it and not inclined to working where his hands didn't get dirty. Phineas was offered the candidacy the following election and like his father ran for the hills when faced with politics. He had too much to deal with raising three children and working two jobs let alone trying to run a city.

It was hard for Phineas sometimes with Romi who could and would be gone for months at a time, Phineas never worried about her beyond her getting hurt, but he was lonely during those times, it's why he still lived in the "Homestead" with his parents and their children. He could care for the kids and help his parents who were growing older. Farin was Seventy and Mandy was Sixty-five and their bodies reminded them they needed help occasionally. Phineas was always there for them all. It was part of what made Romi love him so much, he gave her the freedom to live her dreams and always have him to come home to. Phineas was the rock in the family that everyone turned to, and whom everyone supported when he was missing Romi more than usual.

He and Romi had a faithful and unquenchable trust in one another that was amazing and inspiring. The love was strong and Romi always came home to them full of amazing stories and bizarre presents.

Brion's youngest sibling and the only girl of the trio of children was still in middle school, she was only twelve and was certainly daddy's little girl. Phineas was a tad over protective, but so were her older brother's, Beryl certainly did not lack for doting male figures in her life.

She was the only one of the siblings to look like Phineas. They all had his eyes, and his height, but only Beryl inherited his coloring and his even temperament. The "Homestead" had expanded even more over the years; it was a virtual compound of family homes and workshops. The health clinic was expanded into a freestanding facility and Mary ran that with a volunteer staff while her Husband Leigh ran a law practice in Rael and managed the fundraising and accounts for the free clinic.

Erin, a middle school science teacher and her Husband Aric, a high school literature teacher had built their home next door to start and the additions grew from there. Bo and her wife Margaret lived next door to that, they were both pastry chefs and much to Beau and Cris' gluttonous delight had bought the Fontesque bakery from the owners who were old and wanted to sell and rather than open their own bakery, they bought the landmark location and to keep the heritage of Rael in tact they didn't even change the name and in return for the financial aide to help purchase and win the bidding war for the building, they spoiled certain uncles rotten when they came to visit. Valeria, who was still unmarried, lived at home.

Tovi and Marc were next to join the circus and construction had already started on their home. Tovi was a genius when it came to computers, Cris had taught her everything he knew so finding a job was not going to be difficult for her, Marc would help at the Salvage yard, freeing up more of Phineas' divided schedule. It was becoming a working, self-sufficient family compound quickly.

However, it was always noisy with children of all ages running in and out and Brion reveled in the peace of his cabin on board the "Infinity" it was so much quieter in space.

Everyone gathered at the table in the main room for dinner, Beau had prepared steak and onions with mushroom gravy and the entire cabin smelled of grilled onions, it was wonderful. Beau had become quite adept at cooking over the years, it was his job on the "Infinity" and he did enjoy it so it helped. He was feeling the loss of Tovi almost as much as her parents. For years she had been his student and his companion while the others worked, and when she got older and began working as part of the crew, she still managed to spend time with Beau. He was grieving a little and pouring his energy into keeping busy.

He was writing music, cooking and playing a lot. Eran sighed as he sat down at his plate. "Beau, I worry about you."

"Eran love, I'm fine." Beau reassured laying a hand to his beloved's check. "Eat your dinner, I'm suffering an empty nest is all."

"Tell me about it. Cris sighed, trying not to tear up, again. He missed his baby girl and all the fun they'd had when she was little teaching her. They taught her well and she was a strong, bright woman now, they all had to let go. That was the worst part about never aging or changing. Those you loved did and one could not stop time to prevent children from growing up. It was a sublime pain; the love you gained was worth the sorrow of letting go. They'd not have traded one moment with her, and it wasn't as if she were gone, yet. She was still young, and there would be grandchildren, and then great grandchildren. The cycle of life they'd get to see would be fascinating and something no one but the four of them would ever get the chance to see.

"I wonder how my dad is. I know he's feeling a bit down since I left." Brion said just looking at his dinner.

"Son, every father hates to see his children grow up because you do it so damn fast. He'll be fine eventually, we all will." Val said pouring wine for everyone and then holding up his glass. "To family."

"To family." Everyone raised a toast and drank deeply.

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Lord Xantarun Indivar wanted nothing more than to get to his chambers at the university and shut his door. He couldn't take a breath without everyone watching the favored youngest son of Sansun's Leading Lord Xartova Indivar. Xantarun's elder brothers all followed in their sire's footsteps and held political pull in all the jurisdictions of Sansun.

Xan favored his hosting parent, Devapa Indivar. Devapa had always been the gentle guide in his life, taking great pains to teach his son what it truly meant to be noble. Xan missed his Hopa terribly; Devapa had died suddenly from blood clot in his brain. One moment he had been there, smiling and telling Xan a story, the next moment Xan had seen his beloved Hopa fall lifeless to the floor. What angered Xan the most was his Sipa's reaction. Devapa had barely been in his grave before Xartova had a new mate at his side. Twenty years of mate-matched union, three children, Devapa turning blind eyes to infidelity with their Ounta servants and other Primas and what did he get out of it? Just his youngest son weeping at his grave in anguish and fury at the waste and wishing it had been Xartova in that grave instead of the beautiful Devapa.

Xan vowed then never to be like his Sipa, he hated everything about him. Devapa had been the noblest of them all, and bore it all in silence. Xan would never forget his Hopa, never.

Xan reached his rooms, vast and palatial as befitting his rank, he found that too a waste and excess. But that was the way Sansun was and he was just one man fighting a caste system that had been in place for thousands of years. The Prima, the gifted ones ruled everything, they had the finest clothes, food, education, everything at a whim and gained off the labor of the Ounta.

Biologically the Ounta and Prima were no different. They were a bi-gendered humanoid marsupial race, They were all tall, male in all outward appearances and they all had the same reproductive system, each was capable to sire or host.

When they mated, the sire's semen would enter the small gestational chamber of the host. It was a small flapped canal accessible only when penetrated at the right angle. It was very hard to reach at all and only the right conditions would achieve a conception and only if the host was in his fertile season, Every six months or so for a few weeks every inhabitant of Sansun went through a period of almost an insane need to mate, if both partners were in a mating heat Xan had heard the sex was incredible. But then he didn't know, he'd yet to find a decent partner to mate with, so many left him emotionally cold but if he ever did find one and the conditions were perfect, in a few weeks he or the host would painfully pass what was commonly called a pearl.

It looked nothing like a pearl, and more like a jagged hard stone. It was incredibly painful for the host to pass, even if they were quite small. The stone would then be placed under the large flap of skin that covered their abdomens where the pearl would soften allowing the fetus within the protective passing pearl to grow inside the pouch of the hosting parent. The pearl casing would be reabsorbed into the host's body after a few months and the infant growing would begin to suckle from the hidden mammary glands within the pouch. The entire process took nearly a year before the infant would emerge from the protective pouch of the host. Only to return there until it was just too big to fit for comfort. An infant would sometimes demand of its host to return to the pouch when the host was just not able to hold him any longer.

Many long nights of crying and tantrums were endured. Prima and Ounta alike.

Xan had been one of those demanding infants according to his Hopa. Xan smiled as he remembered his Hopa teasing him about it. "You were nearly two before you stopped trying to crawl back to me. Such a silly, but adorable child." Xan could hear Devapa's voice in his head to this day, soft, gentle and warm. Even as an infant he'd been highly attached to the man who had born him as host.

Ounta's were just like the Prima in that aspect. The only differences were the talents the Prima possessed. Prima's were gifted, telepathic, telekinetic, empathy; the entire range of psychic abilities ran strong in the Prima. It was the main reason the idiotic caste system had come about and the races split into Prima and Ounta.

The Ounta were talent-less, and it had been easy in the planet's history to force the weaker into servitude. Xan detested the way his father treated Ounta's like they were nothing and only put there on Sansun to serve him. Most Prima's treated Ounta's like that; it was accepted behavior in the society, which Xan found morally appalling. Ounta's never were seen, they wore either shades of black or gray from head to foot, and veils covered their faces.

The only parts of an Ounta one looked upon in public were their eyes and their hands. They wore collars that caused physical pain if they spoke, so they were also a silent race that spoke in hand gestures and with their eyes. Household pets were treated with more dignity than an Ounta and they had no power to fight back. Xan pitied them but he was only one man and he knew it was pointless to try and change an entire society's viewpoint when for thousands of years it had been accepted as the status quo.

Xan often wondered just how many Ounta's really were talent-less, even though it was illegal for a Prima to mate with an Ounta, Xan had known his father had taken many to his bed and the gods only knew how many half siblings Xan had working as slave labor in his childhood home.

Surely with all the behind closed door mating that went on, surely some of the Prima talent had been passed on to Ounta offspring. But the Ounta had no voices, and accepted what others told them and feared the Prima retribution and punishment if they dared break the simplest of laws.

Showing his face in public would lead to severe beatings and torture. If an Ounta had been caught mating with a Prima he was killed outright. No punishment ever visited the Prima however, it disgusted Xan to the point he had become withdrawn and was often found lost in his studies rather than associate with the snobbery of the Prima society he'd been born into.

He threw his cloak over a chair and headed toward the bar in his room when a knock came to his door and he threw it open in a huff.

"Begging your pardon your Lordship. I hate to disturb you while you are settling into your chambers, but I have brought your personal Ounta." The low-ranking Prima said, a silent black clad man behind him, eyes downcast.

"I don't need an Ounta. Take him away." Xan said angrily and the Prima gasped.

"My Lord, he is to attend to your needs, I hand picked him myself for you. He has been specifically trained to meet your needs and tastes. Here at the University, meals are taken in your chambers and the laundry is accessible to Ounta's only. You need him while you are with us. He will not leave these chambers, he's specifically trained to be a chamber Ounta, available to you only."

"Fine. He will be bored to tears."

"He's just an Ounta my Lord."

Xan's eyes narrowed, he hated that phrase. He stepped aside to allow the Ounta to cross the threshold and the Prima House Master led him to a small side chamber door beside the fireplace. This would be the Ounta's small cubicle of a room while he lived with Xan.

It held a cot and a small chest, it was boiling hot behind the fireplace and had no window. It was a cell. "You can't expect him to live in here." Xan said angrily as the Ounta set down his small bag of belongings. His eyes shot up and he looked at Xan as if he'd said something he'd never heard before. His eyes caught Xan off guard; they were a brilliant and electrifying blue.

"Of course he will live in here."

"It's an oven in here and that bed must be older than my great-great-Sipa. If you must make me keep an Ounta, I order you to at least give him the means to sleep properly."

The House-Prima laughed. "You must spoil your Ounta's at home. This is a grand room for such a high-ranking Ounta. He's here to serve you, not sleep. You are very witty my Lord. Have a good evening." The House-Prima left and Xan fumed.

"I wasn't joking. Damn it." Xan hissed turning to the Ounta standing there just staring at him.

"Come on, this place is huge, there's got to be a better place for you to make yours."

The Ounta just stood there staring, eyes wide with disbelief. He shook his head, indicating the room was fine for his needs with his hands.

"Do they have a voice limiter on you?"

The Ounta nodded.

"Barbaric. I would hear your voice come here." Xan said from the door way and the Ounta walked over. "Turn around, let me see the clasp."

The Ounta obeyed and bowed his head to give his master access. He felt strong hands move the head covering away to expose his neck. "These damn things piss me off. Almost got it, they can be tricky trying to read my fingerprint as a Prima. There. Access code accepted." Xan said as the electronic device beeped once and slipped off. The Ounta took a deep breath and his hands flew to his neck. He must have worn the collar for years, it looked as if it had seen better days and it was well worn.

The Ounta turned and fell to his knees before Xan and wept. "Thank you My Lord." He sobbed, his voice soft and mellow, and he sounded exactly Like Devapa to Xan's ears. The whisper of a baritone in the lilting delivery of breath and sound.

"Do not thank me. What do I call you?"

"You want my name My Lord?"

"Yes, I do."

"Kivi, Kivi Jui my Lord."

"Well Kivi, please get up off the floor I'm in no mood to play master, nor am I ever in the mood to play these stupid roles. Call me a deviant if you will, but I believe that no man, Ounta or Prima

should be forced to be a slave. I do not wish for you to serve me, I am more than able to wipe my own backside and dress myself."

Kivi's eyes reflected a smile beneath the veil covering his face. "You are indeed as they say My Lord. I will refrain from wiping backsides if that is not your desire. But it truly will be an honor to serve you. Your kindness is deserving of my best."

Xan smiled and reached down to offer the man a hand up off the floor. Kivi took it tentatively and allowed Xan to help him rise. "Just be yourself. If I am floundering I will ask help."

"And it will be given my Lord."

"I would see your face. I also detest these, these abominations of dignity." Xan said reaching up to smooth the veil from Kivi's face and push away his head covering. The eyes had just been a taste of the beauty that had been hidden beneath. Black hair that shone almost blue in the firelight, fair skin, piercing blue eyes and a brilliant shy smile on the youth before him, he couldn't have been older than Xan himself.

"You're beautiful. You remind me of my Hopa, he was dark and fair like you."

"You flatter me My Lord. I could not possibly be as beautiful as your Prima Hopa, He was a legendary beauty, and you favor him not I my Lord."

"That's society talking. I favor my Sipa in looks. And stop with the My Lord please. Xan is fine, it is just you and I in here."

"I couldn't!"

"Don't make me Angry Kivi, I like you. Call me Xan, please. I don't want a servant, but a friend would be nice."

"You are strange indeed. I would be honored to be your friend Lord Xan."

Xan raised an eyebrow and Kivi caught his slip and his hands flew to his mouth. Xan laughed. "Better. I know it will take getting used to. Come on Kivi let's find you a place to stay in here rather than this oven. I'm melting." Xan took Kivi's hand as they explored the large chamber together and Xan insisted Kivi use the guest room, his logic being he had no intention of ever entertaining guests in his rooms. He was a bookworm and liked his solitude and really didn't like people much. It was wasted space so Kivi might as well use it.

Kivi was finding it hard to resist his master's quirks. Telling him no would be impossible. Xan was unlike any Prima or Ounta for that matter he'd ever met. You couldn't help like him; he was charismatic and genuine in his kindness. Kivi felt like he was truly free, even confined electronically to this room with the tag around his ankle.

Once Kivi was installed in his room, he came out to find Xan seated in a chair a book in hand. "Shall I make you dinner? Are you hungry? Tea perhaps?" Kivi asked and Xan looked up from his book and frowned.

"You need not wait on me Kivi."

"I want to. It is no trouble."

"I will lose this debate won't I?"

"Probably." Kivi smiled winsomely and Xan shook his head.

"I concede defeat. Tea would be nice, I am tired from a long trip and have no desire to do anything than sit and relax a while."

"Then relax and I will make you a soothing tea to help you rest well." Kivi said moving into the kitchen on silent bare feet. His toes poking out under his long black robe as he walked. His clothes were so shapeless and far too big it was hard to tell just what lay underneath.

Long fingered, elegantly boned pale hands set a kettle to boil on the stove and those nimble fingers made short work of the tea leaves he blended into a pot before pouring the water over them to brew. Xan watched him over the top of his book; he moved like a dancer and made absolutely no sound. Even the clinking of china was muted as he set out the tea service and carried the tray to the coffee table next to the couch Xan was lounging on.

"You take two sugars correct?"

"They told you huh?"

"I know everything you like, yes."

"Then I am at a loss, what do you like?" Xan asked accepting the cup and saucer from Kivi's hands.

"Whatever you like."

"Bad answer, try again Kivi." Xan said sipping from his tea.

Kivi sat on the floor, his hands folded in his lap and his eyes downcast. "Xan, it does not matter does it? Like it or not, I am an Ounta."

Xan set down his cup and leaned forward lifting Kivi's chin. "It does matter. It does to me at least. Please tell me about yourself, I'd like to know. And drink with me, I never want you to wait until I am finished. I hate that too."

"I do not like tea."

"See, there. Then I shant ask you to drink with me again." Xan smiled sitting back. "What do you like?"

"Cool drinks. Juice, I like juice."

"What else? What's your favorite food?"

"Cheese."

"Just cheese?"

Kivi smiled. "I could make a meal from it. I like it very much. Some Cheese and fresh from the oven bread and I am most content."

"I'll make note of that. We must have fondue sometimes for dinner, I like it too."

Kivi smiled brightly, he was thanking all the gods in the heavens for such a benevolent master.

"What's your favorite color?" Xan went on to ask as Kivi poured him more tea without being asked. Some habits would be hard to break, even if they were just good manners.

"Blue."

"You would look nice in blue." Xan mused thinking it would match those gorgeous eyes.

"Xan. There are some rules you cannot break so. What if someone walked in here? I'm breaking a dozen laws right now with you. I am speaking, I am showing my face, and I am in a Prima's room. Wearing color too?"

"No one will walk in here. I won't allow it. Besides, we are in private and I told you to do these things. You will not be punished for following my wishes."

"I pray what you say is true, I am happy." Kivi said breaking down in tears again. Xan reached out and patted his head and brought Kivi's cheek to his knee while he stroked sinfully soft hair in comfort.

"I am glad you are happy. I am not happy seeing others suffer. You are no different than I Kivi."

"I am, I'm..." He was about to say Ounta when he went rigid in almost panic and immediately pulled his veil back over his face and moved to hide in a corner just as a knock came to the door.

He walked out, once again looking the servile Ounta and he silently opened the door. "Get your master Ounta. Tell him the Head master is here to speak to him."

Xan hearing the exchange stood from his seat on the sofa. "It's late Head Master. I am weary from my Journey. Can this not wait until the morning?"

"No it cannot my Lord. I have a message from your Sipa."

"Probably telling me to take at least one political science course this term of study."

"You are a graduate student Lord Indivar. Four years of University already your Sipa is worried for your political career."

"I have no desire to be a politician. He knows this already. Give me the message then, I am to bed soon."

"Lord Indivar, it is an honor you chose our University to continue your studies."

"You have a good literature department, my father knows full well I intend a career in academia and not government. He tries though, he will fail but he tries." Xan said taking the note, not once letting the headmaster into his chamber.

"Good night Lord Indivar."

"Good Night Head Master." Xan shut the door and spun to face Kivi.

"How did you know?" He asked, his suspicions about Ounta's surging to the surface.

"I could sense him coming. Please do not strike me." Kivi cowered in the corner and Xan walked over and laughed just hugging him.

"I knew it! Sixth sense is just one aspect of gifts. Your Sipa was Prima wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"I suspected this for years, there had to have been enough mixing of blood to produce this, yet they squash you into servitude."

"I can only sense danger. Many of us can. I don't know of any Ounta who can do what a Prima can."

"It's because you have to be taught Kivi. We can't do it without learning how either. Come with me, we're having your first lesson."

Kivi recoiled in horror and fell to Xan's feet. "Please, no. You will get me killed. Xan please I beg you no."

Xan knelt beside the quivering youth at his feet and gently removed his veil and head covering. "Are you that scared Kivi?"

Kivi nodded, his eyes reflecting his terror.

"Then I shall not force you to learn. I cannot imagine the life you know, I am sorry for scaring you so. I will not do anything that will cause you pain."

"Xan, I am scared for you. Teaching an Ounta will get you killed. That is a crime even a Prima is punished for."

"I suppose you are right. I just got excited to have confirmation of my theory. I am sorry."

"It is alright. I just do not wish to see you punished I like you very much, I am blessed as your Ounta."

"Kivi." Xan's voice was warning.

"Detest it all you wish Xan. I belong to you whether or not you like owning an Ounta. I am a gift from the University to you. You do not treat me as property, which is why I am blessed to be yours. There are others not quite as fortunate as I."

"Again we will probably always disagree here won't we?"

Kivi laughed softly. "Probably."

"Then there is no point arguing the point is there?"

"No."

Xan smiled, Kivi was going to be good compatible company at the very least. Xan just shook his head and pulled them both up off the floor. "The tea is getting cold."

"That is when I like tea."

Xan laughed as he sat down. Kivi was going to be wonderful company if he kept that up.

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Xan awoke when a gentle hand on his shoulder stirred him awake. "Xan, Lord Xan. My goodness you're a deep sleeper. Xan."

"I'm awake." Xan rolled to face Kivi, groggy and blurry eyed. The first thing he saw when his eyes focused was Kivi's amused smile and brilliant eyes.

"Good morning. I have your bath ready and your breakfast. Your first class is in an hour."

"Kivi, you don't have to wait on me..."

"I know Xan. But it seemed you were not inclined to care for yourself this morning. It's my pleasure." Kivi replied cheerfully as he stood to leave the room.

"You're amused aren't you?" Xan asked throwing his legs out of bed to stumble toward the bathroom.

"Very." Kivi's soft chuckle could be heard as he shut the door to give Xan his privacy.

"Pay backs are a bitch Kivi." Xan grinned as he slipped into a warm bath with a sigh.

After a luxurious bath with sandalwood scented oil in the water, Xan found his favorite breakfast waiting for him. Fresh pastries that were more savory than sweet, fragrant tea, and fruit that had been cut and peeled into an assorted salad. All light foods, which sat well with him in the morning. Kivi certainly has been apprised of his preferences.

"Will you join me?" Xan asked as he seated himself at the table and Kivi smiled and nodded and sat opposite him at the table. He poured Xan's tea and to Kivi's shock Xan poured juice into his own glass.

"You said you liked this right?" Xan asked, cheerful and Kivi sat there stunned. A Prima was serving him.

"Y-yes. Xan..."

"Kivi, I'm so done arguing. Get used to it. I enjoy fucking with the norm."

"So I am learning." Kivi said as Xan set down the decanter and they both broke their fast together at the table as equals.

During the meal Xan watched Kivi shyly eat, amused. "How old are you Kivi?"

"I will be twenty years from my pouch tomorrow."

"Your emergence day is tomorrow?" Xan asked with a smile. Kivi returned it.

"Yes." Kivi answered moving to clear the plates from the table.

"We should celebrate. Twenty is a lucky year."

"It already is. I need no more, I have all I ever hoped for." Kivi replied leaning over to take Xan's empty cup and his hand cupped Xan's in a grateful and thankful gesture.

Xan smiled, the more he got to know Kivi, the more he reminded him of Devapa, always subtle and gentle as a breeze in manner and movement. "You're quite... refreshing." Xan remarked as he stood from the table dusting off any stray pastry crumbs from his clothes. "I must be off if I am to be on time."

"Yes. You have twenty minutes. Your class is an hour, and then you have ancient literature until mid-day after. I know you like your larger meal mid-day; I will have it ready for you. Would you prefer red or white meat today?"

"Kivi..."

"Xan, this is my job. I have nothing else to do these little things to see to your comfort are a pleasure to me. It gives me something to do. Please let us not argue, please. I am so happy I want to take care of you."

"Fair enough. White meat please then." Xan replied, Kivi was right he would need to eat and Kivi would be bored sitting in here alone day in and day out without things to do to keep occupied.

"Have a good day Xan. Be Well." Kivi walked Xan to the door and handed him his satchel containing his gear.

"Be well Kivi." Xan smiled and headed out to class. Kivi shut the door behind him and leaned against it with a contented sigh. He'd heard rumors that Xan was kind; the rumors were a pale representation of the truth. There wasn't anything Kivi would not do for that man; he deserved his very best at all times. Kivi was eternally grateful and felt blessed to belong to Xan, there was no master like him; he'd move the heavens and earth to please him. So Kivi set to work cleaning away the breakfast dishes and moved to begin preparations for the mid-day meal.

He had the meat marinating in a flavorful white wine, and all the vegetables were cut and prepared when Kivi took a break to take his own bath for the day. He always preferred to kill two birds with one stone. First he'd clean the bathroom in the nude, and as he rinsed the cleaners away he'd wash himself.

He was giving the tub a wipe down with a soft sponge, the shower running to rinse away the cleaners and soaking Kivi in the process. He did not notice the man in the door watching him.

Xan's second class had been cancelled so he had come home to find Kivi cleaning his bathroom, gloriously nude. Xan watched through the crack in the door, he felt like a voyeur but Kivi was hypnotic. Every muscle moved in fluid grace, no wasted movements, efficient and precise. The shapeless robe he wore hid a treasure of form beneath. Lean, strong and elegant, Xan was spying on perfection.

Xan pushed the door open as Kivi turned and squawked in alarm. "Please don't be alarmed. Class was cancelled. Please continue." Xan smiled, his arms folded over his chest.

"Xan. You startled me." Kivi smiled turning to rinse his hair in the spray before he shut off the taps.

Xan walked over and handed him a towel. "Sorry. Do you always clean the bathroom in the nude?"

Kivi took the towel and wrapped it around his middle. "Yes. It saves time and my clothes."

"Can you leave me a note when you plan on doing it next? I missed a lot of that."

Kivi laughed, "I will inform you. Xan you are amusing."

"And you are stunning. I think my eyes fell out when I walked in here."

Kivi turned and smiled. "You flatter me too much and your handsome golden eyes are fine and still in their sockets." Kivi said handing Xan back his towel before disappearing into his room for a moment to dress again. He came out in the same shapeless robe.

"I detest that robe even more now." Xan grumbled good-naturedly.

"You will live I surmise. Do you need anything before I start the meal?"

Xan shook his head and sat on the couch. He was watching again. Kivi smiled and just went to work.

"Do you do anything else without that robe?" Xan asked after a few minutes and Kivi turned and planted his hands on his hips.

"Xan, if you wish me too, you just need to ask. I belong to you."

"Do you mind at all? I feel like a leech here, but you're beautiful. I don't want you to do anything that makes you uncomfortable."

"I am not shy. If you like to look at me I will take this off while I work if that pleases you."

"Does it please you?"

"I would lie if I said it did not. I will do anything you ask, it pleases me to please you."

"We're in a circle again here. I will be content just watching you clothed or un-clothed."

Kivi smiled and let his robe slip to the floor as he continued to prepare the mid-day meal.

Xan was in heaven watching that form move about the room. He'd not seen anyone quite as lovely as the youth before him. "You need to be painted and hung above the mantle. Classic beauty you have." Xan remarked lazily from the couch.

"Xan. You are one of a kind." Kivi shook his head as he placed the meat in the oven to bake. He was going to start cooking the vegetables when he grabbed his robe and pulled it on and over his head hurriedly.

"Is someone coming?"

"Yes." Kivi whispered sliding his veil on and moving to answer the door and reaching the door a few moments before the knock actually came.

It was a stranger, one of Xan's classmates coming to introduce himself and Xan fumed as the youth marched in, slapping Kivi's behind as he walked passed.

"I don't think I invited you in and you will refrain from hitting my Ounta." Xan growled and the youth paused.

"Just coming to invite you to our soiree later Lord Indivar. I meant no offense."

"I am not a social person. I am here to study not partake in parties. Thank you, but I decline your offer."

"Suit yourself your Lordship. If you change your mind you are welcome to attend." The youth said before leaving and Kivi shut the door behind him.

"It is a good thing you declined. He is trouble." Kivi said, his eyes angry.

"You've met him before?"

"We all sadly have. The man is in perpetual season. And Ountas know to hide or you're on your knees." Kivi turned and began taking out anger on a carrot. Xan came over and stilled his hand with his own.

"He forced you?"

"No. I am lucky there. But others have not been so lucky in his presence. He has done nothing but paw me in passing, as you've seen."

"I'm sorry Kivi."

"Dear Xan, you of all Prima have no need to apologize for his actions. You are far, far above them all."

"Hardly, I made you work around here nude. I'm hardly better."

"Xan. You made me do nothing I did not want to. I like you very much. I am equally curious if that sets you at ease."

Xan smiled. "Curious huh?"

"Oh course. You are quite handsome Xan, a man would have to be blind not to notice you."

"Then turn about is fair play then." Xan stepped back and stripped to his own skin and turned for Kivi to take a good long look.

"You are handsome enough to send someone into a heat cycle involuntarily."

"So are you." Xan said tugging Kivi's robe free and letting it pool on the floor with his own garments.

"We are breaking a million laws, you realize this?" Kivi asked, almost short of breath Xan only laughed.

"I do. I'll pour the wine and start the music. You save our dinner from burning and shall we eat Au natural?"

"Xan, you are crazy."

"I know. Go with the moment Kivi, deny this is spontaneous fun?"

"I cannot. You win." Kivi laughed as he pulled their dinner free from the oven and they made a picnic out of it in front of the fire, dressed in only their skin.

They sat by the fire, or rather Kivi sat and Xan lay sprawled with his head resting on Kivi's lap looking up into his extraordinary blue eyes. Kivi indulged him and was currently feeding him tidbits of his meal as they talked.

Xan had no idea what had come over him, he wasn't in heat and neither was Kivi so he wasn't picking up on stray pheromones that were making him go as crazy as he was currently. He had never in his life been so immediately attracted to someone as he was with Kivi. The minute he'd looked into those eyes he'd been interested, he saw that face and melted, he walked in on him nude and he'd been a goner. But that was just the physical attraction; Kivi's beauty went right through. He was everything Xan found appealing, the way he moved, his voice, his personality, his calm demeanor, everything about Kivi pushed all of Xan's buttons. Kivi had no airs; he didn't pretend to be anything he wasn't. He was real, he was natural, and he put up with Xan's quirks with just an amused smile. He was perfect.

"Xan? You've gone so quiet. Is there anything wrong?" Kivi asked his long fingers playing with Xan's hair delicately moving the strands away from Xan's face.

"Nothing is wrong. I'm just thinking how I want to stay right here and not ever move."

Kivi chuckled. "This is nice. I shant move anytime soon, unless of course my legs eventually fall asleep, and then you may have to help me move."

Xan smiled from where he lay. "I'd carry you, never fear."

"I know you would. But you have already swept me off my feet with just being yourself. You are a hard man to refuse and even harder not to love."

"You can always tell me 'no' if I get too strange." Xan grinned and Kivi smiled back softly.

"I like your strangeness."

"I adore you Kivi. You're wonderful company, you put up with me and don't think me insane."

"I never said I didn't think you we're insane."

Xan laughed and sat up. "That's why I adore you. Never change Kivi. I need your sense of humor, it's a comfort to me."

"Are you that lonely Xan?"

"You noticed huh?"

"Yes. It breaks my heart to think you shut yourself away from others when you are such a joy to be around."

"Kivi, I don't like people much. I don't like people trying to befriend me simply because my name is Indivar. I positively detest snobbery and social climbers. I loathe conversation that has to be had while walking on eggshells or conversation that is so insipid you want to fall asleep halfway through. Given the choice Kivi, I'd take sitting here with you over it all. This is real."

Kivi reached up and laid a hand to Xan's cheek. "I will always listen to you. Please I beg you, always keep me as your Ounta. I would rather die than be with another master. I long to take care of you in my heart, please let me. You make my heart ache with want to take care of you and protect you from those who hurt you. I love you."

"Kivi, I don't want to keep you." Xan began and the strangled sob that escaped Kivi's throat made Xan pull him close for comfort.

"I didn't mean it like that Kivi. I meant keep as in own. I would never want to own you. But keeping you close because I love you too is another thing entirely. Let the world outside think what they will, but behind these doors, when it is just the two of us, never treat me as your master. Never. You are precious to me, I do not want to see you leave me either. I've looked for you too long. I fell in love with you almost immediately. You are everything I find desirable in this world."

"Xan, perhaps we are moving too fast. I can't breathe my heart is pounding so fast." Kivi said leaning back from Xan's embrace.

"You are probably right. Perhaps getting dressed is a good idea, we shant be so tempted." Xan said standing and pulling Kivi to his feet and hand in hand they walked into the bedroom and toward the closet.

Xan pulled out a black shirt and pants. "It's not color, but these will look far nicer than that robe. Please wear these."

"I can't tell you no even if I try." Kivi said allowing Xan to slip the shirt over his arms and fasten it for him. Kivi had never been dressed by another; it was almost sensual the way Xan slowly took his time with the buttons.

Kivi shivered and had to break contact; Xan was making him crazy with need. He opted to just return the favor and picked out a blue outfit for Xan to wear. Once dressed they returned to the living area, and Xan sat at the table with his studies and Kivi cleaned their mess and then lounged on the couch with a book of his own allowing Xan his space to study.

Xan however had his attention divided and Kivi had caught him more than once just staring at him. "Xan you will not learn a thing if you just sit there looking at me."

"You're a distraction."

"Shall I leave the room?"

"Don't you dare Kivi. I like you there just fine handsome."

"Xan you are insane." Kivi chuckled but remained curled up on the couch.

"I know. I have a class don't I?"

"In an hour yes you have Historical Archive Studies. It's your longest class. You shant be done until Evening."

"Damn."

Kivi just smiled into his book. "Do you crave anything in particular for supper?"

"Kivi on a platter."

"Xan." Kivi's tone was almost warning.

Xan laughed. "I'm still full from lunch. Surprise me with anything light and I should be heading out. I need to run an errand before class." Xan stood and grabbed his shoulder satchel and leaned over the back of the couch and to Kivi's delighted surprise he was kissed on the cheek.

"I'll see you later handsome." Xan purred into Kivi's neck and Kivi shivered.

"Be well Xan. Come home safe."

"Be well my Kivi." Xan shut the door behind him and Kivi melted into the couch pillows. He was so in Love with that crazy, incorrigible Prima he could hardly see straight. Life was perfect; he never wanted this dream to end.

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Xan had a light gait in his step as he headed off campus to a row of shops along the main boulevard. First he went to a local wine shop and picked up a bottle of mead, a traditional emergence day celebratory wine and placed that in his satchel before he headed just next door into a jewelers.

"Lord Indivar, we'd heard you were in town." The Prima at the counter thrilled at seeing a wealthy patron hurried over.

"I am. Please I have a little time before my class, Show me sapphires please, bracelets or earrings, they will compliment the eyes of the one I am shopping for."

"Ah, a lover my Lord?"

"That's none of your business. His Emergence Day is tomorrow, I would give him a gift is all."

The Prima nodded and brought out a selection of fine jewels. Xan looked them all over, but one piece in particular caught his eye. A deep blue large pendant, surrounded by diamonds in a teardrop cut on a heavy gold chain. It would look stunning around Kivi's neck and could be easily hidden under his garments if needed. "I would have this one. Please wrap it." Xan paid for his purchase and tucked that into his bag and then headed to class.

"That's some gift for just a simple friend." One Prima whispered as Xan left.

"Yes it is, I think the elusive Lord Indivar is hiding something. Maybe Sansun's most eligible bachelor is no longer eligible."

"What scandal. I wonder who the lucky man is, Lord Indivar is harder to impress than a snake. He's short tempered and aloof. Whomever it is must be remarkable."

"And able to put up with Lord Indivar's habits. Did you know he almost refused the Ounta they gave him? Then demanded better accommodations for him? For an Ounta? Lord Indivar has strange priorities. He even refused Lord Tibiae's social invitation. So the rumors of him being a shut-in are true. I wonder who managed to break into his solitary ways."

"We'll have to keep our eyes open to see which young Lordling is walking around with that stone around his neck."

The gossip continued and spread and before Xan's class was over someone was leaning over to speak to him.

"So, I hear you're buying jewels. Who's the lucky boy?"

