



**Wulf**

Tales of the Chosen

Kayelle Allen

(c) 2006

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Published 2006

ISBN 1-59578-282-6

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Liquid Silver Books  
<http://LSbooks.com>

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This is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents and dialogues in this book are of the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is completely coincidental.

## **Dedication**

To my readers who have repeatedly asked when Luc Saint-Cyr would have a story. To my crit buddies at para-rom-crit-3, and to two special readers who have encouraged me every step of the way, Icia and Teoh [read the epilogue!]. For my husband, who supports me more than 100%-thank you, baby. I love you.

### **Author's Note**

Wulf takes place in the Tarthian Empire. You can visit Tarth City and see the places mentioned in this book by cruising over to this site...

<http://www.kayelleallen.com/Wallpaper.html>

...and clicking to open the map, or by right clicking to download it for your desktop for reference. Come and play in the Tarthian Empire, where romance lives forever.

Kayelle Allen

## Chapter One

### Tarth, Tarth City, Kelthian District

#### Batchelors

Sumertsag 18, 4659 Tradestandard date

Six android cooks glanced up and nodded to Wulf Gabriel as he entered the restaurant's back door. He smiled in greeting and angled through the black tiled kitchen, around the cluster of steel stoves and counters.

Chef Yvan was finishing one of the cheesecake masterpieces Batchelors had made famous. He topped the last curl of dark Tyran bittersweet. Wulf snatched it, barely escaping a slap when the man swatted at his hand. He blew the tall blond Yvan a sassy kiss and danced out of the way as the door swung open.

Two uniformed human waiters slammed through it. One grabbed a tray, slid orders onto it and swept back out. The other followed him, ice bucket and wine in hand.

Yvan stepped back from the dessert. "What do you think?" He made a sweeping gesture. "Delicious? Beautiful?"

Wulf sucked a chocolate smear off his fingertip. "Perfect."

Yvan bowed. "What are you doing here so early? No hot date tonight?" He motioned to one of the droids to remove the cake.

Sighing, Wulf folded his arms. "Working. Photo shoot started before dawn and here it is long past dinner."

"Sounds like my life." Yvan washed his hands. "You hungry?"

"I'm good. Ate one of those energy bars on the walk over here."

"Energy? How you gonna get energy from somethin' made of sugar?" Yvan opened one of the commercial refrigerators and pulled out a covered plate. He set it in front of Wulf, handed him a fork and a napkin and, with a flourish, removed the cover. "Eat."

Slices of lean roast beef, a small bowl of salad and a handful of asparagus spears had been artfully arranged on the silver plate. "Looks good." Wulf cut the beef with the edge of his fork. "Somebody didn't pay for their food?"

"Naw." Yvan folded his arms and leaned against the counter near him. As tall as Wulf and built the same way, Yvan resembled a ruckball linebacker more than a pastry chef. "Saved it for you." The concern in his blue eyes warmed Wulf's soul as much as a good hug. "You never eat enough."

Wulf held out a hand and slapped it against Yvan's. "Thanks man." The first forkful of meat almost melted in his mouth, it was so tender. While Wulf ate, Yvan chatted about his day, the celebrity clientele they'd served, how many orders for specialty cheesecakes they'd filled.

Finishing the last bite, Wulf patted the napkin across his mouth. "I've never eaten anything you made that wasn't tip top perfect." He leaned out to admire Yvan's backside when he turned to put the dishes in one of the sinks. "You and Trink must make a mint with this place. Every time I come in here, it's all I can do to keep from getting run over by waiters dashing in and out with orders."

"Yeah, well if you'd come in through the front door like you *spos'd*..." the chef

paused and shot him a stern glance, “that wouldn't happen. Then again, if you did I wouldn't get to see that cute little model butt o' yours nearly as often as I'd like.” He winked.

Wulf stuck out his tongue.

Yvan leered. “You don't want that tongue in yo' mouth, honey, I'll let you put it in mine.”

Wulf rolled his eyes. “You are such a perv. Where's Trink tonight?”

He nodded left, toward the swinging door, where his partner was entering.

Trink halted in his tracks, hands spread. Though far shorter and several years older than Yvan, he always looked more like a kid playing dress up than a true maitre de. With his baby face, few believed his real age when they learned it. “If it isn't his Royal Hotness. You lookin' fine, m'boy. All the honeys be watchin' you to-night!”

Wulf swept a deep bow. “Wuss down, bro?” He brought up a palm and Trink brushed his fingertips across it in greeting.

Yvan nudged Trink's shoulder. “You spy he pushin' de dog?”

“Hell no!” Wulf knew enough Kelthian street slang to get that. “Ain't no boy toy selling cock. Dis boy straight up real.”

Trink rubbed the edge of Wulf's Draap denim jacket between thumb and fingers. He lifted his dark brown gaze and raised both brows. “Your boss know you stole these naughty lookin' taggers?”

Wulf brushed at the denim jacket. “I got off a late photo shoot and the crew didn't feel like putting it all away. Let me wear it home.”

The Draap jeans and jacket cost over two hundred and eighty draks apiece. Their logo on the simple black t-shirt made that worth one twenty-five. And even on the fees he pulled down as the Face of Draap, Wulf couldn't afford the prototype footwear. Low gravity athletic shoes—no sports association in the empire would ever permit such an advantage. Still, walking in them sure felt good.

Rubbing his chin, Trink ambled all the way around him. He gave a low whistle. “You sure be fine tonight.”

Wulf held up both hands and spun in a tight circle, stopping in a chin-lifted pose straight off the runway.

Yvan whistled. Trink grinned. “You be scorin' with the ladies, you keep that up, Wulf.”

He made a rude noise. “Not even for free, bro.”

Trink laughed aloud. “Catch me up. You hawkin' or tawkin'?” *Hunting action or hanging with the guys?*

Wulf gestured right. “Hawkin' this side.” Gesturing left, he added, “Tawkin' that.”

Trink held up a hand and Wulf connected with it, hooked fingers with him, and then released.

Trink dragged over a barstool and perched on it, one elbow on the counter. “You sure you're not slakin' this territory?”

Yvan rested a hip against the counter and winked.

Wulf caught they were teasing. Both had been public pleasure slaves back on Kelthia ... “slakes” in local talk—but had bought their freedom and opened Batchelors together. He loved them for their big hearts; guys dabbling in prostitution always worried them.

“Hey, you know I'm real. Not sellin', bro. Not sayin' no offers to buy, now.” He blew

on his nails. "Good money, too."

Trink leaned over and popped him on the arm. "You is doggin' me tonight, bro. What's down?"

"Got troubles. Need friends."

"Sure come to the right place." Yvan untied his apron and threw it into a bin. "Come on, bro. Grab us all a beer, Trink."

His partner opened a refrigerator and tossed each of them a bottle of the good stuff: gold label. Wulf followed them into an adjoining office, where Yvan dropped into the chair behind the desk. Trink propped himself in the corner and waved Wulf into the only other chair, a wooden swivel-type.

Wulf broke the seal on the beer as he sprawled, legs out in front of him. He took a long sip of the cool golden brew and tilted back his head. A moth fluttered around inside the ceiling light. A seeker doomed to death for finding what he wanted. Way too much like him.

"Anybody ever threaten you?" He rolled his head to one side so they could see his face.

Yvan sat up straight. "You got some fuck leanin' on you, bro? You give me his name; I'll break his damn neck in six places."

"Thanks, man, but this is different. Answer my question first. You ever been threatened?"

The guys shot each other a glance. Yvan answered. "Yeah, 'bout two weeks before we opened."

Trink wiped beer from his mouth. "Inspector guy. Wanted money up front for good numbers. When we wouldn't pay, he gave us a failing report on cleanliness. Yvan about shit. You know how he is about this place."

"Hell yeah!" Yvan leaned both arms on the desk. "Worked our asses off for this place." He cracked a smile. "And I do mean *asses*."

Trink almost spewed his beer. He choked on a laugh and wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. "You straight up right on that, hon."

Wulf rocked forward. "What'd you do?"

Yvan flashed Trink a glance that said, "You tell it," and leaned back in the chair.

"You know the story of how we bought this place. But you don't know how we really got our money."

All slaves had a Freedom Savings Account, provided by law. When they had earned enough to buy out their contracts, they could free themselves.

"It wasn't your freedom money?"

Trink shook his head. "We tell folks that's how, but we had help."

Wulf frowned. "You mean an investor?"

The guys flicked glances at one another. Yvan lowered his lashes.

"Kind of." Trink shifted positions, crossing one ankle over another.

Wulf took a long chug of beer as he sat back. This had a juicy feel to it, like one of those hot novels on Imperinet.

"I tell you this snippet, man, you gotta swear you didn't hear it here."

Wulf drew a cross over his heart.

Trink chewed his lip. Yvan sat still, head down, as if he wanted no part.

"Geez, guys." Wulf gestured with the beer. "If you did somethin' illegal, you don't

have to tell me.”

They both snickered.

“Naw, man, it's cool.” Trink pushed away from the corner. “Yvan and I had the same master. Guy used to sell us on the sly. You know, without paying us. Against the law. Even slakes have rights. He slipped it all in his lover's pocket.” He set a hand on one hip. “Thing is, the lover's a parole officer. If we said anything, the PO would say we were doing something wrong and haul our asses to jail.”

“That low life fuck.”

Trink shook a finger at him. “You said a mouthful there, bro.”

“Straight up.” Yvan reached across the desk and slapped Wulf's upraised hand.

“What happened?”

“Bout ten years back, Yvan was a chef in a brothel on Porosen'la. He used to cook for parties. Master found out. Sent him over to work the Man's gigs once a week. The Man paid for his time two ways—the fee our master charged and then triple that straight into his freedom account.”

“Super guy.” Yvan gestured with the beer. “Asked if I had a friend who'd like to slake a party or two. He paid Trink the same way. Whatever he earned for the master and three times into his account. Shit, we got free of that hole within a year.”

Trink rubbed the beer bottle against his cheek. “We both worked directly for the Man about six months, catering parties and such. He paid us straight up, on time and bonused us for good gigs. When we wanted to start a restaurant, he loaned us the money. Said Yvan's cooking deserved a first class place. Had investors scope one out. That's how we founded Batchelors, man. We paid him back end of the third year out of profits.”

“So did he help you with this inspector guy?”

“Oh, yeah. We called the Man; he went to see the guy in person.”

Yvan chuckled. “Guy prolly wet himself.”

Trink laughed.

“I don't get it.” Wulf leaned forward, elbows on his knees, the beer bottle swinging between fingers and thumb. “Was this man someone important?”

The guys shared another one of those glances.

“Not 'a man', bro.” Trink leaned forward. “It was *'the Man'*. You know. On Kelthia.”

He squinted. He'd been to Kelthia on photo shoots in the last few months. Hell, he'd been born and raised there until his father died when he was ten. That was twenty years ago. “Sorry, guys. No clue.”

“You never heard of 'the Man',” Yvan blinked. “You shittin' me?”

“Sorry, Yvan. I have no id...” Wulf almost stopped breathing at the realization of whom they meant. No, surely not. He swallowed. “You don't mean ... the Harbinger.”

The guys hunkered as if they thought he'd appear any second. No one back on Kelthia said his name if they could help it.

The Man. The Harbinger. The crime boss even the crime bosses feared. Luc Saint-Cyr.

Wulf slapped one thigh and laughed. “I can't believe you went to the fuckin' Harbinger. That's too good.” He took a long pull on his beer and then laughed some more.

“We're not shittin' you man. He helped us out.”

Still chuckling, Wulf nodded. “Oh, I believe you.” His shoulders shook with



laughter. "That's what makes it so funny."

Yvan and Trink stared at him like he'd just sprouted antenna. "Uh, you ok, bro?"

Wulf tried to answer but couldn't stop laughing long enough. He set the beer on the floor and took a deep breath to gain control. After a few gulps of air, he wiped his eyes and sat back.

"Sorry." He snuffled a laugh.

"You wanna say what's gigglin' ya?"

Wulf sucked in a few more deep gulps of air and blew it out slowly, calming himself to speak. "Sorry, guys. Not you, believe me. It's a long story. Kind of personal." He wiped his eyes with the heels of his hands and brushed the front of his shirt.

"No squeeze, bro." Trink perched on the desk. "We got your back. How you bein' threatened, Wulf?"

Sighing, he scooted back in the chair, bent over and picked up the beer. He drained the little that remained, set the bottle on the desk, and then folded his arms. "Last year, my agent fucked with my contract so I'd have to work for him longer. When I tried to sue, he bought off my lawyer. Bought off the media. Hell," he dragged a hand through his hair. "They wouldn't go near that story for a million draks, even now."

"That shit!" Yvan hit the desk. "He still messin' wit you?"

"Yeah. He knows I've always wanted to act. About two months ago, he started feeding me scripts. Good stuff. Not great, but not bad, either." Wulf shrugged. "I'm a newbie. But he said to get the roles, I'd have to sign with him for another five years."

Trink pulled a face, one eye shut. "That doesn't make sense."

"Turns out his father owns the studio producing the vids. I don't sign with his son, I don't work. They'll blackball me to the entire entertainment industry." He kissed his fingertips and flipped up his hand. "Goodbye career."

"That ain't right." Yvan shook his blond head. "Shit like that—that gets my blood goin'."

Trink faced him more squarely. "How can we help, bro?"

Wulf leaned elbows on his knees and put his face in his hands. Blowing out a deep breath, he paused before lifting his head. "I wish I knew. I just got the contract to be the Face of Draap—worth more money than anything I've done so far. If I try to leave, I won't work at all. If I stay with him—fuck. You have no idea what an ass this guy is. I can't prove it, but now..." He swept a hand through his hair. "I should be able to coast the rest of my life off money I get modeling."

Trink and Yvan nodded, enrapt.

"My investments have all been in places he advised before I knew he was dirty. Now I find out he cranked me for most of it." He held out his hands. "I'm flat. Haven't made a lick on what I invest. It sits there, gathers dust. Sure not getting interest."

"Not that I like the law, but you sure they can't help?"

"Trink, I wish they could. This guy has connections and family all over the empire. Hell, he gives the Harbinger a run for his money, power-wise."

Trink's eyes crinkled; he gave Yvan a glance. Yvan nodded.

"I know you laughed when we told you our story," Trink said. "Still, I think the Man might help you."

Wulf closed his eyes. "No." He gave a half-hearted chuckle that fizzled at the end and came out a squeak. "No way."

"He's our friend, bro. If we ask him, the Man'd step in just 'cause we're tight, you know?" Trink held up two fingers together.

Wulf choked on a laugh. He tilted the chair and leaned his head back. The moth in the light overhead had stopped fluttering. Trapped at the source of everything he sought. Just like him. One of the top ten models in the empire, and helpless to get himself free.

"Wulf." Trink and Yvan both leaned against the front of the desk to face him. "Let us help you, bro. We can call the Man. I know he's got the power. Hell, he owns everything on Kelthia and half of Tarth. This whole district owes him."

"Thanks, guys, but there's got to be another way." He dusted off his pants. "I should go." When he stood, Trink took hold of his arm.

"What is it, Wulf? What you not tawkin', huh? Me and Yvan." He gestured among them. "You know we got your back. You can tell us anythin' bro."

"Thanks, Trink." He situated himself so he wasn't being touched, hopefully smooth enough not to offend. "Don't want to talk about it."

Yvan started to speak.

"Guys." Wulf held up both hands. "I appreciate the advice and the offer to help, but the last thing I want is to involve Luc Saint-Cyr. The Harbinger, the Man, whatever you want to call him. If I'd known you'd suggest anything that had to do with him, I never would've come here. No offense." He ducked around Yvan, but the taller man leaned a hand against the door to block him, then swung around and leaned against it, arms folded.

Wulf sighed. "Don't do this, Yvan."

"Doin' nothing, bro. Jes standin'. Whyn't you talk to Trink."

"Yeah, bro." Trink spread both hands. "Let us help."

Pressing his lips together, Wulf concentrated on breathing through his nose, focusing on a dark spot on the wall.

"Listen, Wulf," Trink dropped his street voice. "If you let that asshole fuck you like this you'll kick yourself for it."

He closed his eyes, jaw clenching. "Back off, Trink."

"People always say that to me, Wulf, but truth is I can't. I'm your friend. Friends help friends."

Wulf leveled his gaze on the man's face. "I appreciate your concern, but I'll handle it."

Yvan tilted his head. "We're trying to help you."

"Thank you. Really. Thank you." Wulf tucked his fingertips into the front of the jeans. "Now back off and let me out of here."

Yvan stared into his eyes for a long moment, not blinking any more than Wulf. At last, he nodded his head. "Just tell me one thing."

Wulf ground his teeth together. "What?"

"Why you so dead set against the Man's help?"

"His help." Wulf pressed his lips together, shaking his head. "I would rather die than ask that fucker's help."

You'd have thought he'd just blasphemed. Trink crossed himself and Yvan slid aside like he expected a lightning strike. "Smackers! You got a death wish?"

"You think I'm crazy? How's this? If Luc Saint-Cyr was on fire, I wouldn't cross the street to piss on him."

Their mouths dropped open.

“You want to know why I hate, loathe, and detest Luc Saint-Cyr?”

The guys flinched.

“When I was ten years old...” Wulf slammed one fist into the other, “—he made me watch my father die.”

## Chapter Two

**Tarth City, Di Lusso District  
Nizamrak Building, Suite 4100  
For Women Only Corporate Headquarters  
Sumertsag 20**

“Excuse me, sir.”

His concentration broken for the fifth time in as many minutes, Luc Saint-Cyr tossed aside his reading and leaned back in his desk chair. “Now what?”

“I’m very sorry, sir.” The sixth person he’d hired this month to replace his former assistant stepped inside, shut the door quietly and approached his desk. “I know you didn’t want to be disturbed for the next hour, but...”

He held up a hand to stop further apology. “What is it?”

“The gentleman on the holophone said it was absolutely urgent.”

He pinched the bridge of his nose. “Who is it?”

“All he would say was that his name was Wulf Gabriel and that...”

“Wulf!” Saint-Cyr shot to his feet, sending his chair flying backward into the credenza. Books on its shelves tumbled to the floor. “Why didn’t you say so?” He made shooing motions at the startled woman. “Put him through immediately.”

Eyeing him as if he were some wild animal, the woman edged out the door and snapped it shut behind her.

Once alone, Saint-Cyr opened a desk drawer and swept everything on his desk into it. He stepped one foot into the adjoining bathroom, grabbed a brush and dragged it through his short hair. A quick feel of his chin said he didn’t need a shave yet.

He strode back into his office, seated himself at the desk and waited for the image to glow into existence. *Wonder what he’ll look like... Stupid question, old boy. You see him every single day on Imperinet.*

Saint-Cyr shut his eyes, envisioning the classic beauty of Wulf’s face, the strength of his jaw, the warm whiskey brown of his eyes. On his dresser at home was a picture of himself with Wulf and his parents, taken only two days before Thomas Gabriel’s death. Before all their lives unraveled. Before he’d—

*Focus.*

He unclenched his fists and flattened his hands on the desk. Still no holo-image. The heap of untidy books on the floor drew his attention, but judging by the angle holopics usually took, Wulf wouldn’t see them. How would it appear if the call started and he was on his knees on the floor with his ass in the air? Still... He rolled his chair back and pushed them out of sight with his foot.

No image yet.

Saint-Cyr started to press the button on his desk to call his assistant, but hovered one finger above it. What if she was putting Wulf through and mangled the connection because he distracted her?

Folding his hands again, he waited. On the floor by the right front leg of the credenza lay another book. He scooted his chair over and pushed at it with his foot, but it only

wedged itself between the legs and wouldn't budge.

The indicator on his desk still showed no sign of a call.

He loosened his collar, flicked at a speck of dust on the desk and folded his hands once more. He rolled his thumbs around and around each other. He tightened his collar back up.

Muttering curses, he got down on the floor and straightened the damned books, dusted himself off and sat back down.

The door opened and his assistant crept only far enough inside to shut it behind her. Head down, hands clutched in front of her, she wet her lips.

He stood and went around the desk. "You lost him! Don't tell me you lost him!"

"No, sir." She peeked up as he approached. "He told me to forget it. He said he'd changed his mind and it wasn't important."

*Wasn't important...* Brought up short by those words, Saint-Cyr went so still the motes of dust in the air came into perfect clarity. As if the universe had suffered as harsh a blow as his heart. The first contact he'd had with Wulf in twenty years and it wasn't important.

He turned his back, shoulders rigid, jaw tight. "Did he say when he'd call back?"

"Um, he..."

His breath felt shallow and too, too fast. He stopped himself from turning his head.

She cleared her throat. "No, sir. The call came in on a private channel so I couldn't get a number to return it. I asked, but he wouldn't give me one. I was trying to track it when I realized I should let you know what happened. I'm sorry, sir."

He nodded. "You may go."

"Sir?"

Saint-Cyr pressed his tongue against the back of his teeth. Hands clenched at his sides, he turned his face only enough to show he listened.

"I'll make sure he goes straight through if—I mean, *when* he calls back. Is there anyone else I should know about?"

*You mean is there anyone else who could tear apart my life just by dropping a call?* He closed his eyes. Not trusting his voice, he shook his head.

Behind him, the door opened, clicked shut. Footsteps receded. No outside noise intruded. The lonely silence of the oversized room rang in his ears like a death scream.

He staggered the ten steps to the windows overlooking Tarth City Park and pressed his hands and face against the glass. Sunlight's radiant caress warmed and soothed his skin.

If only it could reach his heart.

*Focus, Luc. Dwell here, not in the past. Let it go. Let it go.*

Forty-one stories below lay the verdant trees of the park, the blue and silver flash of Typhin River ribboning its way through open grass in the center. Destine Pietan Stadium's dome shone holy-white in the glaring sun. Hundreds of soaring buildings wrapped along the curved route of the Stadium Loop, edging right up to the park.

*That's it. Root yourself in the here and now. Yesterday's gone. Tomorrow never comes. Not for you.*

A tap at the door.

By the time it opened, Saint-Cyr stood straight, back unbending. When his assistant came up beside him, he did nothing to acknowledge her.

“I finally traced the call to its source, Mr. Saint-Cyr. I thought you'd want to know where it originated.”

It didn't matter where. His promise to Wulf meant he would never seek to find him; never interfere in his life.

When he didn't respond, she continued. “It's apparently some kind of restaurant over in the Kelthian District. Have you ever heard of Batchelors?” She made a soft laugh. “Of course you haven't. You'd never go to...”

Saint-Cyr gripped her arm. “*Where* did you say?”

She glanced down to where he held her.

He let go. “Where did you say he was?”

“Batchelors. It's in the...”

“I know where it is.” Trink and Yvan's place. Saint-Cyr rubbed his chin. If Wulf had called from there... He took the woman's arms in both his hands and leaned down closer. “Thank you.”

She blinked and swallowed. “You're welcome, sir.”

He patted his pockets, ensuring he had personal items. “I hired you away from my competitor. How strict are you about non-disclosure of their secrets?”

She gasped. “Oh sir, I would never...”

“Good. You've just learned one of mine. My interest in Wulf Gabriel never leaves this room. It is not something to share at lunch with friends or your spouse at dinner.”

“Mr. Saint-Cyr!” She drew herself up to her full height, about the middle of his chest. “I am a professional.”

“Glad to hear it. Handle any of my afternoon appointments that you can and clear the rest.” He strode toward the door. “If you hear from Wulf, transfer the call to my mobile number.” He waited until she met his eyes. “And if you transfer anyone else to me for any reason whatsoever, you're fired. Is that clear?”

Her face lit up as if he'd given her a present. “Oh yes, sir. As glass.”

He jerked open the door.

\* \* \* \*

## **Tarth, Tarth City, Kelthian District Batchelors**

Although he'd loaned Trink and Yvan money for this place and been paid both early and handsomely for his trouble, Saint-Cyr had never personally visited. Now, as he took in the manicured storefronts and immaculate streets, he saw why his advisors had said an investment would return well. Ideal location for a restaurant. Less than a block from Tarth Technical College and its thousands of hungry students, right across the street from a tube train station and one block in either direction to both the Imperial and Kelthian business districts.

Inside, a separate bar room with dark leather lay on the left. To the right sprawled a tasteful restaurant elegant enough for fine dining. Not full yet, but a lunch crowd was gathering. The faint scent of beef and onions made his stomach growl. Yvan's cooking still impressed.

A young woman in a crisp black and white suit greeted him. “Welcome to Batchelors, sir. May I seat you alone, or are you with a party?”

“Alone.” He removed his dark glasses and tucked them into an inside pocket. “In the back, please.”

The greeter's reaction was mild when she saw his eyes. Most flinched and averted their gaze, but she only smiled. “This way, sir.” She led him to a choice table at the rear.

After taking his drink order, she activated the holographic menu on the table and left him alone.

It was no surprise when Trink delivered his drink personally. “Your Kelthian whiskey, neat. Compliments of the house.” He lowered the tray and his voice. “I was hoping you'd come. I didn't expect you this fast.”

Saint-Cyr nodded toward the opposite chair.

Trink slid into it. “Wulf made me promise I wouldn't get involved and that I wouldn't call you.”

He tasted the whiskey. “This is excellent.” He set it down. “What makes you think my visit here has anything to do with him?”

The man's eyebrows twisted in different directions. “I called your office seventeen minutes ago, said I was Wulf Gabriel, hung up and here you are. First time I've seen you in two years.”

Saint-Cyr smiled at that. “How do you know Wulf?”

“His agent suggested he attend our grand opening and he brought ten other models with him, a bunch of friends and one jackass lover who broke up with him right before we closed shop. Wulf was so torn up, Yvan and I took him upstairs and let him talk our ears off. He slept at our place for three days so he could avoid the guy. We've been tight ever since.”

“I see.” Saint-Cyr stroked the lip of the highball glass. “Not that it's my business, but are you lovers?”

Trink brushed the back of his fingers under his chin twice. Kelthian street people spoke in slang or with their hands. As the Harbinger, Saint-Cyr had his own signals, well known on the street. This one meant “fuck you” in the most polite sort of way.

“Why the call, Trink?”

“Wulf's in trouble.”

Saint-Cyr stilled himself, listening.

“Yvan and I thought he should talk to you but when we suggested it he smacked right out. Didn't know we knew you. Said he w—uh, well,” Trink rubbed his neck.

“Actually, you're probably better off not knowing that part.”

He decided against pushing for detail. “You thought I could help him.”

“Yeah.” He leaned one elbow on the table. “His agent's screwing him over. Threatening to blackball him. Ripped off his investments and such. Agent's dad runs some kind of vid company and he's threatened not to hire him unless he signs with the guy for five years. I think there's more to it, but that's all he'd tell us.”

Saint-Cyr sat back. “Any and all of those things are easily remedied. *If* Wulf wants my help.”

“Yeah, well...” Trink aligned two napkins with the infinite precision one gives to a task that delays the delivery of bad news. “He says you made him watch his father die.”

The words struck like a blow to the chest. *All these years and he still doesn't understand.* He blew out a breath. “I'm sorry that's the way Wulf remembers it.”

“He didn't want me telling you any of this, but I can't stand to see a friend suffer.”

Steepling his fingers, Saint-Cyr sat back. "Can you get him to meet with me?"

"I'll talk to him. Not setting up anything he doesn't know about first. Just so we're clear—Yvan and I owe Wulf. He's brought us more business than we could hope to get on our own, just by showing up and bringing friends." Trink gestured around the room. "Our net worth is six times what it was when we first opened, 'cause of him. I know business. Yvan knows cooking. But Wulf—he knows people."

He'd have to talk to his advisors about investing more. "Aside from all this—Have you and Yvan considered other locations?"

"Sure. But not at the expense of setting up Wulf, if that's what you're getting at."

"Certainly not. I simply know a bargain when I see one." Saint-Cyr smiled. Patting his fingertips together, he asked, "What made you decide to call?"

"Wulf made me promise not to talk to you, but I figured that meant *he* could. So if you thought it was *him* calling and you came here to see what *he* wanted..." He shrugged. "I could answer your questions and I wouldn't really have called."

Saint-Cyr toyed with the drink. "I appreciate your tactics but I would have kept your confidence."

"Yeah." Trink held the tray against his chest. "But I'd know that I called."

He lowered one brow. "You did call."

"Not technically."

Saint-Cyr chuckled. "You are a strange man, Terellee Vandermeer."

Trink glanced over his shoulder. "Smackers! Don't let that name out on the street."

"Your secret's safe with me." He made a stroking motion on his right upper lip.

Trink repeated the signal. *And yours is safe with me.*

"My friend," Saint-Cyr shook his head, "I wish I could tell you I will take care of Wulf's situation, but he and I have an agreement. I am not permitted to interfere."

Mouth open, Trink stared. "Not permitted?"

"Long story. Perhaps some day I'll tell you." Saint-Cyr focused on his drink. *When hell has long since frozen solid.*

"Couldn't you just happen to lean on the agent a little? You know, keep an eye on him or something?"