Xan rolled his eyes. He'd have to be more careful; everything he did was gossip fodder. "None of your business. Leave me be, I am trying to listen to the lecture." Xan grunted never making eye contact and typing notes on his portable unit.

He hated people, he hated gossip, he hated being disturbed when he was trying to learn something new and he couldn't wait to go home to Kivi's serene company. Kivi listened when he talked, Kivi left him alone when he wanted to read, he gave Xan space to be himself and was attentive when Xan wanted living contact. To say he was in love with Kivi would be the truth. Granted it was new and untested, but he couldn't deny the fact that he found himself not paying attention to the lecture and imagining Kivi's smile and voice. He needed to go home, he had to see him. He wasn't learning a damn thing for want of exploring this new emotion. During the break in class, Xan collected his belongings, apologized to the professor begging fatigue from the journey and asked to be excused.

The professor took Xan aside as the class filtered outside for the twenty-minute break. "Xan, you are the one student I want this term. I know how you think boy; I have things to share with you. Come see me tomorrow, I have archives I want you to read. Important documents I think only you have the capacity to understand."

"Professor Indira, I'm honored."

"No lad, you're special. You can change this world if you try. Give Kivi my love."

Xan did a double take. "Professor?"

"He's my son." The professor whispered and Xan nodded, an excited thrill running up his spine.

"He's gifted."

"I know, so is his Hopa. We can't talk here, may I beg a visit later this evening, we would like to see Kivi. His Emergence Day is tomorrow."

"I know, you are always welcome in my home Professor Indira."

"I will bring the documents I want you to see. Thank you Lord Indivar. We shall come by after supper."

Xan nodded and Left, hurrying home to give Kivi the news.

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Kivi could barely eat; he hadn't been able to contact his parents in months. When he sensed them coming he was bouncing at the door waiting. Xan could sense them coming too but waited to say anything to see how sensitive Kivi was. It was within a minute of Xan sensing them; Kivi's sixth sense was keen.

When the knock came Kivi threw open the door and two figures quickly moved inside and the moment the door was shut Kivi was all over them.

"Sipa! Hopa!" He sobbed clinging to them both in joy.

"He took your limiter off! Thank you Lord Indivar. Thank you!" Professor Indira wept as he held his son.

The Ounta with Lord Indira walked over to Xan and bowed deeply, it was easy to see where Kivi got his looks; this man was just an older version of Kivi. "Lord Indivar, bless you, bless you. My Kivi is my joy, to know he's with you sets my fears to rest."

"Please don't bow, and please call me Xan. We are all equals here in my chambers."

"See Kadala. I told you he was one of us." Professor Indira winked and looked to Xan.

"You're not alone Xan, there are others who think like you. Not all Prima's like our society and we're many, but none of us quite as high in rank. But we have hope in you, you can make changes if you're strong enough."

"What are you talking about?" Xan asked ushering them all into the living room to be seated. Kivi sat at his Sipa's feet and let him stroke his hair.

"Freedom, shaking off their shackles of oppression. You've noticed Kivi is gifted, so is Kadala. The only reason they are Ounta is because we are forbidden to teach them and certain Prima's would balk at the idea of actually earning a living with their own two hands and not off the backs of slaves. Even though I love Kadala, I have been forbidden to make a formal union with him. They overlook my lack of martial status because I am a low-ranking Prima. They turn a blind eye to my companionship to my Ounta. Kivi is our only child and I am forbidden to acknowledge him in public. That destroys me."

"Sipa, I know you love me. That is enough." Kivi said resting his cheek on his father's knee.

"No it's not. I wanted you to have the same opportunities as other children, but because your Hopa was Ounta I was forced to watch you become a slave with no power to stop it. Xan, you have more power than you realize, you understand do you not?"

"I do Professor. And get to the point, you are preaching to the choir. What would you have me do?"

"First learn the history they don't want you to know. I have collected over the years many archives and documents about the initial oppression of the Ounta, and the purging of gifts on purpose. What the Prima have forgotten will be their downfall. Lead the Ounta out of slavery.

You are powerful, the most powerful Prima ever, everyone fears your gifts, you could be our light." Professor Indira spoke passionately, Xan nodded.

"I am one man. Even with my powers I can't fight an entire country."

"You have an army of untrained Ounta's and Primas like you. We are many Xan." Professor Indira handed Xan a ring with a strange, knotted design that looked like a snake devouring itself. "That is our insignia, you can trust any Prima with that symbol on his hand. He's one of us. The Sansui Society. Once The Prima and the Ounta were once one race. The Sansui, we seek to restore one race. We want the freedom to choose our mates, raise our children, and work without slaves. Earn our living as the gods intended. No Sansui should be forced to live as an Ounta. You think that don't you?"

"I do." Xan said sliding the ring on his finger. "I will help all I can. I do not know if I will be what you are looking for, but I will try. I will need to adjust my class schedule won't I?"

"Yes, I have much to show you. I can arrange your graduate studies to focus on history as my graduate assistant."

"Then make the changes I suppose. I have a horrible feeling I'm biting off more than I can chew."

"We've time Xan. There is much to learn yet."

"And I will help you Dear Xan." Kivi said moving to sit beside Xan taking his hand. Xan smiled at him and laced his fingers through Kivi's.

"I know you will. Will you make me a promise?" Xan asked and Both Professor Indira and Kadala sat in pleased silence noticing the interplay between their son and Lord Indivar.

"You know I will."

"Let me teach you. If you are by my side I want you able to protect yourself. This could get ugly."

Kivi nodded. "You are probably correct. I consent no matter how scared this makes me for your sake."

"Kivi love. This whole conversation we're having is illegal. We're getting in deep; we might as well jump in with our eyes open and prepared. I will need you by my side more than ever, and I'll be damned if I leave you helpless when I know damn well you're dripping with talent."

"He's right Kivi. Your Sipa has taught me, even if am just a weak Empath, I no longer feel everyone's emotions to the point I have those headaches. My talents are few but trained and useful. You take after your Sipa more than you know." Kadala smiled and Indira nodded.

"He's right. Kivi thankfully learned as a child how to block instinctively. Try to prod his thoughts Xan, you'll see."

Xan focused and tried to read Kivi's mind, he met a brick wall. "Incredible. That's natural?"

"Yes, you can't crack his shields with a sledgehammer. He learned that himself at age four." Indira said proudly.

"Amazing. But if they've been in place that long, taking them down to teach him will be difficult. He's used to having them up."

"True, but I've no doubt you'll be able to teach him." Indira said turning to face his son. "I know this is hard my son. Trust Xan."

"I do Sipa. I do." Kivi smiled, his hand still held by Xan.

"I just hope I can do all this. My head is swimming it will take a lot of thought and planning." Xan sighed and Kivi squeezed Xan's hand tighter.

"I will be here to help you always. I have faith in you."

Xan smiled into those blue eyes that he loved. "I will try not to let you down."

"That is impossible. The effort is more than enough, Dear Xan."

"Did you get swept away like this Indira when you met Kadala?" Xan asked with a smirk and Indira laughed.

"Yes I did. He does take after his Hopa. It those eyes, they're bewitching." Indira said taking his lover's hand and kissing the back of it.

"They certainly are." Xan said pushing Kivi's bangs off his forehead. "Worth fighting for."

"I still say you flatter too much Xan."

"Get used to it." Xan smiled and Kivi just sighed and settled against Xan's side.

"Well, I think our meeting would be suspicious if we stayed too long. Here are the initial documents I want you to read Xan. It explains a lot. Kadala and I should be going, but we will visit as often as we can. Once I make arrangements to have you as my assistant our meeting times will be less circumspect. Kivi my dear, Happy Emergence Day." Indira said handing Kivi a small package. It was cheese.

Kivi squealed "Sipa! You know I love this, goodness but it is expensive."

"You're worth it my dear. Don't eat it all at once you'll make yourself ill." Indira chuckled hugging his offspring. Kadala stood and also hugged his son.

"You make me so proud. I will come see you soon. It was just yesterday you left my pouch, now look at you."

"Hardly yesterday Hopa. I love you, be well."

"Be well my pearl, be well." Kadala said kissing both of Kivi's cheeks before covering his face to follow Indira back out in public.

Kivi shut the door behind them with a sigh.

"They love you." Xan said and Kivi smiled where he leaned against the door.

"And I them. You remind me of my Sipa at times."

"Just as you remind me of my Hopa, so we're even." Xan winked reaching into his satchel to hand Kivi the wrapped present.

"What is this?"

"Happy Emergence Day, it's after mid-night so you can open that now."

"You bought me a gift?"

"Of course."

"Xan." Kivi breathed his name in awe as he moved to sit to open his gift.

"Oh Xan! This is... I cannot accept something this beautiful. It must have cost you a fortune."

"Worth every credit to see it around your neck." Xan said taking it out of the box to fasten it around Kivi's neck.

"Xan, you spoil me. It is the most beautiful thing I've ever seen. You will make me cry." Kivi said touching the stone where it rested on his collarbone.

"No tears. Happy Emergence Day my Kivi."

"Xan if I didn't know better, I'd say you were courting me." Kivi said as Xan's arms slipped around him from behind.

"That's probably because I am." Xan replied softly into Kivi's ear.

"Xan that is not necessary. I am already yours and not because I'm your Ounta. You won my heart on your own merits."

"I know Kivi. If you cannot tell I love you in return, then we have a problem in communication."

Kivi laughed and turned in Xan's arms to wrap his arms around Xan's neck. "I too am empathic Xan. I knew."

"I thought you did. Shall we play these stupid courting games or dare we just admit the truth?"

"The truth always is best."

Xan smiled as he bent to kiss the man in his arms. The kiss was long and deep and perhaps the most perfect kiss Xan had ever experienced. Kivi was a perfect compliment and he'd be a fool to deny they meshed together as if it were fate dictating their lives.

"I want to see you in your present and nothing else." Xan purred into Kivi's neck.

Kivi complied with a smile.

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Xan stepped back to admire the view. Every time he looked, the more he saw that struck a chord. Every Sansui had a pattern on their skin that ran from their temples, over their shoulders and down their arms and spines. Kivi's pattern was as graceful as the man himself. Small elegant spots that tapered away to his wrists and tailbone.

Xan's were more diamond shaped and hard in comparison. He was a complete harsh comparison to Kivi. He was taller and broader of shoulder. His face was angular and regal, with large golden eyes and long black hair that hung to his waist. He usually kept that tied back at the nape of his neck to keep it from falling into his face.

Kivi's hair was much shorter and it tapered to frame his chin with a few longer wisps down the back of his neck kissing his shoulders. It was obviously long overdue for a cut and kept short for ease of containing it under a head covering. Xan loved it just as it was, Kivi looked divine slightly rumped and totally natural.

Kivi smiled and crossed his arms over his chest. "Are you through staring yet?"

"Not even close. You take my breath away."

"You seem to be breathing just fine." Kivi chuckled collecting his clothes off the floor. Xan's eyes followed as he bent over and he whistled low through his teeth.

"You have a beautiful pattern. I can't stop looking at you."

"I get my pattern from my Hopa."

"You got everything from him. I could see the unmistakable resemblance." Xan said as he followed Kivi as he folded and put his clothes aside.

"I do look like him. I have my Sipa's hands though. We both have long fingers." Kivi grinned holding up his hand with overly long fingers.

"You got your Sipa's talents I suspect. But I don't want to start lessons quite yet. I'm having far too much fun chasing you around this room. Will you stop cleaning or fussing for two minutes together?" Xan asked as Kivi went into the kitchen to finish putting the leftovers away and pulling out a clean plate and knife and some crackers.

"They will go bad if I don't put them away and I am about to share my Emergence Day present with you. That is why I am fussing."

"You don't have to share with me, that's yours you enjoy it." Xan held up his hands in protest.

"I would enjoy it more if you would share it with me. It is wonderful." Kivi said moving to sit by the fire and patting the floor indicating Xan should join him.

"Wait, I have something else for you too." Xan said remembering the mead in his bag. He retrieved glasses from the cabinet and the bottle and poured them both the sweet honey wine and setting the glasses on the low coffee table, stripped to his own skin before joining Kivi on the floor where he was slicing thin pieces of cheese and laying them on thin wafer crackers.

Once settled, Xan passed Kivi a glass and held up a toast. "Long life, health and happiness. Happy Emergence Day Kivi."

"It is the happiest already." Kivi drank closing his eyes to savor the sweet wine. "That will go to my head if I am not careful."

"Easy to get plastered on mead, it's sweet." Xan grinned.

"It is very nice. You spoil me Dear Xan."

"You deserve it." Xan said tucking Kivi's hair behind a graceful pointed ear. Kivi just smiled and slid closer holding a cracker up to Xan's lips.

"Taste." Kivi almost whispered and Xan allowed Kivi to feed him the morsel. It was indeed a wonderful cheese. Mild, but full of flavor and the mead complimented the cheese well.

"Isn't that divine?" Kivi asked and Xan swallowed.

"It is. You have excellent taste. Here it's my turn." Xan said reaching for a cracker to feed to Kivi. Xan of course, ever one to take advantage of a moment tormented Kivi and kept pulling the morsel just out of reach until Kivi was practically sprawled on top of him open mouthed and following Xan's retreating hand.

Xan finally relented once Kivi was pressed against his chest and he feed Kivi his bite and Kivi melted in bliss.

"You have a mean streak Dear Xan." Kivi scolded as Xan held him close.

"I do. But I have you where I want you, so I win." Xan said picking up another cracker and being nice this time to feed it to Kivi. Their positions from earlier reversed and it was Kivi lounging in Xan's lap being pampered.

Kivi just nodded, content to lie in Xan's arms and eat from his fingers. Xan for his part had never been this intimate with another. He had taken lovers to his bed, but never any he was this infatuated with. He wanted to watch Kivi's reactions to everything. The way his eyes went wide first with joy and then closed languidly in ecstasy as he savored taste. The way his lips turned up into a smile every time Xan touched him either physically or emotionally. The way his voice sounded like warm honey and made Xan's hair stand on end. The curve of his neck when he swallowed, the arch of his back when he stretched, those long dark eyelashes kissing the tops of his cheeks and long fingers tracing Xan's pattern on the back of his forearm.

They finished the crackers and Kivi with a heavy sigh sat up to place the cheese away in the cooling unit before it spoiled. "Allow me, stay here." Xan said tugging Kivi back softly into his arms and Kivi watched amazed as the cheese floated across the room and Xan used his gifts to put it away.

"That is a handy trick." Kivi chuckled and Xan leaned over and planted a kiss on Kivi's shoulder.

"One I will teach you."

Xan felt Kivi tense a little and Xan carried on kissing Kivi's shoulder soothingly. "I know that scares you love. I will protect you."

Kivi turned and wrapped his arms around Xan's neck and laid his forehead against Xan's. His eyes looking deeply into Xan's as he spoke. "Of that I do not doubt my Dear Xan. I am so very blessed." A Tear ran down Kivi's cheek and Xan reached up to wipe it away.

"I am the one who should say that Kivi. I've never in my life felt so free. I love you."

"I love you too. I feel like I am flying."

Xan smiled. "This is flying my Kivi." Xan said and Kivi laughed as he was suddenly suspended from the ground weightless and under Xan's control. Xan stood and took Kivi's hands and spun him around the room.

Kivi's laughter was like music filling the room as Xan made him fly around the room. "Xan! Xan, stop you are making me dizzy." Kivi finally begged and He drifted into Xan's arms. Xan carried him toward the bedroom and laid him on his bed.

"Too much wine Kivi?" Xan asked crawling on top of Kivi on the bed.

"No. I am fine, I am dizzy with you spinning me."

"But did you enjoy it?"

"You know I did." Kivi grinned as Xan pinned him to the bed.

"You do realize I plan on not getting a wink of sleep tonight don't you?"

"Yes." Kivi purred running his foot up Xan's leg.

"I take it you don't mind?"

"Does it look like I mind?" Kivi asked taking Xan's hand to show him the obvious since it seemed his beloved prima had suddenly gone blind.

"Mmmmm. Well I did notice that..." Xan's voice dipped low as his hand slowly encircled Kivi and stroked him softly as his lips traced Kivi's collarbone. Xan's nostrils flared as he picked up on Kivi's aroused pheromones. Then he sensed his own surge to the surface, he'd been due for a heat cycle and Kivi had just sent him over the edge. He saw red and was nearly feral as his hand gripped harder and his teeth nipped at Kivi's earlobe.

Kivi's laughter tickled his spine. "Xan, you smell wonderful. Did you just go into season?"

"Yes, you bastard. Look what you do to me." Xan growled trying to reign in his senses.

"Be glad my cycle is over and I'm not inclined to be a Sipa." Kivi chuckled rolling Xan to his back to straddle his legs.

Kivi's internal oil glands were responding to Xan's stimulation and scent and he was more than ready to mate with this man. He was sexually inclined as a Hopa, he always had been, it seemed this was another aspect that made he and Xan so compatible. Xan was most definitely an aggressive Sipa. His golden eyes had gone red, he was primal and panting and Kivi was not going to make him go mad with need any longer. He lowered himself onto Xan's engorged length and choked back a sob of bliss as he was filled.

"Kivi!" Xan threw his head back and gripped Kivi's thighs. Kivi allowed Xan to control the tempo at first, Xan needed to calm down a little, he was on fire.

Kivi ran his hands up Xan's broad chest and brought his lips to Xan's ear. "Breathe my Xan. Don't let the fire take you yet."

"Too late Kivi. By the Gods you are incredible."

"Those are your hormones talking. Look into my eyes." Kivi commanded and Xan did, looking deeply into shimmering blue. They were hypnotic and he felt the storm ebbing inside, like calm rain, washing the heat away. Kivi moved slowly in an even tempo and the red fell from Xan's eyes and they turned golden again, the urgency was gone. Xan rolled them over and took control, never breaking contact with Kivi's glowing eyes.

Xan panted Kivi's name over and over as he mated with such a glorious and talented creature. Kivi's body responded to every minute shift in Xan's and then Xan struck a spot that had them both seeing stars.

"XAN!" Kivi cried out and Xan couldn't help the smirk that spread across his face. He'd entered Kivi at just the right angle and he could feel he'd entered Kivi's pearl chamber. It felt incredible and it was a very good thing Kivi was not in season because it felt too good to stop and Kivi was writhing in passion beneath him, it was a very sensitive spot for a Hopa and within moments of Xan hitting him just right, Kivi came hard and fast.

When Kivi lost eye contact, Xan lost himself again to his seasonal instincts and his eyes turned red once more and he was driving Kivi to the point of no return. Within minutes of Kivi succumbing to the passion, Xan followed him in release.

Once he'd reached his climax the fire ebbed in his belly and his eyes returned to normal and Kivi was there wiping his sweaty brow and kissing him fervently.

"Xan, how do you feel my love?" Kivi asked concerned and Xan just smiled.

"I am much better for that. I am sorry I had to go into season our first mating."

"Xan, you are fierce. You suffer the madness when you go into season. Your eyes changed."

"I know love. But you controlled me, even untrained you are gifted." Xan pulled Kivi into his arms to hold.

"You are hard to control, you are much stronger than I. Forgive me for losing myself, but you made me see stars there." Kivi laughed softly feeling drunk with pleasure. No partner he'd ever mated with had ever found his chamber. Xan struck it the first time and repeatedly.

"You felt incredible. Was that your chamber I hit?"

"Could you not tell?" Kivi laughed propping himself up on an elbow to smile down upon his lover.

"I thought so. I must remember that angle for future reference." Xan waggled his eyebrows and Kivi laughed.

"Yes, you'd better." Kivi grinned, leaning over to kiss Xan's nose.

"You like being a Hopa don't you?"

"Given the choice? Yes. Although if you desire it, you won't hear me complaining about taking on a Sipa position either."

"I prefer Sipa, but I do occasionally like being Hopa. But for sex only, I have no desire of being a Hopa Host or passing a pearl."

"Really? Oh I do. I know it hurts, but I want to be a Hopa someday. My body giving life to another, I find it fascinating."

Xan smiled and reached up to cup Kivi's cheek. "What a wonderful Hopa you would be too. One day perhaps I will see you holding our son."

Kivi's eyes grew sad and he took Xan's hands and kissed them. "Xan. We cannot. As much as that makes me joyful to hear you say that it is not the same for you and I as it is for my parents. You are too high in rank, you will have to make a proper union with someone and they will bear your children. Not I. They would kill me before your son ever took breath and you know that."

"Kivi, I have no intention of making any one else my mate but you. You are worth fighting for and if I can't change the world for us, I will take you from it and we will go where we can be together. I will have you and no one else."

"Xan, they would never let us leave."

"Do you doubt me?"

"No, but I know how this world works. It will not change in our lifetime, no matter how much we wish it too."

"I'll prove you wrong."

"I hope so my Love. I hope so. Nothing would make me happier than to be yours outside of this room."

"I will make it happen."

Kivi looked up into Xan's eyes, he was deadly serious. Kivi felt hope stir in his breast. "Xan I believe in you. I will follow you everywhere."

"You'd better or I'll chase you down." Xan smiled and Kivi laughed and crawled into Xan's arms.

"Yes, you probably would." Kivi said as they nestled together in bed and Xan waved a hand to extinguish the lights.

"I would. I love you Kivi. I'm getting jealous just thinking of your other lovers."

"Xan, shame on you. I've only known a few and none like you. Like you can honestly tell me you have never mated. I would not believe you."

"I'm just stating the truth." Xan yawned he was exhausted.

"Go to sleep my Xan."

"Stay with me, please sleep here."

"I will stay."

"My Kivi, I will have you as my formal mate one day, I promise you."

"Xan, please do not make such promises you may not be able to keep. You love me, that is enough for my heart."

"I do love you."

"I love you too. Please rest, you are tired and spent. The madness is hard on you. Please sleep."

"Goodnight my Kivi."

"Goodnight Dear Xan." Kivi stroked Xan's hair as he drifted to sleep. Once Xan was deep asleep Kivi wandered over to the window and watched the stars for a while. He wanted nothing more than to be that man's mate and host his children.

There were some dreams still far from their grasp and if Xan wasn't going to keep his feet grounded, Kivi would. They were already in too deep; Kivi's life was already forfeit if anyone discovered their love.

Loving Xan was a double-edged sword. To love him like this was signing his own death warrant.

Xan was worth the price, even if it ended in the morning, Kivi would die knowing what real love felt like in his heart. He would die knowing he was loved in return.

"Kivi come to bed." Xan mumbled and Kivi silently obeyed and let Xan hold him while he slept.

It was much later before Kivi's mind allowed him to find his own rest. He was too scared, too lost, too confused and too much in love to settle. When he finally did find sleep the sun was already beginning to rise.

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Xan was the first to wake and the warmth of a body sleeping beside him brought a smile to his lips. He lay there for a moment just watching Kivi sleep until a smile spread softly across his lips. "Xan, you're staring." Kivi said softly, his eyes still shut.

Xan chuckled and moved to wrap around the man beside him. "You are a light sleeper if just my eyes can wake you."

"I am, and I have not been asleep long." Kivi replied with a yawn moving to sit up, Xan stopped him.

"Go back to sleep, it is early and you've nothing to get up for."

"Xan you need your breakfast and bath and..."

"And nothing Kivi. If you slept poorly you will stay in bed. I can find my own food and turn on a tap. Did I disturb your sleep?"

"No my Xan. There is just much on my mind, I found it hard to purge my thoughts to go to sleep. It is not your fault." Kivi reassured nestling against Xan's chest, his voice sounding exhausted. Xan stroked his hair and kissed his brow.

"I'd argue it is my fault in a roundabout way, but I hate arguing with you when I find it far more pleasing to just lie here and just accept you as you are."

Kivi opened his eyes and stretched to place a kiss on Xan's lips. "You make my heart ache."

"I hope you mean that in a good way."

"I do Xan. My Sipa is coming." Kivi said changing subjects and Xan nodded. He'd learned to tune out the comings and goings of people he hardly paid attention, it was a distraction if he didn't. Kivi was sharp to pick out his father in a sea of people with him just barely through the front door far downstairs. But blood recognition was highly perceptive. Xan always knew where his Sipa was even half a continent away. He was eternally grateful his father was not as strong as he was in that talent, it gave him an edge growing up. Xan stood and stretched and sighed when Kivi crawled out of bed looking worn and padded on silent feet to pull his robe on and head into the main living area. They had at least ten minutes before he made it up to Xan's top floor chambers, but Kivi was up and already putting a kettle on to boil.

Xan pulled his own dressing gown on and headed after Kivi. He'd make him take a nap later if it killed him.

Xan answered the door so Kivi wouldn't have to show his face just in case there was someone else in the hall and Indira quickly stepped inside and as the door shut Kivi walked over to greet his Sipa. "You look tired my pearl. You had a restless night."

Kivi nodded still lost in the luxury of his father's embrace.

"So like your Hopa. Long past the time the body should be resting your minds refuse to let you sleep." Indira had spent twenty-five years seeing that same behavior in his own mate, it was genetic and Kadala faired little better the night before too.

"I will be fine Sipa. There is much change to grow accustomed to." Kivi said with a tired smile as Xan walked over and laid an arm about Kivi's shoulders. Indira could not mistake the sweet scent coming from Xan and he smiled.

"I am intruding." He said with a knowing chuckle and Xan shook his head.

"Life does not stop because I go into my cycle." Xan said and kissed Kivi's temple.

"Very true. I came by to drop off your new schedule. All is arranged you are my graduate assistant officially. All other classes have been cancelled. I have informed the head master you will be indisposed and not to be disturbed as you research. They think you are doing a historical thesis on our early cultural civilization. They just don't know it's pre-division." Indira winked and Xan chuckled.

"So what would you have me start with?"

"Those two scrolls I brought. I am going to make a call later to a very old friend of mine. He holds very rare books for me. I have found very interesting lost chronicles, some kept by the early Primas prior to the purging, some kept by Ountas before their gifts were suppressed.

Fascinating and horrible history, you need to know it all, and these books if found would be burned before you could blink."

"I'm intrigued. Where did you find them?" Xan asked as they moved to sit around the table and Kivi set out pastries and tea before Xan pulled him into a chair to sit.

"Many places. Old cellars, attics, flea markets, buried in libraries, everywhere."

"I presume you're not daft enough to have them near."

"Oh no. They are off planet under protection and safe. I will call my friend to bring them, I only trust him to guard these."

"He must be powerful."

"The man is remarkable. Human, but fearless and brilliant."

"Human? Really. They don't have gifts."

"He has other gifts Xan. He has a military career that would make even the most decorated general pause in salute. Human or not, he fought Tsions and won."

"Tsions haven't been in these sectors since the Tsionic wars. A human has had no contact in over two hundred years or more."

"Ah Xan. Stop thinking logically, there are some things that defy explanation and just are. He has natural defenses that even your talents would be hard pressed to master."

"I will take your word for it. What is his name?"

"Callum, Eran Callum."

"Surely not. He's in the old texts from the wars, no human lives so long."

"He does. You will see when you meet him. He is different and has long been a friend to the Sansui Society."

"I remember him. The man with the purple eyes and the blond human, his mate with him was very kind. He gave me candy." Kivi spoke half asleep in his juice with a smile on his face.

"You were only five, you remember?" Indira asked and Kivi nodded.

"I do. But I think any child would remember candy from another world. Pep-mant or something I think it was called." Kivi chuckled at the memory. "It tasted like our fresh leaves only sweeter."

"Peppermint." Xan said having had the confection before.

"That's it! Peppermint." Kivi nodded and Xan just smiled at him.

"I call Eran back whenever I make a new discovery. This will be the first time I have him bring the books back. He will be intrigued. He is about as insatiable a learner as you Xan." Indira said and Xan smiled.

"Then we shall be good company if that is so."

"I would like to convince him to work with you. He has a unique knowledge and we could learn much from his point of view."

"I am always open to see a situation from a neutral party. It brings clarity to a biased reasoning. I have several rooms here; please invite them to stay with me here. I have a feeling I will not be leaving these rooms much with the sheer amount of reading I see in my future."

"No Xan, you will be busy indeed." Indira chuckled then looked at his son who had dozed off with his cheek resting on his hand on the table.

"He is exhausted." Indira sighed and Xan nodded.

"He spent a lot of energy on me last night. I suffer the madness when I cycle. He fought that and won."

"Did he?"

"Yes. He has strong gifts Indira. Very strong, and even untrained he can use them against me. Granted it was just a cooling hypnotic, but he managed to tame my instincts when they started to control me. He is my perfect match. I have been known to not remember mating at all when I am taken by my instincts. I remember everything. He is my last mate, I will mate no other."

"He'll fight you on that. He sees how difficult it is for his Hopa and I. He fears it even if he loves you in return. He'll resist change. His fear for you will hold him back. Never think he fears for himself, he's not prone to self-preservation. He is prone to sacrifice if he thinks it will help another. It's a bad habit he learned from his Hopa. I begin to wonder sometimes if it's genetic." Indira said watching his son sleep.

"I see a lifetime of arguing with him. I will find it most enjoyable. I think I will move him to bed, he will not be happy if he awakes with a stiff neck." Xan said softly picking up Kivi from his chair, he was so tired even the movement did not wake him. He was literally passed out from exhaustion. Xan laid him to bed and covered him with a light blanket then shut the door on his way out.

"Xan, I must thank you. I have prayed since the day Kadala passed him as a pearl he would one day have someone who would love him as I do."

"Please do not thank me Indira. I promise to protect your son."

"I know you will. I will leave you for now. You have enough to keep you busy and I'll let you know what arrangements I make for more educational pursuits. Be Well Xan-ka."

Xan smiled at the obvious acceptance of his relationship with Kivi. He was honored to be given the honorific title of Son even though he and Kivi we're not formally united. Xan shook Indira's hand. "Be well, Sipa-ka." Xan returned the honorific of fatherly respect and Indira smiled and left.

Xan settled on the couch with the scrolls and drank his tea and ate pastry while he devoured the scrolls and their shocking content.

This was certainly information buried on purpose. It was a horrific accounting of genocide. Xan's hand shook when his ancient family name appeared again and again. It was his family lineage

that had started it all. He was weeping with grief when Kivi came racing out of the bedroom to pull him close.

"Xan! Dear Xan what is wrong? I feel your pain." Kivi's arms shook trying to hold Xan close hurting himself in the process by picking up on Xan's emotions.

"Let go Kivi, I'll be fine. I am just, upset at seeing proof of what I suspected. I know what my Hopa meant. I understand what he tried to tell me years ago. He knew this, he wanted me to understand."

"Xan. Your Hopa was part of the Sansui Society. He started it." Kivi said softly hating what he was about to tell Xan but knew Xan should know the truth. Indira has told this tale to Kivi years ago, it seemed Xan did not know.

"I know. I see it here."

"There is more Xan. You should know the truth. Your Hopa's death... It was not as you have been told."

"Kivi what do you know? I saw it with my own two eyes. He fell right before me."

"Open your adult eyes Xan. He fell yes, what was he telling you as he died?"

"Oh god Kivi. This! He was telling me all of this; I thought it was a story. Oh my god!"

"Yes Xan. Telling you in a way a child would understand, there was one near who objected. My Sipa told me when I was young, right after it happened. It was a sad time for my Sipa and Hopa. They had such admiration for your Hopa."

"Kivi, the only other person in that room was my Sipa."

"Xan, I know."

Xan saw red, he was furious. Stepping back from his eight year old memories and looking at the scene again through adult eyes he knew the horrible truth. Devapa had not died of natural causes; he had been murdered by his own mate and in front of Xan's very innocent eyes.

Xartova must have caused the hemorrhage in Devapa's brain when he had walked in on Devapa telling Xan that story.

Seeing the list of Indivar atrocities listed for centuries before him and how badly a man like Xartova would have wanted this knowledge buried Xan struggled to breathe. His own Sipa had murdered his Hopa.

"I'll kill him." Xan was furious and he threw his teacup into the fireplace in a murderous rage. Kivi was shaking harder and he raced forward and grabbed Xan's arms and shook.

"No Xan! Stop this and think! You must not let him know that you know. It is your advantage."

Xan broke down in sobs, anger and frustration tearing him apart. Kivi held him close and let Xan purge his grief.

"You are everything your Hopa wished you would be. I am sure he is smiling at you from the heavens." Kivi whispered as he traced his fingers along Xan's temples to relax him.

"Kivi. I need you." Xan choked, he was emotionally raw and he needed comfort.

"I know." Kivi breathed as he placed a gentle kiss behind Xan's ear. Not only was Xan suffering emotional heartbreak, he was fighting his cycle at the same time. He needed Kivi more than ever; he was being torn in two. Kivi took Xan by the hand and gently led him back to the bedroom where Xan purged anger and sadness until he fell into an exhausted sleep.

Kivi gingerly walked into the living room. He had not stopped Xan who needed release and when the madness took hold, he allowed Xan's instincts to run wild. Kivi's body was quite unused to such force and he needed to clean up Xan's mess before he found a bed himself to recover.

Kivi hissed as he cut his finger on a piece of glass as he tried to clean it out of the fireplace. He was sucking on his finger and hobbling over to the sink with a limp. His lower body was aching, his emotions were aching, his finger was aching, everything was sore.

He was running his finger under the tap when Xan came out of the bedroom.

"You cut yourself."

"I am fine Xan. It is just a small cut."

Xan walked over and looked crestfallen as he ran a finger over a mark on Kivi's hip. A bruise in the shape of his fingers. "Forgive me." Xan choked ready to cry again. Kivi just laid his good hand over Xan's heart.

"There is nothing to forgive you for Dear Xan. You did not do that on purpose."

"I hurt you."

"It was the madness. I chose not to stop you, you needed to purge and you are in season. It happens."

"I'd rather die than hurt you. Kivi, stop me please next time. I beg you, never let me run wild like that again."

Kivi just nodded as Xan took his finger and wrapped a small bandage over the cut. "Leave the mess Kivi. I made it, I'll clean it, please come rest with me, I am tired and I disturbed your sleep with my outbursts."

"Xan you learned horrible things today, you are allowed outbursts as you call them." Kivi said as he walked into Xan's open arms.

"I've never needed anyone as I need you now. Kivi-ki." Xan said softly, adding a common term of endearment used by mated couples to the end of Kivi's name. It meant beloved and was only used by formally mated partners. Kivi sighed; he was not going to argue with Xan anymore. There were worse things than allow the man you loved to call you his beloved, or to call him that in return.

"I will always be here for you. Xan... ki." Kivi replied and Xan's arms tightened around him in response.

"Thank you." Xan breathed as he led them both back to the bedroom to sleep.

"For what?"

"For just being you Kivi-ki. For just being you." Xan sighed as they curled up together and let exhausted bodies and drained emotions send them into fitful oblivion.

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Xan once more awoke before Kivi and he watched him sleep with a look of worry on his face. First he had used gifts he was untrained in how to use properly and then Xan's gifts had taken their toll on him during the madness. It didn't take too much logic to piece together Kivi's exhaustion and strain. He'd expended his capabilities during their first mating and had no power during their second and he looked worn. Xan was upset, Kivi was the last person he wanted his gifts to affect adversely and rather than wake him up with his emotional upset, Xan silently crawled out of bed and made his way toward the living areas to work.

He looked up from the scroll he was immersed in studying when a silent Kivi laid a hand to his cheek. "I didn't hear you get up. Go back to bed Ki, you need your rest."