"As much as I'd like to, I'm a man of my word. No matter what occurs, I cannot interfere. And no one is more sorry about that than I."

"Can I do anything?"

"No." He drained the glass, touched a fingertip to the corner of his mouth. "I wouldn't recommend it." He stood and pushed in the chair.

Trink rose also and shook his hand, as firm as ever. "You're saying I should just sit by and watch Wulf get hurt."

"Sadly, Trink, to help the ones we love, sometimes inaction from us is exactly what they need most. Sometimes they need to learn to ask for help. Until then, they may not need or want it."

"I'm hardwired to be there for my friends." Trink lowered the tray, letting it hang at his side. "I'm not willing to turn my back on someone who needs help."

"Neither am I, but for now, I'm afraid I must." Saint-Cyr handed him a business chip. "Get Wulf to call me before this goes too far and he loses his career over it. Sorry to say, I really may be his only hope."



## Chapter Three

**Tarth City, Di Consueto District**  
**Renyoj Building, Park Serenity Overlook, Wulf's flat**  
**Sumertsag 21**

When the beeping noise sounded again, Wulf rolled over on the floor and lifted his head. "Go away!" He pulled the empty whiskey bottle against his chest and hugged it. Curled into a ball, he wedged himself between the lime green settee and the ice blue cube-shaped coffee table.

Fists pounded on the door. "Wulf! Open up! It's Fee. Let me in."

"Fee?" Wulf pressed his cheek against the white carpet. "Feeyona?"

"Wulf!" Fists pounded again.

He pushed himself to a seated position. "It's ok, idBot. Let her in." The idBot security system unlocked the door.

"Wulf?" Footsteps sounded on the tile floor, out of sight behind the settee. "Where are you, sweetie?" His fellow model came into view, hands on her hips. "Oh, no. Not whiskey again."

He waved the empty like a flag. "Second bottle."

She shook her head and sighed. "Come on." Reaching down to take his hand, she hauled him to his feet.

He kissed her on the cheek and wrapped both arms around her. "I love you, Fee. Ya know that? You're the one friend who never lets me down. Only one, babe." He kissed her again.

She waved a hand in front of her nose. "Wulf! You're so drunk I could smell it through the door." She propped him up with one shoulder under his arm. Nearly as tall as he, she easily supported him. "Let's get you to bed."

"No... Wanna talk." Wulf tried to break free but Feeyona held him too tightly. "Don't wanna go to bed."

She shook her head. "You're too drunk to talk, Wulf."

He tripped, but Feeyona caught him. "You're too big for me to drag all over like this. Stand still." She braced him against the wall to steady him while she opened the bedroom door. "Who broke your heart this time?"

He waved the bottle. "S'not broken."

"Sure it is. You only get drunk and call me when your heart's broken. I've never known you to get this depressed over anything else."

"Not depressed." He grabbed her around the waist and pulled her against him. "Nobody loves me, Fee. Jus you. If I could love a woman, it'd be you, Fee. You know that?"

"I know it, Wulf. I love you, too." She patted him on the back. "Come on, sweetheart. Let's get you into bed."

Wulf let her guide him into the bedroom. She shepherded him into the bathroom and waited for him to relieve himself. When they reached the bed, she turned him around and walked him backward until his legs hit it. He plunked down and fell onto his back.

"My head hurts, Fee."

"Nothing like it will in the morning, darlin'." She tugged his legs up and turned him sideways. "Smackers, you're heavy. Biggest guy I know. You should've called me before you finished this. Let me have it, honey." She took the empty out of his hand. "You'll hurt yourself."

"That's..." He hiccupped, "—the second one."

"So you said." She sat next to him on the wide bed. "Close your eyes."

Wulf did as told, aware of her presence next to him but unable to move. "You never lemme down, Fee. D'you know I love you?"

"I know it, Wulf. I love you, too, sweetheart."

He felt the warmth of a blanket around him and then cool hands on his face. Soft kiss on his forehead.

"Fee." He gripped her wrist, unable to open his eyes. "I wanna go home."

"You are home, love." She caressed his face. "Try to get some rest. I'll sit with you awhile." She held his hand. Rubbing his brow the way his mom had, Fee hummed a little song to him.

Wulf floated, his stomach unsettled, queasy. "Not gonna be sick this time. Not gonna puke on your shoes ever again, Fee. Didn't mean to do that."

"I know, babe." She stroked his face, tucked back a loose strand of his hair. "You're tired. Try to rest. I'm right here."

"I wanna go home." Hot wetness leaked at the corners of his eyes. "I miss him so much. So much." The warm darkness embraced him.

\* \* \* \*

Wulf woke face down and pushed himself upright. Grunting, he pressed one hand against a throbbing temple. His tongue felt sticky, his breath smelled like a wet dog, and his bladder was so full he knew he'd never make it to the john. He only held it in to keep from cleaning up pee. One smell of that and he'd puke.

"Oh, God." He pressed both hands against his temples. Two empty bottles of Kelthian whiskey lay in the waste bin beside his bed. He would have laughed if he hadn't been in so much pain. "You dumb ass. Two bottles of Kelthian whiskey. Lucky you're not dead."

With deliberate care, he slid to the edge of the bed and leaned one hand against the wall as he stood. He held on until the room stopped spinning. "Stupid, stupid, stupid. You think you're the fuckin' Harbinger?"

The Man's ability to drink was legendary. No one outdrank him. No one.

The seat was down in the bathroom and all the towels had been folded and hung up. He yawned while he relieved himself. His sonic-brusher, a pain-stik, and a drinking glass sat next to the sink. "Shit. I must've called Fee again. I can't believe she puts up with my crap. If I was straight, I'd be a fool not to go for her." Rubbed his eyes. "As if she'd have me. Shit, I am such a fuckin' asshole."

He pressed the pain-stik against his wrist and shuddered as the drug coursed through him. He swirled the brusher around in his mouth for a few seconds to clean it and rubbed his tongue against the roof of his mouth. Much better.

He dragged a hand through his sleep-snarled hair and grimaced at his reflection. Red eyes, lashes stuck together in points from sleep and tears. Unshaven. He leaned over the

sink and peered at his chest in the mirror. Rubbed his eyes and looked again.

"Fuck. Who shaved my chest?" He rubbed a hand over it. Smooth as a baby's... He groaned. He'd done it before for photo shoots; it itched like hell growing back. "Nice move, Wulf. You were drunk *and* stupid."

At least he didn't have a current lover who'd bitch about his shaven chest, or demand he shave anything else. The last thing he needed was some fuckin' Dom telling him what to do. He peed again and then fumbled with the flush handle before he walked blindly to the shower. *Sex is so overrated. Who needs it?*

The shower aimed jets at different levels, cycling first a hot mist, then cooler water to help wake him. He turned on a pulsing stream that massaged his shoulders and back. Bracing his arms against the tiled wall, he rested his forehead against them, closed his eyes and spread his legs.

The jets of water on his legs washed away soreness. He turned a bit, letting it cascade down the inside of one thigh and then the other. When a pulse connected with the back of his balls, he gasped and jerked forward.

A hot fantasy instantly took him. Wulf stood still, rationalizing away the heat that had swamped him, but each thought came back to one: *Who needs sex? I do.* He bent over at the waist, legs wide apart, both hands braced on the wall.

"Get those arms out straight." A deep voice commanded obedience. "Let that water beat you." A hard slap on his ass made Wulf gasp. "Wider, Wulf. Open up."

He complied, his cock lifting as the pulsing current of water rocked his sac like a man's rough hands lifting and tightening a fist around him. Pleasure just this side of pain.

Wulf arched his back, his cock so hard he groaned. Two hands pushed his cheeks apart, letting the water pummel his hole. He shook his head no, but the voice commanded him to take it.

"On your toes. Get up there! I want that water on you."

Wulf fought to comply, his legs shaking.

"Don't move." The voice behind him dropped to his knees and pushed his cheeks even further apart. The water stung like needles. All at once, the sting ended; the gentle touch of a tongue licked across him, making Wulf cry out.

One foot slipped. Wulf regained his balance, arched and thrust back against that questing tongue. Around and around it licked, teasing him with its tenderness.

"Open for me." The firm finger pressed inside, up to the first knuckle. Wiggled, pulled back a little, testing him. Moved all the way around, tugging on his hole. "This is the way I like you. Hot and open. Ready for me."

"Please." Wulf was sweating now, standing in the cool shower.

The voice laughed. The finger slid all the way in.

"You can take two." He pulled out, added another finger.

Wulf screamed in pleasure as they drove inside. Rubbed against his prostate.

"I want my mouth on you when you come." The dark, sensual voice moved in front of him, down on knees, water splashing off black hair and skin, shimmering like diamonds catching the light.

"Mmm." That voice swallowed his cock. Sucked him.

Wulf trembled, arms shaking.

The fingers drove deeper, stroked him again. Pulling the trigger on his orgasm.

"Oh... Oh, please, Luc, fuck me!" He slammed forward, filling that hot mouth.

Feeding his lover's throat with come.

Wulf gasped for breath, flattening his feet on the shower floor. The man greedily clutching his hips and sucking him tilted back his head, mouth full, his cheeks hollow from sucking.

Eyes looked up. Eyes without whites. Solid black.

The Harbinger's eyes.

Wulf jerked free, danced away and turned back, fists balled.

Still shaking from his orgasm, he slid down the wall and hugged himself, completely alone in the shower.

\* \* \* \*

### **Kelthian District**

#### **Trink and Yvan's Apartment, above Batchelors**

#### **Sumertsag 22**

Trink and Yvan's apartment had none of the glamour of his own place. His was the vision of the decorator he'd hired to impress clients. Their place was brick and stone, with windows that were too small and a floor of worn and polished wood. None of their furniture matched. It didn't matter. His place was a showcase. Theirs was a home.

Wulf pushed back from the dinner table and belched. Not to be outdone, Yvan matched him. Trink, shorter than either of them, let loose with a long, hearty brrrrp! that rattled the dishes on the table. The three shared congratulatory laughter.

"Damn fine dinner, Yvan."

"Thanks, Wulf." The man nodded, lifted his mug in a toast. "Awesome beer."

"I'll drink to that." Wulf raised his and peered into the golden liquid. "Is this Tyrant? I've never had better." He took a long swallow and wiped the foam from his mouth.

"Kin stuff." Yvan tipped his up and emptied it. "Trink took it in trade the other day."

"Trade, huh?" Wulf took another sip.

"Yeah." Trink got up to refill Yvan's mug. "The Kin don't allow their males to sell anything. But I took six kegs in trade from one of them for about 100 kilos of prime grade rye." He set the mug in front of Yvan and leaned against his chair.

Wulf squinted. "What do you do with rye?"

Yvan wrapped an arm around Trink's waist and dragged him onto his lap. "This guy here is the reason we make so damn much money at Batchelors."

Wulf smiled at Trink's blush. He might be the brains at work, but at home, he submitted fully to Yvan.

"He's one hell of a trader." Yvan settled his chin on his lover's shoulder. "He bought the rye cheap from an outworlder at the Trader's Market and traded it for beer. Took all but one keg of the beer and traded it for prime organic vegetables." He grinned at Wulf. "Get this. He calls the Jade House, one of the biggest restaurants in TARTH City..." He hugged Trink. "You tell this part."

He reached back and slid his fingers down Yvan's cheek. "They only serve organics, and I'd heard from one of our delivery guys that their usual provider missed a shipment. They were hunting all over the city for another source, last minute." He shrugged. "I got fifty beef roasts in trade."

"Even better, he made a contact over there who promised to throw some of their

overflow dessert catering our way.”

“Guys, that's awesome.” Wulf high-fived them in turn.

Trink laughed. “More than one way to get rich, boys.”

Wulf sat back and enjoyed the sight of these two old friends, so obviously in love.

Trink tilted his head to one side. “There's room for you, Wulf.”

He shook his head. “Thanks, but I'd spoil it. You two are perfect.”

Yvan snorted. “I know Trink is, but I ain't.” He nuzzled his partner's neck. Trink giggled, scrunching up his shoulders.

*What would it be like, being loved? Held and treasured instead of used?* Black eyes swam into focus. Wulf shivered.

“You cold, man?” Trink got up and crossed to the small kitchen. “I'll make us all some coffee.”

“Naw, thanks, I gotta go. I have a shoot in the morning.” A lie, but he suddenly wanted out of here. Wulf got to his feet and stretched, yawning.

Yvan and Trink walked him to the door. Tarrh City's cool evenings demanded a coat even in summer, and while Trink went to retrieve Wulf's, Yvan leaned a hand against the door next to him.

“It's late. You're welcome to stay here.”

“Thanks, but I don't live that far.”

When Trink returned with the coat, Yvan held it for him. Wulf turned around and when Yvan brushed aside his hands and buttoned it for him, he smiled, enjoying the concern and care.

Trink reached up and ran a hand through his hair. “Your hair is perfect no matter what time of day I see you.”

He smiled down at Trink, up at Yvan. “Model's tricks.”

Wulf stood there, unable to pull away as Yvan stared down into his eyes. The man cupped his face in both hands, leaned down and brushed Wulf's mouth with his lips.

He shook his head no, Trink's face at the edge of his vision.

“It's all right, Wulf.” Trink slid his hand inside the coat and released the buttons.

“We both want you.”

He lifted his face to Yvan, searching for the truth.

“Let us take you to our bed.”

Wulf made a soft whimper of lust when they backed him against the door. “Can't ... do this.”

“Yes. Yes, you can.” Yvan covered his mouth with his own, wrapped his arms around Wulf and pulled him close. Hard body, firm arms, his mouth demanding, Yvan kissed with a slake's innate ability to tease.

Trink knelt and ripped open Wulf's jeans, started tugging them down. “Let us take care of you, Wulf. Let us love you.”

“Wulf?” Trink snapped his fingers in front of his face. “You ok?”

He sat up straight in the chair. The remnants of dinner were scattered across the table. Trink and Yvan were staring at him intently.

*Fuckin' daydreamin' about my best friends.*

Wulf stood, kicked in the chair. “Sorry, guys. Must've zoned out there.” He wanted to stretch but feared his erection would show. “I guess I'm tired. I should go.”

“You're welcome to stay here.”

That was way too close to his daydream for his peace of mind.

"Thanks, guys. But I really have to get up early. Photo shoot at the train station over in Royal District. They're doing a spread on Imperinet about Draap's new shampoo."

"You use it?" Trink fondled a handful of Wulf's hair. "Yours always looks good."

"Yeah. I—I mean no. I do, but I—Uh, I gotta go." He took two big steps toward the closet where his coat usually hung and remembered it had been tossed across their bed this time. "You know, I think I'll leave my coat here. It's not that cold tonight."

"Are you sure?" Trink started toward the bedroom. "I can get it for you."

"No, that's ok." Wulf opened the door and stepped half outside. "Thanks for dinner, guys. See you soon, ok?" He couldn't shut the door fast enough. *They're proolly scratchin' their heads, goin', 'What's with Wulf?'*

Inside the stairwell, he rubbed his face and shook himself. He pounded down the stairs and burst outside into the chill evening air.

When he arrived home, he sorted through the messages idBot had taken. One from his agent was marked urgent.

"Now what's that asshole up to?" He tapped the screen to open it.

"Cancel Draap shoot tomorrow afternoon. They've chosen a new Face. Call me."

The Draap Face represented everything the company stood for. Wulf had signed with them only three months previously, for a year-long contract.

Wulf blinked at the message, read it three more times before he believed it. "What? That son of a bitch!"

He paced the room. "Chosen a new Face? They can't choose a new Face. I have a contract." He tapped his own chest. "I'm the Face of Draap."

He hastened back to the screen and sorted through the rest of the messages, checking for more from his agent. A new message popped in as he was closing the program.

Wulf didn't recognize the name but the subject said, "Terms". Inside, one line: "If you want to work, do as you're told."

A background picture came into focus. Wulf caught and held his breath. He backed away from the screen.

The Draap poster of his own face now had knife slashes across the eyes, and the word "obey" gouged into the mouth.

## Chapter Four

### Tarth, Tarth City, Imperial Business District The Jade House Sumertsag 23

The dark-honey depths of his third drink swam with reflections from the table's outer ring of light. How many decades ago had Kelthian whiskey stopped affecting him? Two, three? Fifty? The man known as the Harbinger knocked back the shot and signaled for another.

From his private table in the back of the restaurant, the door lay in full view. A youthful crowd filled the place, their noise an insect buzz in the background. Synthetic jazz tinkled from somewhere to the right. Android and human servers darted among the tables, trays balanced on upraised hands, pristine white towels over shoulders, efficient uniforms crisp.

The door opened, admitted strangers, closed. No one who mattered.

The waiter replaced the empty glass and bowed away without looking at him. Luc Saint-Cyr paid no attention to the slight. Few ever met his eyes.

Two drinks later, he kept the bottle. Anything to pass the time. A different waiter passed his table, carrying the scent of beef, peppers, and onion. Saint-Cyr set a fist against his growling stomach. He slugged down a few more drinks, keeping the door in sight.

When Trink called to pass along Wulf's request to meet in public, Saint-Cyr almost refused. Inviting gossip never appealed. But the draw of seeing Wulf overrode his objections, and now he sat like a public spectacle, waiting for a man who would likely stand him up. He clenched his fists so tightly they hurt.

He opened them, tried to relax. *What the hell is keeping him?*

As if summoned, Wulf stepped inside. He gazed around the room, eyes shielded with one hand, standing in a shaft of golden summer light.

Saint-Cyr shoved aside the bottle and sat up straight.

The defined masculine grace that had rocketed Wulf Gabriel to the top of the fashion modeling industry was in full view. With his classic beauty and strong jaw, any time he flashed his blinding smile, people slowed down to enjoy it. Show off that sculpted body in a business suit and the world ground to a halt. In a swimsuit ... the empire would never be the same. Wulf's appearance here today would be entertainment news around the empire tomorrow.

Especially when the media discovered whom he'd met.

Wulf the boy had been a precocious, endearing pixie with a million questions and a penchant for learning. Wulf the man fascinated on every level. Intelligent, attractive, generous, kind. Perfect body, stunning face. Saint-Cyr chided himself for such thoughts regarding one he protected.

*Remember what you are, old boy. He will. He wants your help, not you.*

Wulf started toward him across the club. Saint-Cyr smoothed the front of his suit and squared his shoulders. He snapped his fingers at a passing waiter to take away the bottle.

Table after table of patrons delayed Wulf's progress, recognizing him as he passed. Saint-Cyr drummed his fingers. Every person Wulf greeted took full advantage of the opportunity to shake his hand, their touches lingering.

Wulf met his eyes and smiled across the distance, their past relationship making the warmth seem far more intimate than it truly was.

Curious stares turned Saint-Cyr's way. He basked in the change from shock on their faces to the grudging admiration they showed once they realized Wulf had come to meet *him*. People *feared* him. They *wanted* Wulf Gabriel.

Fact was if they knew the truth, few would envy.

He stood when Wulf reached the table. Neither spoke. They took each other's measure like old sentinels, seeking a chink in armor or a lowered guard. Neither looked away, as if breaking eye contact would cost them points. Wulf offered his hand first.

While they shook, Wulf continued to hold his gaze without hesitation. He'd never feared Saint-Cyr, even as a child. "Thank you for agreeing to see me in person."

Saint-Cyr inclined his head and lifted a finger to signal the waiter.

Wulf slid into the chair opposite. The waiter approached him directly.

"A Black Mystery, please." Black vodka layered above crushed ice and a clear mixer. Wulf folded his hands on the table in front of him and smiled.

"The usual." Leaning back in the chair, Saint-Cyr tapped his fingertips together. "I see you still have your sense of humor."

Black Mystery indeed. As black-skinned as any Kelthian-born human, Saint-Cyr passed for one in every test known to man. The rare few whom he allowed to know his true nature—his Chosen—concealed it. Black contacts completely covered his eyes, hiding more of the truth. Wulf's fair skin, dark hair and pale brown eyes made a unique counterpoint of light to his darkness.

Saint-Cyr cracked a smile. "It's good to see you after so many years. You're all grown up. None of the gawky boy I remember."

Wulf tossed back a lock of wavy hair. "I hope not! I like to think I left him far behind."

"I would have to agree. I was afraid I wouldn't recognize you when we finally met again. I should have known Wulf Gabriel would stand out in a crowd."

Wulf's smile blazed. "I felt the same way about you." He slid one finger back and forth on a wet spot on the table. "I had this memory of a huge black-skinned man with all black eyes towering over me. I wasn't afraid of you, but I was in awe."

"Awe, was it? I recall you were quite a scamp. I believe the last time I saw you, you were munching cookies fresh from your mother's oven." They both smiled at the memory. "We could have met in private."

Wulf took a deep breath, letting it all out as he sat back. "I wanted this to be public for several reasons. I nee..." He broke off as the waiter returned with their drinks.

"Will there be anything else, sir?"

Wulf deferred to Saint-Cyr, who flipped his hand in dismissal.

Against the shimmering light in the outer ring of the table, the crushed ice in Wulf's drink glowed blue-white. The murky darkness of the vodka on top seeped down around it into the clear liquid at the bottom.

Saint-Cyr sipped his whiskey. "You were saying?"

Wulf finished a long sip and made a face as he set the drink back on the table. "I



wanted to be tied to you publicly when I do what I'm about to do.”

Toying with his drink, Saint-Cyr waited a moment before speaking. “Which is?”

“Quit my job.”

Trink had made Saint-Cyr swear he wouldn't reveal he knew about the threats. “How is associating with me going to help you do that?”

“I wanted to leave modeling last year. I can't prove it, but I think my agent altered some clauses in my contract.” He squirmed on the seat. “I wasn't able to quit and had to remain with him another year. I want to really leave this time. I'm afraid he'll find some other way to keep me working for him.”

“Just say no.”

“I have. He doesn't take that for an answer. He's been angling to keep me tied to him by offering me acting jobs. Last week, he sent over a script with some goon who looked like an escapee from a gorilla farm. The threat was implied, but it was there. Read the script or else.” He rolled his eyes. “I felt like I was in one of those third rate holoflicks, but this is my real life. I want out and I want away from him.”

“I see.” He steepled his fingers. “You believe your agent will think twice about trying to intimidate you if you're associated with the Harbinger.”

“Yes. Exactly.” Wulf gifted him with a flash of teeth so brilliant it could melt rocks. His smile beamed from the walls of half the dentist's offices in the empire.

“Because I'm rumored to head the largest crime syndicate on Kelthia?” He leaned momentarily forward. “Not true, by the way. Or perhaps because I used to head the Thieves' Union? Or is it because I own three percent of all businesses here in the capitol and have a direct influence over eight percent on Kelthia?”

Wulf stared at him for a moment, brows drawn together. All at once, he relaxed. A smile tilted the corner of his mouth. “Does it really matter? The fact is he won't mess with me if he sees me with you.”

Saint-Cyr let him squirm. Picking up his whiskey, he tasted it, licked his lips, set it down again. “I'm disappointed in you, Wulf.”

His brown eyes went a bit wider, face paling. “Dis—Why?”

“Four reasons.” He laid a hand next to the shot glass. “First, the concept of scaring off one bad guy with a bigger one rarely works. That brings us to the second, which assumes your agent will fear me. He may not. Although, unless he's a fool, he should. Third, you didn't simply ask for my help. Fourth, you assumed I would agree to being used.”

“I wasn't using you! I was...”

“Setting it up so we are seen in public together chatting like old friends precisely so your agent will draw specific conclusions sounds like 'use' to me.” He faced him squarely. “How else would you define it?”

Wulf opened his mouth, shut it again. “I should have known better than to ask you for anything.” He shoved himself to his feet.

“Sit down.” The sober authority in Saint-Cyr's voice wrought instant obedience. He controlled his breathing. He'd almost lost him. The very strength Wulf found so irritating was the same trait he sought. “Have a little patience, my boy. I did not say that I would not help you.”

“Don't ever call me 'boy' again. I'm thirty years old. Even to someone as ancient as you, that should count for being a man.”

Saint-Cyr let out a long breath. *Thousands of years alive and it still bothers me when someone calls me old.*

Wulf pushed one hand back through his hair, shoulders sagging. "Ok... I'm sorry. That was harsh, but I felt safe knowing you'd be in the picture. It was the only thing I could think of."

"Hence my disappointment." At Wulf's wilted expression, he softened. "You were not trained in the way of the Chosen, so you don't understand. I forgive your rash behavior."

"You forgive me?" Wulf clenched his jaw. "I'll have you know, if there's any forgiving here today, it needs to be by me. Not you!"

"Glad to hear it. I accept."

"Oh!" Wulf tossed himself back against the seat. "You-are-infuriating!"

Saint-Cyr lifted the whiskey in a toast, tossed it down and signaled the waiter for more.

"I do not have to take this." Wulf stood.

"Your family," Saint-Cyr met his eyes, "served me faithfully for five hundred years. I owe them a great debt. No one takes advantage of the Chosen without facing my wrath. That said; if you want my help, next time ask for it."

The waiter came up with his drink, and Saint-Cyr turned his outward attention to that, although every part of his being attuned itself to Wulf. The young man stood there, hands flexing open and closed, his breathing audible.

The waiter hesitated, then walked away.

Wulf seated himself once more. "Let's get something straight, Saint-Cyr. I do things on my own. I don't ask for anything. One thing I sure as hell don't need or want is your damned forgiveness."

"So you don't need my help, either?"

Wulf's chest rose and fell, mouth a tight line. "I admit that I do right now. But I'll soon be on my own again and I won't need anyone's help."

Saint-Cyr inclined his head. Time to return a little of his pride. "You've carved quite a career for yourself." He toyed with his drink. "I've been pleased at your success. And you did it completely on your own, as you said you would. Quite an accomplishment."

Wulf held himself more erect, chin lifted. "Thank you."

"Now, how can I help you, Wulf?"

"Will you help me leave the business in such a way that my agent won't be able to stop me?"

"Of course, if that's what you wish. Tell me why you're afraid of this man."

Wulf groaned, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "Jim used to be great to work with, but in the last few years he's gotten mixed up with some people who've changed him. He's..." He made a futile gesture. "I don't know. Different. Distant. Edgy. I don't trust him any more. He's not taking care of my interests. He's taking care of his. At my expense. Lately, he's taken to threatening me."

"Written? Provable?"

"Yes. I went to the police with three of them."

"Hmm." Saint-Cyr tapped his fingers on the table. "And they did what?"

"Took the report, assigned extra android security to my building."

Saint-Cyr curled his fingers into a fist. "That's it?"

“Pretty much, yeah. And then last night he sent this.” He reached into an inside pocket, unfolded a sheet of paper and slid it across the table. “It wasn't signed, but I'm sure it was him.”

One of Wulf's Draap posters with its eyes gouged out and the mouth carved with the word “obey.” Ugly piece. Saint-Cyr refolded it. “May I keep this?”

Wulf nodded. “Glad to be rid of it.”

Saint-Cyr slipped the paper into a pocket. “To start with, you're not to return to your quarters. I'd prefer you not stay with Trink and Yvan. No need to endanger them. I'll send my butler around to pick up your things. You'll be staying with me.”

“What?” Holding up both hands, Wulf shook his head. “Oh, no I'm not. There is no way I...”

“Are you truly so naïve? This level of threat will not go away simply because you've been seen with me. If you want safety, you should tie yourself to me in every way possible. If your name had been linked with mine from the beginning, none of this would have happened.” He held up a hand, stopping Wulf's objection. “Yes, I know. That was not part of our agreement.” Time to play dumb. “Refresh my memory. Your agent's name is...”

“Jim Stahlwell.”

“Hmm. Familiar, beyond the fact that I've kept up with your career. Not sure why.” Saint-Cyr passed a hand across his mouth. “You can stop worrying about him as of this second. I'll see to it he never interferes with you again. Send him your resignation letter this afternoon, certified tradestandard e-post.”

“You...” Wulf chewed his lower lip. “You won't hurt him, will you?”

“You don't trust me.”

“No, I don't.” He dragged a finger through that wet spot on the table again. “It's not as if I don't have reason.”

Saint-Cyr folded his hands. “You came to me with a problem. If you want assurances everything will be done legally, you have them. I cannot guarantee Stahlwell won't suffer for his reckless decisions. Financially, most certainly. Losing you as a client will cost him a quarter of a million draks per year, tradestandard commission alone. That is far too high a percentage, by the way. If you're asking will I hurt him, I will do whatever it takes to ensure your safety while maintaining my good name.” He tapped his fingers on the table. “Now either you trust me, or you don't.”

“Fine.” Wulf slapped both hands on the table and leaned forward. “I trust you. Satisfied?”

“It will do. Now that's settled, we can get on with more important details. What do you want to do instead?”

“Instead of modeling?” Wulf rubbed his chin. “I'm not sure. I've only thought about what I don't want to do.”