"I am alright my Xan. Please do not worry so over me." Kivi said leaning over to place a gentle kiss on Xan's brow. "I am hungry I will sleep better after my stomach settles." Kivi reassured moving into the kitchen, Xan following him.

"Sit Kivi. I'll make it for you, you can barely stand."

This time Kivi did not protest and Xan smiled as Kivi gingerly sat in a chair.

"I am sorry Kivi."

"Xan, I know. It was the madness, not you. If it is any consolation, it felt wonderful while you were mating me. It's just after that takes getting used to, my body is just not used to you yet."

"I don't want you getting used to such force. I don't remember even doing that to you. I wish I did not suffer so. I get this from my Sipa and his before him. It's sadly an Indivar affliction."

"And many besides you suffer it. I have it, just not to the degree you do. I just get, quite insatiable during my season." Kivi grinned and Xan smiled as he set a plate of their warmed leftovers in front of Kivi.

"Do you now? Please do elaborate." Xan set fixing a plate for himself as he joined Kivi at the table.

"Xan. You are funny. My madness manifests as just an intense desire to be mating, pretty much constantly. My madness comes on me and stays turned on for a week. Yours at least passes."

"A constantly turned on Kivi." Xan closed his eyes and he smiled. "When are you due?"

Kivi laughed and just shook his head. "Xan, you're a fool. Honestly, you are such a joy. Not for a few weeks at the earliest. I had a cycle about five months ago."

"I am looking forward to that."

"You would. But you should be careful, you've already shown twice now you can find my chamber with ease."

"I found it again?"

"Yes my Xan."

"I'll get some protection. You're right; we don't need you passing a pearl. Yet."

Kivi just sighed; Xan had stressed the word 'yet'. It was obvious the man was dead set on Kivi being his life mate. Kivi gave up the fight. Xan was too stubborn and it wasn't as if Kivi had objections toward the idea, just the situational trials they'd face. Xan took his hand and kissed every fingertip.

"I will protect you. No one will take you from me." Xan said and Kivi interlaced his fingers in Xan's.

"I know Xan. It's just... I am scared of many things and many difficulties I see ahead of us. I fear, even if I am most happy. It is a paradox. I have long wanted love like we share; I have a sincere desire to be your life mate and to host your children. I just cannot allow myself to be lost in those dreams; the world is going to become even more chaotic. I can feel it."

"We'll whether the Chaos Ki. Together."

Kivi nodded leaning across the table to share a tender kiss with Xan. "I will never be able to resist your will Xan-ki."

Xan smiled and ran a hand over Kivi's soft hair. "Eat Ki, then back to bed. I have much to take note of here and I want you rested and recovered from my urges before I start showing you how to tame me properly." Xan winked and Kivi just smiled in resignation and finished his meal before heading back to bed to rest.

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"Incoming Transmission. Holy Fuck, hang on this is encrypted out the wazoo. What fucking code is this in?" Cris cursed as he looked at the incoming garbled message. "Whatever this is, it's important. What language is this in?" Cris always did have a habit of talking to himself while he worked.

"Where was the point of transmission?" Eran asked leaning over Cris' shoulder.

"Sansun. It's probably from your friend Indira. He's the only one who sends you stuff this protected."

"He's either got a new find or the Society shit is about to hit the fan. That is a political hot spot waiting to blow up like a time bomb."

"Tell me about it. What a fucked up society, I sure as shit would not take some fucker telling me I had to walk around in a sack with a collar on that made it so I couldn't even talk."

"You try fighting someone who can smash your brain with a thought. Hell my friend Devapa was a Prima and he still managed to have his brain squashed. I swear I'm waiting for the chance to stick my foot up Xartova's ass."

"I hung out with Kadala last time we were there. Dude, that man can cook and he told me way more than I wanted to know. I can tell you right now, thank FUCK I don't have a pearl chamber. That is seriously fucked up." Cris chuckled as he clacked away trying to decode Indira's message.

"I heard the sex is incredible though. It's like hitting the g-spot times twelve." Eran waggled his eyebrows with a shit-eating grin on his face.

"Yeah, I know. Still. I would not want to shit out a rock with spikes after. Regardless of the killer sex."

"It's only small."

"Did you talk to Kadala? He said it was probably the worst pain he's ever felt in his life. Excruciating and he almost bled to death. Although I must admit being able to self lubricate would come in real handy sometimes." Cris smirked then changed the subject for a moment. "Almost got this decoded."

"That would be really handy and you saw that sweet kid. Tell me Kadala would have given up his son. Ask any woman with labor pains, the pain I guess is worth it."

"You've gone soft in your old age Eran. But Kivi was an adorable kid. Pissed me off he had to wear that stupid collar. It broke Kadala's heart." Cris said as the message beeped and Indira's face showed on the monitor.

"Eran, my friend, I hope you have been well. Cris forgive my extra precautions but I am sure you managed to break my code." Indira chuckled on the recorded message and Cris saluted the image.

"Of course dude." He replied with a wink as the message continued.

"I have a favor I beg of you. I need you to bring back all the documents. Our society's hope has come of age and his Hopa would be more than proud of him." Indira said specifically not mentioning the name. "He has joined the society and he must know it all. I also ask your counsel, you have always been friend to us and your insight and experience we are in need of now."

Eran paused the message. "Xantarun Indivar is probably whom he means. He was Devapa's youngest son. He was eight when Xartova killed Devapa right in front of him. At least Devapa was able to influence him young enough. This is gonna be interesting." Eran said lighting up a cigarette. Hitting play again on the message as he sat back to smoke and listen intently.

"Our hope has shown interest in getting your neutral and unbiased opinions. He has far surpassed our hopes. His skills are unequaled and his mind is sharp and keen. He can lead this world with the proper guidance and aid at his side. I beg you for the society and as a friend. Please help us. This is our hour at last." Indira's message ended with him formally bowing and Cris switched off the monitor.

"Big news." Cris said turning to Eran who looked deep in thought.

"This could get real ugly, real fast. This is civil war brewing big time."

"Yeah. We should probably take Brion back home before we get mixed up in this shit. Cause I know you, you're chomping at the bit here."

"No time. I have the Books and scrolls in a vault on Dantoba. We're just three days from there and then another five to Sansun. To detour back to Pirotaine would take us three months. Wait a minute, Romi is on Sansun isn't she?"

"Fuck, she is."

"We send him with his mother. She's suddenly gotten laryngitis, I do not want her there either." Eran said stubbing out his cigarette.

Eran hit the speaker com to make a ship wide announcement. "Family meeting, right now at the table." He said as he and Cris headed into the living area to play the message for Beau and Val.

"We are going right?" Beau asked and Eran nodded.

"If we are all in agreement yes." He answered and Val slammed his hand down.

"Damn straight we're going. It broke my heart having to watch that shit last time. Tovi cried for a week after. She wanted to smuggle Kivi away in her luggage. I can't say I didn't want to either. He was just a baby practically. And he had it lucky. I am in, shoot me, like I can die? I'm in." Val said emphatically.

"I want to get my mom out of there, even I know how dangerous a Prima can be."

"Even Tsions don't mess with Primas kid. Human psychic abilities are like a single flea biting a dog to them. You will take your mother HOME. This will be one nasty war when the shit hits the fan. I've no doubt I'll be blown up a time or two from the inside out before it's over."

"Eran that was positively not necessary to state." Beau shuddered but knew it was the truth.

"Just stating the facts. We'll be way out of our league, but we'll at least be able to offer perspective from an untalented point of view. We're going for counsel, but Prima's are smart, they'll try to take out the brains of the organization first. We'll be at that core."

"Shall I record a response?" Cris asked picking up a recorder to point at Eran.

"Absolutely." Eran said turning to face the lens as Cris hit record.

"Indira. E.T.A. Eight days." Eran's messages were always direct and to the point. Cris just turned the camera on himself. "Never mind gloomy. Tell Kadala I'd love some of his almond cookies. Pretty Please." Cris blew kisses at the camera before shutting of the camera.

"You're an absolute retard." Eran rolled his eyes and Cris grinned.

"With an IQ of 222?"

"I'll 222 you. Send the fucking message."

Cris laughed and loaded the message on the computer and encrypted it with the code Indira had used on his transmission then sent it back to its point of origin.

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By the following morning with Xan purposefully avoiding his urges to mate, Kivi was well-rested and looking more like himself. Xan however did not escape a scolding when Kivi found him asleep on the couch. "Xan-ki, you did not come to bed last night. You must feel horrible this morning."

"I'm fine Ki. I wanted you to sleep undisturbed. I will live if I leave my mate be one night." Xan said sitting up and running a hand through his tangled hair.

"I can smell you all the way in the bedroom. You are in desperate need, please don't torture yourself for my sake." Kivi said coming over to kneel in front of Xan who still sat on the low couch.

"I would give you your first lesson before we mate again. I would not torture you for my sake either." Xan ran his fingers through Kivi's hair and smiled. Kivi just nodded and leaned into the touch.

"What would you have me do Xan-ki?"

"First let us eat. Then I will show you how to tap into your gifts in a controlled way. Not blindly as you have been doing. You use it up far too fast when you don't know how to focus." Xan said taking Kivi's hand as they moved together into the kitchen. They finished Kivi's cheese and ate sliced red fruit nestled together on the couch. Xan closed his eyes and drank in the warmth of feeling emanating from Kivi by his side. He could feel love and comfort surround him like a blanket, if he had any doubt of Kivi mistaking love for gratitude; they were washed away as they just sat in silence to share their meal. Xan felt drunk but very alive. Kivi smiled and just turned to lay a kiss on Xan's cheek.

"You are most content this morning Xan-ki."

"I am. This is all I ever wanted. Peace and Quiet and a mate by my side who accepts me for who I am not what I am. Kivi you bring me peace of heart, I am blessed."

"As am I, Dear Xan-ki." Kivi said still resting his head on Xan's shoulder as they sat pressed close together on the couch. Kivi took a deep breath and sighed with a pleased coo from the back his throat. "You smell wonderful. I'm getting light-headed." Kivi added and Xan chuckled.

"Never fear Ki, you will survive. After your lesson I will be about ready to explode with want of mating you again. You can handle my scent until then?"

"Xan, your scent alone is enough stimulation for me. I would not be surprised if you sent me into my own season against my will." Kivi chuckled sitting up.

Xan smirked. "That's good to know. Are you ready to begin Ki?"

Kivi nodded and Xan moved to sit on the low coffee table facing Kivi where he sat on the couch. They were eye to eye and Xan held Kivi's hands in his own.

"This is normally fairly simple. However, you have spent many years behind an instinctual shield. We need you to take it down, and I'm not sure you know how. So first, close your eyes. I want

you to imagine yourself floating in a field. Nothing around you for miles and miles, just open up everything, you're safe in this field. Concentrate on only that." Xan instructed while erecting a barrier around them both so any outside triggers that had caused Kivi's shield creation in the first place would not have him slamming up his senses again to block them out.

Xan almost gasped out loud when he felt power flowing in Kivi's hands. It was much stronger than he'd anticipated. It felt incredible where their hands touched. Kivi was like a peacock's feathers. Xan felt powers that struck him like a sea of colors. Blue, green and purple hues, extraordinary gifts were flowing in Kivi. "Beautiful Ki. Can you feel me?" Xan asked getting high of sensation.

"Xan... what is this?" Kivi asked confused and with a heavy lust in his voice.

Xan chuckled. "It's power Ki, yours and mine, which is contained in this barrier around us, mixing and joining where our hands touch one another. We are well mated indeed, our gifts are highly compatible, I could devour you for your gifts alone."

"I see red and gold fire dancing behind my eyes."

"That's me Ki."

"You are beautiful." Kivi's hands were beginning to tremble and his breathing was getting heavy. He was sending off incredible scents. Xan was highly amused and rather smug. Kivi was aroused purely from Xan's gifts. Xan was too, but he knew how to control it, this was Kivi's first time and Xan was enjoying watching Kivi's brush with mental stimulation, which was well known to be even more sexually stimulating than physical attraction.

"Kivi, you are wonderful. Calm down your hormones for a moment, I know power meshing is a wonderful stimulant but I need your focus here with me. We will mate soon, but I have to show you this first before we do, now that we've power meshed, you think I was wild before? You need to know how to tame me Ki. I am struggling to maintain control as it is. You are the most beautiful power I've ever touched."

"What do you see Xan?" Kivi asked still lost in sensation but becoming clearer headed.

"Blues and Greens are very dominant. You have sensitive gifts. Empathy is very strong. You have a healing touch, very calm. Had you been born a Prima, I've no doubt you would have been schooled in mental healing. I saw a mental healer for many years after the loss of my Hopa."

"My Sipa's Sipa is a Mental Healer."

"Then it's clear where your gifts are inherited from and how you managed to build your own shields without training. You healed your own mind from stray gifts being used around you and even the ungifted emotions touching you and hurting your empathic reception. It's remarkable Kivi."

"Xan, I feel, my head is beginning to hurt."

"Because you're wide open Kivi. Don't close yet, the pain is phantom, you're not really in danger. Now I want you to open your eyes and look into mine. I am going to teach you how to take control of my mind. I'm going to show you where in my mind to go when I am suffering the madness and how you can heal it. You already have been there once during our first mating. You

drove the madness from me, but you drained yourself doing it. I am going to show you how little power it actually takes."

Kivi opened his eyes and Xan nearly lost himself to shock. Kivi's eyes were swirling with color. Blue seas churning with gifts and glowing with inner light, hints of metallic green and purple catching the light in the dominant blue, Kivi had mystic eyes and they were mesmerizing.

"Ki. You are touched by the gods." Xan took a moment to kneel before Kivi and laid his forehead against Kivi's knees.

"Xan? What are you doing?"

"Showing you the proper respect my Ki. I have heard but have never seen one with the touch of the ancient ones."

"What are you talking about? Xan I am confused."

"Kivi, you have mystic eyes, you don't have sixth sense, I was mistaken. You know things before they happen, you feel things others, even I cannot. You have been touched for greater things." Xan was almost shaking with awe and still had not risen where he knelt before Kivi.

"Xan? I don't understand."

"Kivi, have you ever heard the story of First-Hopa Ameretat?"

"Xan we all have. He did great things, the first gifted one, he saved our race from extinction. He was the first Hopa Host after the comet mutation-plague and we became one gender, every child has heard his tale from his Hopa."

"You have his eyes Kivi. You have his gifts. I cannot close my eyes to the portent of this. We will see change in our world for good or for ill there will be changes. You know as well as I upon his death it is written he vowed to return to heal a 'great wound'. I can think of no wound as painful to Ameretat, who loved his race, as the division of our people. My skin is tingling Kivi. I have clairvoyance gifts to a degree. That sense is making every hair on my body stand on end."

"Xan I am not Ameretat, any more than you are. We are all related to him if you can draw your lineage back that far. That was ten thousand years ago."

"No, but he is in you Kivi. No one, NO ONE has had eyes like yours in over five thousand years, not since Ameretat's bloodline diluted too much to draw a direct line to him. Look in the mirror Ki. See for yourself." Xan said taking Kivi over to the mirror hanging above the mantle.

Kivi turned to the mirror and looked at his reflection and just stood there in shock as his eyes danced with light and shifting shades. "Xan..."

Xan stood behind Kivi with a look of affection and pride and wrapped his arms around Kivi's shoulders. "See Kivi. I knew the moment I met you, you were special, you were destined for great things. I am blessed to be your mate, you will heal our people, not I."

"Xan. What is happening?"

"I don't know Kivi. But I can't help seeing direct correlations. Jamari, First-Sipa was an Indivar. Ameretat's life mate, history is repeating itself. I'm getting chills thinking how we are pawns of

the Gods right now. It is either extreme coincidence, or Ameretat's words are coming to be. I tend to lean toward the romantic outrageous myself. Jamari died of grief when Ameretat passed. I don't find it too hard to imagine that if Ameretat was reborn, Jamari would follow."

"Xan you are insane. It is a romantic notion, but really, it is outrageous. I am not a great person, I am just Kivi."

"I'm sure Ameretat said that too. It's the deeds that linger after the mortal life fades."

"Xan... we are arguing again."

"When are we not disagreeing Ki?" Xan chuckled and Kivi just shook his head and smiled at Xan's reflection in the mirror.

"Come, I have a feeling this lesson will be fairly easy for you. Humor my hunch." Xan said taking Kivi back to the sofa to continue the lesson.

"What do you wish me to do?" Kivi asked as they took up their previous seats and faced each other.

"Look in my eyes, I am going to think of something. You tell me what I am thinking. I want to test your probing abilities."

Kivi did as told and blushed. "XAN!"

Xan laughed and winked. "What did you see?"

"Something best left in our bed. Shame on you."

Xan laughed, Kivi was correct he was thinking of doing rather intimate things to his mate, Kivi was sharp.

"Okay for real this time, pardon my joke Ki. What do you see now?"

"My Sipa."

"Now?"

"Your book on the table."

"Now?"

"Xan, stop! STOP!" Kivi shook, the image had been of a Beautiful Man, but the emotions tied to the image were strong and swirling with despair. Xan just held Kivi's hands.

"That is not real pain Kivi, block out the emotion and look at the image."

"I can't Xan. Your pain is real I cannot tune that out." Kivi said shutting his eyes and trying to lean away from Xan.

"You can, you have to learn this Kivi. Try again." Xan said holding onto the image of his Hopa in his mind and forcing Kivi to conquer his fears and learn how to control his empathy. It was vital he learn this.

Kivi tried again and was blinded by Xan's emotions, Kivi wept with the pain but Xan held him and forced Kivi to keep his shields down when he felt Kivi instinctively try to throw them back up.

"Keep trying Kivi. Just see my image tune out my emotions. Separate the two. You can do this, pick them apart and block the emotions."

"How?" Kivi sobbed and Xan rubbed the back of Kivi's hands with his thumbs.

"You know how Kivi. Just concentrate, you can tell the difference between thought and feeling. Just think logically. You can do this." Xan encouraged feeling horrible for putting Kivi through this, but he did need to learn. Once he mastered this first obstacle the rest would be simple.

When Xan felt Kivi trying to erect a specific barrier he gave him the freedom to do so. A filter was different than a full barrier. Kivi was used to blocking everything out. He needed the ability to poke holes in his protections to let useful information through. "That's it Kivi. Perfect."

Kivi let out an audible sigh as Xan's strong emotions became tolerable and he was able to focus on the memory image without added turmoil. "He was beautiful." Kivi said softly as he focused on the man from Xan's mind.

"Inside and out. Like you Ki." Xan smiled leaning forward to place a gentle kiss to Kivi's brow. "I know that was painful. But you did it, I knew you would."

"I feel like my skin is tingling. What am I feeling?"

"The power around you. You used to block it all out and only felt a minute brush of power that would affect you directly. You are now sensing ancillary powers; the things going on around you that don't affect you directly but are still always present. You can filter these out too; I do unless I need to know what's going on around me. Put your shields back up and just focus on letting me in. I'm going to teach you how to pinpoint and concentrate now."

Xan allowed Kivi to put his shields back in place and then he felt Kivi open up a direct link only to Xan. "You are a very fast learner. Perfect."

"I like this feeling. I feel connected to you."

"Because we are. Well you to me. Now feel the returned connection." Xan said making his own connection to Kivi completing the link.

"I cannot explain what I'm feeling. This is almost euphoric." Kivi sighed as Xan and he meshed.

"This we leave in place Kivi. You will always know where I am, and I you. If one of us is in need, the other will know. If one of us is suffering the madness, no matter where we are we can tame it. You will not even need to touch me Kivi. You could be across the continent and still heal me. And likewise, I can protect you, through you. If you are in danger I can use my gifts through you as a conduit. You will ever be safe. We are a combined entity."

"What do you mean through me?" Kivi asked and Xan smiled.

"Like this Kivi." Xan demonstrated by closing his eyes and moving to fill Kivi's senses. Kivi gasped as he felt Xan enter his mind and take control of Kivi's movements. Kivi's hand raised and the

book on the table raised and flew into Kivi's hand. Xan was a very strong telekinetic and had used his talents through Kivi's mind.

"I felt as if I had stepped out of my body, but I was still there." Kivi said as Xan released him and he sat holding the book.

"That's because you're technically correct. I borrowed your mind and used my gifts in your body. You can do that to me in return. I have a heightened sense already where my weak empathy is concerned. You amplify my weak gifts because you are strong where I am not. We each have strengths and weaknesses alone. Together we are strong Kivi, very strong. I was not wrong when I said we compliment each other. This was before I got a taste of your gifts properly. I am most pleasantly surprised and amazed at how we seem to fit together almost too perfectly."

"I would agree with you there. I am finding life suddenly very overwhelming."

"Me too Ki. But I am overjoyed to have you."

"Xan-ki, I have never been happier. I have never felt so utterly at peace even though the world around me is terrifying, I feel for the first time hope."

"Hope. A very appropriate word, I have many hopes now where before I had none." Xan said moving to hold Kivi where they sat on the sofa.

"What do you hope for Xan?" Kivi asked as he sank into a warm embrace.

"You know Kivi. They mirror yours."

"But it is nice to hear it spoken." Kivi said and Xan held him tightly.

"I hope for freedom. I hope for a life by your side. I hope for a son one day I can raise in a world without slavery."

"Xan, even if we try we succeed."

"Very true Kivi. Even defeat is honorable if you try." Xan said tracing the spots on Kivi's shoulder with a finger. Kivi shuddered with growing pleasure.

"You smell wonderful Kivi. Are you?"

"Xan, the moment you meshed with me I connected to you in ways that are unbelievable. I have gone into my cycle, even my heart is beating in time with yours."

"I thought so. It happens with all gifted life-mated partners, bodies will synchronize involuntarily because of the connection. I'm not surprised you've gone into season early to match my cycle." Xan chuckled stroking Kivi's back in lazy patterns.

"We'd best be very careful. You have a knack of hitting my chamber Xan. As much as I would desire it, it is unwise for us right now, and I am known not to think clearly when I am in season, but I told you this already."

"I know. I have already taken precautions. I made circa tea this morning and drank it all. I will not be fertile once it takes effect. It takes about eight hours; we need to abstain a little longer yet. It's why I slept out here, I need to be shooting blanks first, I knew this would happen."

"You are most wise My Xan and thank you. Circa tea tastes awful."

"I know, but it works." Xan chuckled as Kivi sat up to face him, his eyes still shimmering like stars. He had settled into his powers even better than Xan had anticipated.

"Are you as hungry as I?"

"Yes. Famished. We worked hard we should eat or we will be suffering headaches later." Xan said standing and taking Kivi's hand they went to prepare the mid-day meal together.

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Kivi fidgeted in his chair as they ate and his eyes were glassy. Xan watched him amused and picking up very strong sweet aromas emanating from him. When Kivi had said he became highly aroused when in season he meant it. Xan stood and walked around the table to offer his hand to his mate. "Come, I can not wait longer and nor can you."

Kivi was out of his chair so quickly he almost knocked Xan over as he leapt into Xan's arms his lips firmly devouring Xan's as Xan lifted him and carried him into their bedroom. "Xan I am on fire." Kivi panted in between fierce kisses.

"I know. I'm am blinded by it." Xan replied in kind ripping off Kivi's robe as he laid Kivi in bed and tore his own robe off, his eyes beginning to glow.

Their eyes met and Kivi's eyes returned the fire and need. Xan focused on those eyes that held him firmly in control. Xan felt the madness churning but his senses were totally aware. Once Kivi had opened up to his gifts and they meshed as one, Xan was finding it much easier to stay in control and fight the blind lust. Kivi's instinctual healing instincts mixed with Xan's precise and powerful control were a potent combination; the madness would never take Xan again to the point of disassociation from his mind. He was still highly lustful and aroused, but clear minded.

He smiled as he trailed hot kisses down Kivi's pouch. Soft smooth skin from chest to groin. The skin on his pouch taught and firm and Xan ran his hands over the soft skin. "I live to see this full." Xan growled sliding his hand inside to touch the warmth beneath and touch the hidden nipples with his fingertips. Kivi's head was thrown back and he was moaning his pleasure as Xan touched him most intimately.

Kivi was lost in sensation, he'd never been touched where Xan's hands now caressed, his skin burned beneath those fingers. "Xan, please." Kivi moaned deeply, his desire to mate was driving him mad with need. Xan removed his hand and crawled atop Kivi, capturing his lips as he entered Kivi smoothly. Kivi's scent alone was enough to fuel Xan's drive. He'd never been near another in season that smelled as fragrant as Kivi. It was like mating in a bed of roses, Kivi's oil glands produced an intoxicating aroma and the oil market would have paid a fortune to harvest Kivi's for sale. It was a potent aphrodisiac on Sansun; Kivi's secretions were pure and volatile in potency. Xan was driven and almost possessive over this gift of the gods in his bed. Kivi was everything and more he'd ever desired. He would never let this man go and he'd never let harm come to this gentle creature.

"I am yours my Xan-ki. Always." Kivi panted placing his hands on either side of Xan's face as Xan drove their mating tempo.

"I will protect you, I love you Kivi-ki." Xan moaned, almost in tears as he gasped for air in the nape of Kivi's neck as they mated. Kivi shivered and wrapped his arms around Xan as they crashed together and Xan shifted slightly to once more connected to Kivi and his chamber.

All coherent thought was obliterated and Kivi writhed and moaned in sheer ecstasy. Xan's ability to mate with him and connect repeatedly to his chamber was un-heard of, it was as if Xan instinctively knew and purposefully set out to ensure his mate was his and no other would claim possession of the chamber of his chosen Hopa host. Xan had already shown his desire for a son from Kivi, it was obvious his body craved it and found the means to achieve his desires.

Once Xan found Kivi's chamber, their mating frenzy quickly brought intense completion. It was within minutes of finding such a sensitive place, and it was highly pleasurable for them both. The sheer blinding intensity of mating when they were both in season quickly took its toll and they had barely slowed their breathing before sleep heavy and deep was upon them both.

Kivi awoke much later as they lay spent in bed. Xan was passed out cold from exertion and Kivi ran a cool hand over Xan's luxurious hair. He was grateful that Xan had taken measures to ensure Kivi was not going to pass a pearl from their lovemaking and seasonal madness. "Xan-ki. One day I will give you a son. I vow, I swear on the Gods who dictate our lives. I will host you a son if I am able." Kivi whispered. And Xan smiled and reached up to pull Kivi close.

"I know Ki. I know. I can be patient. Sleep with me, I want you close." Xan said groggily waking just long enough to seek his mate's comfort and Kivi complied letting Xan wrap his body around him to sleep.

Kivi had never felt more content or safe in his life and drifted back to sleep with a prayer of gratitude to the Gods. Love like they shared was rare and it was a precious gift that Kivi would thank the Gods for as long as he lived.

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"What are you reading?" Beau asked as he crawled into bed next to Eran who was reading one of the scrolls they'd retrieved from Dantoba the day before.

"Ancient History. I've read this before but I find this one particularly fascinating. It's very old."

"So tell me a story." Beau said fluffing his pillow and settling back. Eran smiled at him and set the scroll aside.

"It's basically an accounting of the mutation. The Sansui used to be both male and female. About ten thousand years ago a comet slammed into Sansun nearly wiping out the entire population. The radiation fallout mutated the survivors. They became a single gendered race in an evolutionary cesspool. Most didn't survive the mutation process, many became sterile, many more committed suicide or became mad. Because not only had their bodies changed, the mutation also awakened their psychic abilities and many could not handle the heightened awareness." Eran began and Beau got comfortable to listen. Eran always did tell fascinating stories when he was interested in the subject matter.

"This particular scroll is about a man named Ameretat. He's commonly referred to as First-Hopa. He's a legend and damn near a God to that society. He was the first to bear a living child and to master his psychic abilities. He and his life mate Jamari rebuilt Sansun from the ground up really. Jamari was a political genius and his leadership was key in forming the foundation of their society. Ameretat had amazing healing abilities and when he wasn't hosting one of Jamari's

seven sons, he was teaching the Sansui how to harness their gifts and how to use them. He was also the first Mind-Healer as they call that type of gift today. Mind-Healers are highly respected, because it's all well and good to be able to make shit fly around a room, but a Mind Healer can repair a brain that was wounded by talents. Mind-Healers are exceedingly rare and any healer can draw a direct lineage back to Ameretat Indivar apparently. At least that's what this scroll says in a nutshell." Eran said getting up to put the scroll away safely and returning to bed.

"What happened to Jamari?" Beau asked as Eran pulled the cover up over them both.

"He died of grief they say. Ameretat was older than Jamari and having seven children and spending many years using his gifts took their toll on him. He gave of himself right up until the end. They say on his deathbed Ameretat vowed to "return to heal a great wound". Jamari found no comfort in that and he died not long after Ameretat leaving their sons to form the seven-seat judiciary counsel that still rules Sansun today. Xartova Indivar is a direct descendant of Jamari Indivar and an Indivar has sat in the first chair as counsel leader since it's creation."

"If history tells us anything, power corrupts."

"It does, I'm positive Jamari and Ameretat are spinning in their graves with the shit their descendants have done over the years." Eran sighed switching off the light as Beau snuggled up to his side for warmth.

"You seem hopeful about this Xantarun."

"I know Xartova. Arrogant bastard. Devapa was a good friend; it was a political match that he was bound to Xartova. But he had fire, and he started the Sansui society right under that bastard's nose. His first two son's Xartobin and Xedapa are just like their sire. Devapa was allowed very little contact with his first two children after they emerged. He begged to be allowed to raise the last one and he was granted his whim just so he'd leave Xartova alone. I met Xan when he was just a toddler. He was probably about two or three. Looked like his Sipa facially but had Devapa's coloring. Nice enough I suppose, it's hard to tell with babies what they'll turn into. You three were staying with Indira. I went to actually pick up that scroll I was reading from Devapa that afternoon." Eran chuckled remembering Devapa fondly; he had been a good friend.

"I remember that. Kadala wasn't even hosting Kivi yet."

"Yes, Xan's probably three or four years older than Kivi. Give or take." Eran said through a yawn.

"I wonder how Kivi is."

"You don't want to think about it Beau love. He's probably the property of some Prima by now. He's must be nineteen or twenty now. At fourteen they go into servitude, whether or not they like it. Indira's probably beside himself with grief, he can't even acknowledge Kivi is his son."

"I know. I hope Kivi is well regardless for Indira and Kadala's sakes. They love him so much."

"Every parent loves their children, let's hope we can help make it so Indira can claim his son in public. That's all Indira has ever wanted from the Society."

"True. I don't know how much help we'll actually be, but we can at least try. It's a good cause."

"Very good. Slavery is the one thing I will fight against without argument. I remember all too well believing you were a slave to a Tsion. I have a personal bias there."

"As do I. I was a slave for fifty years. Let's not relive those memories Eran. These past thirty years have done much to purge our time apart. I love you more today than I did then." Beau said leaning over to kiss Eran tenderly. Eran's arms wrapped around his husband and he held him close.

"Beau, you're my soul, you know that I hope."

"I do Eran. I love you, you big soft sod." Beau said reaching over to pull Eran's shirt off over his head.

"In the mood?" Eran chuckled as Beau undressed him.

"Oh yes. Can't you tell by now? How many years does it take for you to clue in when I'm in the mood?" Beau chuckled as Eran rolled over atop him.

"Give me a few hundred more, I might develop psychic abilities by then." Eran grinned as he divested Beau of his own garments and they made love late into the night.

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Indira was at the spaceport waiting to welcome the Infinity as it docked. "Welcome my friends." He cheered as he held open his arms to embrace his friends as they disembarked. "Where is fair Tovi?" He asked as He kissed both of Cris' cheeks in welcome.

"She's back home on Pirotaine, she's expecting my grandson or granddaughter in a about six months." Cris said smiling and Indira brightened.

"Children grow so quickly do they not?" Indira said with a knowing look as he greeted Val in the same manner as the others.

"They sure do." Val answered as he carried a satchel on his back that looked like luggage but contained precious documents. Eran's duffle was equally heavy with contraband. They'd learned if they made it look like they were just coming for a friendly visit, no one batted an eye at harmless human travelers.

"Come Kadala is waiting in our transport, we will take you straight to where you will be staying. During your visit." Indira winked and everyone followed laughing and looking innocent.

Once inside the transport Kadala greeted them all in a similar fashion. When he got to Brion he smiled. "You remind me of my son. Does he not resemble Kivi Indira?"

"A little yes. I noticed that too." Indira smiled as he piloted them back to the university.

"How is Kivi?" Cris asked and Kadala smiled.

"He is most well. You will see him when we get to the University. You will be staying with him."

"I thought we were staying with Xantarun?" Eran asked and Kadala turned a proud smile toward Eran.

"Yes you are. Xan has taken my pearl as his life mate. I could not have prayed for a better union for my son. There have been many changes since last you were here. Kivi has much changed for the better. I find it hard to comprehend that my body was host to such an event."

"Whoa, what? What do you mean?" Eran asked highly intrigued.

"You have read all the documents I presume Eran?" Indira asked and Eran nodded.

"My Kivi is touched by the gods. Ameretat shines in him."

"You mean the Ameretat?"

"Yes Eran. Xan opened Kivi's gifts and the results had us all on our knees in shock. Kivi has hidden talents none of us, not even Kivi were aware of. He has Ameretat's eyes, there is no mistake, and no one has borne his eyes in centuries. I am most proud that my son was chosen to be Ameretat's vessel."

"Even if our son rejects our views as romantic and prophetic madness." Kadala chuckled. Kivi was always the skeptic.

"I'd not want to be labeled as a reborn savior either, I can see where he's coming from." Cris said and Kadala nodded.

"You understand my son's way of thinking well." Kadala said as they landed in a shuttle bay at the university and traveled up to greet Kivi and Xan and start.

Xan greeted them at the door and everyone hurried inside. Kivi walked out from the bedroom dressed in a long white silk robe with blue trim. The low neck revealed a stunning teardrop sapphire and diamond pendant resting on his collarbone and his hair was adorned with small diamond clips. He looked regal and stunning, and his eyes shimmered with otherworldly light. Everyone paused to drink in the sight. Xan walked over and took his mate's hand and kissed the back of it. "We welcome you to our home. I am Xan and I believe you already have met my mate Kivi."

"Wow. What happened to our little Kivi?" Beau asked walking over to hug the youth.

"I have grown. I am most pleased to see you all again. I have fond memories of you all." Kivi said returning Beau's embrace.

"Same here. I can tell you I'm glad to see you looking like this and not like I remember." Val said taking his turn to shake off the shock and hug the child he remembered from years before.

"I humor my Xan. It is why I hide from the door when it is open. I am still Ounta, but Xan prefers me dressed like this. He spoils me."

"You are beautiful and I retain the right to spoil my mate as I see fit." Xan said as everyone moved into the living area. Earn smiled knowingly, he knew exactly how Xan felt. He tended to spoil his husband 'just because' too.

"Kivi if you walked out that door, not a single person would think you an Ounta. Hell if all the Ounta's dressed up and walked out, you couldn't tell them apart. I can only tell the difference because of the clothes." Cris said and Xan turned.

"Precisely. I keep telling my Kivi that and he refuses to believe me."