“Which is? Wait. Let's order food first. I'm starving.” He gestured the waiter to their table. “Beef tenderloin steak.” He held his hands close together. “A filet about so big. His rare, cool in the center, mine medium. Baked potatoes with everything, his on the side. Field green salads, his with no tomatoes, and a berry vinaigrette on the side. Pour plenty of it all over mine and give me his tomatoes. Bring us the salad first. Do I need to remind you I only want organic?”

“No, sir. The Jade House serves nothing else. I'll bring the salads at once, Mr. Saint-

Cyr.” The waiter bowed away.

Wulf propped both elbows on the table, hands together. “You haven't seen me in twenty years, yet you ordered my favorite meal.”

“I'm the Harbinger, remember? All right. Go on, Wulf. What do you want to be when you grow up?”

At that, Wulf laughed. It had a lilting sound, like a voice singing. Saint-Cyr leaned forward, hoping to hear it again.

“I don't much care what I do, as long as I can use my brain and walk through a room without being mobbed.” He shrugged one shoulder. “It's not that I mind the fans. I don't have a private life. Anything I do is all over Imperinet the next day.”

“Happens when you're the top model in the empire, I imagine.” He sipped his whiskey. “You counted on that notoriety today.”

Wulf had the moxie to grin. “Yeah.”

“Private lives can be bought, my boy—sorry.” Saint-Cyr smiled. “Won't call you that again. They're not cheap, but nothing worth having is.” He nodded toward the rest of the room. “You notice no one has approached our table since you sat down.”

“Yes, I did.” Wulf rested his chin on one hand, an appealing pose. “It's like you have a force field up or something. No one's even glancing our way.”

“Being a boogey man has its advantages.” Saint-Cyr tapped near one whiteless eye. “Don't think we aren't being watched, however. The media is predatory.”

“Straight up right. But even the dumbest predators recognize the difference between easy prey and one with claws.”

With a laugh, Saint-Cyr folded his arms and rested against the chair's back. “True. Go on. What else don't you want?”

“I'm tired of the same thing every day. The locations change but it's always the same. I'm up before dawn, do the make up, fool with the hair, take this set of clothes off and put that set of clothes on. 'Sit here. Stand there. You'll need to be nude for this shot. Of course it's tasteful.' Right.” He pressed his temples. “All the flashing lights, the holocams spinning around to get the whole shot. 'Hold that pose. Smile. Smile more. Smile over here, please.’” He made a toothy grimace. “And then the very next shoot, it's 'Don't smile, lovey. No one wants to see all those teeth.' Grrrr!” Massaging his temples, eyes closed, he slouched. “Plain tired of it all.”

Saint-Cyr slid one finger along the edge of his glass. “Your life would sound like heaven to some.”

“It's not that I'm ungrateful for the opportunities I've had. I'd like to actually work. Use my mind instead of standing around getting paid to be stared at. It's brainless and mind-numbing. Most of my co-workers are pretty faces with nothing behind them.”

“Ah. Now we're getting somewhere.” He stroked the outside of his glass. “As I recall, you have more than one degree. What did you study?”

“Business communications. I picked up a dual degree in business administration and management, then added a third in NETway tradestandard communications.”

“Which you gained before the age of twenty-two. You have a wonderful mind. How much time did you spend working in those fields before you went into modeling?”

Wulf pressed his lips together. “You already know the answer.”

“Indulge me.”

He toyed with his drink before answering. “None.”

Saint-Cyr nodded. "Do you remember my advice when you decided to model right after graduation?"

"I can quote you in your own voice, even though you wrote it to me and didn't say it aloud."

"Is that so?" He narrowed his eyes, unwilling to let him see how much it pleased him that Wulf had read his letter. He'd agonized over writing it for days. "By all means, do."

"Continue to study so you'll be current in your field, my boy." Deep voice, perfectly pitched. "You might want to enter the business world one day."

Saint-Cyr tried not to smile too widely. "That was quite good, actually. You must be all the rage at parties."

Wulf rolled his eyes. "My mother loved that but I never did it for anyone else."

"Good. See that you don't." Saint-Cyr tapped the table. "Did you follow my advice?"

"Of course not!" That hot, bright smile flashed. "I was far too impetuous." Wulf stirred his drink. "Besides, I thought I'd be rich and famous and wouldn't need to work."

"Ah." Saint-Cyr tilted the nearly empty glass toward him. "And are you?"

"Yeah." He laid the stir on the table. "I didn't count on being bored by that." He sipped the drink, peered down into it and pulled out the lime twist, which he popped into his mouth whole. He moved it to one side of his mouth to speak. "Or that I'd want a new career at thirty."

"Mmm. What do rich old uncles know?"

Wulf covered his eyes. "I had that coming. But to be honest, I haven't thought of you as an uncle in years."

"No?"

Wulf lowered his head and smiled up at him through his lashes. The seduction in that pose sucked Saint-Cyr's breath away. "Far from it."

He held a hand over his stomach and swallowed against a throat tight with desire.

*You're misreading him. Down, boy.*

Waiters arrived with their salads, and for a few minutes, neither spoke, too busy eating to talk. Ravenous, Saint-Cyr had to remind himself to slow down. Relax. Enjoy the food as well as the company.

Helping himself to a hot breadstick, Saint-Cyr broke it in half. "Have you covered the things you don't want?"

"Mmm." Wulf poked through his salad, spearing mushrooms. "I can add some things I like, if you want."

He waved the bread. "By all means."

"I speak fluent Felis and Woeder, plus both dialects of Etymis off Kivahndo-Passat and can hold my own with Kelthian street slang. 'Yo down, yo boffy? Me square witchoo.'"

"Good lord." He dabbed his mouth with the napkin. "You sound like Senthys."

"Who?"

"One of the street boys I adopted a few years after your father died. He's a union-trained thief." He stabbed a few vegetables. "He's only fifteen, but what skill he has! Impossible to discipline though. He's a HalfKin and..." He waved the fork, negating his words. "Never mind. Long story. Suffice it to say I'm quite proud of him despite his troubles. You were saying?"

"I've done a lot of charity work. Chaired committees on childhood literacy, low-cost

housing, and preventing childhood blindness.” Wulf dipped salad in the dressing and held it while it dripped. “I enjoyed making sure everything worked together. That it all coordinated.” He lifted the food, lush lips closing around the fork as he pulled it slowly from his mouth.

Heart rate up, Saint-Cyr focused on shoving two grape tomatoes onto the tines of his fork. His hands shook from hunger—or was that desire? He stuffed the food into his mouth and chewed.

The silence held an edge of anticipation. Wulf continued to eat, each bite a tease of sultry motion. Spear, dip, pause, guide the long fork slowly into the sensuous mouth and lick the lips.

Saint-Cyr shifted on the seat, his cock stirring. “Um... D-do you, uh...” He tightened his jaw. *You dolt! You sound like one of his adolescent fans.* He coughed into his fist. “Is it the um, administration you like or working with people?”

“Both. I’m actually quite good at organizing things and directing people. The others in the committees followed my direction without quibbling.”

“Impressive. What else have you done?”

“Fundraisers. I co-chaired the ball last year in Tarth City to restore the concert hall of Destine Pietan Stadium.”

“I heard you were involved. I attended that, you know.” Saint-Cyr patted the napkin across his mouth. “I was sorry you weren’t there.”

“Me, too. I had prior commitments, but I was insanely proud of the fact you donated the lion’s share. I’m sure other than Her Majesty I was the only one who understood the importance of that building to you.” Wulf chased down a sweet pea that had rolled off his fork. He speared it and sucked it into his mouth. “Per my agreement with you, I let my co-chair approach you and stayed out of the picture.”

“I wouldn’t have turned you down, Wulf.”

“I knew you wouldn’t. But our agreement was that I would make it on my own. You wouldn’t give away your ties to me in any way. I didn’t want to succeed—even in that—based upon your influence. Not in anything.”

Saint-Cyr laid down his fork. “And now?”

Wulf studied his salad, poking his fork here and there. He met Saint-Cyr’s eyes. “I’m ready to take your advice. Do what you suggest.”

“Now that you need me, you mean.”

He had the grace to blush. “I’m sorry to admit you’re right.”

“So am I.” He moved his hands as the waiters returned with their entrees.

The scent of sizzling beef hit him in the stomach like a fist, hunger so acute he ached with it. One of the drawbacks of living forever—a metabolism that demanded protein several times a day. He stabbed the meat, cut off a bite and stuffed it in his mouth.

He almost growled at the delicious flavor. Rich, an overlay of butter and herbs, the seared edges tinged with smoke. He took another bite. And another. The butter and sour cream melting on the baked potato oozed down the salted brown skin and onto the plate. Saint-Cyr wiped his next slice of meat through it and moaned at the wonderful taste.

Wulf was watching him when he lifted his head. “I remember when I was little and you used to visit Father. At dinner, Mother would always give you the biggest piece of meat. I thought it was because you were important. I didn’t understand why you needed more until right before Father died.”

"Sorry." He dabbed at his mouth. "I haven't eaten since this morning."

"Don't apologize." He sliced the edge of his steak. The dark pink inside bled slightly. "Especially not for what you are. Not around me, of all people."

Saint-Cyr dug into the potato. "Delicious." The chives and cheese in the center beckoned. He mixed it into the rest of the sour cream and scooped out a forkful. "I hope you enjoy this as much as I do."

"Are all your appetites so intense?"

He hesitated, fork halfway to his mouth, hyperaware of the young man beside him. Saint-Cyr refused to meet his eyes while he had this much hunger in him. "Yes." He popped the food into his mouth and chewed.

Wulf hummed a response that sounded far too much like interest. Saint-Cyr concentrated on eating. They shared a companionable silence through most of the meal, broken only by the click and scrape of forks on china.

Wulf pushed away his plate long before it was empty. "Enough for me. I wish I could eat as much as you and keep my shape. If I tried to match you bite for bite I'd end up twice your size. Not to imply you're fat." He glanced around before speaking. "Can Sempervians get fat?"

He shook his head. "We pretty much stay around our healthiest weight. Never have to diet."

Wulf groaned. "Must be nice. I live on a diet. How tall are you? I remembered you being huge when I was small." He smiled. "Seems you're still much bigger."

"In tradestandard, I'm six feet five inches. And you're six even, unless you've grown recently."

"Not likely." He sipped his vodka, watched Saint-Cyr. "It must be nice to be able to eat whatever you want."

"There are drawbacks. Difficult to be polite when you're starving but etiquette demands you nibble."

He laughed. "I hadn't thought of that."

"For someone who knows your weakness, it's a quick tool to gaining surrender."

"So," Wulf lowered his voice, "could you actually die from starvation?"

Saint-Cyr ensured no one in the restaurant watched before answering. "A Sempervian would die faster from starvation than a human would. But it wouldn't matter. Once we went through rebirth, we'd come back just as strong, only to starve again. It's my least favorite way to die. Unfortunately, the only other person who knows that would take full advantage if he got the chance."

Wulf's grimace of sympathy said he knew to whom he referred. "I can't believe you shared that with me."

*Neither can I.* Saint-Cyr took another bite. *Talking to him like he's my confidante.* Once he'd swallowed, he gestured with the fork. "Order us some wine, will you? I was too hungry to think of it earlier. Pity the waiter didn't think of it."

Wulf beckoned the man over. "We'd like some wine, please. A good burgundy, if you have one. You may take this." He slid the plate toward him.

"Of course, sir." He picked up the plate. "We stock an excellent Skovron Burgundy from Whinbrice for Mr. Saint-Cyr. Would sir care for anything else?"

"That's all, thanks."

"Very well, sir." He hurried away.

Wulf sat back, trailing a fingertip through another spot of water on the table.

Saint-Cyr forced himself not to correct the behavior the way he would Senthys. Like his son, Wulf lived in the moment. Not a bad thing, all in all. He cut into the meat. "Tell me what you remember about your father."

"I was only ten when he died, so there are a lot of things I never knew about him. I knew he loved my mother. And me." He smiled at Saint-Cyr. "And he loved you. Matter of fact, I think my mother was a bit jealous."

He smiled at that. "Your mother was a force to reckon with."

He laughed. "No. She was a terror. Right up to the day she died." Wulf's handsome face grew sad, contemplative. "But she adored you in her own way. And she was as fiercely loyal to you as my father."

"You're the first Gabriel to desire a career beyond my service. Would you consider returning, now that you've had a taste of the worlds?"

"Father said guarding the Sempervian secret was the highest calling of his life."

Saint-Cyr patted his mouth. "That was hardly an answer."

"Sorry." He fiddled with the stir from his drink. "I don't know exactly what it was my father did for you."

"He never told you?"

He shook his head. "My father knew how to keep a secret. I remember when he first told me the truth about you."

He continued to cut up the meat as he listened, not eating it.

"He used to tuck me into bed with a story every night. On my tenth birthday, he told me he was going to begin a new story. He said if he told me some of it every night, I'd never be able to hear all of it even if I lived forever."

Saint-Cyr lifted his head and met his eyes. Pride and love stared back at him.

"He told me about a pioneer known as Cyr de Typhin who built bridges and dams and roads all over TARTH and Kelthia. How he worked beside his people even in the worst weather, never taking a break until they did. How he nursed them back to health when an epidemic hit one of the road camps. Lucky Typhin who never fell sick even when everyone else did. Father's great grandfather worked for him, he said."

Saint-Cyr pushed aside his plate, unable to continue.

"He showed me a history book with Typhin's likeness, from old fashioned photographs taken during that time. The next night he told me about Ran Holding, a Kelthian native who revolutionized the cattle industry on Mjuka by introducing new breeding techniques. How he fought for the farmers' rights against the empire—and won. Father's grandfather worked for him. Holding's picture was there, too. It wasn't until the next night, when he told me how his father worked for Neene Saint-Thomas that I realized Typhin, Holding, and Saint-Thomas were the same person."

The waiter returned with glasses and a bottle, which he opened and poured. Wulf deferred to Saint-Cyr, but he nodded.

Wulf tasted it. "Very good." He took the bottle. "Thank you. I'll pour."

The waiter gathered Saint-Cyr's plate and flatware as he left. Once alone, Wulf poured wine for Saint-Cyr and offered it to him. "Imagine my surprise when Father told me he worked for him, too."

Saint-Cyr laid his napkin beside his plate. "I asked you to talk about your father. Not me."



"I can't talk about him without talking about you. You were the meaning behind everything he did. I stayed up all night last night, thinking about that."

He sampled the wine. "What did you think when you learned the truth?"

"I thought my father was joking. He loved to tease me, so I didn't believe him. Then he showed me pictures of Cyr de Typhin standing next to Empress Destine Pietan." Wulf shook his head. "That moment is burned into my memory. To this day—twenty years later, I can still recall the impact it had on me. I was seeing a picture of you and Empress Destoiya, two people whom I'd actually met in real life, who had lived hundreds of years ago. I asked him why people didn't see that and realize it was you and her."

"And he said?"

Wulf smiled. "That people wrote it off as coincidence because humans only live a hundred and twenty years at best." He took a long drink of the wine.

Saint-Cyr rolled the goblet stem between fingers and thumb. "Were you frightened?"

"A little, at first. I remember climbing out from under the covers and onto Father's lap. He leaned back against the headboard with me and showed me more pictures. He told me how our family was the safeguard for these things. He taught me about the bridge over the Typhin River, and how all the symbols on it related to your past lives. He explained about Destine Pietan Stadium and how you'd helped build it, hundreds of years ago. He said it was our job to protect your secrets. He answered every question I asked." He smiled. "I'm sure he grew tired of them."

"Your father loved you more than anything, Wulf. He never grew tired of talking to you. Or about you."

"I imagine there was so much more he wanted to tell me. Teach me." He gazed at the tabletop, but his thoughts were obviously elsewhere. "I was so distraught when he died. It took a long time to get over that and get on with my life. I was mostly angry at him. And at you."

Those words struck Saint-Cyr like a brand to the heart. He drew back.

"I'm sorry." Wulf shook his head. "I didn't mean to hurt you. It was a child's anger, misdirected."

"I assure you, Wulf, I was broken by his death also. Your father had been my true friend for many years. I'd known him since he was a child. One of the odd things about living forever. I've known almost everyone since they were a child."

"You probably thought you and I would have the same relationship that you and my father had."

"Yes." He nodded, head down. "I'd hoped so. Thomas had such a nimble mind. He grasped concepts quicker than most people I've known. I could talk to him about anything and he was right there—with me." Saint-Cyr paused, the pain of loss still like a knife in the heart, even after so many years. "When your mother took you to TARTH to live, it felt as if I'd lost a child of my own."

"I used to cry myself to sleep because I missed my father." Wulf ran his tongue across his lower lip. "After a time, I cried because I missed you."

Saint-Cyr clenched a fist, fighting for control of his emotions.

Wulf gave him a smile that tugged at his heart. "I was too proud to admit it, even to my mother, but I wanted to go home. And to me, home was where you were."

Saint-Cyr pressed a hand across his mouth.

"I blamed you for his death. Mother tried to make me understand, but I was too

young and too angry.”

“Believe me, Wulf, I wanted to go to you. Comfort you the way I had your father when he was young. He was thirteen when his father suffered a heart attack. He and your grandmother lived with me until he grew up. I felt obligated to help you, but I was held at arm's length.” He bit his lips together. “I lost him, your mother, and you all at once. I don't mind telling you, it broke my heart.”

“What's it like, knowing the people you love are going to die, and you can't stop it? Knowing you're going to live no matter what happens to them?”

Saint-Cyr had to break away, turn his head.

“I spent hours last night, going over all the old stories my father used to tell me, studying you. Researching your past.” Wulf gazed into the wine. “When it occurred to me how you must feel when one of the Chosen dies, I realized I had no right to be angry at you. I knew even at age ten that you had nothing to do with my father's death. But back then, I thought it was unfair that you were going to live when my father had died. I thought you should have tried to stop it. That you could have fixed it somehow. Given him a piece of your life. And I was furious that you made me watch the evidence of his death.”

Saint-Cyr gripped the edge of the table. “You don't know how many times I've wished I could take back that action. Your father... I thought if you saw him die, if you understood that he couldn't come back, it would force you to believe that he was dead. That you'd pick up and go on... It was a stupid blunder, Wulf. The worst mistake of my life. I never meant to hurt you. Ever.”

“I know that, now. Last night I thought about everything that my father ever told me. Read about you in every history I could find on Imperinet. Remembered my mother's tales. You've always done the right thing where other people are concerned. I was wrong to hold my father's death against you.”

Saint-Cyr blinked away sudden wetness and rubbed at his eyes. The instant sting alerted him to the damage he'd done. These new contacts tore far too easily. Without the lenses, everyone in the place would soon know he wasn't human.

Withdrawing a pair of very dark glasses from an inner pocket, Saint-Cyr set them into place and stood. “Wulf, forgive me, but we must leave immediately.”

Wulf slid out of the chair and came around the table. “Is it because of me? I...”

“No, no. Nothing so dramatic.” He smiled. “I tore my contacts. I—we have to leave.”

“Oh.” Wulf fell in step beside him.

Walking with Wulf toward the door, he passed through the sweep of silence and barrage of black looks that accompanied him everywhere. Saint-Cyr put one foot in front of the other, focusing on each step, refusing to acknowledge the bold stares.

*My life's too damn much like Wulf's, only no one wants to get close to me.* Proper society snubbed him. The business world sang his praises. The underworld kept their heads down and scattered every time he appeared.

Wulf walked beside him as if he belonged there.

The cool air of outdoors instantly refreshed. He sucked it into his lungs. His driver pulled up and started to get out, but Saint-Cyr opened the door without waiting and climbed inside. Wulf joined him.

The driver pulled away from the curb without asking directions.

Wulf sat facing him. "Are you all right?"

"Mmm." Saint-Cyr shut his eyes, opened them again. Wulf remained close. "I'll have to remove my lenses."

"I've never seen you without them. Do you want me to hide my eyes or something?"

"No. Not necessary unless you'd rather not see." He reached beneath the glasses and rubbed one itching eye. "These damn things don't last." He removed the glasses and tucked them in a pocket. "I think it's the brand." Leaning forward, he pulled down his lower right lid with his left hand and reached up to peel off the lens.

Wulf gasped. "Oh, my God..."

Precisely the kind of reaction he needed to avoid inside the restaurant. Of all the Sempervians, he was the only one with eyes like this. No one alive remembered why he'd been created this way. Over the centuries, he'd hidden his eyes behind various kinds of lenses. Most appeared human. These solid black ones suited the Harbinger's personality. But all of them had a tendency to tear when he least expected it.

He removed the second one, folded a tissue around them both and put it back in his pocket. The complete silence might have meant anything. He wet his lips. "Wulf? Are you all right?"

No answer at first, then, "Yes." He coughed slightly. "I had no idea what to expect. Your eyes are... they're amazing. Beautiful. Uh, can you see better now that you have those off?"

"No. I'm quite blind without them."

"Blind? Oh. Oh... But, then how do the lenses... Never mind. Are you—Is there... uh, anything you need me to do?"

"My driver knows what to do." Saint-Cyr pressed his lips together to keep from smiling at his curiosity. Some things didn't change. "I'm fine. Once I get home, a new pair of lenses will put me back right again. Do my eyes bother you?"

"No! Not at all." Wulf's voice dropped. "I hate that you have to hide them." Warmth next to him said he'd moved to the same seat. "Are you sure you're all right?"

Saint-Cyr edged away, turning toward him. "I'm fine. Is this pity, Wulf?"

"Fascination, more like."

He could feel his warmth as Wulf leaned toward him. This was not the way he'd wanted to get closer. "By staring at me, you're taking advantage of a blind man, you know."

"I can't imagine anyone taking advantage of Luc Saint-Cyr." Wulf moved back. "Have you always been blind?"

"Yes." He propped himself in the corner. "There are only two times that I can see. When I wear lenses that cover my eyes, and when I've had enough sex to completely sate me. Being a Sempervian—that's not actually possible with a human lover." He cleared his throat. "At least, not often."

"But how do the lenses help you see? Do they see for you?"

"Not at all. They're simply thick, colored lenses that prevent..." He gestured to his own eyes. "Well ... this."

Wulf hmm'd. "Does that mean that you can't see your own eyes?"

"That's exactly what I mean."

"How odd." His hand bumped Saint-Cyr's. "Excuse me." He slid away a bit. "Have you ever seen them?"

“No. I've seen pictures, but never my eyes in the mirror. At least, not like they are now. When they look human, they're brown.” He picked at a thumbnail. “When I'm sated.”

“Sated.” Wulf's clean crisp scent came to him. “That means gorged or stuffed full doesn't it? Sated sexually?”

The heat of the car prickled sweat down Saint-Cyr's back. He swallowed. “Yes.” Not the way he'd pictured this at all. Out of his element, handicapped in a way he'd never expected, he loosened his collar so he could breathe.

“How do you get that way?”

He coughed politely. “Multiple orgasms. Marathon sex. I've achieved it with human lovers only a few times in any life. With other Sempervians, often.”

Wulf laughed. “Is that why the empress has so many lovers in her stable? Because she wants to be sated?”

The Chosen knew who all the Sempervians were. “That would be telling.”

He laughed again. “I love it. What's her reason? If yours is blindness, what does she have to overcome?”

“Are you asking as my Chosen, or a curious onlooker?”

Wulf went so silent, not even his breathing sounded. “I deserved that.”

“And?” Saint-Cyr waited, listening.

“I can't answer that yet.”

“Neither can I.”

Wulf moved again, turning. His knee brushed Saint-Cyr's thigh on the seat. “Does it make you uncomfortable not to be able to see?”

He considered how to answer. Wulf would take advantage no matter what he said. Saint-Cyr made a small shrug. “Yes. A bit.”

“Good.” The leather seat creaked as he scooted back. “I think I like having you a little off balance. Maybe we'll get along better that way.”

“There's no 'getting along' required, Wulf.” Saint-Cyr folded his arms. *Two can play the off-balance game.* “You'll be a guest in my home. All you need to do is obey.”

## Chapter Five

### Tarth City, Di Lusso District Nizamrak Building, Penthouse—"The Loft"

"Oh, I know you didn't just tell me to obey you." Wulf jammed his arms across his chest. *Of all the...* He snorted. "That's the same stupid thing my agent wrote on that picture. How can you throw out the word 'obey' like you have some kind of right to order me around?"

"I do, Wulf." Saint-Cyr sat there with his eyes closed, propped in the corner of the car as if he were sleeping. "As I said, you'll be a guest in my home."

"I thought guests were treated with respect."

A hint of a smile played about his mouth. "If you want my respect, obey me."

Wulf grunted with frustration and turned away. "You haven't changed at all. Still the same pig-headed..." He huffed a sigh.

The car's tinted windows let in plenty of the view. The Imperial Business District streets felt like the bottoms of canyons with all the skyscrapers that lined them. Even the shorter ones rose a hundred stories. The tallest, the Royal Arms Hotel, made an inverted pyramid shape to the thirtieth floor and then rose straight up one hundred and fifty stories. It looked as if an arrow had been thrown into the ground. Tyran engineering made it structurally sound.

As they entered the Di Lusso District, one structure rode against the sky, a dark bulwark towering above all the others. The highest building on Tarth, built by Luc Saint-Cyr of course. Did the man do anything half-way? Wulf shook his head. Not bloody likely.

"Is that where we're going?" Wulf turned back to Saint-Cyr.

"To what are you referring? I can't see, remember?"

"Sorry. The Nizamrak Building." Wulf gazed back at it. "The businesses you own are all headquartered there, aren't they?"

"Yes. The Bank of Tarth, For Women Only, Lucsondis Entertainment, and idBot, among others. I live on the top floor in the penthouse. I call it the Loft."

"Sounds intriguing."

"It's exactly like your home."

Wulf froze; a prickly fear making his neck hairs rise. "What do you mean, like my home? What do you know about my place?"

Saint-Cyr opened those eerie eyes of his, shut them again. "There was an article in Tarth Times last week about homes of famous people decorated by Nonnahs Rae. Same person did my place."

"Oh." Wulf relaxed a little, nodding. "I'd forgotten about that." He'd hired Rae because he wanted to pick the man's brain about the Harbinger's home, but never got the courage to ask. Ensuring Saint-Cyr still had his eyes shut, he pulled open a door on the side panel. *Huh. Full of booze.* He shut it again. "So, you saw pictures of my place?"

"Mmm. You have a flair for color that I lack. Most of the Loft is black and white. Chrome. White marble. Leather furniture. Quite basic. I was impressed with your style."

Very organized. Bright, full of life.” He smiled. “Rather like you, I imagine.”

“I hate my place. Rae did whatever he wanted. It's not me at all.”

Saint-Cyr scratched one eyebrow. “What is your style, then?”

“I don't know.” He fiddled with the lock on the door. “I never thought about it. It was a showcase, not a home.”

“Why did hire Rae then? He's not cheap. Seems a waste of money to decorate when you don't know what you want.”

Wulf twisted around on the leather seat to face him. “You don't know anything about me, Saint-Cyr, so don't presume to judge me.”

“That was not my intention.” He paused, sighed. “Nevertheless, I am sorry it came across that way.”

Unprepared for an apology, Wulf floundered for the right response. Saint-Cyr saved him from needing one.

“My rules are only to protect you, Wulf. Once we reach the Loft, I want you to make yourself at home. There are three floors. Your rooms will be on the first, mine are on the third. The second is off limits.”

“Why, what do you keep there?”

“If I wanted you to know, I wouldn't make it off limits.”

Wulf stewed over that for a moment. “So if I can't go to the second floor, how am I supposed to get to the third?”

“The third floor is my quarters. Why would you want to come there?”

“Oh, well... uh, I wouldn't,” he finished. *Smooth, Wulf. Why don't you tell him about your hot little shower fantasy while you're at it? To him, you're nothing more than Thomas Gabriel's son and a pain in the ass.* He sighed.

“Something wrong?”

“No!” He regretted his tone the moment he spoke. “Sorry. Didn't mean to snap at you.”

The car slowed. The driver's voice came over the com. “We've arrived, sir. We'll be home within two minutes.”

Darkness enveloped the car as it moved into the building's garage. When it stopped, instead of the doors opening, the car lifted.

The feeling of movement changed direction. “Are we in an elevator?”

“Yes. It's easier to come and go that way. We can fly from the top if needed.” Saint-Cyr sat up properly. “Part of that expensive private life.”

“Wow.” Wulf straightened his clothes.

When the car finally came to a stop, Saint-Cyr waited for the driver to open the door. “When you travel with me, Wulf, there are a few things to remember. You are first into the car and last out of it. You'll enter offices and buildings with me the opposite way.”

“I'm not your damned servant, Saint-Cyr.”

“No. You're under my protection. This is a precaution to ensure your safety.”

“Oh.” Wulf tightened his fists, biting into his lip. “Sorry.”

“Come along.” Saint-Cyr stepped out of the car.

When they entered the Loft, Saint-Cyr bid him welcome and then excused himself. The apartment's walls were all glass on the outside, revealing the twinkle of lights across the city. Wulf walked through a maze of couches and chairs to make his way to the bank of windows.