"Xan I can't walk out that door anyway without setting off a dozen alarms. I am tagged."

"Tagged?" Cris asked and Kivi sat on the sofa and rested his bare and rather small for his size foot on the coffee table, an electronic device attached to his ankle.

"I cannot take that horrid thing off. I've tried. There is no clasp control. If I separate it, the alarm will sound." Xan cursed angrily and Cris smirked and went into the kitchen and found a blunt knife.

"Dude, allow me. These are a piece of cake." Cris said leaning over the anklet and sliding the knife between the sensors keeping the electronic current connected. He kept the current flowing as he undid the clasp and slid it over Kivi's foot then reconnected it without breaking current then tossed it aside. "There, just stick that somewhere and they'll never know the difference. Monitors will think he's still cooped up in here."

"You've done that before." Xan said amazed at how easy Cris made it look.

"I used to be thug. You learn handy things on the wrong side of the law." Cris winked and Kivi leaned over to hug him.

"Thank you Cris. I am most grateful."

"As am I. You have my gratitude as well." Xan extended his hand and Cris just slapped it off jovially.

"Not a problem. I love this kid too. My daughter wanted to smuggle him off planet the last time we were here. I was going to let her do it." Cris said and Kivi brightened.

"Tovi! I remember her. I played with her many times. Is she here?"

"Nope. Tovi's married and off about to give me a grandchild. She's on Pirotaine."

"A Grandchild? You are surely not older than I." Xan said wide-eyed and Kivi chuckled. The others decided to let Xan in on their secret.

"Immortal?"

"We are."

"I need to be seated." Xan said sitting next to Kivi amazed and speechless.

"Think how we felt when we found out?" Val chuckled as Eran moved to the window.

"Not to change the subject. But this location is not appropriate for the type of work you plan on doing. Way too easy to get into and spy on. I would like to make a suggestion before we start talking about the matters at hand. We move. I'm sorry, I've spent too many years in wars, this room is not secure in the slightest." Eran said checking out the buildings and windows. "There is a telescope focused on this room from the building across the street."

"I am gossip fodder I know. It is why the curtains are drawn." Xan said and Eran turned.

"You are high profile and you just have taken ill. You need rest in the country immediately for your health. You need to step out of the public eye first and foremost." Eran said and Xan nodded, he like a man who got right to business.

"My Hopa had a retreat in the country that has been closed since his passing. We can go there." Xan stood to walk over to Eran by the window.

"Make arrangements, I can secure a manner for you. Indira I'd like for you to contact the society. Get men that can drop everything to help staff that manner. I don't want anyone in that manner not part of the society, we'll need a secure network."

"Consider it done." Indira said as Kadala came over to hold his son's hand.

"Indira, Kadala we'll need you here to monitor all the gossip, we can use that to our advantage. Kivi, you are, if anyone asks, a Prima from the country."

"I cannot lie!"

"I'm not asking you to announce this to the public, I'm saying lie if asked. I don't think anyone is even going to bother, looking at you even a human can see you're gifted, they won't even question you, you're going to get used to leading by example. Your goal is freedom, people are more apt to follow you by actions not words."

"He is right Ki."

"I won't protest. I will go along I can see the logic." Kivi said as Eran leaned against the wall and scratched his chin.

"Xan, how's your public speaking?" Eran asked

"Good. I come from a political family after all."

"Because eventually you're going to have to announce your intentions and union with Kivi. That's a bit down the road yet, but I'm thinking in the long term. Propaganda and visuals get attention and eventually you're going to want a lot of it, just not now. Right now until we get up to speed on what we want to accomplish you're going into hiding. You're going to meet and fall in love with your caretaker and make a union him. Perfect set up and excuse. You do not want the masses to know Kivi was your university Ounta. Bad romantic incentive, people respond to the outrageous and romantic. We want him recognized as a mind-healer not a servant. We want him respected before the bomb drops he was born Ounta."

"You have a devious mind, but it is a good plan. I'll make arrangements immediately."

"My head is swimming." Kivi sighed and Xan walked over and took his hand.

"As is mine, but we knew once they got here we would begin in earnest. I am off to make calls. Sipa-ka will you aid me? The retreat has been unused for years, it will need to be prepared and you have the contacts."

"I'm already on it." Indira said following Xan into his small office to make the calls they needed leaving the others to sit in silence as Eran followed Indira and Xan into the office.

"Eran certainly doesn't fuck about. Beau he's been making notes hasn't he?" Cris asked with a grin. Knowing full well the answer.

"For days. He's had those scrolls out and studying since we picked them up. Slavery is a sore spot with him, he wants to end it here badly."

"Was he a slave?" Kivi asked and Beau shook his head.

"No. I was for fifty years. During the Tsionic wars I was taken to the prison camps while Eran fought them on the outside. Our entire homeland was almost destroyed by the Tsions. He has a personal bias against any form of slavery." Beau said and Kivi took Beau's hand.

"You have a deep wound. I feel your heart ache. I can see your memory I wish I could give you comfort." Kivi said as his eyes shifted hue and Beau was almost hypnotized by them.

"Kivi, time heals my wounds. I have Eran and I have Cris and Val. I survived and I will heal in time. It gets easier. Don't you worry about me, Memories are just that, memories."

"You are wise and kind. I look forward to working with you and becoming better friends. My memories are from my childhood, I see you with different eyes now."

"That's what happens when you grow up. And I need to remind Eran to make a call to Romi. We want her off planet."

"Romi, the vocalist? She is most amazing." Kivi said, he had a recording of her voice; he was quite a fan of the human female.

"She's Brion's mom." Beau winked indicating Brion who was sitting off to the side quietly.

"Your Mother?" Kivi asked and Brion nodded.

"Yeah, I'm not sticking around I'm afraid. Unlike my Uncles, I'm not immortal and I'm taking my mom home. I'd love to help, but I gotta take care of her first."

"As you should. We would not have you stay with so much at stake that is not your doing or concern. Your Mother is your concern." Kadala said as Beau went to go remind Eran to make the call to Romi.

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Romi returned to her hotel room after a successful show and her travel manager was waiting outside the door.

"What's wrong?"

"You have an urgent message Romi. Do you know a man named Eran?"

"I do. My Brion is with him! Give me the message. Is something wrong?"

"He didn't say. Just that you need to call him at this number immediately." Romi snatched the message and dashed inside to make the call.

Eran answered his vid communicator and almost fell off his chair with Romi's frantic voice. "What's wrong? Is it Brion?"

"Calm down Romi. He's here and fine. We can't talk over the com, not secure. I want you at these coordinates yesterday. Pack everything and get your tiny ass over here a.s.a.p." Eran said sending directions to the university.

"I'll be there in two hours." Romi said disconnecting and grabbing her cloak. She hired a transport and was on her way within fifteen minutes.

Kadala and Kivi were fixing dinner when the knock came to the door and Brion answered it since he was sitting closest. He was crushed in his tiny mother's embrace. "I missed you too Mom." He chuckled as he tried to shut the door while stuck in his mother's arms.

"What the hell was that message about Eran?" Romi asked dragging her son across the room with her as she crossed the floor.

"Let's not waste time on introductions eh Romi?" Eran teased as Romi finally remember her manners and she was in a Prima's home.

"God I'm sorry, but what the hell Eran? You had me worried to death." Romi said and Xan just laughed.

"No need to apologize Mrs. Corcoran. Any parent would worry and forget social proclivities. Welcome to my Home Madam. I am honored."

"As am I." Romi bowed, still holding onto Brion's hand.

"Mom, long story short. I'm taking you home no arguments." Brion said and Romi looked up at her tall first-born.

"Mind if I ask WHY? I have seven more sold out shows, I can't drop everything on a whim you realize."

"It's not a whim Romi. How long until your tour is up?" Eran asked and Romi flipped open her pocket calendar.

"Two weeks. Can it wait that long?" Romi asked and Eran nodded.

"Yes, I suppose it can. Brion will finish the tour with you and then take you home on the first transport back to Pirotaine."

"You're up to something." Romi eyed Eran warily.

"Yes. This is your last tour of Sansun for a while." Eran said his eyes grave.

"Tell me you're about to fuck with the social structure."

"Did I ever tell you when you were younger how much I adored you?" Eran laughed. Romi was always blunt and sharp.

"Yes. And I take your reply as a yes too I presume."

"You were always a clever cookie Romi."

"Thank God. Good luck I suppose and thanks for not getting my son blown up."

"Like we'd involve Brion? Not on your life. Just the moment came up and we jumped on it. Just go home, eat Mandy's cooking and give everyone our love. It'll be a while before we come home again."

"You got it." Romi said turning to Cris and Val. "Phineas tells me you're going to be grandparents." She said changing the subject and Cris nodded.

"Tovi's due on our Anniversary. It's going to suck missing the birth, promise to take me lots of pictures?" Cris asked and Romi nodded.

"Absolutely. Goodness gracious it smells divine in here. Where are all the flowers I smell?" Romi said changing gears again lightening fast. Kivi blushed and Xan laughed.

"No flowers. You smell Kivi and I. We are still seasonal."

"Huh? Oh yeah, I forget about that. Well you both smell great then." Romi winked and Kivi coughed a little overwhelmed with such a celebrity he admired telling him he smelled good.

"Mom, you really do just fill a room don't you?" Brion laughed as Xan indicated Romi should join them in the living room while they waited for dinner.

"Well baby, it's just a waste of time not to be yourself." Romi grinned as she sat next to Xan and held out her hand. "Sorry for the outbursts. I'm obviously Romi and you are?"

"Xantarun Indivar. Call me Xan."

"Whoa, I heard of you. You're big news kiddo. I thought I filled up gossip columns you have me beat." Romi teased and Xan laughed.

"Yes, I cannot sneeze without making news. It is most troublesome."

"Honey laugh at it. Hell according to the rags I have three children with Phineas and a dozen more illegitimate offspring. Including a Zootari lover. I mean really. Zootari are nice, but they have tentacles! Honestly." Romi rolled her eyes and Xan chuckled.

"I read that one." He said as Kivi came in with a decanter of wine.

"Mrs. Corcoran, are you thirsty?"

"Oh lord honey no. But stand there a minute. Wow, you smell fabulous up close. What I wouldn't give to have your glands baby. Just call me Romi too."

Kivi smiled. "Thank you." He said softly a pink hue still on his cheeks.

"Don't be embarrassed love. I just speak the truth." Romi said as she met Kivi's eyes for the first time. "Wow, fabulous eyes too. Kivi you should be on a stage modeling or something. You're stunning."

"Oh my no." Kivi looked aghast.

"Romi, cool it. Kivi is technically an Ounta, you're lucky you see him at all." Eran said and Xan nodded.

"Kivi is my mate. He is in the open to humor me, he is still growing accustomed to my whims."

"It's a damn crime. I'm sorry Kivi, I didn't mean to embarrass you."

"It is all right. I am most flattered coming from such a beauty as you I am most honored."

"Now you sound like my husband." Romi grinned.

"Dinner is ready, would all please join at the table." Kadala announced and Kivi helped bring the food to the table.

Xan sat at the head and Kivi opposite him at the other end of the table as hosts. Xan stood and raised his glass. "To new friends, to my beautiful mate and to all we hold dear. May times be gracious, peaceful and hopeful." He held up a toast that everyone was more than eager to drink to.

After dinner, everyone sat around the living room with tea and coffee and chatted about mundane matters. Beau had his guitar and Kivi sat awestruck as he, Cris, Val, Brion and Romi sang Pirotaine songs for an audience who had never heard them before.

"What a wonderful place your homeland must be to inspire such loving hymns." Kivi breathed in wonder.

"It is a beautiful place." Beau said noticing a small Sansun lap harp sitting in a corner.

"Who plays that?" Beau asked and Kivi smiled.

"I do. I was inspired after you left to learn it. I am not very good." Kivi said shyly.

"He lies Beau. He is too modest. He is most pleasant to listen to when I am reading." Xan said getting up to hand Kivi his small hand held instrument.

"Play something, I'll jump in and we'll duet." Beau said strumming his guitar once in a chord to see if he was still in tune.

Kivi nodded as he sat on the floor and plucked out a soft ballad on the mellow little harp. It sounded almost mournful in tone. Beau plucked out an improvisational counterpoint that livened the tune with a springtime air. It was like the dying of winter and the birth of spring combined.

Everyone sat silently listening and then Romi began to hum a third melody, adding her song to theirs. Like a bird welcoming the dawn light.

By the time the song faded, everyone sat with their hair standing on end.

"That was amazing." Xan shivered in his seat.

"I'll say. I want to record that." Romi said and Beau smiled.

"Me too. Let's hope one day we can find the time to do that." Beau said setting down his guitar, there was no performance that could have topped the feeling lingering in the room.

"I most enjoyed that very much. I have never played with another, it was exceedingly pleasurable, I am honored." Kivi bowed his head to Beau and Romi.

"Well, I hate to call this a night. But I have a two-hour transport from here to my hotel. I think I will steal my son and say goodbye before I break down in tears. I don't want to hear about anyone of you getting hurt." Romi stood and everyone with her.

"We'll take care Romi. We can't die we'll be fine." Eran reassured as he hugged Romi and Brion farewell.

"Just be careful. I love you all." She said hugging the rest and then moving to hug Kivi.

"You, don't you ever cover up that face again and you will play for me again. Promise?" Romi asked and Kivi smiled softly and returned her embrace.

"I will ever play when you ask. I am pleased to have met you, I have always admired you." Kivi said as Xan walked over and took her hand and kissed the back of it.

"You honor us both. Perhaps I might beg you return one day when times are different where we may have more time to visit. I would entertain your family with mine one day as friends."

"It's a date." Romi said moving to the door with Brion.

"Take care everyone. Send us word so we don't sit and worry." Romi added as she and Brion opened the door to leave.

"We will if we can." Cris said shutting the door behind them.

"We should go too. You have much to do if you are off this night." Indira said taking his son into his arms.

"I am scared Sipa. I shall miss you."

"I will be fine as will you. You will be safer where you are going. Your Hopa and I will pray for you." Indira said as Kadala joined the embrace.

"Your Sipa is right. I would worry less with you safely away from here. I have faith and I have much hope. All will be right. Xan will take care of you better than we ever could." Kadala kissed his son's cheek and wiped his sons tears with his sleeve.

"I love you both. I will do my best." Kivi said softly as Indira and Kadala moved to the door.

"We know. Xan-ka be well. Be strong."

"Sipa-ka, Hopa-ka..." Xan bowed to them both. "Be well, I will do all in my power."

"Eran, Cris, Beau, Val, my dear friends be well and be blessed." Indira said and everyone replied in kind as Indira and Kadala went home.

Xan turned to Eran. "I will get us packed, we can leave whenever you feel it is best."

"The less people out and about the better. We'll leave around midnight." Eran said and Xan nodded taking Kivi's hand and leading him to the bedroom so they could pack and get ready for travel.

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Eran and Cris left Xan's chambers to go and discreetly find or steal if they couldn't find a transport that would get them from point A to point B as inconspicuously as possible. There was no way Eran was going to allow Xan to hire one, the only gossip Eran wanted was the sort he could use to his advantage. Until further notice the only contact Xan would have with other Prima's were ones Eran personally approved of and had screened.

Val was sent to nonchalantly walk the area, out for a casual stroll to see if he could spot anything peculiar or out of the ordinary. With people as high profile as Xan was, there were always paparazzi and people hanging around trying to get up close or that million-credit image capture of the elusive Lord Indivar. Val's eyes were wide open as he pretended to take in the architecture of the university buildings.

Beau helped Xan and Kivi pack their necessities, basic clothes and important articles only; everything that could be replaced was left behind. Once they finished Kivi disappeared into the bathroom and came out covered from head to foot.

"No Ki." Xan said walking over to take off Kivi's veil.

"Xan we are going outside."

"I know Ki. You're never wearing that again. Lead by example go change back. Remember from now on you are Kivi Jui, my mate, my equal you will not hide your face again." Xan said with compassion, he could guess how difficult this was going to be for Kivi. He took Kivi by the hand and led him back into the bedroom and reached out to remove Kivi's black robe and he pulled the white and blue one back over Kivi's shoulders. He'd specifically purchased that for Kivi, he looked beautiful in it. He then sat Kivi down on the edge of the bed and he fastened the star shaped diamond hair jewels back into Kivi's hair. Another purchase he'd made for his beloved.

"Shine my Beautiful Kivi. Hold your head up proud."

"I'm so scared." Kivi said with his hands clasped tightly in his lap. Xan knelt and took those hands in his own and kissed them both.

"So am I Ki. We have much change before us, but think what we gain if we try." Xan said and Kivi leaned forward to kiss his mate tenderly.

"I will try to be strong even if I feel about ready to shake apart." Kivi said as Beau gently knocked on the door.

"I'm sorry to interrupt. They're back. We have an all clear, it's time to go." Beau said with an understanding smile as Xan stood and took Kivi's hand and led him over to a pair of cloaks hanging over a chair.

Xan's was black with a red lining but he chose to pick up the midnight blue cloak with a white lining and that he placed over Kivi's shoulders, drawing up the hood over Kivi's hair. Kivi's face was framed in soft silk and velvet. The clasp framed the necklace hanging around Kivi's neck. He

looked like romantic nobility from out of a child's fable. Xan smiled, Kivi's soft features lent themselves to be showcased in simplistic and radiant splendor. Xan cut a handsome figure at Kivi's side as he pulled his own cloak on offering his arm to Kivi as they headed to the door.

"We are ready." Xan said as the others picked up luggage. It would look suspicious if Xan carried his own gear and naturally the "prima" at his side certainly would not lift his own luggage either.

Eran and the others were dressed in black Ounta robes and all had their faces covered. Four humans would also raise too many eyebrows. Eran looked at Kivi. "Remember, hold your head up. You are Lord Indivar's Mind-Healer come to escort him to the country for healing. You have to play the role Kivi; we know you're scared. Xan look a little less healthy please. Fake fatigue and lean on Kivi's arm, make this look good. If we run into anyone you know the story. Are we ready?"

"As ready as we'll ever be." Xan took a deep breath to steady his own nerves.

Kivi just swallowed and nodded and Cris led them out followed by Val and Beau. Eran took up the rear behind Kivi and Xan for protection as they made a slow walk from Xan's chambers down to the waiting transport. Xan managed to look quite ill and Kivi on his arm looked quite concerned for Xan's state of health. It was a very good act even to Eran's jaded eyes.

But sure enough, halfway through the main floor lobby, with their transport in sight, a group of young Prima's stumbled into the front door laughing from a night out. Kivi only flinched minutely but kept his composure.

"Lord Indivar? Are you unwell?" Lord Tibiae slurred half drunk as he swaggered over. To everyone's shock Kivi spoke.

"My Lord is unwell yes. Please do not hinder our way Lord Tibiae, it is urgent I take him where I may tend his needs." Kivi said, his voice firm and calm. Lord Tibiae paused noticing Kivi and smiling in unmistakable lust.

"Do I know you my Lord? If not I have been most blind. Sublime you are, positively a most stunning creature. Your scent is most electrifying." Lord Tibiae slurred eyeing Kivi from head to toe wantonly. Xan straightened.

"You would show better respect to my Mind-Healer. Or ill or not I would strike you down randy cur." Xan fumed his eyes dangerous. Kivi's eyes sparked to life and turned to Xan taking Xan's face in his hands.

"Calm your instincts Xan." Kivi said turning angry and dancing eyes to Lord Tibiae who noticed Kivi's eyes and took several steps back before bowing and going to one knee.

"Forgive me. By the Gods grace you have the eyes of Ameretat. Forgive my impudence." Lord Tibiae sobered almost immediately and his friends also noticing Kivi's eyes fell in reverence beside their fellow.

"You are forgiven. Pardon us now please. Xan needs me." Kivi said playing his role well as he and Xan hurried outside the others quick on their heels.

Eran lingered to listen to the rest, the gossip would already begin and in their favor.

"Had I not seen him, I'd not have believed it. Ameretat's eyes! Surely we would have heard of a noble with such lineage. Who was he?" One asked.

"I don't know, he and Xan certainly know each other. The jewels Xan has been buying, they were all being worn by the Mind Healer."

"He was outrageously beautiful. Xan has been hiding him."

"Obviously, could you not smell they were both in season? They are mates surely."

"But who is the Mind-Healer? I can't understand why no one, NO ONE has heard of or seen a man with Ameretat's Mystic Eyes. What secret is this?"

"Who knows, but I'd lay a wager Lord Indivar will make a formal union announcement soon. I certainly would with a man that divine on my arm."

"Xan looked on fire. And rumor says he purchased circa tealeaves. A man only drinks that when he is looking to make himself temporarily sterile and with the Healer also in season? They are hiding an affair."

"Indivar's suffer the madness during their cycles. It's well known. It must be part of the reason he is suffering fatigue."

The conversation continued on in much the same vein and Eran smirked under his veil as he joined the others in the transport and hurried off.

Eran piloted them down the streets and Kivi was in the back with Xan shaking like a leaf. "Calm yourself Kivi love. You were brilliant." Xan was immensely proud of Kivi.

"I'll say. I could not have orchestrated that little gem of gossip better. Come morning you Kivi will be big, BIG news. Everyone will be wondering who you are, tongues will wag a mile a minute. It's like a fucking faerie tale. That sort of gossip is worth its weight in gold credits."

"Lord Tibiae of all people! He will know Xan. He will figure it out." Kivi was almost hysterical with fear.

"Kivi, trust me. He's too stupid to put two and two together. An Ounta to him has zero talent, you showed him your eyes, he'll never even suspect you were my Ounta."

"I hope you are right Xan. Oh please I pray to the gods you are correct."

"Kivi, I wouldn't worry. You were perfect back there." Eran laughed and Cris smiled from his seat.

"He's right Kivi. This will work honestly. Everyone loves a fabulous Cinderella story."

"A what?" Kivi asked and Beau chuckled.

"Human fairy tale. Cinderella was the poor abused little servant girl whose fairy godmother sent her to the ball where she met Prince Charming and lived happily ever after as his bride."

"Well, Kivi's got four fairies of a different sort watching after him, even better." Cris grinned and once again Kivi looked confused.

"Just stay confused Kivi. Cris is being rude." Beau said as Eran laughed in the front at Cris' rude humor.

Xan leaned over amused. "Ki, human males like them who choose to partner the same sex are often called 'fairies'. It's a derogatory term."

"Why would you degrade yourself?" Kivi asked and Cris winked.

"Kivi, we're just making a joke. It's no longer funny when you have to explain it. Sorry Kivi, I'll try to keep my odd sense of humor in check."

"No please don't. I like to learn new things. One day I will get your jokes." Kivi smiled and Cris winked.

"Kivi, sometimes I don't get his jokes and I've been married to him thirty years." Val laughed as the city vanished behind them and Eran flew them to their destination almost five hours away still in their slow transport.

Somewhere around the third hour everyone's stomachs were beginning to growl.

"Did anyone remember to bring food?" Cris whined from the co-pilot seat, tired and hungry, not a good combination for his mood or spirits.

"No I didn't. I am sorry." Kivi apologized and Cris turned to frown at him.

"Kivi, not your fault kiddo. You had a lot more on your mind. Eran, are we close to any sort of civilization?"

"Yes, there's a small town about five clicks east. We can stop for food. It might be good to let Kivi work his magic on country bumpkins too. It never hurts."

"What town?" Xan asked from the back.

"Dastupa."

"I've been there once on my way to the University. There is an Inn with good Food. It's out of the way a good place to stop. Just a few people out and about this time of morning. Kivi will not be overwhelmed. It's my usual to choose out of the way places too. I detest crowds so it will not be out of character for me to stop at such a place. However you will have to shed your Ounta disguises if you wish to eat too."

"Planned on it. We're now your personal entourage Xan. Personal security for the Mind-Healer." Eran said with a grin as he found the little Inn just where Xan directed and they landed to get something to eat.

The inn was practically empty at such an early hour; just a few Primas sat at the tables and everyone paused eating as Xan walked in with Kivi on his arm surrounded by four humans.

The Owner hurried over. "Lord Indivar. I am most overjoyed to see you again. You honor us with your presence." The owner bowed frantically waving his arm to get his serving Ountas over to see to such prestigious guests. Kivi's eyes looked sad as he watched the Ountas fall all over themselves and when one stumbled, it was second nature for Kivi to reach out a hand to help

steady the youth, he hardly looked fourteen years old and was still unsure. Kivi remembered being his age.

Kivi smiled softly as he righted the youth onto his feet. "Be well, there is no hurry young one." Kivi's voice was full of compassion and kindness and the youth became lost making eye contact and looking into Kivi's eyes and he bowed low. Everyone in the room watched the exchange and when they noticed Kivi's eyes too everyone stood and then knelt.

"Xan, help me." Kivi said under his breath and Xan chuckled.

"My Mind-Healer would be pleased if you would all refrain from kneeling in his presence. We are but hungry in our travels. DO carry on with your business." Xan said as a table was prepared for their hungry party and Xan held out a chair for Kivi who gracefully sank into it, wishing he could just crawl under the table and hide.

"Smooth. Very, very good." Eran was smirking into his menu, if Kivi kept this up he was going to be famous without any help from Eran whatsoever.

"He almost fell. Poor lad was so scared." Kivi sighed losing his appetite with all the stares being directed at him.

"Kivi love, not forever." Xan said as the same lad came over again holding out a ribbon of red silk. Kneeling and blushing with his hands shaking, he was giving Kivi a gift. Kivi reached over and lifted the boy's chin smiling. He held out his wrist and using the Ounta sign language encouraged the youth to tie it on his wrist. To refuse a gift of gratitude was an insult and Kivi would never insult the boy who had nothing to give but a tattered piece of silk.

Xan watched pleased. Kivi was so much like Devapa it made his head swim. So gracious naturally, kind to the core, beautiful, un-assuming and elegant in every movement and gesture, a true noble spirit indeed. After the youth tied the ribbon around Kivi's wrist Kivi thanked him in sign language and then to every Prima's shock in the room Kivi placed a chaste kiss on the Boy's visible forehead and smiled laying a hand to the boy's covered cheek.

The youth blushed and bowed as he backed out to go back to work. Eran wanted to sing, it was glorious scandal, even Eran was positive Kivi was indeed touched by the gods at this point. He was just perfect.

"My lord Mind-Healer. I am sorry if the boy troubled you." The Owner said aghast that the Ounta would dare step out of line to present the Mind-Healer with such a ludicrous gift.

"Absolutely not. I am touched. This is probably all he owns in this world, it is most precious and am honored he thought me worthy to give it to." Kivi said hoping the youth did not get into trouble.

"Very worthy. You humble me." Xan smiled at his beloved amazed and so very proud.

"Xan, you've no need to be humble. You lead me by example. Shall we order?" Kivi asked and Xan nodded.

Everyone ordered and the youth was back again and again making sure drinks were full and all needs were attended. Kivi spoke to him throughout the meal in the Ounta sign language making the boy's eyes dance with joy."

"What are you telling him?" Cris asked. Intrigued at the sign language.

"Nothing much really. I asked just now for another napkin."

"He fancies you." Xan chuckled and Kivi smiled into his cup.

"I know. He is so young it is a crush and our scents. He will recover when we leave. He reminds me of myself at his age."

"Surely Mind-Healer you were just as delightful in your youth as you are now. Begging the intrusion. I simply had to come pay my respects." A tall man, roughly Xan's age stood there and he nodded at Xan. On his right ring finger was a symbol that mirrored the ring on Xan's right hand.

Xan stood and held out his hand to the stranger. "I am just Xan. My Mate Kivi."

The stranger bowed to Kivi who smiled in return.

"I am Sanjay Fadula. I got the message from Indira this morning. I was heading out I presume to the same destination you are."

"Then please join us my new friend." Xan said and Sanjay pulled up a chair next to Eran.

"You must be Captain Callum and associated company." Sanjay held his hand out to Eran.

"You got it in one. Give the man a prize." Eran smiled as he tried in vain to get used to Sansun coffee. It was horribly weak.

Sanjay laughed as he turned his eyes back to Kivi. "Utterly amazing. Ameretat's Eyes, I never thought I'd ever see this in my life. I am filled with hope at last."

"We'll talk more later. Too many ears about." Eran said indicating the other Primas watching intently. Kivi especially.

"Prudent." Sanjay said accepting a cup of tea from Kivi as they finished their meals and Xan chuckled noticing that you could dress his beloved Ounta up, but some habits died hard. Xan just took Kivi's hand in his to keep him from serving everyone at the table.

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As they stood to leave Kivi made sure to make eye contact with the young Ounta and he smiled and gave a small bow as Xan led him back outside by the elbow. Xan nodded his head at the boy as well, the boy looked crushed and Xan paused turning to the boy's owner.

"The lad is an attentive one. He pleases my Mind-healer, Might I inquire if he is for sale?" Xan asked and the innkeeper smiled.

"For you Lord Xan, yes. But I have more seasoned Ounta's he is young."

"But he pleases my healer, how much?" Xan asked as Kivi stood trying not to gape and Eran smirked behind his hand as he went outside to smoke a cigarette.

"One hundred thousand, it is what I paid."

"Sold." Xan handed the Prima his credit disk and winked at the astonished boy. "GO collect your belongings lad. We leave, make haste."

The lad ran so fast he was a blur. Xan paid for the boy, the first Ounta he'd ever purchased and went outside to wait for the boy.

"Xan? What are you doing?" Kivi whispered in shock and query.

"He likes you, he will be loyal to you. We can use every ally and I pity him." Xan said as the lad raced back outside his eyes shining.

Xan motioned to the transport and everyone piled back inside, Sanjay pulling his own transport over so he could follow behind the others.

Once Eran lifted them off and the doors were shut Xan turned to the boy in the back. "Lean forward lad. Let me take that infernal limiter off." Xan said and the boy wide-eyed did as told.

"My Xan is spontaneous and he likes to have his way young one. I felt the same when he took my limiter off me." Kivi smiled and the boy lifted his head in shock as Xan freed him from silence.

"Y-you're Ounta?" He asked incredulous.

"I am." Kivi smiled and Xan snorted.

"You're not anymore. And neither are you boy. What's your name?"

"Manju, my Lord." His voice was shaking, and changing. He'd have a deep voice once it settled into manhood like Xan's rich and deep tones.

"All I ask of you Manju is to be loyal. We are heading into changing times, we can use every friend we can muster and can use every hand."

"Lord Indivar, I don't understand."

"I hardly do myself. We're taking one day at a time." Xan smiled and turned to look at Kivi who was amused and content. "You're worth every step in that journey Ki."

"As are you Dear Xan-ki." Kivi replied leaning close to rest against Xan.

"I hate to break your heart Manju, Kivi is mine."

"I could tell my lord." Manju smiled feeling suddenly out of sorts and dizzy. Kivi reached over and took his hand.

"You are in much turmoil, I understand all you are feeling right now, I feel it myself. You may always come to me for an understanding ear, I shall ever listen." Kivi said as Beau turned around in his seat.

"I always wanted to know. I mean I know some humans with talents, but nothing like here. How do you know I mean how can you tell? I don't feel anything." Beau asked his curiosity getting the best of him.

"You would not. For lack of a better description, for one who is receptive or talented it is like static electricity. You feel it on your skin even though it is not matter, it is energy." Xan answered then cocked his head. "I am surprised though you feel nothing. You are quite sensitive, you emote strong emotions when you sing or play. You influence emotions, perhaps you have never been taught to feel, but you certainly know how to project."

"I always said Beau could move an entire room. I see I was right." Eran grinned as the scenery flew past the windows outside.

"He can, he does so unconsciously. I would love to test a human's skills I have always been curious myself the potential if any."

"Well test away I suppose. I'm afraid you're not gonna get much out of me." Beau shrugged and Xan's eyes glowed as he looked into Beau's and then he suddenly shut them and turned away in pain.

"Xan!" Kivi picking up on Xan's distress was instantly alert.

"I will be fine, I met something I did not expect, Kivi needs to touch your mind first. He can heal that damage."

"What damage?" Beau asked and Xan looked dumbfounded.

"You have been mind raped, someone else has crawled into your mind and caused intense talent mutations. Someone else sensed potential and purposefully tried to destroy it. I have not seen such cruelty since I studied the Tsionic Wars and what they did to their prisoners."

Beau shuddered. "I was their prisoner once, for a long time."

"Kivi, please heal him. Embrace his mind with your gifts. This is your talent not mine."

"I'm alright."

"You will be better after. You will notice a difference, you are accustomed to the blocks they put on you. It's like a web of knots, Kivi can instinctively untie them."

"Let me try Beau. I will not hurt you I promise." Kivi said and Beau nodded. Eran handed Cris the controls so he could join Beau in the back. He knew the horrors Beau had lived through, he'd not known of the mental torture.

Kivi took Beau's hands and looked deeply into Beau's eyes. Almost immediately Beau seemed to go into a hypnotic trance as Kivi's eyes danced with prismatic light. "I see what you mean Xan. All of Beau's light is tangled and distorted. Blackness feeding on the light." Kivi said almost detached as Beau leaned forward almost like a robot and his head rested on Kivi's shoulder. Kivi embraced him and his eyes closed as his hands stroked Beau's forehead.

For Several minutes they sat in silence before Beau began to move and blink as if waking from a deep sleep. "That was... I feel high." Beau was shivering as Eran moved to hold him.

"Do you feel different?" Eran asked expectantly.

"Yes. Good god what is this I'm feeling? I've got chill bumps and I saw blue and green lights."

"You are sensing Kivi and I, the light was Kivi in your mind. He is beautiful when he touches you is he not?"

"It was like floating in space in the middle of the Northern lights. Wow." Beau blinked trying to adjust. A weight seemed to have lifted that he hadn't even known existed.

"I hate to sound crude. But I have never been so turned on in my life. I could devour my husband in front of everyone right now and not give a damn." Beau's voice was lustful and Eran laughed.

"That's REALLY a good thing to hear. Pull over Cris!"

"Eran you bastard. I would care after this wore off. What is this?"

"I am sorry Beau. I touched you and I am, well I am in season and I am feeling quite, needy myself. That is my residual touch on you. That will fade."

"Is this what it feels like to be in season?"

"Yes."

"I am so jealous right now. Wow."

"You're jealous? You Horny is one of my favorite pastimes." Eran grinned and Beau slapped his arm.

Xan laughed. "It sometimes is not so nice when one must travel long distances next to your mate and you can do naught but sit uncomfortably and wait."

"There is that, we could pull over ya know." Eran winked and Kivi blushed.

"Xan! Eran! Please it is bad enough to wait in silence."

"Forgive me Kivi-ki. I know." Xan placated is reserved lover whose pheromones where protesting being denied for over almost two days. Kivi was fighting his own hormonal woes. It was a good thing both he and Xan only had a day or two more to deal with seasonal distractions. They had both been in season over a week; they were heading out of their cycles.

"What did you do to me Kivi?" Beau asked getting back on topic.

"I shed light on the dark spots."

"Huh?"