Directly below, Destine Pietan Stadium glowed under its night lighting. A trail of hovers circled on Stadium Loop, their red and white lights making a blurred trail. *Must be a concert or a play tonight. I wonder who it is.* He'd paid little attention to the news lately. TARTH City Park stretched all along one side, between this building and Top Tier, a dusting of lights halfway up the mountain to the starport.

The remnants of glory from a red and gold sunset glowed to the west, beyond the starport. From up here, some of the lighted runways showed. White lights tracked a giant starship liner as it settled into its berth.

As he walked along the windows, the palace came into view. Massive white marble pillars led to the palace entrance. Lights shone over its surface. Even from here, the Praetorian Guard's black uniforms showed against the bright surface of the marble courtyard. *Must be hundreds of them!* He slid hands in pockets and took in his first real view of the pageantry of the elite force protecting the empress.

Around another corner the rest of TARTH City loomed like a blaze of glowing candles. Lights burned to the horizon. The arrow of the Royal Arms had racing lights that outlined its shape, giving the impression of the arrow burying itself. "That's bizarre."

"What is?"

Wulf whirled to find Saint-Cyr behind him. "You scared the life out of me."

"Sorry." He adjusted his cuffs. The man had taken time to change out of his formal suit and now wore a relaxed fit white shirt, brown slacks and slippers. His eyes were back to their usual solid black. "You said something was bizarre."

"Oh." He turned back to the window, afraid he wouldn't be able to stop himself from raking his eyes down Saint-Cyr's body. *Damn, he's hot.*

The man's image reflected off the glass. Wide shouldered, he had a muscled body with strength evident in every movement. Wulf swallowed, his cock lifting, thickening. His balls tingled. The delicious lust the man inspired rose in him like a latent heat.

"What are you looking at?"

"Oh, nothing." He tried to step back from the window but Saint-Cyr had come up close behind him, his body blocking the movement. "Just the lights."

"You can see the palace from here." He reached over Wulf's shoulder to point it out. "Have you ever watched the Changing of the Guard?"

The man's heat radiated from him, burning Wulf with his nearness. Wulf tried to speak, had to clear his throat. "I—uh, not since I was about fifteen. My mother took me when the Conqueror announced the discovery of the Tyrans. We saw their ambassador sign the surrender documents that brought them into the empire."

"Hmm." Saint-Cyr's front almost touched Wulf's back. "The Changing of the Guard has occurred every four hours without fail since Birit 25, 4645." The man stepped aside and leaned against the glass to face him. "Do you know the significance of that date?"

"Mmm. It's the date Empress Destoiya began her reign. Is this a history lesson?"

"Sure, if you want one." The first truly relaxed smile he'd seen on the man transformed his face. Always attractive, when he smiled, the man oozed masculine charm. Powerful, rich, charismatic; Saint-Cyr had it all.

And totally off limits to one of the Chosen. No member of the Chosen had ever been his lover. *Does he even like other guys? Nothing in Father's notes indicates that, but maybe he wouldn't have recorded it. Why does Saint-Cyr want me to be one of the Chosen? Can't he see how I feel? If he knows so much about me, he must know I'm into*

*guys. Damn it, of all people to have the hots for.*

Wulf shook his head. "Maybe some other time. I imagine you know history better than anyone."

He shrugged. "I tend to forget details of some things, but remember others. I can tell you more than you ever wanted to know about building roads, but no longer have any idea how to breed cattle."

"Yeah?" Wulf tilted his head. "Couldn't you just put a couple of bulls together and let them go at it?"

Saint-Cyr laughed. "I think you'd need some cows in there, too, don't you?"

"Oh, yeah." He grinned. "Unless they were gay bulls."

He laughed again, harder this time. "Now *that's* an image I didn't want in my head." Saint-Cyr jerked his head to the left. "Come on, Wulf, I'll show you to your room."

\*

Saint-Cyr walked with Wulf toward the center of the building and the guest bedrooms. Having him here made him want to roar like a lion claiming a mate.

"I've given you a suite. Bedroom, sitting room, dressing area and bath. I was going to give you a room with a balcony, but until I can assess the level of threat you're under, I don't want to chance that."

"You think it's that bad?" Wulf looked up at him, worry marring his fine features.

"You'll be fine as long as you stay here. It shouldn't take more than a day or two to get the situation under control. Stahlwell is tied to a hefty crime element in Tarth City, but I have ties to a badder one."

"Badder." Wulf smiled, a brilliance of perfect white teeth that never failed to dazzle Saint-Cyr. "Shouldn't that be a 'worse' one?"

"Not these guys."

Wulf chuckled, and the sound caressed Saint-Cyr's soul.

*How can I fall in love with one of the Chosen? Especially with him right here in my own home. Oh, mercy... I've got to keep from touching him. I don't know what I'll do if he rejects me.*

Saint-Cyr dragged a hand across his mouth. The scent of Wulf's skin and hair rose to him like an aphrodisiac.

"Here we are." Saint-Cyr opened the door to the sitting room and gestured him inside. "There are a few things in the closet—I keep them for guests. Mostly unisex exercise wear, swimsuits and t-shirts, but there are several white dress shirts and black pants, all in various sizes. Something should fit. If it doesn't, I'll send out for clothing."

"No need. Don't go to any trouble." He removed a few things from his pockets and tossed them on an end table.

"No trouble at all. You're my guest." Saint-Cyr put his hands in his pockets to keep from straightening the items Wulf had discarded. He turned his back to them.

"You must do a lot of entertaining here." Wulf walked around the room, touching the furniture. "Everything in here is top quality. I'm impressed."

"Thank you." Having Wulf here inside his walls sent his heart soaring. A week ago he'd have chided himself for a fool to think such a thing could ever happen. He crossed the room and opened double doors to the bedroom. "I had McDoth turn down the bed for you."

"McDoth?" Wulf beamed at him. "I haven't seen him in years. How is he?"



"Very well, sir." The human-skinned android appeared from inside the bedroom. As always, he wore his formal butler's uniform. Light skinned like Wulf, he had short dark hair and deep blue eyes. "You seem to have grown up well, Master Wulf."

Wulf laughed. "Haven't been called 'Master Wulf' for awhile." He shook hands with the android. "It's good to see you again, McDoth."

"Welcome, home, sir. If I may assist you in any way during your stay here, please do not hesitate to call upon me."

"Thank you."

The android bowed to Wulf, then to Saint-Cyr, and left the suite.

"Gosh, he looks so human. You could almost forget he's not. I get such a kick out of hearing him talk. He's so formal." Wulf shivered.

"Are you cold? Or did McDoth frighten you?"

"Frighten me?" Wulf laughed. "I used to climb up him like a tree when I was little and poke him. He never did a thing about it except tickle me. I'm just a bit cold, that's all." He rubbed his arms. "Must be a chill in here."

Saint-Cyr opened a closet door and pulled out a thick terry robe, which he held for Wulf. "This should warm you a bit."

"Thank you." He slid his arms into it.

Saint-Cyr tucked it around him and folded the lapels across one another. Wulf stood silently while he adjusted it. The whiskey brown eyes beheld him with such an expression of love it rattled him. Saint-Cyr released him and stepped back.

"Sorry. I should let you ... do that."

Wulf ducked his head. "It's all right." He tied it around himself. "I appreciate your hospitality. You didn't have to take me in."

He waved aside the comment. "Don't be absurd. It's no trouble. You're family."

Head tilted, Wulf gazed up at him. "Is that what I am to you? Family?"

"Of course." Saint-Cyr fought the notion that Wulf was asking for more. *He's made it clear he wants no part of you, old boy. Don't go getting your heart broken over him.* He smiled. "What else would you be?"

Wulf hesitated, his lips parted as if he were about to speak, and then he shook his head and smiled. "Yeah. What else? Even so, thank you."

Saint-Cyr wet his lips, searching for something else to say. He rubbed his fingertips across the top of his head, put his hands behind him.

Wulf shifted his weight from one foot to the other, back again, looking everywhere in the room except at him.

"Uh, listen." Saint-Cyr clasped his hands before him. "Why don't I get out of here and let you get some sleep?" He gestured to the phone. "If you need anything, pick it up and dial one. McDoth will see to you right away. He doesn't sleep, so he won't mind."

"Thank you." Wulf gazed up at him through his lashes.

His heart melted at the sight. After a moment, he rubbed the back of his neck. "Um, if you dial two, you'll get me. I'm a light sleeper. If you need something McDoth can't get for you, call me. You can watch Imperinet from the bed. There's a screen on the ceiling." He pointed up. "McDoth will have your clothes here by tomorrow morning. You'll be able to shave with your own razor."

"Thank you."

"Um, is there... uh..." *Oh gods, I'm doing it again. Pull yourself together, Luc.* "Is

there anything else you need? Pajamas?”

That hot smile flashed at him again as Wulf lowered his gaze. “Not really. I think I'll take a long hot bath and just soak. I hope it won't bother you—I prefer to sleep nude.”

The image of Wulf lying naked in bed, sprawled in sleep, brought Saint-Cyr's cock all the rest of the way up. His balls almost throbbed. The urge to drag Wulf into his arms made him take a step closer. *Oh, gods, is that a smile—Is he flirting with me?* Saint-Cyr swallowed. *Snap out of it, Luc. He's your Chosen.* He shook his head. “Fine with me. McDoth won't care.”

“Such a big bed. Plenty of room for two in there.” Wulf sauntered toward it and tested the springiness of the mattress with both hands. “Just the way I like it. Hard.”

*Oh, gods. I have to get out of here.* Saint-Cyr turned and headed back toward the sitting room door. He paused, not daring to turn back. “Good night, Wulf. Pleasant dreams.”

## Chapter Six

### The Loft Sumertsag 24

Wulf woke and rolled over against Luc's warm body, snuggling closer. One strong arm looped around Wulf's shoulders and tugged him right up next to him. Eyes still closed, Wulf wrapped his arm over Luc's chest and pushed himself upward. He pressed his mouth against Luc's shoulder.

Why was he wearing clothes? Wulf stroked a hand across the man's chest. It felt like tweed. *Damn, he's already dressed?* He opened his eyes.

"Fuck." He'd been cuddling a pillow. That hot morning snuggle had been the tail end of an erotic dream. He lifted the sheets, took a peek, and groaned. Great. A *wet* erotic dream.

He wiped himself off with the sheet; sorry as hell that McDoth was going to find the evidence. Would he tell Saint-Cyr? He groaned again, threw off the covers and rolled out of bed.

"Good morning, sir." The android was exiting his bathroom.

Wulf yanked the sheet off the bed and wrapped it around him. *Stupid for a model that strips ten times a day in front an entire photo crew. Especially in front of an android.* But he fastened it around his waist anyway.

"Your things arrived last night, sir. I took the liberty of placing your toiletries in your bathroom. Shall I run water for your bath?"

"Thanks, McDoth, but that's not necessary. I can take care of myself."

"No trouble, sir. I'm glad to have you here. Mr. Saint-Cyr gives me too little to do." He turned and went back into the bathroom. The sound of water running into the tub followed.

When Wulf entered, McDoth gestured to a stack of fluffy white towels on a low black table set with two large white candles. "I replenished your supply. Did you sleep well?"

"Yes, thank you." He hesitated, then unfastened the sheet and handed it to him. "I'm sorry, McDoth, but I kind of..." He swallowed. "Um..."

"Not to worry, sir." The android wadded up the sheet and tucked it under his arm. "You're not the only one this morning." He winked.

Wulf's mouth dropped open but that turned to a swift snicker. "Oh, yeah? What do you know?"

McDoth brought a finger to his mouth, signaling a secret.

Climbing into the oversized tub, Wulf sank into the bubbling water. "I stayed in this thing last night till I was an albino prune, but the water never got cold."

The android hung a towel within Wulf's reach. "The elements inside the tub keep the water warm." With a glance toward the door, he added, "He hates a lukewarm bath."

Wulf chuckled. "Me, too. Is there a gym in this building?" He slid down to his neck. "I like to start the day with weights. I train five days a week at home."

"There's a private gym on this floor. Mr. Saint-Cyr likes his privacy, you know."

McDoth laid out his razor. "When you leave your room, turn right and it's the third door on the right. He usually exercises first thing also."

"Oh, yeah?" Wulf cupped a handful of steaming water and let it trickle through his fingers. "Thanks, McDoth."

"I've activated the shaving cream dispenser for you, sir." He patted a chrome spigot near the water faucet. "Just pump it once to prime it and it will dispense hot cream."

*Pump it for cream. Mmm.* He laughed to himself. *I'm turning into a perv like Yvan.* He nodded. "I wondered what that thing did. Thanks, McDoth. I could get totally spoiled living here."

"That, I believe, is the idea." The android bowed slightly and exited the room.

Wulf picked up a fresh bar of soap. "Spoiling me is the idea, huh?" He sat up and started lathering the soap. "Gotta get through this bath and go see if the Man is still exercising."

\* \* \* \*

Saint-Cyr pushed himself to complete one more set of crunches. He'd done four sets of forty already, and only needed one more set in a different position. When finished, he stretched out on the mat and let himself rest for a minute.

The slow fans overhead cooled his damp skin—he'd forced himself to sweat. The erotic dream he'd had about Wulf still lingered in his mind despite the torture he'd put his body through this morning.

*Curled up in bed, Wulf's head on his shoulder, they watched a game on Imperinet. Neither cared who won; it was the male camaraderie that mattered. Lovers who were friends first. While the crowd cheered, their kisses grew deeper, longer, until Wulf pulled him down on top of him and submitted to—*

The pounding drums in the background music changed, and he rolled over and got up, heading for the weights.

"I must stop thinking about Wulf." He loaded up sixty pounds of free weights and gripped a set in each hand. Today was his day for focusing on his shoulders, back, and forearms. He faced the mirrored wall, adjusted his grip and lifted.

Wulf chose that moment to enter the workout area, dressed in hot pink shorts and white gym shoes.

The weights sailed over Saint-Cyr's shoulders and clunked the floor with a thud.

Dancing out of the way as they rolled toward him, Wulf flashed him a smile of perfect white shiny teeth and warm rosy lips. His eyes sparkled with merriment. "Guess I startled you."

"Startled me?" Saint-Cyr chased down the weights. "I almost threw these things through the wall."

"Sorry." Wulf put a foot on top of one to stop it.

"No sweat. It's ok."