"Kivi's terminology is instinctual. I can tell you there were places in your mind like small black holes. It's where the Tsions touched you and placed taint on your gifts. There were many. Kivi's gifts reversed the taint. Think of a purification of cancerous distortions. Kivi needs very little training, he sees things others do not, his gifts are natural and instinctive, whereas mine needed to be controlled and made precise so I did not destroy my Hopa's rooms or gardens. I could have hurt you by accident, it's why I pulled away so quickly." Xan explained and Beau still didn't know, but he was certainly going to read a few books while he was here and learn what he could. He felt incredible.

"What are those little lights in you? All four of you have millions and millions of them in your minds." Kivi asked after touching Beau he noticed them in the others.

"Those are probably what keeps us immortal. It's a long story. Let's just say we're not entirely human. We have a symbiotic life-form using our bodies as hosts."

"They are content lights. Peaceful." Kivi smiled watching them dance.

"Yeah, they get a free lunch on us." Eran snorted as the signal beeped on the console.

"Hate to break up the interesting party back there. We got company. We're getting an incoming transmission from a restricted source." Cris said and Eran rolled his eyes.

"Do not answer." Eran said and Cris nodded and blocked the incoming transmission.

"Xan is not taking any calls until his health is much better and the scandal has spread more. We want the planet begging and chomping for information. We've got a great start." Eran said as a beautiful rambling estate appeared on the horizon, surrounded by woods and large open fields.

"Tantawood Castle. My Hopa's private estate. I always loved it here, he left it to me in his will."

"God that's gorgeous. It's a palace. Look at all the people!" Val gaped out the window. There were bright billowing tents all over the vast lawns and hundreds of men waving in welcome from the gates and on the stairs of the vast white alabaster palace.

"I did not expect so many." Xan said as they flew over the crowd to land near the large staircase leading into the ancient home of Xan's family on his Hopa's side.

"Neither did I. This is a good sign." Eran said as they landed and prepared to walk out to greet the cheering crowd making a joyful noise.

Their hour had come at last; it was at last time to begin.

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Eran and Val were the first to emerge from the transport, followed by Cris and Beau. Sanjay joined them from his transport as Manju stepped out looking overwhelmed. Sanjay took his hand and motioned him to step aside with him with a smile. The youth did so trying to fathom what was going on but getting out of the way to make room for Xan who stepped out to a great roar from the crowd. He held up his hand in a wave and a smile then turned to offer his hand to Kivi. Kivi took it with great trepidation and allowed Xan to guide him from the transport and as he stepped into the morning light hundreds of Ountas and Primas alike knelt in a wave that ripped out from the palace stairs and over the lawn.

Kivi was taken aback and Xan just held his hand and laid his arm around Kivi's shoulders to offer his beloved support. "My New friends. We thank you for such a warm welcome. My home is yours make yourselves welcome. Please rise; while your respect is honorable, my mate feels discomfort at such displays. You would honor him more by treating him as you would any other man. The burdens of Ameretat's gifts are enough to bear without added ritualistic submission and reverence. However well intentioned such displays are." Xan said and the crowd rose from the ground and Kivi visibly relaxed.

"Thank you Xan-ki." Kivi whispered and Xan just squeezed his hand and smiled.

A small child around four or five came walking up the stairs carrying a bouquet of wildflowers and Kivi knelt as the child approached.

"What is your name little one?" Kivi asked with a smile, he adored children and this child was lovely dressed in gauzy summer silks in pastel shades of pink.

"Arunali." He said as he held the flowers out to Kivi. He was missing his front two teeth and Kivi melted from his winsome grin as he took the flowers and leaned over to embrace the child and kiss both his cheeks.

"Be blessed Arunali. Thank you for such lovely flowers." Kivi smiled, eye level with the child.

"My Hopa helped me pick flowers." The child grinned and Kivi smiled.

"Thank your Hopa for me too then. I must put these in water soon so they do not fade in beauty. Thank you Arunali." Kivi said as Xan looked down on the scene amused and longing. He desperately desired such a scene with his own child standing in Arunali's place bringing flowers to his beautiful Hopa. Kivi turned his gaze to Xan and smiled.

"One day my Xan it will be yours. I promised you did I not?" Kivi smiled as Arunali ran back down the stairs to his Hopa's arms and Kivi stood and held up the flowers for Xan to smell.

"You did, I will practice patience if I am able." Xan smiled into the flowers then turned back to the crowd.

"You are able Xan." Kivi chuckled his eyes shining with mirth. Xan turned back to the crowd.

"Let us continue this inside. I beg time to get established before we begin. Shall we continue this celebration in the main hall in three hours hence, let us dine at mid-day together and I will take questions and ask a few of my own." Xan issued his decree to a cheer and then took Kivi's hand and led the group inside the main doors.

"Okay I'm impressed. What am I here for again? I don't think you need my help Xan." Eran mused as he walked alongside Xan and down stately corridors.

"I will. I am flying blind myself. I am overwhelmed, I begged time to collect my composure."

"You could have fooled me. You command a crowd well." Eran grinned as he drank in the beautiful palace surroundings, Beau on his arm gaping at the splendor.

"I grew up watching the seven chair counsel sessions. You learn a few things by watching." Xan said pausing to gaze out a window to a beautiful garden. "Just as I remember. See that fountain? Many times as a child my Hopa would indulge me and I would play in it while we drank tea and ate cookies. Those were happy times." Xan said almost seeing his Hopa sitting on the edge of the fountain laughing.

Kivi laid his head on Xan's shoulder and admired the garden. "I can almost see you there. What a wonderful child you must have been."

"I was spoiled rotten." Xan chuckled as he shook off his memories and carried on down the corridor. Up several flights of stairs and down another long corridor they came to a pair of ornate doors at the end of the hall. First Xan however paused at the side doors along the corridor. He

opened the one to the right; it was a stateroom for important guests. "Eran, Beau these you will occupy, I want you close to me. Val, Cris the door opposite is an identical room. This was my bedroom when I lived here; the other was empty as my brother's rarely came here. The large doors here were my Hopa's rooms, I would have Kivi live in that room, my Hopa would have wanted him too." Xan said as the group splintered to get settled and refresh after a long trip in a cramped transport.

Xan pushed open the doors and Kivi's breath stilled as he took in the beauty. Large marble pillars and floors of variegated white were the main sitting room. Bright silks in rainbow hues hung from the large French doors that lead out to a balcony swayed in the breeze. The floor was piled in lounging pillows in a mirror to the draperies in one corner, a large marble desk was in the other and several chaise chairs and large urns with potted tree roses decorated the main room.

"Xan, this is beautiful." Kivi was in awe as Xan shut the door behind them.

"It is. My Hopa liked color. There is more. Come." Xan took Kivi's hand and led him through a side door; it was a guest room of sorts. Small and decorated with a crib and several small children's toys "This was mine once. Until I grew big enough to have my own room." Xan chuckled and Kivi smiled and leaned against the door.

"I can take a hint Xan." Kivi teased and Xan turned an innocent smile at him that didn't fool Kivi for a moment.

"Good. This is our home. I have a feeling my student days are over and I must admit I had feared coming back here once. Afraid of my memories of this place, but not with you at my side Ki, I am filled with hope for our future. My Hopa is smiling at seeing his home filled with happiness I am sure. I am happy for the first time since he passed." Xan said and Kivi walked in and into Xan's arms.

"I am too. You are my happiness Xan. I pray I can live up to your expectations of me."

"I have no expectations. I just need your love Ki."

"That you have." Kivi said tilting his head back to receive a kiss from Xan.

Xan then led Kivi to another room that led off the large main space. It was a private Office and conference room where a party of ten could sit and discuss important matters privately. The next room was the bathroom. More marble from floor to ceiling, a large sunken pool that one could almost swim in was in the floor and down a pair of marble stairs. Mirrors were all along one wall with a pair of sinks, a private room held the toilet facility and another room was filled with shower taps that would mimic rainfall. It was an extravagant bathroom indeed. The next room was another guest room. "Tanvir lived in here." Xan said, he hadn't thought of Devapa's personal Ounta in years.

"Who was that?" Kivi asked looking at a heart shaped locket on the small bureau table. Kivi opened it to reveal two faded images inside. One of whom he recognized as Devapa the other of a small child with golden eyes. Kivi smiled, it was Xan as a small boy probably no more than six years old. Xan looked over Kivi's shoulder and ran his fingers over the locket.

"I always wondered what was inside this locket. Tan always wore it." Xan said taking it sitting on the edge of the bed. "He was more of a Sipa to me than my own. It is because of him my distaste of Ounta slavery grew into hatred. I was never allowed to look at his face, but I remember his voice. Late at night when I was scared of the dark, he'd come in and light a candle

and tell me stories until I fell asleep. His eyes were always sad." Xan sighed as Kivi knelt before Xan.

"He loved you and your Hopa. I can feel the love lingering on that locket. What happened to him?"

"I don't know Kivi. When my Hopa died it was chaos, when I finally came out of shock long enough to ask, no one knew and I was told not to worry about an Ounta. I think that was when I became against slavery. I didn't even get to tell him good-bye."

A gentle knock came to the door and Xan quirked an eyebrow and went to answer it wondering whom it could be. He opened it and stood there in shock, a man who looked eerily like his Sipa stood there. It obviously was not Xartova, the clothes were poor in quality, but the face was too much like Xartova's and it wasn't until Xan made eye contact he knew the truth.

"Xan, you have grown so much." There was a tear in the man's voice and Xan hauled him inside in a hard embrace, which was returned, and the older man wept as he held Xan close.

"We were just talking about you." Xan said through tears of his own as he stood back to look at the man's face he'd so longed to look at in his youth. Kivi joined them and held out the locket.

"I believe this is yours." Kivi said and the man nodded and took the locket and slid it around his neck holding it as if it were a long lost treasure returned at last.

"It is. Xan, may we talk in private. I have spent many years dreaming of this day to come."

"I am seeing things with adult eyes and there is a question I suddenly am wishing to ask you myself." Xan said motioning that they should all sit on the low sofa in the sitting room.

"Xan, there was much we wanted to tell you as a child but could not." Tan began and Xan nodded.

"I have a feeling my Sipa is not my Sipa." Xan said getting to the point and Tan nodded.

"I am your Sipa. I am also Half-Brother to Xartova. We share a Sipa. My Hopa was Ounta therefore I was not acknowledged as a true Indivar. But your bloodline is still true." Tan began and Xan nodded.

"I care not about my bloodline. I do care to get to know my true Sipa better and how you and my Hopa managed to pull my pearl passing off as Xartova's."

Tan chuckled. "Xan. You suffer the madness as I do, as any Indivar does, you know as well as I your father cannot remember mating when he suffers. Devapa and I were together long before he was forced to marry my brother. All three of you are my Children and not Xartova's. The union to Xartova went unconsummated for twenty-five years. The man was that clueless and far too pleased to take Ounta's to his bed rather than his own mate. Devapa was more than willing to let Xartova think what he would and we carried on. As you can see my Brother and I look alike, it was not hard for him to think my children were his own." Tan said and Xan laughed, his whole world was upside-down and topsy-turvy.

"It explains why you never let me see your face."

"Precisely. It was hard, but I loved you enough to make that small sacrifice. Your brothers however, Devapa and I had no contact with, sadly Xartova's influence on them is too strong. But with you, your Hopa and I moved heaven and earth to allow us to raise you, as we wanted to. You make me proud, so very proud."

"I am going to cry." Kivi said holding his sleeve to his eyes fighting tears.

Xan just smiled and pulled Kivi close to use his own robe to wipe Kivi's eyes. "You're romantic."

"It's beautifully heartwarming. It gives me hope." Kivi sniffled and Tan reached forward to take Kivi's hand and kissed the back of it.

"As you give us hope. Devapa would have been overjoyed with your choice of life mate Xan. As am I. He is exactly as Devapa had foreseen. He knew Ameretat would come back to us, to you specifically Xan. Devapa's gifts always amazed me, he was always right. From Ounta Slave to a Sansui Lord, you Kivi are the reason behind the Sansui Society. Devapa knew you would come and began the society to prepare for your coming." Tan said and Kivi shivered.

"I told you Ki, you will heal our world not I." Xan said and Kivi sighed and buried his face in his hands.

"I am no great deity. I am just Kivi, I understand so little. I feel overwhelmed and terrified." Kivi said and Tan reached out a hand and touched Kivi's hair in a gentle fatherly gesture.

"We know. That is why we are here, to aid you. Xan will lead by knowledge and power; you will lead us by instinct and kindness. Devapa left you many notes Xan. They are in your desk in the top drawer. It has a false bottom. He foresaw his death, and left you many things to guide you. I will leave you for now to settle and prepare for the meal. We will have much time to talk later. We will move fast, but not so fast as to forsake your health. You had a long journey and many shocking revelations in a few days. Peace be with you both." Tan said standing and Kivi was up and embracing him.

"Sipa-ka I promise to try. Be welcome always here in our hearts and home." Kivi said as Xan stood by his side and smiled fondly at his true Sipa.

"I echo Kivi's words. I have ever wanted a Sipa other than Xartova. I am pleased to know I always had that. Be well my Sipa. We will have supper together in private tonight, I would have you bring a counsel of those you trust most to meet those of my counsel."

"I will bring them. Until tonight my beloved Pearl." Tan held his locket as he bowed and left the room.

Xan smiled as the door shut and sank back to the couch. "The world is changing fast. What more surprises I wonder will come to pass."

"Many I fear. You and I are dancing to a tune that fate I believe is dictating. I shant try to resist the dance, it is far too hard. I must swallow my own fears and face tomorrow with you. Whether my sensibilities like it or not." Kivi said and Xan looked up and smiled.

"I believe I have been telling you that from the beginning. Shall we finish the tour before I go mad from want of you and your scent."

"Xan, four later I am much in need of purging myself first. We have two hours, we have time." Kivi said grinning taking Xan's hand to help him off the sofa.

Xan chose to carry Kivi into the far double doors that lead to the bedroom and to the very bed Xan had been conceived in, it was almost ironic if he had lingered on the thought. As it was he was far too busy loving his mate to pay attention to anything else.

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Xan lay propped up on an elbow looking down at Kivi who still laid splayed out in pillows and silken sheets looking content and not inclined to move.

"I would have you painted looking as you do right now. You are far too beautiful not to capture forever."

"Xan you are one of a kind." Kivi chuckled groaning as he sat up. "If I do not take a hot bath I will nary be able to sit through a long luncheon. Once again you have proven too talented in knowing exactly where to love me. Perhaps once we may make love without you finding my chamber. I do not think a body is designed to be that stimulated that often, you will kill me." Kivi said throwing his legs out of bed Xan chuckled and sat up beside him to plant a kiss on a graceful bend of shoulder.

"But what a way to go eh?" Xan smirked and Kivi leveled him a look that nigh on defied description. Xan just laughed and stood to help Kivi stagger into the bathroom.

They bathed together in the large tub and the steam did wonders to revive protesting muscles. Both wrapped in towels they wandered back into the bedroom and Xan opened up a large closet filled with beautiful robes of the finest materials. "These were my Hopa's, I would gift you all of these my Kivi-ki. They have long sat unused and I am sure my Hopa would have you wear them again."

"So beautiful." Kivi said reaching out to a midnight blue form fitting robe, with an under robe of white with billowing silk sleeves. Silver accents dotted the over robe in a starry pattern that caught the light and sparkled. "He must have looked radiant in this." Kivi gasped at the finery.

"As will you." Xan said taking it off the hanger and urging Kivi to dress in it.

Xan chose something that he had brought with him, he would have to get his own garments, he'd soon run out. He chose something that complimented the midnight blue Kivi was dressing in. A Black over robe with silver buttons, and a dark blue under robe with the same large sleeved style.

Xan hardly paid attention to his own garments as he watched Kivi's form fill out the robe. It fitted him perfectly and he was stunning. Xan sat him down at a vanity in the corner and he once more fastened the star hair jewels into Kivi's hair. "If we did not have to go downstairs. I would see you out of this again. I cannot believe how beautiful you are and keep getting more so. I daresay your very skin is shining today."

"You re biased. I hope I don't tear this, it's the most beautiful thing I have ever worn."

"Just don't try to serve everyone at the table and I think you will manage." Xan laughed leaning over to tie his hair back with a silver clasp.

"Allow me Xan. I would like to see you with it free for once." Kivi said making Xan switch places with him and rather than letting Xan just tie it all back from his face. Kivi took his hair from his temples only and twisted it back to expose Xan's pointed ears. Kivi took the silver clasp and braided it into a knot that would hold Xan's hair back from his face, but allow the long strands to fall down his back.

"Your hair is so beautiful Xan. Might I request you humor me occasionally and wear it where I may admire it?"

"If it pleases you, absolutely." Xan smiled at Kivi in the mirror as Kivi placed a silver circlet on Xan's brow with a large sapphire in it that matched the necklace that Kivi wore.

They looked the picture of a regal mated couple, Xan was more than pleased as he stood and offered his arm to Kivi. The others were waiting in the hall ready to escort Kivi and Xan downstairs. They too were dressed in traditional Sansui robes and Cris was admiring the embroidery on his sleeves.

"I could get used to these clothes. Talk about comfort." Cris said his hair also loose and bejeweled.

Beau looked lovely in the soft pastel blue and his own curls were tamed with jewels. "We figured when in Rome do as the Romans do. Not to mention I totally love the jewels. I love sparkly things. Even if Eran refuses to wear them."

"My bonding ring is enough jewelry for me, you however can wear them all you like, you look edible."

"He looks like a Hopa. Hopa partners wear hair jewels traditionally." Xan grinned wondering if the humans knew the significance.

"Well considering if I had a chamber I would be the Hopa partner all is well I suppose." Beau grinned; he knew the difference and the significance.

"That goes for me too I suppose. What we bottom boys go through huh Beau? We better get sparkly things out of it right?" Cris winked and Beau laughed.

"Like you complain about it? Not that I can recall." Val grinned looking smug. Xan laughed.

"Just making sure you knew before you inadvertently advertised sexual preferences to an entire crowd. Being a single gendered race, we have to advertise so we don't choose someone incompatible to our own tastes." Xan said as Eran smirked.

"Why do you think I wouldn't let you tart me up? Shall we go greet the masses?" Eran said offering his arm to Beau who took it smiling. Val followed suit and Cris took his arm with a smile of his own. As they led the way in procession Xan and Kivi arm in arm behind them.

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The massive dark wood doors in a rich red patina that lead to the grand main hall stood open and the room was full of long tables and benches filled to capacity. The ornate long table on the raised dais had six empty seats. Four of the ten were occupied, two on either end of the table. Tanvir stood there and by his side was the gentleman they'd met earlier, Sanjay. On the other

end of the table were two strangers that Xan was sure he'd get to know better before the day was over.

Everyone stood as they walked in the doors and voices raised in a rich male choir in hymn. It sent chills down Beau's appreciative arms, he always loved a male choir and this welcoming song was full of spirit and hope. The choir sang the group up the center aisle, Xan smiling and nodding to various people and Kivi even though frightened managed to smile and nod and carry himself elegantly up the long aisle to the table at the head of the room.

Eran took his seat to the right of the large Chair obviously meant for Xan, Beau beside him and next to Tanvir. The other larger chair was only slightly smaller than Xan's and obviously meant for Kivi to occupy. Val took the seat left of Kivi's and Cris next to him. They remained standing as Xan escorted Kivi around the left hand side of the table to his seat, which he held out for Kivi.

After Kivi was seated Xan moved to his seat and before he sat he held up his wine glass of cut crystal and full of rich red berry wine. "To new friends, to our shared journey, and to all Sansui men who long to be free. Blessed be one and all and may the Gods smile upon us."

"Blessed Be!" The crowd returned Xan's toast with a cheer and everyone drank. Xan seated himself after he drank and once the master of the Hall sat, everyone else took their own seats.

There were no servants, everyone in the room was equal and everyone had helped prepare the feast and the food was already laid out on the tables for the occupants to help themselves.

"Is there a holy one among us who might start off our feast with a prayer?" Xan asked and the man next to Cris stood.

"If it would please you my Lord Indivar. I am a holy scholar, it would be my honor to make a prayer over our meal."

"Then please lead us with wisdom." Xan nodded and the older man nodded once at Xan and once at Kivi, his eyes shining with kindness.

"We look not to the heaven's with expectations, but rather for guidance. We ask not of the God's what we are not willing to sacrifice ourselves. We thank our ancestors for the wisdom they impart to us and the skills they gave to us that we in turn shall pass on to those that come after us. Let us take a road less traveled, for the journey of a life time knows no certainty, but many adventures, success and failure in equal measure if we choose to walk with our eyes fixed on the road ahead and our hearts true. We are blessed this day to begin a new path, blessed be the day we break our first bread as equals. Long live the Sansui, May we please the Gods and may the path they guide us down bring us all peace. Blessed be."

"Blessed Be!" The prayer ended and the holy scholar bowed to Xan and to Kivi and returned to his seat. Xan raised his glass to the old man and Kivi smiled and held his hands together palm to palm and bowed his head to the old man in silent respect.

The next few minutes was cheerful chaos and silverware clinked and bowls were passed along tables and plates were filled. Kivi automatically reached for the white meat Xan liked in berry sauce and he piled a portion onto Xan's plate and then his own with a much smaller portion, he was never a large eater. Xan just sat bemused for a moment before he decided to call Kivi out on his menial habits, again. Kivi was onto placing the roasted tuber roots onto Xan's plate before Xan leaned close.

"Don't scold me Xan. Just eat your lunch." Kivi grinned and Xan chuckled.

"But what fun would I have if I could not scold you for being servile?"

"I suspect you will find other things. This pleases me Xan." Kivi said as he held up a basket of bread for Xan to select a piece from.

"You spoil me." Xan said taking a slice of bread as Kivi took his own piece before passing it on to Val and Cris.

"I know. That is what pleases me." Kivi smiled as he placed his napkin on his lap to protect his robes.

"You took very little Kivi. Are you sure you have enough to eat?" Xan asked noticing just a few bites on Kivi's plate.

"I am waiting for the cheese tray to make it down to this end of the table." Kivi grinned and Xan laughed.

"I forgot. Sipa, would you be so kind as to pass the cheese tray down this way? It is Kivi's favorite." Xan asked and all four humans did a double take as Tanvir nodded and handed the tray toward Xan.

"Sipa?!" Eran asked passing the platter down.

"I will explain later. Eran I am surprised you do not recognize me, but then again you only ever saw my face behind a veil." Tan said and Eran slapped his forehead.

"Tanvir!" Eran gasped and Tanvir nodded.

"I can put two and two together, but yes, I'd like to hear more later." Eran smiled as the platter reached Xan's hands and he held it for Kivi to select cubes of cheese and fruit to add to his plate.

"Xan would you care for any since you seem to have your hands full?" Kivi grinned and Xan nodded.

"Yellow cheese, I prefer it. Just a taste I have more than enough on my plate already thanks to you. I will grow fat if you feed me like this always."

"You'll get enough exercise." Kivi winked and Xan almost choked and dropped the tray. Kivi only smirked as he took it from Xan's hand and passed it on down the table.

The meal continued with a myriad of conversations going on around the room. The rumble and buzz of voices, the occasional hearty outburst of laughter and gasp of shock could be heard as Xan surveyed the room and its occupants.

Kivi was watching a group of small children play in the corner when he noticed one of them not quite like the others. He sat there very still, his eyes distant, as the others played around him. Kivi stood as if on a command from voices only he could hear and all eyes watched him as he walked on silent and bare feet down the dais and to the small toddler. He said nothing, his eyes were fixed solely on the child and he knelt before the boy and his long fingers ran through the boy's messy hair, the child did not react.

"He's autistic my Lord, he cannot see us." His Sipa said and Kivi just looked up and smiled.

"He sees what you or I cannot." Kivi whispered taking the boy's face in his hands and turning to look into the child's eyes.

"I know the lights are beautiful. Do not get lost in them little one." Kivi said to the child as his eyes danced with the same lights. The boy instantly reacted and reached a hand to Kivi's cheek. Kivi kissed it as his own hands cupped the toddler's face never breaking eye contact.

"Pretty." The toddler said and his parent's hands flew to their mouths, he had never uttered a single word before.

Kivi just smiled as the brighter light faded from his eyes into the lighter luminous orbs that now seemed to glow with eternal inner flame constantly. He leaned forward and kissed the child's forehead tenderly. "Live in this light sweet one." Kivi said turning him to face his parents.

"He was just lost. He is fine." Kivi said as the toddler beamed at his parents in a true smile of recognition.

"Sanda!" Both his parents wept and fell to their knees gathering their son in their arms. His Sipa prostrated himself before Kivi who still knelt on the floor.

"Lord Kivi Bless you! Bless you!"

"Get up please. I am just Kivi and I did nothing but show him a way out of the maze in his mind. Please don't." Kivi said reaching a hand down to urge the man to rise.

"Lord Kivi I will follow you until my dying day. No Mind healer has ever been able to help him. You have my undying loyalty. You healed my son." The man said as Xan walked over and knelt beside Kivi.

"Kivi follows his heart and instincts. He did nothing he would not do for anyone. We are all blessed with him." Xan said proudly taking Kivi's hand and urging him to rise.

Eran kicked back in his chair and lit up a cigarette, his job was way too easy. Kivi had just cemented himself in his role. No one in this room would ever doubt him. "Eran quit smirking." Beau nudged his husband as Xan led Kivi back to his chair at the table so he could finish his meal.

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Several men, Prima and Ounta alike took it upon themselves to help clear away the dishes and left over food and once the volunteers for clean up duty disappeared Tanvir stood and addressed everyone in the room.

"As you all well know, this was the day my beloved Devapa desperately longed for. They day he would see our son grow into such a splendid man a Sipa and Hopa can be proud of, Xan you are everything we ever wished you would be, I am honored to be your Sipa." Tanvir smiled and Xan stood and bowed to him.

"As I am honored to be your son." Xan replied sitting back down to allow Tanvir the floor again.

"And Dear Kivi, I remember the day vividly that my mate came to me with a vision he'd had. Our own Xan was not even a pearl yet and I remember Devapa's voice still to this day telling me that we were to have another son, and that our son would be the one Ameretat would choose. I remember Devapa how he had described you in his waking dream. When I first saw you this afternoon I was reminded how vivid Devapa's dreams were. You were exactly as he described you would be, I was taken breathless and am even more charmed by your grace and humility. You also put a smile back on my son's face that has been absent since we lost his Hopa. For that alone you have my undying love." Tanvir bowed to Kivi who smiled shyly and turned to lay a hand on Xan's cheek.

"I would have him smile always Sipa-ka. For he has my undying love." Kivi replied and Xan took Kivi's hand from his cheek and kissed his palm.

"As I love you Kivi-ki." Xan replied keeping hold of Kivi's hand as Tanvir continued.

"We of the society have spent many long years laying the groundwork for your coming of age. We have men and we have arms if needed but we pray we have no need of such physical means of rebellion. But changing a society so rooted in place History has shown that sometimes force is a sad inevitability. We are prepared for that worst case scenario, but I have faith that the charm of Kivi and Xan's charisma in the political arena will help pave the way for a new order. I will turn the floor over to Sipa-Juhi to continue." Tanvir bowed to the Holy scholar who had said the prayer at the beginning of the meal. The Sipa added to his name a sign of respect for the historian of spiritual pursuits. He was much older than most in the room, he had an aged wisdom in his kind eyes that still sparked with youthful enthusiasm.

"Thank you Tan. Lord Indivar, Blessed Kivi I stand here today with such joy in my heart. I was your Hopa's tutor in his youth. I was always amazed by Devapa's gifts and insight. Even as a boy his kindness of heart was inspiring. I was honored to have him touch my life and make me see how beautiful a world can be when kindness of heart rules over greed and avarice. I watched Devapa throw off the shackles of class and station when as a youth barely beyond his first cycle he fell in love with a headstrong, bitter boy. I had to watch with a breaking heart, because such dreams of youth are cast aside for political whims and society stigmas." Here Juhi wiped his eye, tears of a memory that still moved him.

"I remember your Hopa sobbing in my arms when he was told he was to be united with Xartova. I remember Tan trying to be strong for them both. Love like theirs, like yours..." Here Juhi nodded to Kivi and Xan "... Should never be cast aside, because it will find a way. As Did Devapa and Tan's, so will yours. For centuries how many other lovers had had to go through the torment of not being able to be together simply because society labeled one a Prima or an Ounta? We are all one race, and love over the centuries did find a way."

Here Juhi walked off the dais toward the children. "See the beauty of Children born of love. See their gifts shine, gifts know no station, Ountas and Primas have mixed enough over the years that one child is now no longer different than the next. It's the lack of education, plain and simple. We all see this, and others do too but are too afraid to speak up against the seven-chair counsel for fear of retribution. The more support we can gain from the people the weaker the counsel grows. Seven men have held too much power for too long it has become corrupt and unstable. Deception, greed, power, tyranny all the worst aspects of our nature have festered in what was once a good thing. It was once thought by our ancestors that dividing the power would keep our world pure and untainted. But alliances and personal weaknesses made the division of power pointless." Juhi sighed and Eran raised his hand.

"Yes Captain Callum. You have a statement to make?"

"I do. Call me devil's advocate for a moment, but stand back a moment and look at the statements you are making. You would trade one system that rules with personal opinion with another whose values more closely match your own. Granted your values are those shared by most decent people regardless of race or species or gender, but what would protect your new rule from the same mistakes made by this one. You said yourself it once started out with good intentions. There is a human saying that states 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions.' You have to look farther than the immediate problem of change. You have to look at building a foundation that works. I am afraid in all my years I've yet to come across a perfect ruling body. You have to consider much more long term. Are you seeking a monarchy or a parliamentary system like you already have? I have made a few observations in my time I would offer some opinions." Eran said and Juhi smiled.

"Captain Callum, we are all ears. You have seen more in your lifetime than any of us. I myself remember meeting you as a boy. Your wisdom is eagerly accepted." Juhi stated sitting on a bench next to the children to listen.

"The best working systems are indeed senate based, there are flaws, but with elected officials change happens more readily than inherited seats. That's the one fatal flaw in this one. The same families have run this world for centuries. The elections here are mockeries; the candidates are the same four families year after year. Three of the seats belong to Indivar, two Mavoohi, one Kadapali and one Sripa. The first step is to take over one of the seats from the inside. You affect change when you have a strong voice. Once you have a foot in the door, you demand more candidates, when a counsel member demands change people are more apt to add their voices to a stronger one."

"I can see where you are heading Eran. You wish me to run for counsel." Xan said and Eran smiled.

"Precisely. I doubt you'll grab your father's seat, but running against a brother you've got a decent shot. Your brother's do not have a lot of loyalty, they are bullied by Xartova."

"You've done your homework. Yes, neither of my brothers hold sway on the counsel, Xartova intimidates them."

"He never did you."

"He's a bastard. I am the cancer in his side. I have a mind of my own."

"What better way to make the cancer spread than to be in his face opposing him? Tell me you are not inclined to see him fall? You can start the avalanche Xan. The people for one actually like you, you're front-page gossip fodder, you're charismatic, you're outspoken, you're the exact opposite of what they hate. I took the liberty of checking out the news a few hours ago, after we arrived. Right now you are the top story everywhere. Lord Indivar suddenly suffering fatigue has them all worried. Not to mention Kivi is on everyone's lips too. The strange healer you left with, Tibiae and his entourage from last night have been talking all night. The morning news broke with speculation your fatigue is an excuse and you are in fact off getting united in secret with the Heir of Ameretat Beauty." Eran reached into his robe pocket and tossed over a print out of the news. "You've never been more popular. If you want a counsel seat, you just have to reach out and take it."

"He's absolutely right Xan. Your Hopa saw this too. You will head the counsel one day, and as head seat you can change the world for the better." Juhi said and Xan nodded.

"I would make a request. I would hear more of Eran's insight on senatorial workings. I have studied a few myself. The ones that work best are the ones where you are limited on how long you may actually hold your chair. Here there is no limit, I like the ones that say every few years you must be voted on again and after a set limit you can no longer run for the seat and must retire from it. Those seem to have the least woes that impact the people."

"Xan you are a bright man. That's precisely what I meant. I see we think alike and I'll research the best governments I know of and give you a report on it. But that's the second step in the long-term goal. The first is to actually get you on the counsel. We can't make changes without you there speaking for the people who put their faith in you. That's the governmental side of things. The flip side of this reformation is Kivi. You'll need to announce your intentions of a formal uniting and soon. You need to be seen with Kivi in public as often as possible, Kivi just needs to be himself, he can charm the spots of a leopard. They will be so infatuated with him if the news ever breaks he was born Ounta there's not a person alive who would dare refute him. Well Xartova probably will, but he won't dare touch him because it will affect his own political standing. You're his son; he'd look a fool if his own son united with an Ounta under his very nose. He'll have to condone it, because well it's pretty damn obvious Kivi is different, he'll be the exception to the rule that will be the catalyst for you to make the rule crumble for good. Did I make any sense there? I'm rambling."

"You're making very logical sense. Brilliantly linear. Xartova is so subtle and twisted, walking a straight line up to him he won't even see." Xan said and Juhi clapped.

"Captain Callum, you are an asset indeed."

"I just have experience. I would help move this along quickly, Devapa was a dear friend, and I have my own reasons, personal reasons I'd like to see the last of slavery here. I will help all I can and where I can."

"Then shall we open up the floor for questions?" Tanvir asked and Xan nodded and the next few hours were small details and clarifications over Eran's suggestions discussed in length. It was late in the afternoon and early evening before the great hall was emptied and people wandered off in groups to talk about current events.

Kivi had sat silent most of the day, listening and it was with great relief when he found himself alone in the garden by the fountain while Xan stood nearby with Tanvir and Eran still discussing matters. The sound of the water was calming and cool under his fingers. His head was swimming and when Beau and Cris appeared with Beau's guitar and they settled under a shady tree to talk about unimportant things and eat the sweets Cris carried in a basket and to listen to Beau play soft melodies in the tranquil setting. Kivi found peace and before he realized it, he had dozed off leaning against the tree in the warm afternoon with the scent of flowers and the sound of Beau's lullaby and didn't wake until Xan sat beside him and moved Kivi to rest in his lap. "Go back to sleep Ki, you're exhausted. It has been a long day and your scent is gone. Your cycle is ended; I know mine always drains me on the last day. Tomorrow I will more than likely be in your shoes too. Funny how yours started after mine and ends before."

"Mine are usually short. Forgive me for being so suddenly tired."

"Nothing to forgive. Rest Ki."

"I love you Xan. I am nervous for you. You do not like politics."

"I hate it yes, but I do want change, this is the way to go about affecting them. I will not always be political. I would much rather be a studious man, lost in my library in my books with you being lazy and academic."

"I just want to be by your side, wherever you are." Kivi sighed closing his eyes and using Xan's legs as a pillow as Xan stroked his hair.

"Me too." Xan replied, his own voice sounding tired as he leaned back against the tree and shut his eyes.

Neither of them awoke until Tanvir and Eran found them and woke them for dinner.

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Once back in their private rooms, Xan and Kivi found Sipa-Juhi and Sanjay already present and waiting, Manju was sitting on the balcony and brightened when he saw Kivi and Xan and he rushed over.

"Manju, are you fairing alright? We turned your world upside this morning." Kivi asked as the boy halted before them bowing. Looking greatly changed in a dark red robe that complemented his dark blond hair and deep brown eyes.

"I am fairing wonderfully. Sanjay has been most kind to me today, I sat and listened during the meal and I am eager to offer what help I can."

"I thought he would be a good helper to you both, he's smart, he's loyal and he's quick. Might I suggest he take up my old room and be at hand whenever you need him? These will be busy times, having a lad at hand to run errands you trust is prudent." Tanvir said and Xan nodded.

"Most prudent. Manju will you accept the undignified job of our messenger?" Xan turned to Manju and asked.

"Undignified? Hardly. I owe you both everything, I will always help you in whatever way I am able. You will need servants you trust, your job is a lot harder than me delivering things for you or making sure you have food when you're hungry. I'll take care of you both so you can take care of the rest of us." Manju bowed and Kivi laughed.

"I do like you Manju, you are refreshingly honest." Kivi said picking up nothing but true goodwill from the boy.

"Just make sure Kivi doesn't do everything first. He has a bad habit of fussing." Xan said and Kivi frowned at him.

"Xan, I am like Manju, some habits will take a long time to change to please you."

"Don't worry Lord Xan. I'll make sure Kivi doesn't over work himself." Manju grinned and Xan clapped him on the shoulder.

"Good lad. Come let me show you your room then, you'll be in here with us." Xan said taking Manju to the room Tanvir had called his own private space for many years, even if he did hardly ever use it in favor of spending his private moments together with Devapa.

A knock came to the door and Manju dashed to answer it, Kivi hid his smile behind his hand, the boy was so eager. At the door was the last member of Xan's new inner counsel, the stranger that had been seated next to Sipa-Juhi at the head table, the Body Healer Lalam. "Forgive my tardiness. There was a slight accident with children, a graveled pathway and some subsequent skinned knees from running too fast and into one another." Lalam chuckled as he entered and Manju shut the door behind him. "You're new lad." He added with a wink.

"Manju's our designated go-boy." Eran said as he smiled from his perch by a balcony door smoking a cigarette and blowing the smoke outside.

"I'd scold you for harming your body, but then again you're not are you?" Lalam said moving to shake everyone's hands now that they had a chance for informal introductions.

"No he's not. He functions best on high doses of Caffeine and Nicotine, if you're ever inclined Body-Healer Lalam, I am a field trained Physician myself and my medi-com on board the "Infinity" you are more than welcome to access." Beau said shaking the man's hand.

"I will take you up on your offer. Our species are quite similar where disease and other such maladies are concerned, I'd like to see human research on some of our more troubling issues."

"Speaking of the "Infinity" we need to bring her closer. We don't want her docked in that spaceport too long. Val and I can navigate her in under radar, there's plenty of docking space behind the castle here in the forest cover. I want at least an escape route if we need one in a real hurry." Cris said and Eran nodded.

"I agree. That's a good idea."

"We thought so, I've got the access key control, Val and I can be back by morning if we go now."

"Won't you eat first?" Kivi asked concerned for their health.

"We can eat on the way, the sooner the better." Val smiled at Kivi, still seeing that small boy he'd loved in the man before him. Some things never changed, Kivi's heart was one of them.

"Then Be Blessed and safe journey." Kivi hugged them both and escorted them to the door.

"Cris thinks like a criminal, he's always gotta have at least one way out." Eran grinned, and that had come in handy over the years.

"That's a good way to conduct yourself, you don't wind up painted into a corner." Xan said as the group moved into the sitting room and making themselves comfortable while they talked.

"Precisely. You'll find Cris is good for a lot more things too. He's a genius; I don't know how many times over the years having him around has saved my ass. Literally." Eran winked and Xan chuckled.

"Good to know." Tanvir laughed with his son as the door was knocked on again and Manju went to open the door and help cart in the private dinner and set it out on the table in the sitting room buffet style. There were some things they still needed servant help with and everyone understood that this core group had better and more important things to do than cook their own dinners on top of everything else. The castle was full of willing servants lending as much aide as possible to help smooth the course of changing times.

"I still feel odd being the one being served." Kivi sighed and Sanjay smiled.

"Kivi, we know. You'll soon learn we're helping you because we desire to, not because we are slaves, that is the difference." Sanjay said passing Kivi a plate of cheese. "Your favorite yes?"

"Yes." Kivi smiled, it seemed everyone now knew his favorite food thanks to Xan and there was plenty for him to choose from in the offerings that had been brought up to the room.

Once everyone had their dinner and were seated informally in the main room on various pillows on the floor, conversation began.

"Might I ask what brought you to the society. I already know my Sipa's tale, I am curious what motivates you all." Xan asked curious what sort of people he would be dealing with in the future.

"You already know Tanvir's and Sipa-Juhi's, mine is along a similar line. I too knew your Hopa; I was in attendance while Devapa passed you as a pearl. You were quite difficult on your Hopa. Unlike your brother's which he passed easily, you proved even as a pearl to be stubborn." Lalam began smiling at Xan over his wine.

"Devapa and I went to school together as children he was always a positive influence on me. I am here because I believe in his visions and I want to see a world as we hope to bring about. It's as simple as that." Lalam said and everyone turned to Sanjay who sighed and set down his mug.

"I have a far different motivation, but not one dissimilar to your current one Xan." Sanjay began his eyes suddenly turning quite sad.

"I think my tale is best stated from the beginning. I will make it as brief as possible." Sanjay turned to look at Kivi with a tender smile.

"I would spare you the pain of my story, I know you are quite receptive to emotions, but I am sorry to say the sadness is my motivation."

"I will be fine, please continue." Kivi said taking Sanjay's hand in a comforting gesture.

"I was young, hardly more than sixteen when I met Amali. He was just barely fourteen and new in my father's household. I was ever in trouble with my father, I was headstrong and disobedient and all around a nasty boy. I was being rather obnoxious and thought it would be a good idea to lay a trap for my father involving foul smelling water and a bucket strung over a door. I was lying in wait when the poor boy walked through the door and was drenched. Dropping the serving tray and breaking the china, just as my father came in. I had to watch in horror as my father beat him for breaking china. It had been my fault." Sanjay's eyes looked off into the distance as he remembered.

"My father left him on the floor and when he'd gone I went to help him. I begged his forgiveness as I carried him to my chambers and drew him a bath. He just smiled at me. I'll never forget that in my entire life. I caused him pain and he just smiled at me. He was beautiful when he smiled. He was beautiful anyway. As I took off his veil I think my world stopped right then and there. Huge green eyes, light brown hair, fair skin, with a pattern of diamonds. In a word, breathtaking." Sanjay smiled here closing his eyes, he could see Amali whenever he shut his eyes.

"I helped clean him off and took care of his bruises and continued to beg forgiveness. He just laid his fingers to my lips and shook his head. His collar prevented conversation, but his body

language was enough. His eyes were full of mirth, he at least was amused at the trap I'd set even if he was the one to walk into it. Amali always did have a dark sense of humor, like me." Sanjay chuckled wiping a stray tear from his eye.

"The next few months I couldn't get him out of my head, I'd find excuses to be near where he was working and by the gods I was bold, I'd even sneak into his cubicle at night to drag him out at all hours. Sometimes I'd play him songs, sometimes we'd just walk in the garden, sometimes he'd show me things he'd done. He had a talented green thumb, our gardens never looked better before he came. I was in love before I even realized it myself. It was about a year though before I got the nerve up to ask him to walk with me with his face uncovered."

"It wasn't long after he complied, I found the courage to kiss him. A few nights later I came into his room to find him highly agitated and smelling incredible. He was in his first heat cycle, I responded almost instantly, we hurried off to the back of the garden and neither of us were thinking very clearly being lost in the lust of a seasonal cycle. I do remember it was perhaps the best sex of my life. I was careful, he was careful, we were thinking clearly enough to try and avoid his chamber. But our lives changed from there, for three years we were lovers, when I left for university, I took him with me. I finally heard his voice for the first time when I pried that damn collar off his neck that first night away from home. Hearing him say he loved me? That was heaven." Sanjay's voice cracked, he was having a hard time now telling his story.

"We were together five years, I had moved us to a small home near the university. I was getting my bardic degree and he took care of me. I came home one evening to find him curled up on our bed sobbing. He was passing a pearl. I have never been so terrified in my life. We could not call for a body-healer, he had to pass it all by himself with only me to help him. I was only twenty and one and knew nothing of healing. I thought I was going to lose him, he was in such pain and bleeding badly. But by dawn I was holding our pearl and Amali was lying there smiling at me as we placed our pearl in his pouch. We kept our affair quiet, and behind our doors only. Our son, Amjay, was growing; it was hard to hide the obvious. So Amali stayed inside at all times and we were both looking forward to him emerging it was nearly time." Here Sanjay stopped, the sobbing had begun.

"I came home one afternoon to find Amali dead on the floor, our son torn from his pouch and laying dead beside him. A note from the council lay on the floor saying they had been terminated for breaking the liaison with a prima directive. My love, my son GONE! Left there for me to find as a reminder that I needed to choose a partner more suitable for my station. I'd just left Amali that morning laughing neither of us suspected anything. I must have sat there sobbing for hours, holding them both, praying they'd wake up. They both only looked asleep, but the blood in their ears was proof they were never going to awaken. I tried committing suicide, I laid them both in bed and lay down beside them and took every pill in the house and went to sleep holding Amali and our son and sang to them. I awoke in Sipa-Juhi's house under Lalam's care. Sipa-Juhi had heard of the termination and came to console me and found me on the verge of death myself. He saved me and showed me the way is not suicide it's changing a world that caused the pain in the first place. The rest is history, I never found out who turned us in, if I ever do, I will murder him. I am here because I never want another to live a life like mine. I lost him four years ago and not a day goes by I don't wish I had him here."

Kivi was sobbing along with Sanjay as he pulled him close to hold. No one had a dry eye as Sanjay regained his composure. Some wounds would never fade completely; Sanjay's were deeply rooted.

"His story sadly is just one of many. Most of our members have similar pain and heartbreak." Lalam sighed as Manju came over to Sanjay and held out a cloth to dry his eyes.

"I am so sorry Lord Sanjay." Manju said, his own eyes red. Sanjay just smiled at him and took the cloth to wipe his eyes.

"Don't be sorry Manju. You remind me very much of Amali, my hopes for you far exceed my pain now. I pray I can give to you what I was unable to give to Amali." Sanjay said truthfully. He'd taken a shine to the boy from the moment they'd met that morning. He was young, he was the future, and he was something fresh in a dark world.

Kivi took Manju's hand and Sanjay's and held them together. "This is good. This is a powerful healing here. You need him Sanjay and he needs you. Please don't shy away from this." Kivi said and everyone raised an eyebrow.

"Kivi what are you talking about?" Xan asked since Kivi's eyes were swirling again.

"Caring. It's a strong emotion that heals. Just do what your hearts tell you to do, that's all I am advising."

"Kivi... are you implying?" Xan asked and Kivi only smiled.

"I am implying nothing more than potential and good compatibility. That is all."

"I'm far too old for him if you mean what I think you mean." Sanjay said almost in shock.

"I am beginning to regret speaking here. I just am stating truth. You mesh well; I can see your colors. Xan what word am I looking for here?"

"Power meshing?" Xan was just as confused as everyone else. Kivi was being strange.

"No. Well yes in a way I guess. Am I the only one sensing this?"

"I am afraid you are Ki. What are you seeing?"

"Goodness, it's hard to describe something I've always been able to sense. It's more a feeling than anything else. Let's see if I can't put this into words that don't seem to confuse everyone more. For instance, when you are with a good friend you feel comfortable right? When you are with a lover you are peaceful. It is the mixture of personalities that compliment. That is evident here, that's all. Friends or lovers there is a fine line but the complimentary aspects of your natures are the same with either. It is the same when you meet someone you instantly dislike and you are on edge, this is the reverse. There is that clearer? You are complimentary souls."

"That does make sense. You can see that in others than yourself?" Xan asked and Kivi nodded.

"It's very sharp when it affects me personally, but yes I can sense when people will get along well with another too. I've been like this for as long as I can remember, it is even more keen now that I no longer have my barriers up."

"Ameretat's gifts. Heightened spiritual awareness, Kivi is touched by things we will have a hard time understanding. You fascinated me as a child, I met you once many years ago, I never dreamed you'd turn into the man before me. I knew you were special, but I attributed that to your nature. You were barely three years old and I was watching you out the window as you played in sun with a small butterfly. It amazed me that it repeatedly landed on you and how delicately a child your age touched it. It even followed you inside. I should have known the

touch, should have sensed something more. We just thought you were a delicate and sensitive child. You were so much more." Sipa-Juhi said and Kivi smiled.

"He's right, I remember you then too. You were about the same age when we first met you too." Beau said thinking back. "I've never known a toddler not to get fussy occasionally. You were so quiet all the time and I remember Kadala remarking once how blessed he was with such an even-tempered child. I don't ever remember you crying or yelling at all. Just this little tiny serene boy who liked my peppermint candy." Beau grinned and Kivi laughed.

"I remember the candy. It's a very vivid memory of my youth." Kivi grinned and Beau reached into his top pocket and handed the small tube over to Kivi.

"They're just mints. I always have them on me." Beau laughed and Eran chuckled.

"He's got a hygiene fetish Kivi. Even his breath must smell good at all times. Not that I'm complaining, but he's telling the truth, he always has peppermint in his pocket." Eran laughed at his husband's quirk.

Kivi accepted the mint and took one then passed the roll around for everyone as he tasted and smiled in bliss. "Taste just like I remember."

"You made that same face too if I recall." Beau grinned as the roll reached Manju who made a similar face when he tasted.

Sanjay chuckled. "Simple joys. That's what life is about."

"I agree wholeheartedly." Xan said as Kivi settled back against his legs, resting his cheek on Xan's knee. Xan instinctively rested his hand on Kivi's hair and absently petted the silken strands as he would a cat.

"Now to change the subject. We should address the sheer number of people here. That will be suspicious. I would ask you all to select for me a good core staff for the palace here, then send the others home for now. This will raise Xartova's suspicions enough me coming here without an entire community camped out on my lawns."

"Glad you brought that up, I agree, we want attention of the right kind. This is not the right kind." Eran said and Sanjay nodded.

"We are already on that. Fifty have been selected to stay the others are going home in the morning. I've also sent for Indira and Kadala. We have enough ears on the outside and Indira is the best historian we have, he'll be indispensable for your campaign issues." Sipa-Juhi said as Kivi sat up almost giddy.

"Naturally having your parents here too will be comforting while you get used to your new role in life. Of all of us you have the most adapting to do, something familiar helps. Indira confirmed he'll be here in two weeks. He's put in his resignation at the university and will be your new personal employ Lord Indivar."

"That's good to hear. Okay Eran, what do you want me to do personally?"

"Get miraculously well, and start getting out there where you can be seen. Make a show of it, accept invitations to social gatherings, get people interested more than they are, Kivi must be prominently displayed on your arm, make it obvious your intentions. Get everyone crazy with

wanting to know Kivi, but keep him mysterious. Announce the union soon, and make that a pageant. I want people lining up wanting to attend, Hell I'll get Romi to perform before she high tails it off planet. That's a people pleaser. Once your popularity and your union are cemented, then you announce you plan on running for council too. These are the oldest tricks in the book; you use popular opinion to your advantage. You get everyone liking you and they believe everything you say as gospel. You want change, you gotta come in with a big voice."

"Understood. One thing, we have to keep Xartova away from Kivi. I don't want that man within fifty feet until I am formally united. He practically interrogated my brother's mates. Almost to the point the unions never took place. I don't care what anyone has to do to run interference, just do it."

"We can do that." Tanvir said noting Xan had pointedly stopped calling Xartova his Sipa. It greatly touched him, even though it was unnecessary. The show of respect to his real Sipa did not go unnoticed.

"Good. Then let's enjoy the evening and not waste it going over what we already know, it's pointless now, we have to just take the steps now was they happen. I hear music outside, Sanjay you are a bard are you not?" Xan asked and Sanjay nodded.

"So is Beau, I'm sure his talents will interest you greatly and perhaps you can show him how to use his gifts properly."

"That would be an honor, I did notice he was talented the same as I. Mr. Shannon will you give me the honor of playing with me?"

"Absolutely." Beau grinned standing.

Xan helped Kivi up off the floor. "I would dance with you. That is one joy we've yet to have the pleasure to indulge in." Xan said and Kivi smiled taking Xan's arm.

"I would like that too."

"Then let's go mingle." Eran said holding the door open for everyone to make their way outside to join the festivities happening on the lawn.

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The lawns were alive with merriment, lanterns in a rainbow of colors were lit, the aroma of cooking food permeated the air, wine was flowing freely, music, singing and laughter rang loud and strong and almost the moment Xan and Kivi set foot in the crowd Kivi was swarmed by a group of children and he laughed with joy as they pulled him into their little group. He indulged them as they danced in a ring holding hands.

Xan stood back with a fond smile as Kivi positively glowed surrounded by children, he was indeed Ameretat, First Hopa, even if he did deny it still. Beau and Sanjay joined the group of musicians set up by a large paved path that was perfect for an impromptu dance floor and Xan moved to a convenient boulder near the players to watch the dancers and children, his eyes mainly watching Kivi lose himself to joy. His fear and reticence evaporated in the jubilant setting as the music changed and a group of young men, all obviously Hopas laughed and took Kivi's hands. The dance was the dance of silks, a traditional dance for Hopas. Kivi smiled at Xan as he was handed a sheer veil of white silk and he joined the other Hopas in dancing for their mates in a rather

seductive dance of teasing with eyes and movements around colorful silken veils. Xan sat transfixed as Kivi danced, their eyes locked and Kivi's smirk occasionally was reviled from behind the silk as it swirled around him as he moved.

Xan had noticed how graceful Kivi was right from the beginning, seeing him dance, truly dance freely, Xan couldn't tear his eyes away and he certainly was not going to be standing up any time soon either.

The song ended with Kivi wrapping the silk around Xan's neck and the other Hopa's doing the same around their own mate's and more than one Hopa got kissed within an inch of his life, Kivi included, as everyone else cheered and clapped and Kivi sat back from Xan's kiss with a huge grin on his face.

"I gather you were pleased?" Kivi waggled his eyebrows and Xan laughed.

"I could devour you. Incredible."

"I love to dance. It makes me happy."

"I can tell. Dance with me?" Xan asked as the music began again, a couples dance traditionally and Kivi nodded and took Xan's hand and they took center of the floor as the lively tune began and Xan proved he was quite a good dancer himself as he steered Kivi around the floor in a quick pace. Kivi was out of breath as the song ended and Xan stood there smiling, hardly a strand of hair out of place, Xan had incredible prowess and stamina, Kivi should have known dancing would be easy for Xan.

"I need to breathe." Kivi laughed as he fluidly sank onto the boulder Xan had been sitting on and almost immediately there were men there offering cool drinks to him.

Kivi accepted a small glass of juice from one with a thankful smile as Xan walked over and had Kivi stand a moment. He sat on the boulder and pulled Kivi onto his lap. "Sit on me, I am far more comfortable than a rock."

"You're lumpy and you can put that evil thing away Xan-ki." Kivi grinned squirming on Xan's lap.

"The evil thing will hardly go away if you keep fidgeting." Xan chuckled as his hands loosely held Kivi around his waist as they sat and watched other dancers for a few more songs before joining them again.

Sanjay had a beautiful rich baritone and he brought Kivi to tears with the mournful ballad he sang for the dancers to wind down a bit. Beau accompanied him with a lyrical counterpoint on his guitar. There were no shortages of offered strips of cloth for Kivi to dry his eyes with as the song faded. He smiled and laughed at himself for being so emotional as he accepted the nearest bit of cloth.

"Don't apologize Lord Kivi. You are who you are and we would have you no other way." The young Hopa, whose own eyes were damp smiled and bowed as he stepped away again.

"I agree naturally. You charm me more and more every day Ki." Xan said taking Kivi's hand and kissing the back of it as an uncomfortable hush fell and Xan's and Kivi both snapped to attention and turned to see a man walking through the crowd.

Xan took a step forward as the man stopped before him. "Xartobin. What brings you here brother?" Xan asked blocking Kivi from his eldest brother.

"I would ask that of you. Rumors have you at death's door and here I find you in our Hopa's palace obviously quite in good health. Our Sipa has been trying to reach you since this morning."

"I was just suffering the madness, hardly life threatening. I am just here enjoying my home and my friends in celebration of my good fortune."

Here Eran moved within earshot and Xar quirked an eyebrow. He was a good ten years older than his youngest sibling, but they were quite obviously brothers. They both looked exactly like Tanvir with Devapa's coloring. "Good fortune?"

"Xar, I will make the news public soon enough, but I have found my chosen mate and I intend to announce my intentions of making a formal union with him as soon as possible. Our friends here just helped us make ready the palace for us to move into immediately. Seeing as it is also my love's emergence day we decided to celebrate before quitting back to our lives again."

Eran smiled, Xan was very quick on his feet a very good thing.

"So I also hear if rumors are true. I would meet him." Xartobin said as Kivi stepped from behind Xan, his eyes alive. Xartobin visibly stepped back and to Xan's surprise he bowed.

"Ameretat's eyes, I see the rumors are true indeed." Xartobin's signs of respect were not so reverent but no less acknowledged. He was after all a very high-ranking Prima; only Lord Xartova out-ranked him as head council. Kivi was astonished the man bowed at all.

"Please, there is no need to bow my Lord. I am just Kivi. I am pleased to meet the elder brother of my beloved Xan." Kivi's voice was gracious and soft and Xartobin actually smiled as he took Kivi's hand and laid his forehead against it in a sign of acceptance. If Eran could have crowed he would have.

"Xan, an absolutely stunning creature. Our Sipa will be pleased I've no doubt. His choice for you pales in comparison. Where have you been Lord Kivi? I am amazed a man such as you has been missed so readily by society. Surely your lineage is impressive to hold the eyes of Ameretat still."

"We met at the University. Kivi is rather quiet and is easy to miss if you are not looking. It was a matter of I was in the right place at the right time to cross his path brother, it is as simple as that." Xan neatly danced around the topic and he knew Xartobin was taking notes for Xartova, he would feed his brother the information he needed to know, all of it technically the truth, and just missing the crucial details. Xan was no fool.

"Fascinating. I would hear more."

"There really is not much more sadly. A tragically boring reality, nothing nearly as fantastic as you can read in the dailies." Xan laughed and Xar along with him.

"True, true. I daresay our Sipa had heart failure thinking you had succumbed to a great devastating illness of mind. I came to appease him, I see you are quite well and I am shocked my little brother is actually settling down. We thought you'd never find someone you actually liked let alone were compatible with."

"Kivi is very much my match. Please tell Our Sipa he should cease making matches for me, I will refuse them."

"He already knows that Xan. He will be quite pleased with you bringing such a pure-lineage into our household. He will want to meet Kivi soon you realize."

"I do, tell him later please. We have much to arrange for now and naturally there will be a social obligation when we announce our union dates. I must tie up my affairs too; I cannot stay a student forever, not if I am to begin a family of my own. There is much to do."

"I never thought I'd hear you say that. Kivi you are a good influence on my brother." Xar said and Kivi just smiled and lowered his chin. Xar was quite taken by Kivi's gentleness and smiled.

"Stunning creature. A perfect match indeed." Xar remarked noting that Xartova would be pleased that Xan's choice was such a refined and elegantly silent Hopa. The perfect political match in Xartova's eyes, he always did favor the demure, Xar had no doubt Xartova would approve of the union sight unseen once he brought back the news.

"He is my perfect match, I am pleased you agree with me brother. Please share a drink with us before you go, I would have you celebrate Kivi's emergence day with us and drink his good health with me."

"I would be honored. Kivi-ka Happy day to you." Xar said and Eran smiled a truly feral grin. The honorific added to Kivi's name did not go unobserved. One family member down, two left.

"Thank you My Lord Indivar. I am already most blessed."

"Please, Xar-Ka you will be my brother by union, there is no need for more. To your health." Xar rose a glass and Xan smiled into his drink as his brother toasted the health of Kivi.

He left not long after and Xan was positive he was heading straight to Xartova for the gossip. Eran leaned over Xan's shoulder as Xar's transport sped away.

"You are a smooth bastard."

"Xar has no sentient thought. He is easy to manipulate. I have played him a fool since I was a child. Xedapa is the skeptic and Xartova trusts only his first-born. They have weaknesses I have long learned how to play against."

"You're still brilliantly smooth and not a single lie."

"Half truths work best on them, they are not inclined to seek details. How are you fairing Ki?"

"Fine actually. He really has no malice." Kivi said and Xan nodded.

"No. Xar is a good man, just not very bright. Xedapa however can be cruel maliciously. You will not likely see him turn up here. He's crawled up Xartova's ass too far."

"He is the most like Xartova. That always broke my heart." Tanvir sighed as he walked forward.

"It must crush you to know they too are your sons." Xan said laying a hand to Tanvir's arm.

"I have long come to terms with my lack of influence. I always said they were born with the potential to be like their Hopa. Had we been given the chance to influence them, they might have turned out like you. They are the products of many years of Xartova shaping them into his own image. He gave in with you because he had his heir and his spare. You were an afterthought to him. Until you started showing incredible talent, then he became interested too little too late." Tanvir smiled and winked.

"Sipa, you are wicked." Xan laughed as the music started up again.

"I am tame compared to your Hopa. You take after him more than you know." Tanvir said as he filled wine glasses and they all drank heartily.

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Xar picked up his communicator and dialed as his Ounta drove the transport home.

"Well?" Xartova asked and Xar smiled.

"Sipa, I would not worry. Xan is fine, he was in season I could smell it, that's all. I met his chosen mate, you will be pleased."

"The eyes?"

"I have never in my life seen such eyes. They are mystic eyes truly. Ameretat's lineage is quite evident. Xan is bringing in very pure blood into the family. I could find no fault in the man at all. Quiet, elegant, noble, gracious and beautiful. Xan has exquisite taste."

"Interesting. Did you find out where he came from?"

"Just they met at University, Kivi-ka is quite shy. I can see how he has been missed; he's not the type to stand out in a crowd. It is no wonder Xan chose him, they suit each other."

"Did you get his family name?"

"I don't think he mentioned it and I did forget to ask. But Sipa is it really important? Minor nobility or not, the blood is obviously pure and the portent of Ameretat's talents alone will grace our house. Xan honors you and our family in his choosing."

"We'll see. Xan honors himself first and foremost. I understand he has taken his inheritance of Tantawood?"

"Yes, I do believe he is earnest to settle as quickly as possible. I get the impression Xan is anxious to be a Sipa, but he is in season you know what it's like."

"I do. Then I will not trouble over it for now. I will see for myself soon enough I suppose. Goodnight Xar."

"Goodnight Sipa." Xar turned off his communicator and sighed.

"You're worried." The Ounta in the front spoke and Xar nodded moving to sit beside the Ounta driving now that his obligations were taken care of and he could relax.

"I am. Kivi is an Ounta."

"No! How can you tell?"

"I have loved you long enough, you should know. He had the hands of a servant. Rough, used to work. I pray Xan pulls this off, I do not wish him the life we have."

"Xar-ki. I know you would have united with me if you could have. I do wish you would stop. My pity is reserved for the one you were forced to unite with. He is truly unhappy. He wants what I have, I am blessed with your love."

"Ramda, I just fear my brother is getting into something that will break his heart. Although Kivi may just be able to pull this off, it's evident he's talented, perhaps my Sipa will not look past the surface."

"Just support Xan. I always told you he would be a good choice. Don't fear making him your ally."

"I trust your instincts Ram-ki. You have never been wrong."

"Changes will happen Xar. Just be standing on the right side."

"I will ki. How is Tanjir?"

"Being a little terror as always. Your pearl has learned the joys of tantrums I wonder where he gets that from?"

"Not from me." Xar chuckled.

"You liar. I heard tales and I do remember you as a boy I know better."

"Shall I scold him?"

"No, he just wants you, I can't blame him most of the time."

"I wish I could see him more."

"I know. Someday Xar, someday."

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Xan was already under the covers as he watched Kivi get ready for bed. "You've something on your mind." Xan said watching Kivi undress distracted.

"Your brother. Xan you should talk to him more. I sense something. He is hiding something that hurts him. The more I think about what I felt the more I am sure he is more complex than you give him credit for." Kivi said as he crawled into bed beside Xan.

"What did you sense?"

"Feelings. Shock when he took my hand and what I would almost call fear. He hid his pain well. Xan I think he knows."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. But there is no malice in him. His words were sincere. I think you would have strong support from him if you held out your hand."

"He's Xartova's puppet."

"By will or by design? I think Xartobin is just afraid. Trust him."

"You feel that strongly about it?" Xan asked as he curled up and around Kivi to lie pressed close in the darkness of their bedroom.

"I do Xan. He is good; he is more like you than you think. I feel it deep down."

"Then I will trust your instincts. I will make a point of seeking him out to talk if you wish." Xan said through a yawn.

"That's all I ask. Goodnight Dear Xan-ki. I love you." Kivi rolled to face Xan, his head tucked under Xan's chin.

Xan kissed his brow as they finally settled into soft pillows exhausted. "I love you too Ki. Rest well."

"And you." Kivi replied in kind as they went to sleep with the windows open to the night and the sound of crickets from the garden below was their lullaby.

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The sun was already shining brightly before Xan awoke and found Kivi already up and sitting out on the balcony off their bedroom. The sun shining through his light linen robe illuminating his slender frame in silhouette as he stood with a small glass of juice in one hand, sipping from it as he looked out over the garden. Xan smiled as he pulled on his own morning robe and slipped through the curtains to join Kivi.

Kivi's smile and affectionate gaze greeted Xan as he slipped his arms around his mate. "You look radiant in the morning."

"You flatter. Manju brought us breakfast it is there on the table for you." Kivi nodded his head toward the small wrought iron table on the balcony.

Xan nodded and selected a piece of sliced green melon fruit and savored the juicy flesh as Kivi poured Xan a cup of tea and handed it to him. "Your scent is gone this morning too." Kivi added and Xan nodded he was out of his cycle this morning a feeling much better for it, the blind lust was gone, it was a relief to be able to gaze at his beautiful mate without seeing red.

"I know. I feel wonderful this morning. You?"

"The same. Not that I don't find you desirable Xan-ki, quite the opposite. It is nice however not to be totally wanton the first thing in the morning." Kivi laughed and Xan grinned.

"Pity."

"Evil man. Drink you tea." Kivi scolded as Manju knocked on the doorframe to get their attention.

"Good morning. I've come to let you know that Val and Cris are back and are heading to sleep for a while, and most of the society has returned home. Tanvir and Sanjay are getting the staff settled into rooms, Captain Callum wishes a word when you're awake and refreshed and last but not least the invitations from the local families are already arriving and I have put the invitations on your desk Lord Xan."

"Efficient lad. Thank you. Please tell Eran I'll see him anytime, we can talk over my breakfast and I'll let him go through the invitations and select which ones to accept."

"Right away Lord Xan." Manju smiled and dashed off to find Eran and deliver Xan's reply.

"He feels important. He is exceedingly happy." Kivi smiled as he finished his juice and nibbled on red fruit slices and of course cheese.

"He is important, he has our communication in his hands and my belly in mind. The melon is wonderful."

"I know, but the cheese is very fresh and you know I cannot resist." Kivi chuckled as Eran and Beau made their way out on the balcony.

"Have you eaten?" Kivi asked as they took up the remaining two chairs at the small round table.

"I have, Beau hasn't he just fell out of bed a few minutes ago." Eran grinned as Kivi passed Beau a small plate.

"Someone didn't wake me. Thank you." Beau accepted the plate after scolding Eran and chose a variety of fresh fruit and cheese from the tray and a small buttery roll, he loved fresh bread in the morning.

"You were tired." Eran replied wishing desperately Sansui drank more coffee, finding coffee in the palace was a chore.

"And you're cranky without coffee. Val and Cris are back, I'll bring out your brewer from the galley and set it up in our room for you later."

"I love you. I'm gonna show you how much later." Eran grinned and Beau winked.

"I thought you did that last night. Dog."

"Woof."

Kivi laughed wiping his eyes. Xan chuckled into his tea and rolled his eyes. They may have looked young, it was obvious they had been together for many years and it was comforting.

"Laugh all you want Xan, You're gonna be a busy boy today. We've got invites falling out of our asses from all over the region. You've had half a dozen or more dallies calling begging for interviews. You're going to be giving one in three hours. You'll be holding a press conference in the garden just after lunch, I wrote you a few suggestions down, but you are a natural, I trust you can wing an engagement announcement."

"Goodness things move fast." Kivi said eyes wide.

"They have to right now. Kivi just be charming and Xan you run interference when they start asking the really personal questions."

"Naturally. Our story is simple, we met at school, one of my tutors was Kivi's Sipa. The truth without details. I felt fatigue from my cycle and Kivi took care of me and here we are. Boring reality."

"They'll ask who my Sipa is."

"We wish to respect the privacy of the family from unaccustomed media attention. Your family origins and relations will remain anonymous until after the union, they'll respect that for a first interview."

"Xan you seem not to need my help at all."

"I will. This is the easy part, the difficult task will be the council and the Gods forbid anything more. All your advice is welcome at all times."

"It'll be given. I'll keep my eyes open and listen to the winds. Who knows how they'll shift."

"Precisely. But first things first, take it easy this morning, relax, and take your time getting ready. I'm going to head downstairs and set up the area and secure it so we don't get wandering reporters into private areas. Just come down looking gorgeous, this will be a Kivi photo opportunity we cannot pass up. His face will be on every vid screen and article for weeks."

Kivi looked positively green. "I hope I don't lose my breakfast with nerves."

"You won't Ki, you'll be fine." Xan winked pushing the tray closer. "And eat a lot now, because lunch will be rushed and the gods know when we'll get a chance to eat after. These can run long."

"Very true. I've already given Manju duties for after, your dinner will be served in here and there will be plenty." With that Eran stood as Beau wiped his fingers on a napkin to rid himself of fruit residue.

"When you're ready to look like a god, call me. I get dibs on dolling you up." Beau winked as he left leaving Eran to do his business and he was off for a trek through the woods to retrieve Eran's coffee maker and cigarettes, he was getting low on those too. A cranky Eran was never fun to play with after all.

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Xan was sitting on the balcony watching Eran make preparations in the garden and assign several men guard duties at strategic points in the garden, the man was highly efficient and was taking great precautions to orchestrate a flawless press conference and ensure tight security measures all around. Beau was with Kivi going through Devapa's vast wardrobe and making Kivi try on dozens of robes finally settling on a virgin white robe with sheer sleeves and sapphire blue embroidery around the neck and gathered cuffs.

It made Kivi's necklace really stand out against his chest as the v-neck robe framed the jewelry. Beau was currently trimming the rough edges of Kivi's hair and styling it up and away from his face with hair jewels with just a few strategic wisps falling free. A diamond and silver circlet sat on his brow to complete the picture.

"Cinderella, eat your heart out." Beau remarked with a grin standing back to admire his handiwork.

"I feel overly festooned." Kivi sighed as Xan walked in and smiled.

"You look beautiful. The whole idea is to showcase your beauty today and I have never seen you look more divine. White makes you look quite, pure."

"Good thing I'm not really then. Huh?" Kivi grinned wagging his eyebrows at Xan.

"You are pure, just not in our bed. Thank the Gods." Xan chuckled leaning over to kiss Kivi's cheek before rummaging in the closet for something to wear himself.

"I already picked yours out too Xan. There on the bed, the Red and Black one. It will look fabulous next to Kivi's. Not to mention you look Hot in bright dark colors." Beau winked and Xan chuckled.

"You are enjoying this far too much Mr. Shannon."

"Of course dah-lings. It's not everyday I get to be Tinkerbelle here. I'm such a predicable twinkletoes. I get off on this shit; I'm the perfect stereotype fag here. It's pathetic. Cris is really the only one who lets me do this shit to him. He's my poor guinea pig ninety-nine percent of the time. But give me handsome boys and pretty girls and let me loose I'm really a happy boy." Beau grinned as Xan pulled his robe selection on just as Manju brought in a light lunch.

"The great room is already full of people. It's so exciting downstairs and it's so weird I had to walk through there and I was very nervous since Sanjay threw my Ounta clothes away and not one of them even noticed. Sanjay kept saying no one would and to hold my head up and he was right. Lord Kivi don't you be worried a minute no one will know, it's amazing how people only notice the surface." Manju said his voice excited Kivi sighed and sat back in his chair.

"I told you ki." Xan grinned as Manju passed him a plate of cold meats and cheese and sparkling juice.

"I know, I know. I can't help being nervous Xan. I'm going to be under the microscope in a few minutes, my stomach is in knots. I have never liked being the center of attention. I am much happier being the observer not the observed." Kivi said taking the plate Manju passed to him.

"I know Ki. Once the circus is over and we get a chance to breathe again. I promise to let you sequester yourself in here and be as serene as you please."

"I think serenity is a long way off. But I am happy so I will not quibble over this moment of chaos." Kivi smiled just nibbling at his food, his stomach was protesting due to nerves.

"Kivi one day you'll have to come to Pirotaine for a vacation. You can run around being serene all you want there, well if you stay away from our "Homestead" that is. There are a lot of noisy kids around these days."

"I love children. Joy is infectious." Kivi smiled and Xan looked smug.

"That's true." Beau said as Eran walked in looking pleased with himself with a mug of coffee in his hand. He leaned over and kissed Beau's cheek.

"I love you, thank you for my coffee. I needed this."

"I know you did. I put your cigarettes in the drawer in the bureau under the big mirror in the main room."

"I am going to thank you in such a way later I'll smoke a whole carton after."

"Oh goodie. Are we ready?"

"Pretty much. Sanjay is ready for you out in the garden. Once you're down there just play while they settle in and get seated. Tanvir will open the doors to the garden in twenty minutes. We'll give them twenty minutes to seat themselves then it's Showtime." Eran winked turning and noticing Kivi. "Beau you've outdone yourself. Perfect. Kivi you look fabulous."

"Thank you. I feel nervous, I hope I don't look it."

"You don't. I'll let you guys eat, I'm gonna grab a bite myself and I'll come up and get you both when we're ready. Don't forget, if anyone asks about the oddball humans, we're old family friends of Kivi's and hired by his father to look after him. Another half truth eh?" Eran winked and Xan chuckled.

"Always better to tell at least a partial truth than to lie outright." Xan replied and Eran gave a whimsical half salute before taking his husband downstairs and finding himself a sandwich from the kitchen from an obliging older Hopa in charge of the new kitchen staff.

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"Indira! Indira Come in here!" Kadala howled from the living area of the small apartment he shared with his longtime mate.

"What?" Indira asked setting down the books he'd been packing to go into the other room.

"The vid screen! There's a press conference about to start. They just said Xan was going to make an announcement!" Kadala was on pins and needles as settled down to watch. Currently Sanjay and Beau were sitting under a tree playing music beside a small table with two draped chairs. On either side of the larger chairs were two rather intimidating looking Sipa psi-fighter males. Very large, very mean looking, and they wore psi amplifier headpieces. They meant business and they were obviously personal guards for Xan and Kivi that Tanvir or Eran must have chosen. Every high-ranking Prima had several psi-fighters in their employ. Men with very honed powers who had been trained as personal protection for the higher class.

"Look there's Eran!" Kadala smiled as Eran walked into the garden and up to the voice amplification box sitting on the table where Xan and Kivi would be sitting, he made sure it was on then took up a place next to one of the Psi-fighters. He looked impressive dressed in full military dress uniform, a rather large blaster strapped to his hip. Cris and Val joined him, also looking extremely dangerous in black leather and fully armed and all three wearing Psi-limiters. Invented during the Tsonic wars to protect against psychic powers. They were electronic devices worn on the temples that protected the person wearing the unit from any wayward attempts at trying to hurt the brainwaves with psychic abilities.

"Impressive. Eran certainly means to show he'll tolerate nothing but good behavior." Indira said as Eran stepped forward.

"My lords, I am Captain Eran Callum and I would like to thank you all for coming here today. I am personally overjoyed at being able to present to you this afternoon Lord Xan Indivar and the son of a very dear friend I've known for years. I hope you forgive my over indulgence in security, however I take Lord Kivi's welfare personally, his Sipa would kill me if I allowed harm to come to something so precious. Not to mention his Hopa's foot up my backside after having express orders to keep his pearl safe." Here Eran winked and the crowd laughed. The tense atmosphere vanished. The security was addressed, it was clear it was there but it was no longer quite as terrifying.

"Eran you'd better fear my foot." Kadala laughed at the screen as Eran continued.

"So without further wait, I am proud to present to you Lord Xantarun Indivar and my dear, dear friend Kivi."

Eran stepped aside and the crowd stood as Xan and Kivi appeared at the back of the room arm in arm and the camera turned to zoom in on the smiling couple that walked arm in arm up the center aisle, escorted by two more Psi-fighters on either side.

"Oh my word. Kivi looks beautiful!" Kadala almost cried seeing his son on the vid-screen.

"He certainly does. Look how he carries himself Ki. He makes me so proud." Indira was smiling ear to ear as he watched all the reporters and attendees sink to their knees in reverence as Kivi passed. Showing him the time honored respect given to those born with the touch of the gods.

The camera followed the couple and was trained on Kivi specifically. "Remarkable." You could hear the man behind the camera gasp forgetting he could be heard as he filmed.

Everything across Sansun came to an abrupt halt as men, Prima and Ounta alike stopped whatever they were doing to watch the press conference. Every vid screen was displaying the news and people clamored and gasped and stared transfixed at the image of Ameretat on the screen before them.

"Lord Tibiae is that the man you saw?" One asked as the tavern quieted to watch.

"That's him! Yes! By the gods is he not the most beautiful creature on the planet? You should have smelled his scent. Perfection. Xan you lucky bastard!" Tibiae held up his drink. "To your beauty." Tibiae spoke to the screen as Kivi reached his seat and sank gracefully into it. His white robes pooling around him as he sat and folded his hands in his lap.

"He is ravishing. Those eyes, I cannot get over it, Ameretat's eyes! He's truly touched."

"Shut up you goons! Xan is going to speak!" The bartender threw a towel at one of his patrons as Xan smiled and held up his hand.

"Please rise and be seated. We welcome you to our home today so I may shed some light on some rumors and make a formal announcement." Xan said and the garden's occupants returned to their bench seats and Xan took up his chair beside Kivi and took Kivi's hand in his where they sat side by side.

Xan allowed them a moment to be seated before he continued. "First, I would like to put any fears to rest about my health, I am in quite good health, I was just suffering some mild fatigue

due to seasonal maladies. I'm sure I need not go into intimate details." Here Xan laughed and the room with him, they understood.

"Secondly, I would confirm the rumors of my relationship with this divine creature. I am indeed taken by his charms and wish you all to share in my joy as I announce my intention of making a formal union with him as soon as we can make the necessary arrangements." Xan smiled and kissed the back of Kivi's hand as camera flashes went wild.

Xan called on a reporter who had his hand raised. He stood with a bow. "Lord Indivar, I offer my sincere congratulations and I am sure I and many other would like to hear how this came about, it has taken us all as quite sudden."

"It is sudden we know. It is really rather boring, I am rather a boring man myself. I was just blessed to cross his path at the right moment. Had I not had my eyes open, I would have missed him myself."

Another held up a hand and Xan gave him the floor. "Lord Kivi, all of Sansun is clamoring to know where you are from. The sheer magnitude of your talents and the obvious touch of the gods on you are mystifying. Where have you been? Why have we never heard of you before? Ameretat shines in you and it's baffling how an entire planet has seemed to have missed you."

"I am of little consequence. I have never been one to be seen much is all." Kivi replied, his hands severely shaking as Xan took hold of them in comfort.

"Are you alright Ki?" Xan asked concerned with the severity of his trembling hands.

"I'm alright." Kivi smiled and Xan turned to the gathering.

"Forgive my beloved. He is unaccustomed to such attention." Xan said and the crowd softened in sympathy. "Allow me to answer for him. Talent such as his is taxing when having to face large numbers of men. Kivi is not usually found in a social setting, it's why none of us have heard of him before. He's been in the background all along, we just never noticed. I was fortunate enough to find myself in a setting alone with him."

Eran smiled to himself Xan knew precisely what to say and how much to say. He could tease a crowd and make them think they were getting the whole truth.

"I am the fortunate one." Kivi said, his eyes soft with affection and gratitude. He found if he looked at Xan and not the crowd he wasn't nearly as nervous.

The crowd found his attentiveness to Xan charming and romantic and the cameras had not stopped flashing since the interview began.

"What is your family name? We know so little, please enlighten us."

"Jui. Kivi Jui." Kivi responded smiling. Jui was a common last name, Eran had commented that the surname Jui on Sansun was about as common as the surname Smith was on Earth. It was safe to give Kivi's full name.

"Lord Jui, we hate to impose when we can easily tell you are being gracious even in your nervousness. So we thank you for indulging our queries. What are your talents? Are they truly Ameretat's?"

"I have mind gifts, yes."

"He is modest. I've seen him do remarkable things instinctually. He disagrees with my romantic notions he is Ameretat reborn." Xan grinned and Kivi rolled his eyes.

"I'm just Kivi. Xan you are outrageous."

"You love that."

"I do." Kivi smiled and for a moment the crowd got a real glimpse of the couple they were. If there had been any doubt of their affection and compatibility it had been removed.

The interview continued much the same with various questions and Xartova sat in his office watching and smiling. At least for once his wayward youngest son was doing something good for the family. Kivi was the talk of the entire planet, his soon to be son by union. Any fool could see the power dripping off him in waves. He would be a good asset to the family and with Xan's gifts and Kivi's combined in their offspring the Indivar name would continue to be the highest and most notable of them all, ensuring continued dominance on the planet. Xartova switched off the vid and called over a servant.

"Take a message to my son. I approve of his union and wish to have them united as soon as possible. Send to them as a gift a tailor to make their uniting robes and send the jewelers with selections for Kivi and Xan to choose their uniting bracelets. My gift to them. I would want them here in a fortnight for a celebration in their honor so I may meet my future son." The servant bowed and took the message out as Xedapa stormed in.

"Did you see that?" Xedapa asked and Xartova nodded.

"Of course, you're not pleased?"

"Xan makes a mockery of us. You had him a mate chosen."

"But he chose one on his own much better. Ameretat himself. I see Ameretat returns to an Indivar. Jamari was our bloodline, it's obvious he is in your brother."

"You're not following that fantastic hype are you Sipa?"

"It's good for politics. It's good for our family's standing. You will honor your brother's choice. Think of the pure blood he's bringing into our family. The powers their children will have will ensure the Indivar name will continue strong."

"The man is as meek as a kitten."

"All the better to do as he's told. An obedient Hopa is a good thing to have, Xan has chosen well. Besides, it's quite obvious the lad is young and is not used to being in such a position. Comfort with media attention comes in time. Not everyone is like us who are born in the public eye. He did fine and was gracious and composed at least."

"I don't trust Xan at all."

"You never did. We are done arguing I have sent my blessings and you will keep your opinions to yourself." Xartova said standing and quitting the room. Xedapa fumed, Xan once again was proving to be a thorn in his side. Perfect and annoying, spoiled Xan, always getting away with

murder ever since he was a child. Xartova's obsession with Xan's talent infuriated Xedapa. Both Xartobin and Xan were much more powerful and always more in favor with Xartova. Xedapa stormed out of the room he'd watch and wait and the moment he found fault, he'd make sure Xartova would be the first to hear about it.

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After the reporters left Kivi made a mad dash back to his room and into the bathroom. Xan had to chase him up the stairs; he could feel the sheer urgency and the overwhelming feelings of illness. Xan was there with a towel the moment Kivi finished purging.

"I'm sorry Xan. I feel awful." Kivi almost whimpered going to wash his face in the sink.

"I knew you were nervous, I am sorry this made you so ill, it will get easier."

"It's not that Xan. I really don't feel well all of a sudden. I thought it was nerves at first, maybe they just made my meals sit badly today." Kivi leaned against the counter to dry his face with the towel.

"Could be. Why don't you lie down a while?" Xan's voice was full of concern as he ran his knuckles over one of Kivi's soft cheekbones. "You look pale."

"I feel queasy still. I think I would take a bath first, maybe that will help." Kivi started to head for the tub and Xan stopped him.

"I'll fix it for you, just change I don't want you bending over you're light headed I can feel it." Kivi just nodded and sat at the vanity in the bathroom and removed his jewelry and then slipped from his robe. Xan held his hand for support as he stepped down into the tub and let the heat of the water soak into his muscles. Xan leaned over the side of the tub and washed Kivi's hair for him silently. Kivi really did feel ill and the bath was not helping much.

"Will you be alright a moment? I would like to call Lalam in to see you, just in case."

Kivi nodded, his eyes closed as he rested his head against the side of the tub and Xan left to find the body healer.

Thankfully Lalam was only just down the hall in his own room and he was immediately by Kivi's side.

"You're right Xan he has gone too pale. Out of the hot tub, you'll make it worse. Xan you get him to bed and I'll go grab my bag." Lalam said as Xan carried Kivi to bed.

Beau returned with Lalam and Beau took Kivi's pulse as Lalam took his temperature, his pulse and vitals were fine, but he was slightly warm. "I think your suspicions are correct I think he has been a nervous wreck all day and it's taken its toll on his digestive system. I'm not overly worried, this does happen. You ate a lot of dairy it can sour in a stomach when you're in such an aggravated state." Lalam said and Beau agreed.

Beau handed Kivi his mints out of his pocket. "Peppermint can also help calm a queasy stomach. Keep those and I'll go make you some of my peppermint herb tea and get you some soda crackers. Those will help." Beau said heading into his room to raid the supplies he'd brought out of the Infinity that morning.

Kivi never one to like tea, did find the peppermint to his liking and it did help settle his stomach. He managed a light dinner of soup and crackers before everyone sent him to bed early.

Xan was sitting in his office with Eran going over invitations when a call came in from Xartova, he couldn't ignore the man today so he answered it.

"Xan, I've been trying to reach you for days."

"I know. Forgive me as you are probably well aware, I've been preoccupied."

"I saw. Congratulations."

"Thank you Sipa. I am most happy."

"That I could see. He is charming, I find myself reading the evening dailies as if I am hungry for gossip myself." Xartova laughed and Xan caught Eran's grin out of eyeshot from the vid monitor.

"Really Sipa. There is not much to tell. We met at school and he is a beautiful soul."

"Jamari once again wins the fair Ameretat. It's in your blood, you are Indivar through and through."

Xan laughed. "Sipa do not let Kivi hear you say that. He balks at romantic notions of fancy."

"You need a level headed Hopa who's not apt or prone to excessive vanity. That pleases me greatly his humility."

"He has that in abundance."

"I would like very much to speak with him."

"I am sorry Sipa. Kivi has already gone to bed. His nerves got the better of his breakfast and he is feeling a little poorly."

"He'll get used to it, I do hope he feels better soon. I would like to throw you both a proper union party to celebrate the news. Can you manage me in a fortnight?"

Eran held up three fingers and Xan turned to the screen. "Can we make it three weeks? I'm buried in preparations Sipa. Not to mention I have dozens of party offers lying here I have to sort through and let some people down eloquently."

"Three is fine. What day are you planning the union?"

"We're hoping in four weeks if I can manage it. We'd like to join in the garden here and I have a limited staff here."

"Then allow me instead of two parties since your schedule is so full, to be the patron of the celebration. I care not if the celebration is here or there. I would like to come a few days before if I may."

Eran nodded.

"It would be an honor Sipa. Thank you. I've already received the news that the tailor will be here tomorrow and the Jewel selection you sent is stunning. I will let Kivi choose his bracelet in the morning when he is feeling more himself."

"Unions are always trying and turbulent to plan. I will leave you be then to make the preparations and I'll arrive in three weeks to help with the last minute planning. I can wait to meet your mate until then. Xartobin gave him high praise indeed, although Xedapa is of mixed emotions."

"Xed is hateful, I know better Sipa."

"You know your brother."

"Too well. I do not expect him to attend, but the invitation is already on its way."

"He'll come. He would dishonor our family if he did not. The council is on summer session leave, shall I ask Xartobin to come help you?"

Eran shook his head no but Xan held up a finger "Absolutely if he wishes it, he is always welcome in my home."

"I'll send him word. Good night Xan."

"Goodnight Sipa." Xan cut the transmission.

"Are you nuts?" Eran gasped and Xan smiled.

"Kivi made me promise to hold my hand out to him. He senses something about Xar. He feels very strongly we'd have a good ally in him."

"Is he sure?"

"Very. I trust Kivi's predictions. He may deny Ameretat, but you and I know better. I will not doubt the gifts of his intuition."

"Nor will I then. What does he suspect?"

"Just feelings, Xar hides something and he is fearful."

"We'll see I suppose. So it looks like Xartova is taken."

"He is easily seduced by Hopas like Kivi. He is too wrapped up in Kivi's gifts and his handsome face to notice much else. He's seeing our children and the Indivar name growing stronger with our union."

"Be careful what you wish for eh Xan?"

"I am just taking one day at a time right now. I just want the union over with so we can stop playing society and get to business."

"You are not a party man are you?"

"I detest pageantry. It's a necessary evil I know. But I'd much rather be working or being industrious at home."

"I hear you. Give me a good book any day and Beau naked looking saucy and I'm content."

"We think alike." Xan chuckled as he heard Kivi get up and wander to the bathroom before coming into the office.

"How are you feeling?" Xan asked holding out a hand for Kivi to walk over and sit on his lap.

"All right, the worst is over. It was the cheese, it had to be, I will resist in the future." Kivi sighed looking tired.

"It will be easier, now it's just smaller parties until the union itself. Eran called Romi; she's going to perform at the celebration. She will sing during the ceremony itself."

"Oh I adore her voice. Thank you Eran."

"She's excited. Beau's writing you both a song for it, he does write wonderful lyrics. Sanjay is helping with the music and Romi will be here in two weeks to learn it and practice. This will not be as frenzied, the union itself will be quiet and refined. We are limiting attendance to one hundred people. Cris will have cameras everywhere for it to be broadcast outside. You won't be swarmed in your own home." Eran said and Kivi nodded sleepily.

"Go back to bed Ki. Eran and I are almost finished I'll join you shortly." Xan said kissing Kivi's cheek before urging Kivi back to bed.

"Rest well Eran. Thank you for everything."

"Kivi, anytime. Just think of me as your crazy uncle, we take care of family." Eran winked and Kivi chuckled and bowed.

"Then goodnight Uncle Eran, sleep well and do let Beau rest tonight."

"Much later perhaps." Eran winked and Kivi smiled and chuckled his way back to bed.

Xan and Eran spent the next quarter hour making two piles of invitations, the accepted pile and the "write a nice declination letter" pile.

Xan would tackle those in the morning.

Eran excused himself and found his bed and Xan did the same. Kivi was well asleep and didn't even stir when Xan crawled under the covers and extinguished the lights.

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By morning, while feeling more himself Kivi avoided anything even remotely resembling a dairy product for his breakfast, opting for simple fruit and granola grains with his juice. He and Xan ate in Xan's office as Kivi helped him address his letters and sort through the various dallies that had the news of their union on the front of every one.

"Goodness gracious I feel a spectacle." Kivi groaned looking at his face on page after page.

"You are. But you're beautiful, not an unflattering image to be found. You are very photogenic." Xan grinned over his tea looking at a particularly flattering image of the couple looking at each other. He'd have loved a copy of that photo actually, he made note to contact the news agency for copies for his own personal collection.

"I can see why you became a hermit while at school. I don't blame you for trying to avoid this sort of attention." Kivi sighed setting the papers aside to seal more envelopes.

"You will get used to it love and after the newness wears off they will stop being so prevalent." Xan reassured as his communicator buzzed and he turned on his private Vid to see Xartobin was on the other end of the transmission.

"Good morning Xar. I take it you've just gotten a call telling you to contact me?"

"I have. Do you want me there or is our Sipa just being commanding as always?"

"A little of both. I've staved him off coming himself for the time being. If you're free I would like the chance to talk with you, and any help you can offer will be most appreciated."

"It's summer session, I'm free until Council resumes I would enjoy having some time with you before you and Kivi-ka unite. We've not spent any decent time together since well before our Hopa passed."

"How soon can you come?"

"I can come immediately. Parth however is off with his friends at the seaside and isn't scheduled back until week after next, he'll join us after." Xar said and Xan raised an eyebrow.

"Not off enjoying the sea yourself?"

"Xan we'll talk when I get there." Kivi nodded when Xan looked at him.

"Understood. How long is your journey?"

"I can be there by midday."

"Then I'll make sure to have lunch waiting for you, be blessed and I'll see you later brother."

"In a few hours then." Xar cut transmission and Kivi set letters aside for Xan's seal.

"I told you. Something is there."

"I always suspected he and Parth had been forced to unite. They never did look happy."

"They are not. Your brother certainly isn't." Kivi said finishing his juice as he munched on what was left of his granola. "These are finished, you just have to seal them and Manju can have them delivered."

Xan nodded and placed the hot paraffin wax seal on each envelope and stamped them with his crest and Kivi took them out to Manju to get sent out to their respective recipients.

When Kivi walked back into the office Xan was sitting with his arms folded on the desk, his face turned to the window in thought. "Xan-ki you will know soon enough." Kivi smiled walking over to run his hands through Xan's thick hair from where he stood behind the chair.

"I suppose, but I am curious by nature, I am intrigued."

"As am I, all my senses are telling me today will be a great turning point for you and your brother."

"Me too and my intuition pales in comparison to yours. We shall see won't we?" Xan asked tipping his head back to smile up at Kivi.

"We shall." Kivi leaned over to kiss Xan's brow before moving to collect their used breakfast dishes and clear them off the desk and set them out in the main room out of the way for Manju to take downstairs later.

Xan followed him out of the room stretching; he was still dressed in his morning robe, as was Kivi as he headed into the bathroom. "Care to join me for a bath?" Xan asked undoing his robe and smiling suggestively.

Kivi nodded returning Xan's smile as his robe joined Xan's on the floor and they took a nice long bath together and they would have done more had Kivi not been feeling still out of sorts and when Xan touched him they noticed he was tender and he felt discomfort. They chalked up Kivi's physical distress due to a week of high-strung nerves and seasonal excessive mating. So they opted for simple affections and sincere kisses and caresses before bathing properly and returning to their duties.

Mid-day arrived and with it a single transport. Kivi and Xan were standing on the stairs as Xartobin emerged from the back without the aide of an Ounta to open his door. Xan thought that was suspicious behavior and then stood there gaping when a toddler no more than two and dressed in Ounta black was helped out of the transport by Xartobin and the Ounta driving the transport followed scooping up toddler in his arms and following Xar up the stairs. Kivi just smiled knowingly at Xan as Xar stopped on the stairs before them.

"Don't look so shocked little brother. You yourself are about to unite with an Ounta are you not?"

"Xar! How did you know? For that matter when?"

"I presume it's safe to talk here?" Xar asked and Xan nodded.

"Everyone here already knows yes. How long? Good Gods does anyone know? Parth?"

"Parth has always known yes. I knew about Kivi the minute I shook his hand, he has rough hands and you certainly remember Ramda yes?"

"Yes, but then the last I saw you was years ago. Is this?"

"Our son, Tanjir. He just turned two a few days ago." Xar said proudly taking his son from Ramda and propping him on a hip.

"We definitely have to talk then Brother. Come inside." Xan said shaken and Kivi just smiled and took Ramda's hand.

"Your pearl is beautiful." Kivi remarked eyeing the child and smiling. He looked exactly like his Sipa. Kivi couldn't wait to get his hands on him - he adored the little ones.

"He is proving to be much like his Sipa." Ramda chuckled and Xar snorted.

"You always blame me. You are no saint Ram-ki."

"Where is the fun in that?" Ramda grinned as the group made it to the garden where lunch was set out on a table.

Once seated Kivi held his arms open for the child. "Please may I?"

"Of course." Xar smiled handing the child to Kivi who bounced him on a knee.

"He is beautiful. Goodness he looks like you Xar-ka. He will be so handsome when he is older." Kivi smiled making faces at the child who laughed at him.

"He is the most beautiful thing to me, next to his Hopa naturally."

"You'd better say that." Ramda laughed pouring juice into a cup with a sipper lid for Tanjir and handing it to Kivi who gave it to the toddler in his lap.

"I am speechless. I never knew this." Xan said still stunned and Xar smiled at him.

"No one does, especially our brother. Xan do be careful Xed has never liked either of us, it's dangerous what you are doing."

"I know, but I do this to change what we hate Xar. Tell me you don't want to take your son out and claim him as your own."

"Everyday Xan. But I would kill him if I said anything."

"Then stand with me, and we'll shape change together. I am going to run for council against Xed."

"That in and of itself is dangerous. He already hates you, he be looking for slander."

"Well I have a whopper in my pocket. I know something you don't." Xan said handing Xar a glass of wine. "You're going to need that."

"What do you know?" Xar asked his interest piqued.

"Xartova is not our Sipa. None of us are his."

"You're joking."

"I'm not. We are Indivar, but our Sipa was like your son. An unclaimed Indivar, he is Xartova's half-sibling."

"Who?"

"Me." Tanvir walked into the garden smiling, having been witness to the entire exchange his mood was overjoyed. Xar stood, seeing his true Sipa in front him, he was the mirror image of the man before him, even more than Xan was.

"I know you. Dear God Tanvir? Hopa's Ounta?" Xar asked and Tanvir nodded.

"Yes. Your Great-Sipa Xanvir is my Sipa and Xartova's. I was with your Hopa years before he was forced to unite with Xartova, much as you were forced to unite with Parth."

"Sipa." Xartova bowed and then stood and hugged the man before him. "I never knew."

"We could not tell you for obvious reasons. I am so pleased to see even with Xartova's influence you take after your Hopa. You have a good heart my son."

"I am weak in the knees suddenly." Xar sat back down his head spinning.

"As am I? Honestly Xar you didn't know? Every Ounta in that house knew the truth." Ramda asked and Xar looked at his long time lover in shock.

"You knew?!"

"Of course I did, I thought you did too."

"Where's my wine?"

Xan laughed as he passed the glass over. "I told you, you'd need that Brother."

Xar drained it in one go and sat back rubbing his tired eyes. "Xed will break a vein in his head when he learns this."

"Probably, won't that be incredibly fun to watch?" Xan chuckled and Xar shook his head.

"No, it will be messy. Not to mention our Sipa – Xartova, will not be pleased either. Do you have a plan? Please tell me you have something brewing up your sleeves. Regardless I will stand with you, I'm just wondering how you plan to change things." Xar asked as Kivi fed bits of cheese to the toddler smiling at the scene, he knew he'd felt something in Xar. The fear was still there, but the pain was lessening.

Xan explained their tentative plans and Xar sat there in the garden with his eyes wide. "That's it? Just up and unite, run for council and hope for the best. That's not very solid. Not only will you have Xedapa doing every nasty thing he can think of to sabotage you, the minute Xartova finds out Kivi is Ounta he'll FIND a way to have him executed. Heir of Ameretat or not."

"He killed our Hopa, I will not let him kill another I love."

"He killed Hopa?" Again Xar was flabbergasted and then infuriated.

"Yes. Trust me Xar we'll let you in on all we have learned, I won't let this continue, if it takes an all out war we're prepared for that event too. We're hoping the current course will be enough, but if I have to over-throw the council I'll do that too. We have the society behind us, not to mention every Ounta out there once the news breaks. Ounta's are no longer un-talented, just untrained. How many Prima's are out there with little to no talents? It's because the blood is mixed, we are one race with a caste system of enforced slavery. I will break it if it kills me."

"It will not kill you." Ramda smiled and looked at Xar. "I told you for years to wait for this moment. Xan is the path."

"Are you gifted?" Xan asked and Ramda nodded.

"Foresight. Waking dreams. I get visions in my dreams. They have always come to pass." Ramda said and Xan nodded.

"I do not have visions, but my intuition has always been my guide. From the moment I met Xan it has told me to stay by his side no matter the path. I loved him the moment we met." Kivi smiled, as the toddler grew bored on Kivi's lap and squirmed down to go crawl up into his Sipa's lap.

Xar kissed his son's brow and held him close. "I will do anything for him. I want so much to give him a life where he is free."

"Me too. It is for the children in the long run. So they do not have to live as we did. My Sipa was like you Xar. He loved me and it killed him to see me go into servitude. That hurt most. I could handle the work, it was seeing my Sipa cry that hurt." Kivi said reaching out a hand to Xar who took it to hold affectionately.

"He must be proud of you."

"I try to make him proud of me. Believe me, given the choice of taking the easy path and avoiding the things that scare me or taking the difficult path and facing my fears. I want to choose the easy one. I lost my breakfast to the privy yesterday from nerves after the interview. I am terrified of being discovered too soon. But I think of the children, like yours and the others I've met and they are my inspiration. I think of my own children someday. I will face any fear for them." Kivi said smiling fondly at the babe and running fingers through his dark hair.

"I could watch you all day like this Kivi. Xar I am so jealous right now. May I hold my nephew a moment?"

"I thought the desire to be a Sipa had bitten you." Xar laughed as he handed over his son.

"In a very large way. He does look like us. The Indivar blood runs strong, we get that from our Sipa." Xan smiled at Tanvir who smiled in return.

"Facially. Last I looked my hair was dark brown. That black hair and those golden eyes come from your Hopa, not I." Tanvir said leaning over to look at his Grandson proudly.

"I named him after you. I had no idea you were my Sipa when I did it. I just remembered when I was little how kind you were to me. Life is certainly ironic." Xar said and Tanvir looked up touched.

"It killed me that my firstborn was denied contact with us. The moment you emerged from your pouch, they only let Devapa feed you until his milk was gone and you grew too big for the pouch. Everything else that you needed was done by your infant attendants, I had more access to you as a servant than he did and he was your Hopa. Devapa cried constantly. Xartova said he didn't want his firstborn influenced by Devapa's flights of fancy." Tanvir snorted.

"I hardly remember him. Every time I tried to see him I was stopped. Now I know why. Hopa began the society didn't he?"

"He did. And yes, Devapa may have been whimsical in personality, but he was deadly smart and highly gifted and Xartova underestimated him and then killed him when he realized how much influence Devapa really had over people."

Tanvir smiled when his grandson crawled from Xan to him and he held him on his knee and bounced him as they talked. "Tell me how does Parth take Tanjir's emergence?"

"He encouraged it actually. He was forced into this as much as I was and even before the union we talked and he knew how much I loved Ramda. He felt badly that we were stuck in a position where we had to deny our partnership and we came to an agreement. In public we would play the happily mated couple, behind closed doors we would take to our beds those we loved. It's been ten years now and he really still does not have anyone to love. Not for lack of me trying to help him either."

"I pity Parth. He has a heart of gold, he really does. He makes it easier for Xar and I but he has no one for himself. He took me aside once and told me that I should stop preventing a pearl, that we were all growing older and that Xar deserved a son. Parth was the one to help me in my passing of Tanjir as a pearl. After he emerged he is always stopping by to see him. We both love Parth very much." Ramda sighed, speaking of Parth always made him sad.

"I got word from him just after I called you. He's cutting his trip to the seaside short and we'll be here to help us in a few days."

"He always struck me as introverted and complacent, again I was mistaken." Xan said and Xar nodded.

"We all were. Times are certainly changing. Perhaps Parth will find happiness too. That is something to fight for as well, he deserves it." Xar said and Ramda nodded in agreement.

"What about Tabi? Xed's mate? I have never seen him since the union." Xan asked and Xar groaned.

"Tabi is in hell. They've been united five years and Tabi can't be social, Xed keeps his pouch full. The moment he passes a pearl and it's emerged from his pouch, Xed is forcing another on him. I have never seen Tabi not hosting. They have four children already and Tabi is hosting the fifth. He looks old and he's only thirty. He's miserable, the children, while he loves them, are causing his body grief and aging him beyond his years. His body has not been able to have a break since he united with Xed; he's constantly supporting another life with it. Believe me, he'd take the kids and leave Xedapa in a heartbeat if given the opportunity. He's just plain exhausted." Xar said and Xan nodded.

"We've got potential help there then too." Tanvir said and Xan agreed.

"Perhaps. My head is beginning to ache thinking about this." Xar rubbed a temple and Kivi stood and walked behind him and rubbed temples soothing the headache almost immediately.

"We all are walking turbulent times and one misstep can be fatal. But I have faith in Xan and in you. We can do this if we try. I believe it." Kivi said stepping back and returning to his seat.

"I pray to the Gods that is so." Xar said as Manju entered the garden bringing more wine and juice, Eran and Beau behind him.

"Sorry we're late, I was getting more information and lost track of time." Eran said as Xar stood and they shook hands.

"I remember you, you have not changed since you came to visit my Hopa when I was a boy."

"I don't change. But apparently you do. What did I miss?" Eran said taking up a seat and he was filled in on current events.

"Interesting. Just how many other Council members do you suspect are in similar situations? We can use all the support we can get Xar." Eran asked and Xar scratched his chin, a trait Xan also exhibited when thinking. They were certainly brothers.

"Let me ponder it, let me look at it through different eyes. I will make a list, and we'll make sure they get invites to Xan's union." Xar smiled and Eran nodded.

"Fair enough. I'll let you be in-charge of the personal guest list. You are already on the council, you have insight we lack there."

"I'll give you all the inside information I have. I'll work on Xan's public relations and I'll get him strong backing. Xartova seems to think I have no influence. I do and I'll use it to help Xan. I want him in Xed's chair. Once he's there it's a short path to Xartova's." Xar began and their conversation in the garden continued and soon everyone of import was there. Sipa-Juhi and Lalam came first, followed by Val and Cris and then Sanjay soon joined the meeting and they talked well until late afternoon and early evening when Manju and several others brought them out dinner so they would not have to cease their plans to fill their bellies.

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The following week was full of small private luncheons or dinners for Kivi and Xan, their time was mostly spent making preparations for the union and it also saw Cris and Val beginning installation of a state of the art surveillance system all throughout the palace. Inconspicuous high-resolution cameras were installed everywhere. Cris was a stickler for aesthetic integration, not a single camera was visible to the untrained eye and tucked into every corner in practically every room. Thousands of cameras, sending their remote information wirelessly to the main CPU system installed up in Xan's office. A fly couldn't land on a wall without Xan or more specifically Eran and the Psi-Fighters knowing about it immediately. Xan's office CPU sent duplicate imagery to the security room for the on-staff security Psi-fighters and an early warning system would scan every person that came in and out of the palace. If they were not recorded in the security database, remote silent alarms would sound notifying the security staff instantly.

"He does think like a criminal." Xan remarked to Eran as he demonstrated Cris' system.

"I told you, he's a genius. Nothing is getting in here, you have the tightest security on the planet." Eran grinned as Kivi walked into the office, Tanjir on his hip. He was on baby-sitting duty while Ramda helped Cris and Val tweak the remaining system checks and while Xar was attending to the guest list roster.

"You look in your element." Xan smiled at Kivi as he bounced the toddler on his hip.

"He's a joy. He's also a handful, he's so curious about everything. I'm afraid one of your shirts succumbed to a spill. He figured out how to take the lid off his cup and purple juice does not come out of white shirt very well." Kivi chuckled sitting in a chair and letting Tanjir walk over to crawl up into his uncle's lap.

"Shirts can be replaced. I can't get over how much he looks like Xar and I." Xan said letting Tanjir scribble on his desk mat paper with a pen where he sat on Xan's knee at the desk.

"I know." Kivi smiled noticing how well Xan handled the child; he'd be a marvelous Sipa himself one day. "And I hate to interrupt, but don't forget we have to leave in an hour if we're going to make it to that festival you said we'd attend."

"Time already? I'll go get ready I did forget the time." Xan said standing and handing the toddler back to Kivi who already seemed ready save for changing his robes.

"I should go get ready myself, Beau and I will also be going to watch your backs." Eran winked going to find Beau so they too could get ready.

In no time, Eran was flying the transport across the valley to the nearest town. There was a summer festival being hosted by the local lord in charge of the district and this was one of the invitations they'd accepted.

The festival was packed with people and a great cheer arose when Kivi and Xan walked up to the platform and Xan waved to the crowd. "My new friends and neighbors, thank you so very much for your warm welcome. Kivi and I are thrilled to be here today. Since we've taken up residence in Tantawood, this is our home and we're proud to share today with all of you. You made us feel most welcome." Xan spoke and people clapped and cheered as Xan turned to shake the local Baron's hand.

"My Lord Farinmaj, thank you for the invitation to join you today."

"Tantawood is part of this district, it's a great joy to see it occupied again My Lord Indivar. These were your Hopa's lands, and yours now in his place. As steward of your inheritance I hope I have honored you and your Hopa."

"You have Lord Farinmaj, my Hopa's faith and trust in you was not misplaced." Xan said shaking the man's hand, a hand that also bore the Sansui insignia ring. This particular festival was for show and publicity and Lord Farinmaj had taken great pains to ensure Kivi and Xan's protection.

The open-air festival began with dancing and food and market stall after stall filled with jewels and produce, clothes and crafts, baked goods and pastries, fresh fruit and chilled ice treats.

Xan escorted Kivi through the market, followed by a throng of photographers. Every stall they stopped at together they were surrounded by people and flashing cameras. Kivi's stomach was once again in knots as he tried to ignore them and carry on as if they weren't there like Xan had instructed. He did all right with people directly, small groups of people were not a problem and he was comfortable, it was the media that made him nervous and even though Xan told him to pretend they weren't there, it was easier said than done. Their emotions were strong, they all wanted something, and tuning them all out was difficult.

They were surrounded and Kivi never one to be truly self conscious before was suffering the affliction and moved silently beside Xan afraid to make any move at all, afraid to show favoritism

over items in fear of offending someone. Xan sighed he could feel Kivi's trepidation and he leaned close. "Ignore them Ki. I can feel you, you're stomach is churning again."

"It's been churning for a week. I'll be okay Xan-ki. It's just I'm afraid of offending someone and it's making me more nervous than I should be." Kivi said as Xan paused at an ice vendor and bought Kivi a small cup of berry flavored ice and handed it over hoping it would help soothe his protesting digestive system.

"Is that better Ki?"

"No, but I'll get used to it I suppose. This does taste lovely, and the cold helps a little, I'm just more afraid of offending a market keeper than the photographers."

"How so?"

"Pride bruises easily. I don't wish to favor one artisan over another. There are so many beautiful things here."

Xan laughed. "Kivi, you'll never win that argument. There will always be someone offended, you cannot please everyone no matter how hard you try to be magnanimous. What did you see you liked?" Xan asked curious now what had caught Kivi's eye he didn't mention.

"The robe stall we passed back that way." Kivi pointed. "The embroidery and fabric was lovely, I thought you would look nice in some of his works is all."

"Then take me back, I need clothes anyway." Xan said and Kivi took Xan's hand and led him back to the stall. "Which one did you like?" Xan asked as they stopped and the stall keeper beamed at seeing the couple back at his stall.

"This red one with the gold and black trim. It's beautiful." Kivi said showing Xan the garment with an embroidered dragon motif around the collar and sleeves.

"Lord Kivi you honor me with your praise." The Elderly prima with gnarled and arthritic hands bowed.

"Did you do these?" Kivi asked and he nodded.

"They are wonderfully intricate. You deserve the praise for your craftsmanship." Kivi bowed back and Xan agreed.

"Kivi is right, I've never seen anything so finely tailored. I would see more, I am in need of a decent wardrobe. I will have this one that Kivi chose. He has a fine eye. Ki will you choose more for me?"

"Of course." Kivi smiled moving through the racks of robes while the old man measured Xan for fit. He'd adjust the purchases to Xan's build.

"Oh, this one matches the red one only in Blue and silver. I like this too." Kivi held out the sleeve and Xan nodded.

"Pick whatever you like Kivi. I am usually a poor choice for myself. You've seen my sea of black clothes, well worn and nearly threadbare no less. I have no fashion sense."

"Where is Beau?" Kivi asked and Beau whistled from another rack.

"Kivi I am way ahead of you. I'm looking too."

Kivi laughed and joined Beau as Eran moved in beside Xan. "You're gonna be sorry. Beau is HARD on a purse."

"I think I can manage. Let them shop, I don't have to then." Xan chuckled and Eran lit up a cigarette.

"We do think alike. I like you more and more every day Xan."

"Same here." Xan winked settling down on a bench to wait for Kivi and Beau to finish going through the clothes on display.

Kivi paused for a moment a look of discomfort on his face. "You alright Kivi?" Beau asked seeing the look on Kivi's face.

"It's my stomach again. I've not been able to shake this since the press conference. It comes and goes. Small cramps." Kivi said still looking in pain, Beau walked over and took his pulse.

"Your heart is fast and why didn't you tell Lalam or I you've been suffering? We thought it had passed that first night." Beau asked looking into Kivi's eyes, which were dilated slightly.

"Because it's really not important. It's only been mild discomfort and the peppermint you gave me helped. Today it's just churning again since we got here. I'm sure it's just my nerves around so many people." Kivi began then winced a little from a cramp before turning back to shopping for his mate. Xan was right by his side.

"I felt that. Kivi, are you alright?" Xan asked and Kivi nodded.

"I was just a cramp, I'm sure." Kivi smiled holding up a green sleeve to Xan's face. "This one too, green is good for you."

"Just tell me if you want to leave. If you're feeling poorly we'll go home."

I will live Xan-ki. A little stomach acid troubles I can live with. But I promise if they get worse I'll tell you." Xan nodded as went back out to wait with Eran.

After Kivi was satisfied he'd looked over all the garments and picked out a myriad of choices that would compliment Xan and Beau gave his stamp of approval. They made arrangements for the garments to be altered for Xan's body and delivered to Tantawood as soon as they were finished.

From there the group continued down the market stalls, it was Xan's turn next to pause to admire a booth. Xan did have an eye for jewels; more specifically pieces he thought would look nice on Kivi. "Xan my necklace and hair jewels are more than enough. You've already spoiled me."

"I've hardly even begun Ki." Xan winked as he pointed to a tray in the display case and the Jeweler eagerly brought out the set. Emeralds and diamonds in a matching set. Seven hair jewels in a flower motif, the emerald centers surrounded by diamond petals. A matching necklace that formed a collar of flowers, a bracelet that mimicked the necklace, and a ring in the same flower pattern rounded out the set.

"You like soft settings don't you?" Kivi asked peering over Xan's shoulder.

"You have soft features, they compliment you." Xan said holding up the necklace to Kivi's neck.

"Xan I'm not going to let you spend money on me here today. I like what I have already, I don't need more." Kivi grinned as Xan studied a ruby set in the same pattern as the emeralds.

"I know you don't need them. But you're going to have them anyway. I spoil my mate as I see fit." Xan grinned right back and turned to the Jeweler. "I cannot decide which suits him more, so I will take both."

"XAN!"

Xan just laughed and handed the jeweler back the purchase for wrapping when something else entirely arrested Xan's attention he whipped around to see Kivi holding his side as a cramp washed over him again.

"Kivi those are not gas cramps. I felt that." Xan said moving to support Kivi where he stood.

"That really hurt." Kivi said moving to sit on a nearby bench, suddenly weak kneed. He barely made it to the bench before another pain struck and doubled him over. Xan was right by his side supporting him.

"Oh Gods, Xan." Kivi panted as he was blindsided with a pain that ripped the air from his lungs.

"Eran, please get the transport, we have to get him home. Now." Xan said picking up Kivi and carrying him toward their transport.

Kivi was on the verge of frantic tears and his face was distorted in pain as his hand was holding his stomach in agony. Xan looked white as a sheet as Eran ran off to get the transport and Beau helped push a way through the crowd wondering what was suddenly wrong with Kivi. The cameras were going crazy.

"What's wrong?" Beau asked as they waited at the edge of the square for Eran.

"It can't be! Xan, We were so careful." Kivi was crying now, he looked panic stricken.

"Not careful enough. Don't cry Kivi, please don't cry. We'll get through this." Xan held Kivi in his arms and kissed his brow as yet another pain washed over Kivi making him cry out.

"Don't tell me, he's?" Beau asked eyes wide.

"Passing our Pearl, yes." Xan said, the crowd gasping and then clapping and cheering as Eran pulled the transport over quickly for Xan and Kivi to make their escape. The News would be all over the globe in minutes.

Even before the union, Lord Xan and Lord Kivi would be blessed with a pearl. It was a good Omen, for any union that had already been blessed with a pearl it was a sign of good luck and fortune. It showed the gods favored the union and had given their blessings on the couple.

Eran had the transport to them in no time and Beau helped load Kivi into the back and the door was barely shut before Eran had them racing back.

Kivi was panting and squeezing Xan's hand so tight Xan's knuckles were white. "I'm sorry. Xan I'm sorry."

"Don't you apologize for this. Please don't say you're sorry for giving me a son. Kivi I love you, I wanted this. Please don't say you're sorry." Xan was crying too, but his face was happy. He was scared, but the smile was genuine.

"No Xan-ki. I meant your hand." Kivi chuckled and regretted it as he felt another pain rip through him.

"Oh." Xan laughed and leaned over and kissed Kivi's brow. "I thought..."

"I know what you thought. Xan, I wanted this too. Just didn't quite this soon is all. I want our son, he just could have chosen better timing." Kivi smiled as the pain shone in his eyes.

"I think it's perfect timing actually. The Heir of Ameretat, First Hopa, passing a pearl before the union with Jamari was a sign of good fortune. You two are repeating history even when you were trying to prevent it. Kivi if you continue to deny you are Ameretat, I'll knock you one for being purposefully skeptical." Eran grinned as he pulled into the courtyard and Lalam came rushing out to greet them.

"I knew it. His skin has been glowing for a week." Lalam smiled as he helped Kivi out of the transport.

"Eran, can you please contact Indira? His Hopa should be here for this." Xan said, his face drawn and worried.

"I'll take care of it, go with Kivi and just worry about him right now." Eran shoed him off as he followed behind, he'd call from Xan's office. It wasn't everyday one was witness to a pearl passing. He had always been a little curious about it himself if he was honest about it.

The entire front room was full of the inner council and Xar was pacing a hole in the floor while they waited. Lalam, Beau and Xan were in the bedroom with Kivi, they too waiting and feeling horrible that there was nothing they could give to help Kivi's pain. They could just be with him and offer comfort.

The room doors flew open a few hours later and a man who was obviously relation to Kivi ignored everyone in the room and raced across it. "Eran! Kivi!"

"He's through there Kadala." Eran pointed and Kadala was a blur across the room.

"I take it that was Kivi's Hopa?" Xar asked and Eran smiled.

"Got it in one Xar. He's really quite amiable when not panicked over his only pearl." Eran winked as Indira came in a few moments later.

"Kadala runs too damn fast. Is my son okay?" Indira was out of breath.

"As far as we know. He's through there," Eran pointed and Indira smiled and made his way into the other room.

"And Sipa I presume." Xar chuckled as he continued his pacing.

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"Kivi!" Kadala cried as he raced over and dropped kisses all over Kivi's face where he lay looking brutally tired in bed.

"Hopa. I'm okay so far." Kivi smiled as Kadala crawled into bed beside his son and let Kivi use him as a pillow as he finger combed Kivi's hair.

"My pearl having a pearl. I could cry." Kadala smiled at his son as Indira made it into the room and opted to stand by Xan next to the bed.

"How long so far?" Indira asked and Lalam looked at the wall clock.

"About four hours, we've got a long way to go yet. He's got a tilted Chamber this will be a rocky road I'm afraid."

"I'm the same. It took a very long time to pass Kivi. I think I was in passing pains for almost thirty-two hours."

"I really don't want to hear that right now Hopa. And forgive me, I had no idea it hurt this much."

"Then you also don't want to hear how long it took Xan to pass. It was closer to fifty hours worth of passing time. He was a large pearl."

"If Kivi doesn't want to hear it I don't." Xan shuddered his whole system one anxious knot of worry.

Kivi held up a hand to Xan which he took as he sat on the edge of their bed. "Don't worry so Xan-ki. Yes it may take a while, but I am not the first Hopa, nor will I be the last."

"I want to stop your pain and I can't."

"It's a part of life Xan-ki. I am lucky if things go awry we have help, I will be fine."

"We should give you some privacy Kivi, try resting a while. We'll leave the door open and we'll be in the other room if you need us." Lalam said ushering out everyone but Xan from the room.

"I love you Ki. Is there anything at all I can get for you?" Xan asked kissing every fingertip on Kivi's hand.

"I am a little thirsty. Some water would be nice." Kivi asked and Xan held out a hand as calling the pitcher to him from across the room and he held the glass for Kivi to sip from. Kivi smiled in thanks as he lay back and let another sharp pain hit him and he tried to tune it out and focus on anything but the severe pain.

"What do you want to call him?" Xan asked getting the glass aside and smoothing the hair away from Kivi's sweaty brow.

"Oh goodness I don't know. It's traditional to combine our names for the firstborn."

"Xavi?"

"Oh I like that." Kivi smiled at Xan who nodded, he'd been considering names for a long time, he favored that one himself and was glad Kivi agreed.

"Then Xavi he is." Xan smiled as he stroked Kivi's hair and watched Kivi drift into a semi-sleep. It would soon be over when the next wave of pains hit, but any rest was good rest and Xan left him for just a moment to sleep as he went to go get more ice and water for when Kivi woke up.

Kivi was able to sleep about half an hour before the pains woke him again and everyone took shifts sitting with him, waiting for the arrival of the pearl everyone had begun referring to as Xavi already.

It was a long afternoon and a very long night. It was mid-morning the following day before Xan was holding the jagged hard casing of his pearl as he wept with joy and he held Kivi close as they looked at the ugliest yet simultaneously the most beautiful thing they'd ever seen. Their son's pearl casing, he was large like Xan had been, and Kivi would need medical attention to take care of the extra bleeding, but right now, they only noticed the joy.

Xan held the small casing in his hands and gently placed it in Kivi's pouch, kissing both the pearl and Kivi's pouch as he did so. "I love you already Xavi. Grow strong, I will always protect you both." Xan whispered to the pearl in Kivi's pouch and Kivi ran his fingers through Xan's unkempt hair.

"You're a Sipa now, how does it feel?" Kivi smiled, his eyes heavy with exhaustion.

"I am thrilled. How about you Hopa?" Xan grinned; laying his hand over Kivi's pouch and the small bump that was the pearl.

"I am overjoyed. I am so scared right now, but so happy."

"Well Xan go give the news, Beau and I need to clean Kivi up a little." Lalam said and Xan nodded and went out to share the news with everyone waiting in the living area.

It was afternoon before Xan and Kivi managed any decent sleep and while they slept, Xar and Eran issued a statement on Xan's behalf announcing the healthy and successful pearl passing.

Kivi's popularity while already high, soared to new heights with this single event and news of the Heir of Ameretat was everywhere, he was even being referred to as Second Hopa by everyone, he was according to every paper and every person on the entire planet the second coming of a legend.

Only one person doubted him and that was just out of spite. Xedapa heard the news about the pearl passing and snorted turning off his vid screen. "Like it's news an Indivar is fertile? Please."

Xed rolled his eyes after his sarcastic comment and went off to find lunch, he was hungry and not in the mood for more news on his little brother's sex life.

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Xan was awake first and he lay there in a state of euphoric exhaustion as he lay looking at Kivi asleep beside him. He looked haggard but beautiful. His face was tired, but the soft smile on his lips still managed to take Xan's breath away. It had taken twenty-eight long hours and a brutal assault on his body from the larger size of the pearl and his tilted passage making the journey of

that pearl long, painful and difficult but in the end, he only tore very little and it was something thankfully Lalam and Beau had been able to take care of after the fact. Kivi cried very little, it was more his being scared at having a child so soon than the pain of the passing itself. Xan had reassured Kivi during the passing that whatever happened, he was not going to allow anything to happen to either Kivi or their pearl.

Kivi stirred and blinked open eyes to look up at Xan, his smile deepened and his brilliant blue eyes caught and reflected the midnight moon. "Xan, it's the middle of the night my love."

"I know. How do you feel Ki?" Xan asked touching Kivi's face and hair softly and affectionately.

"Tired, incredibly sore, but ah Xan... I feel wonderful." Kivi's hands were resting on the small protruding bump that the still hard shell casing made in Kivi's pouch. In a few days the casing would soften due to the enzymes being produced within the security of the hosting pouch and would be reabsorbed into Kivi's body, leaving just the fetus in his pouch to grow. The pouch itself was already changing right before Xan's eyes practically. It's lining was already preparing to protect the life within. The lining of the pouch would create a liquid cushion around the infant within and Kivi's mammary glands underneath were already bloating with milk to sustain the child and also help cushion the occupant on all sides. It was only slight, but Kivi's mid section was already smooth and rounded, his body was changing rapidly.

"As do I. I'm a Sipa." Xan chuckled leaning over to kiss both Kivi and then the small bump that was his son. "You'd best be good to your Hopa Xavi." Xan spoke to the pearl and Kivi chuckled and ran his fingers through Xan's hair.

"I don't think he can hear you yet Sipa." Kivi grinned and sighed. "Can you feel him? His light?"

Xan nodded laying back to gather Kivi in his arms and lay a hand over his pouch.

"I can. He's only a spark, but he's there. He's got my aura." Xan said with no little pride.

"I know. Reds and golds, I can see he has your gifts already. This makes me so happy. I hope he looks like you."

"We'll see Ki. I'm sort of the opinion that he should look like his Hopa, but then I am biased here." Xan chuckled as Kivi yawned deeply.

"I love you Xan."

"I love you too Ki. Go back to sleep you need your rest Hopa." Xan kissed Kivi's brow as Kivi snuggled up close against him and was asleep again rapidly.

Xan wasn't far behind Kivi, it was still very late and he too was exhausted. They slept close for warmth and comfort and barely moved until morning brought Kadala, Ramda, Beau and Lalam in to bring them both breakfast and check on Kivi and Xavi.

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Kadala was full of brilliant smiles and affection as he helped his son sit up while Xan piled the pillows behind him. Kivi hissed in pain as he moved. "You're going to feel torn apart a few days my pearl. The curse of being a Hopa." Kadala said in sympathy he remembered the pain vividly.

"It's worth it." Kivi smiled as he settled back with a sigh and a smile that had not left his face since Xavi had passed.

"It sure is." Kadala smiled back resting his hand on his son's face lovingly.

"I cannot comprehend how much I love him already. Did you feel like this after you had me Hopa?"

"Oh gods Kivi sweetheart. I cried for joy for days. I couldn't wait for you to emerge. I wanted to see you so badly. And I was tame compared to your Sipa. He used to rub your bump for luck, talk to you in my pouch, every silly thing parents do. You were our joy." Kadala said leaning over to kiss his son then he turned and repeated the gesture on Xan.

"I cannot be happier for you both. You made me a grand-Hopa and I do intend on spoiling Xavi rotten." Kadala grinned and Xan laughed.

"That is a grandparent's job is it not?" Xan winked pulling on his robe and using his gifts moved the table closer to Kivi's side of the bed to his breakfast was within easier reach.

Kivi smiled in thanks as Xan handed him a glass of juice and as he drank he finally noticed what his Hopa was wearing. "Hopa, you look beautiful. I've never seen you out of your Ounta robes." Kivi gushed, Kadala was a beautiful man and even more striking in the bright red silk he wore.

"I must agree with Ki. I can see he gets his beauty from you. I am not saying this to flatter my Hopa-ka, but you do look beautiful. Every time I see you I am amazed at how much Kivi favors you." Kadala smiled at his son's mate fondly. Kivi always had favored him in looks he could never deny that Kivi was his son. He did also feel wonderful not having to hide under robes and a veil. He felt beautiful in the new robe Indira had given him that morning, Indira however always managed to make him feel beautiful and he had for twenty-five years.

"I made a promise to your Sipa. That when we got here, I would follow my son's guidance and shed my own shackles, your Sipa likes red." Kadala smiled and Kivi grinned.

"You look wonderful. Are you trying to give me a little brother finally?"

"Bite your tongue Kivi. I am far too old to be considering that again. The only babies I want puking and peeing on me in the future are yours." Kadala laughed moving to let Lalam and Beau closer.

"We'll let you eat in a minute Kivi. We want to check your stitches and see how you are fairing this morning." Beau said taking Kivi's pulse as Lalam lifted the covers to check on Kivi's stitches.

"Healing nicely." Lalam said laying the cover back down and smiling down at his patient.

"I wish it felt like it." Kivi smiled back as Kadala passed him a bowl of berries and cream, one of Kivi's childhood favorites for breakfast. Kivi brightened even more as he accepted his breakfast bowl and spoon.

A knock came to the door, it was Xar and with him a strikingly handsome man. "Are we disturbing?" Xar asked and Xan waved him into the room.

"Not at all. Parth-ka you made it, it's wonderful to see you again." Xan said hugging the man with Xar.

"I made it a few hours too late. I missed it." Parth pouted in jest returning Xan's embrace.  
"Congratulations."

"Thank you." Xan smiled taking Parth by the hand and leading him to the bed. "Parth, this is Kivi. Kivi, Parth."

"It's an honor, I've heard much about you Lord Parth." Kivi held out his hand and Parth just smiled and leaned over and embraced him.

"It's my honor. Congratulations. Xar told me all about you, I do hope we can become good friends. I will stand beside you as well, you have my vow." Parth said and Kivi picked up Parth's longing emotions for his own pearl, but sincere goodwill.

"I am surrounded by so many good people, I am truly blessed." Kivi sighed as the embrace ended and Parth stood beside Ramda and smiled at him.

"How is Tanjir?" Parth asked and Ramda grinned.

"Terror as always. He'll be glad to see you."

"As I him. I have presents for him in my luggage."

"You spoil him." Ramda laughed and Parth winked.

"Of course I do. He's so fun to spoil." Parth replied as yet more visitors arrived. Indira and Eran walked in all smiles to see how Kivi was faring.

"How's my son this morning?" Indira asked sitting beside Kadala on the bed edge.

"Sore, happy, excited, scared, you name it Sipa." Kivi replied as he finished his berries.

"I've no doubt about that, you are your Hopa's son. Here Indira leaned over and rubbed the small bump in Kivi's pouch. "Lucky Bump." Indira grinned and Kadala rolled his eyes.

"See, I told you Kivi. Your Sipa is odd."

"It's good luck."

"It's your bloody superstitious nature."

Kivi laughed at his parents seeing himself and Xan in them. Xan grinned at Kivi from where he stood by the window eating a red fruit and drinking his tea.

The room was filling by the minute as Manju came in with Sanjay. "There's a call for you Xan. Xartova." Sanjay said and Xar held up a hand.

"I'll take it Xan. By the gods he's impatient. I'll stave him off, you're still sleeping." Xar said heading out to take the call to give Xan time to eat his breakfast.

He was passed by Cris and Val as he left the room and they were carrying a vast array of packages that they set down beside the bed in a neat pile. "We're gonna have to make a dozen

trips. There are presents falling out of ears down there. Everyone on the planet is sending you gifts." Cris grinned as Kivi stared wide eyed.

"What?"

"Face it Kivi, you are the Cat's meow. I've been watching the news this morning. People are throwing parties for you, the newest fashion is your haircut and star jewels, every Hopa wants to be you and Every Sipa wants to, you know..." Cris said and Xan almost snorted tea out of his nose as he choked.

"Cris!" Beau chastised and Cris shrugged.

"Hey man, it's the truth. Every news station, every news paper, all the on-line journals, everything is Kivi this, Kivi that the kid is a superstar. I'm about ready to ask him for an autograph myself and I was there when he was a pipsqueak. A damn cute pipsqueak I might add. I sure hope that little one looks like you. I wanted to take you home in my pocket." Cris grinned ruffling Kivi's hair.

"I almost did. Glad now I didn't. Congratulations Kivi." Val said leaning over to hug the boy. "And I just want you both to know Cris and I managed to tweak the cameras in here last night. We caught the whole event on digi-tape for you."

"You did?" Xan asked and Cris smiled.

"Dude of course. What better way to capture the moment? I put the disk on your desk, I took it off the hard drive this morning."

"Thank you, that is something nice to have. I would like to see it, I sort of missed most of it, I had my eyes shut." Kivi smiled and Cris laughed.

"Mandy had me film the birth of Erin, I thought you'd like it." Cris said as Xan retuned.

"He's content to wait for you to call him later. He really, really wants to talk to Kivi, but I told him that Kivi was exhausted and he'd just have to wait until he recovered." Xan winked at Kivi.

"He is exhausted and we looky-loos need to leave him to his breakfast and more rest. You stay in bed today we'll all be near and be checking on you." Lalam said ushering the crowd out. Only Xan remained as he handed more fruit to Kivi.

"Not yet, I need to, I'll need your help Xan. I need to go to the bathroom." Kivi said not really embarrassed, just desperate.

"Of course." Xan said using his gifts to help carry Kivi into the bathroom and he was there to help keep Kivi on his feet while he attended to his bladder and then helped him back to bed.

Kivi looked drained from just the short trip out of bed. "That was painful. I don't want to think about doing more than that."

Xan shuddered. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. It's not your fault."

"Um, it sort of is my fault. I do believe I am the cause of you passing a pearl am I not?"

"Well, you have a point, But last I heard it does take two of us." Kivi grinned at his mate as he settled into his pillows and finished his juice.

"True. I was calculating time earlier. I do believe I drank all that circa tea for nothing. This must have happened immediately after we meshed and you went into your season. I don't think we gave that first dose of tea time to work. Gestation is only two to three weeks normally. It was two weeks and two days ago you went into season. We were a little hasty that day."

"Xan-ki we were all over each other even before that. You are irresistible to me. I have no regrets. I did want this, it will be difficult but I am so very happy."

"Me too. I'm scared out of my mind, but Gods Ki we're blessed. It's hard to even make a pearl in the first place for most people. We've been given a precious gift."

"We have. Come here, the pearl is getting softer come feel."

"Already?" Xan asked coming over to feel the bump in Kivi's pouch. It was like jelly, nowhere near as hard as it had been.

"Amazing isn't it? My whole body is different today. It's fascinating how fast it changes for Xavi."

"Incredible. I can really sense him now, he's strong."

"He is very bright now. He feels content."

"You can sense that?"

Kivi nodded. "His emotions are limited, but yes. He is comfortable."

"Can you show me?" Xan asked intrigued and Kivi nodded.

"Just mesh with me Xan-ki." Kivi said and Xan did and as he did so Kivi took control of Xan's mind, very much as Xan has done with him during their first lesson. Once he had control he used his gifts through Xan to touch their son. Xan gasped, he could feel the pleasant contentment surrounding him.

"He's beautiful." Xan wept as he felt his son through Kivi and he laid his cheek against Kivi's pouch as the tears formed in his eyes. "I have only ever fallen in love this fast once in my life. And that was with your Hopa Xavi." Xan spoke to his son and Kivi smiled and finger combed Xan's hair.

"We don't waste time do we Xan?" Kivi asked and Xan looked up and smiled.

"No we don't." Xan chuckled as he sat back up and once more attempted to get Kivi to eat.

This time Kivi complied and once he'd eaten he settled down to sleep some more, and Xan got dressed and headed out to his office to continue working and make a call to Xartova. It had to be done, no matter how much Xan despised the man. He would play the dutiful son for a while longer yet.

Xartova was pleased and Xan promised to send him a copy of the vid-capture. That appeased Xartova and once that matter was handled. Xan set about getting Kivi's presents upstairs and canceling their schedule until the Union.

Now that Kivi was recovering, there would be no parties until the union itself. This gave Xan time to focus on the event with Xar and Eran and they used that afternoon over lunch to finalize the date and guest list.

The union would take place in four weeks on the Summer Solstice and the invitations were addressed and sent.

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Kivi rested for the remainder of the day and by the following morning was moving around slowly on his own power. He was still in pain, but it was manageable. Xan and Xar were in his office trying to decide the garden layout for the union when Kivi walked into the office.

"What are you doing out of bed?" Xan asked looking up from the diagram he and Xar were sketching out on paper.

"Moving so I loosen up some. I'll live Xan-ki, I need to start moving about again. Can I help?" Kivi asked moving to gingerly sit in one of the chairs.

"Actually yes. You can pick out which bracelet you like for our union bracelets. Xartova sent some over, they were all over the top, I ordered a selection sent over from the same jeweler that are much more simple. I've already gone through them and set aside several sets that I liked, I would like your input too."

"Xan, everything you pick is always beautiful, you have a fine eye for jewelry. I'm hopeless there."

"Humor me Ki. Please?" Xan handed over a tray that held seven sets of bracelets and Kivi took them and looked at the finely detailed, simplistic and elegant sets. His eyes straying to the simple silver and gold thin twists of metal. No stones, just simple etching on the metal that caught the light when he picked them up to look closer, Xan smiled he liked that best too. It was simple and refined and he knew Kivi's unassuming nature would gravitate to that set in particular.

"This set is very pretty I like the two metals combined very much."

"I knew you'd like those. I do too." Xan said setting them aside to keep them safe and then calling Manju in so he could get the rest sent back to the jeweler's for him.

He came in with Kadala who was carrying a large bundle. "Your uniting robes arrived. They are beautiful." Kadala said moving to lay them out on a chaise to look at. They were both identically embroidered around the necks and sleeves and cut in a mirror pattern only the colors differed. Kivi's was white with blue and silver trim, Xan's was black with red and gold accents.

"You're both going to look wonderful in these." Kadala added standing back to admire the finery.

"I don't care what we're wearing, I can't wait to get this over with. I just want to be united, the ceremony is a necessary evil." Xan said frustrated with pageantry.

Kivi smiled. "Here we agree Xan-ki." Kivi said leaning back in his chair with a sigh.

"Ceremonies are always for others benefit." Xar said as he sketched another possible layout to the garden set up.

"True, but I am excited. It's not everyday my pearl gets formally united. I retain the right to be giddy." Kadala smiled as he picked up the garments to hang them up.

Kivi followed Kadala and lay back in bed as Kadala came out of the closet. "I wish you and Sipa had this chance."

"Kivi, sweetheart. Your Sipa and I are not unhappy. Besides we did have one in a way. Our vows to each other may not have been witnesses by others, but the gods heard them and I think they approved. We got you." Kadala said sitting beside his son and smoothing his hair away from his face.

"If I am half the Hopa you were and are I will be happy." Kivi smiled affectionately and Kadala returned the smile.

"Kivi, you already are a wonderful Hopa. All it takes is love, there are no answers to being a parent only questions and hope you make the right decisions along the way. How do you feel today?"

"Much better. Still very sore, but I can move around in short trips without too much difficulty." Kivi answered as Kadala leaned over to lay his cheek against Kivi's pouch.

"I can feel him. It's only faint and his only emotion is comfort, but I can sense it."

"I get those gifts from you, yes he is content. His casing is almost gone today. I fear now, I've heard of cases where the pearl cannot suckle and starves. I am so scared Hopa."

"It's rare that Kivi. We are all born with that basic survival instinct. I'm sure Xavi will be fine, please don't worry. You'll feel it when he begins to take milk, you'll always be aware of his presence and movement. If in a day or two you haven't felt him take to a nipple, Lalam can help. I think you're worrying over nothing."

"Did you not worry?"

"Of course I did and you are my son." Kadala chuckled sitting up again.

"Did your nipples hurt? I swear I am overly sensitive I can feel my own pouch skin against them."

"They did. Remember your whole body is going through drastic changes to accommodate Xavi. My nipples hurt, my pouch ached as it bloated. You'll really feel it when Xavi is close to emerging. His weight on your skin will pull and they move around a lot just before. I had to keep poking your foot back into my pouch, you liked to stick it out and wiggle your toes. It was very cute, and you were very ticklish."

"I am still ticklish, do not tell Xan-ki." Kivi laughed as Xan chose that moment to walk into their bedroom.

"Too late I heard." Xan grinned moving to sit next to Kivi on the bed. "I promise not to torture you until AFTER Xavi comes." Xan winked and Kivi rolled his eyes.

"You better not Xan-ki."

Xan just grinned evilly handing Kivi a paper. "This letter came for you specifically."

Kivi quirked and eyebrow and opened it. "Oh Xan." He gasped as he read. There was a photo of a child in the letter.

"What is it?"

"They are asking, no begging for my help, this poor child suffered a fever that gives him seizures and no healer has been able to help. Please, can I go? I must try. Look how beautiful he is, poor little one. He's only five."

"I don't want you going anywhere, not in your condition. But I will have them brought here, I'll send Sanjay to get them."

"Thank you Xan. If I was born with these gifts I have an obligation to use them, yes?"

"You have a wonderful heart Ki. Yes. I'll go make the arrangements." Xan said kissing his mate's cheek before quitting the room letter in hand to go contact the family. Kivi never noticed the family name or their rank, he only saw a child who needed him. Most Mind Healers saw to the powerful first, minor nobility second, middle class next and Ounta's had no help unless someone was feeling charitable. The child was a middle class Prima, no rank and just one degree separated them from Ounta status class. What Kivi would do for them would make the entire middle class his ally and Kivi was just being himself.

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