Saint-Cyr had the treat of picking up the weight beneath Wulf's foot and rising to see the entire length of his muscled leg. For a man with dark hair, Wulf's leg hair was more like golden fuzz. What would all that soft hair feel like beneath his hands? His mouth? In contrast, Wulf's ripped abs and tanned chest were completely smooth. Did he shave? Did he shave anything else? He finally reached the top of Wulf's muscled body and his gorgeous, clean-shaven face. The man was grinning; obviously aware Saint-Cyr had

taken his time feasting on his half-bared body.

*Oh, mercy. I'm going to need another cold shower.*

"Morning." Tied around Wulf's brow was a band of hot pink cloth. He wore a necklace of multicolored beads and had a braided strip around his right wrist. He cocked his head to one side. "Ok if I work out in here? I'd hate to screw up my regimen."

"Uh ... uh huh." Saint-Cyr slapped himself mentally. *Try to speak in full sentences, you dolt!* "Uh ... I'm almost finished."

"No need to rush off." Wulf glanced around and whistled in appreciation. "You've got everything in here. There's plenty of room for two." He pointed toward the treadmill. "Ok if I start there?"

"Sure." Saint-Cyr plunked the weights back on their bench and turned his back to towel his face. Face hidden in the towel, he managed a peek at Wulf in the mirror.

His heart kicked in like he'd started cardio—Wulf was checking out his ass. From the expression on his face, he liked what he saw. Like Wulf, he wore only shorts and shoes. *Well, what do you know...* Saint-Cyr hid his face a moment longer, trying to control his smile. *So, the beauty wants a piece of the beast, eh? You've still got it, old boy.*

"What's this control pad do?" Walking at a slow, beginning pace, Wulf turned his head toward him. "It has a red horn on it like these new shoes I've been modeling."

"Don't push that unless you're holding on." Saint-Cyr tossed the towel over his shoulder and came up next to him. "It's a prototype that one of my holding companies is testing. The Tyrans want to market their low gravity devices in sports equipment."

"No shit! It must be the same maker, then. That's in the shoes, too. You can walk forever in those things." Wulf grabbed hold of the handlebars of the treadmill. "Spot me and crank her up. I wanna see what this baby can do."

"Are you sure?"

"Hell, yeah."

Saint-Cyr had to laugh. "You asked for it." He tapped the pad once. "This is the lowest setting."

Wulf picked up the pace. "It just seems faster. I thought I'd float or something."

"Give it time." He leaned against the wall beside him, enjoying the view.

The perfect symmetry of Wulf's ribbed abs flexed as he walked at a brisk pace. When Saint-Cyr was sure he was keeping up without difficulty, he reached over to the pad. "Ready for the next level?"

"Go for it."

He tapped the pad, increasing the speed, but reducing the effort.

Wulf started to sweat. "Whew!" Almost running, he hung on the handlebars, his knuckles white. His body worked like a perfect machine, legs pumping, chest rising and falling.

"You ok?"

He nodded. After a moment he asked, "You got more?"

"You *sure* you want it?"

Wulf fixed a man-eating grin on his face. "Give me all you got."

*Wouldn't I love to do that...* Saint-Cyr tapped the pad again. He'd been on this thing countless times. The third level made your heart race like the wind, but your joints didn't ache. Your feet didn't swell. Your knees felt no jarring pain, no pressure.

Wulf was experiencing that now and his face showed it. His eyes lit up. Head back,

he laughed like a child at play. “This is great!”

Saint-Cyr let him run for five more minutes. “Time to cycle down.” He pressed the pad again, slowing him down a bit.

By the time he'd cycled back down through all three levels, Wulf's body shone with sweat. He slowed to a stop and leaned against the handlebars.

“Now *that* was a workout.” He motioned to the towel around Saint-Cyr's neck. “Borrow?”

Before Saint-Cyr could hand it to him, Wulf reached out and took it, brushing the back of his fingers against his chest. Saint-Cyr held his breath a moment at the touch.

Wulf wiped his face, pulled off the pink sweatband and rubbed the towel through his hair. “I had no idea it would be that good.”

“The public isn't ready for one of these.”

“I sure am!” Wulf ran his hands over the machine. “What does something like this cost?”

“Somewhere in the neighborhood of fifty thousand draks.”

Wulf made a face. “Ouch! Not going to be in my apartment any time soon, I can tell you that.”

Saint-Cyr patted the control panel. “I have one of these in every house I own.”

An alarm went off. Wulf lifted his head and looked around.

“Reminder.” Saint-Cyr grabbed up another towel. “Enjoy the rest of your workout. It's time for me to go to work. Remember, you stay here where you're safe while I investigate Stahlwell. You can do anything you like. Rest, watch Imperinet, exercise, play games. Shop. McDoth will give you my credit codes. Buy anything you want.”

Wulf blushed. “Thank you, but I'm fine just hanging out. Will I see you at dinner?”

“Wouldn't miss it.” He took in Wulf's honey brown eyes and thick dark lashes. *I'd be the luckiest man in this empire, having him to come home to every night.* He gave Wulf a satisfied smile. “See you tonight.” As Saint-Cyr walked away, he rolled up the towel and snapped it across Wulf's ass.

\* \* \* \*

In addition to the high protein breakfast McDoth had served him—using “only organics as Mr. Saint-Cyr directed”—the android pampered Wulf with a massage after his workout. According to him, simply more of the “spoil him” treatment Saint-Cyr had ordered.

*Oh, yeah. I could definitely get used to this.*

He lolled on the couch watching a game on Imperinet most of the morning, eating balanced carb snacks McDoth made for him and drinking organic juice. Afterward, he sprawled on the couch and slept.

McDoth woke him for lunch, fed him fresh lobster and steamed vegetables with a buttery dipping sauce for both.

Saint-Cyr's Imperinet connections provided more than two thousand channels, and that was only in the sports lineup. McDoth confirmed the Man had every channel available in the empire. Wulf wondered idly what the bill cost. He spent an hour surfing and couldn't find a single game he wanted to watch.

In the bedroom, all his clothing had been completely unpacked and was hanging in the closets as if they'd been made to suit him. Every drawer held his things, folded

precisely the way he'd had them at home. His shoes were on one side of the lower closet. Just like home.

"Hmm."

Wulf stood in the middle of the room and turned all the way around. The entire room was laid out like his. The placement of the bed and nightstands, closets, bathroom, dressers, even the mirrors. He returned to the sitting room and did a slow perusal here, too.

His couch was a different style and color, but it was placed to the left of the door, like this one. Four lamps, two vases, all placed exactly as his were at home. A painting over the chair... He gasped and went closer to it. The signature read Tenomear. One of the premier artists in the empire. Wulf's was a print. No doubt this was the original.

These rooms were duplicates of his apartment.

Saint-Cyr had said Nonnahs Rae decorated his place. What if he'd hired Rae after he decorated Wulf's? Paid him to duplicate the style here?

But why?

Saint-Cyr had ordered his favorite meal. Insisted on bringing him home where he could keep him safe. He hugged himself. What if Saint-Cyr had been stalking him? Watching his every move.

Suddenly, the air felt closer, heavier. *What was it he'd said... he expected me to obey? Obey what? Am I a prisoner here?*

*Oh, God.*

Wulf ran to the door, placed his hand on the knob and prayed it would open. When it did, he stuck his head out and checked both directions before going to the end of the hall. Pressed against the wall, his heart pounding so loud he feared McDoth would hear it, he listened for the android.

McDoth was elsewhere; he could hear him humming as he worked.

Wulf returned to his bedroom, found his ID and debit bracelet where he always kept them at home and went back to the hallway. Tiptoeing to the end, he listened for a moment before walking boldly toward the door.

No one stopped him. Once outside, he breathed a sigh of relief and took off on a dead run for the elevator—and freedom.

## Chapter Seven

### **Nizamrak Building, Suite 4100 For Women Only, Corporate Headquarters Sumertsag 24**

Saint-Cyr's assistant announced McDoth's call and put him through. "Well?" he leaned back in his chair as the android appeared. "How is our guest?"

"He sneaked out about five minutes ago, sir."

The clock on the wall read 2:43. "He lasted quite awhile. It seems you won this bet, McDoth. I was certain he'd take off before lunch."

The android quirked a smile. "The Fists were playing on Imperinet this morning."

"Oh, that's right. The NETway Cup Championship." For Women Only had sponsored part of the game but Saint-Cyr had sent one of his assistants to attend in his stead. He shrugged. "Well, at least he likes my favorite team." He patted his fingertips together. "Have you called idBot?"

"Of course, sir. I waited until I heard the door close. Wouldn't want him to think I was spying. They have him in view as we speak."

"Tell them to call me if he endangers himself. Otherwise, they're to let him enjoy himself and stay out of his way. I don't want him to know he's being followed."

"Very good, sir. They can track him easily, however. The soap I gave him had a dusting of trackules. He's coated with them. They could see him in complete darkness a mile away."

"Excellent. Keep me posted."

Saint-Cyr leaned forward and disconnected. He stood and went to the windows, hands clasped behind him. "Wulf, Wulf, Wulf." He drew in a deep breath, let it out slowly. "You truly must learn to obey me."

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### **Tarth City, Di Consueto District Renyoj Building, Park Serenity Overlook, Feeyona's flat**

Wulf leaned on the buzzer with one hand and beat on the door with the other until Feeyona Joie opened it. He swept past her and slammed the door behind him, pressing his back against it.

"What the hell are you doing?" Fee crossed her arms.

"Fee, you've got to help me." He gripped her by the arms. "I have to get out of town for a few days. I need cash."

"What's wrong?"

"Long story." Wulf hugged himself, chilled in the apartment's cool air. "Luc Saint-Cyr is after me and I..."

She gasped. "Oh, my God." She reached past him and bolted the lock. "Come away from the door." She drew him into the kitchen and guided him to a chair. "How in the worlds did you get mixed up with the Harbinger?" She pulled up the chair next to him.



Wulf hung his head and covered his face with both hands. "You're better off not knowing, Fee." He lifted his head and found her studying him. "Please trust me."

She ran the tip of her tongue across her lower lip, back and forth, before finally nodding. "Ok. If you need help, you know I'll give it. Tell me what you want me to do."

\* \* \* \*

### **For Women Only, Corporate Headquarters**

Sitting at the conference table, Saint-Cyr let his staff hash out the contract details of the latest concert they were handling. FWO covered female celebrity clientele only. The more powerful the woman, the more protection she needed, so most of his staff was female also, to provide the client an extra measure of comfort and personal security. He covered his smile. For beautiful women, they dickered like street peddlars.

His assistant entered quietly and came to his side, bent down to whisper in his ear. "IdBot is on the line, sir."

Saint-Cyr pushed back from the table. "Excuse me, ladies. I'll be back in a moment."

When he reached his office, the image of Shohn Lexius awaited him. One of the feline Kin, her catlike ears flicked to attention as he entered. Her black and green uniform fit impeccably. Shohn rested her clawed left hand on the hook knife attached to her upper thigh and crossed her right hand over her chest as she bowed.

"What's going on, Shohn?"

"Mr. Gabriel entered the apartment of a female friend, Mr. Saint-Cyr. According to our scans, she linked to an Imperinet travel site and bought transportation off-planet using a transferable account."

"Meaning she can give the tickets to someone else."

"Yes, sir."

"Hmm." He rubbed a hand across his mouth. *I underestimated him.* More disappointed than angry, Saint-Cyr nodded. "Anything else?"

"Mr. Stahlwell hired private investigators to research you, sir."

He chuckled at that. "Good. I hope they talk some sense into him. Threatening his highest moneymaker is stupid by anyone's standards. Anything new on him that we can use?"

"Yes, sir. He was named after his father's older brother, James, but his father legally changed the family name before he was born. It used to be Stalkos."

"Ah ha!" Saint-Cyr snapped his fingers. "That's why it sounded so familiar."

"Sir?"

"James Stalkos was my partner years ago, before he embezzled company funds and almost bankrupted me. This isn't about Wulf at all. Jim Stahlwell is attacking Wulf to get to me. I put his uncle in prison."

"So it's some kind of trap for you?"

"Mmm." He pressed his hands together and tapped them against his mouth. "Find out if Stalkos is still in prison. I'm betting he's been released. Check out all the holding companies Stahlwell's linked to and research his financial situation. The only way he'd give up sure money is to have guaranteed funds already on hand."

"Yes, sir. How should we handle Mr. Gabriel? Stahlwell is still after him. We heard rumblings on the street about a contract."

“Stalkos is a maniac. Give me the address of Wulf's friend, send six of your best guards over there and have them wait for me. I'll take care of Wulf myself.”

“Yes, sir. Beaming the address to your desktop now.” She saluted. “Shohn out.” The image faded.

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**Tarth City, Di Consueto District**  
**Renyoj Building, Park Serenity Overlook, Service area**

Wulf left Feeyona's flat with a pocket full of tradestandard cash and a transferable ticket to Porosen'la. The central jump off point in the empire, he could catch a flight from there to any planet he chose. Not that it would stop the Harbinger—he had no illusions about that. But it might throw him off. Slow him down.

At least until he could think of a better way to hide.

He took the express elevator to the ground floor and then walked down the stairs to the service area in the basement. As he exited the stairwell, a shadow loomed in front of him.

Wulf drew back, waited a moment, but the shadow was only from one of the cleaning droids. Wulf poked his head outside the door. The basement was quiet. On the far end, another pair of bots cleaned the concrete floors, the lights on top of the units blinking amber. The entire garage smelled of grease, soap, and the faint scent of cats.

He'd taken no more than four steps before a hand cupped over his mouth from behind him and two strong arms dragged him back against a body as hard as steel.

## Chapter Eight

### Tarth City, Di Consueto District Park Serenity Overlook, Service area

Fighting panic, Wulf breathed deeply through his nose. His years of workouts in Tyran Ustijuj trained him to go still; to wait for any opportunity. The arms holding him gripped like iron bars. Android? Kin? Big son-of-a-bitch, whoever. The hand covering his mouth loosened as his captor stepped back, pulling him along as he did.

Wulf struck. Dropping out of the loosened embrace, he rammed his booted foot back against his captor's shin and threw his weight into it, slid down and stomped the top of the man's foot. At the same time, he twisted and brought his elbow up into the solar plexus—his other hand bracing it. It felt like he'd hit a brick wall. He continued his quick drop, wrapping an arm around the man's upper thigh as he thrust himself sideways. He toppled his captor, rolled away and sprang to his feet.

Sprinting for the lighted exit, Wulf wasted no time looking back.

The tackle took him down hard.

The wind knocked out of him, Wulf fought to breathe as the man flipped him from his stomach onto his back. He struggled to squirm out from under him. Free himself. Get away.

His captor lay atop him, holding Wulf's arms above his head, pinned to the ground. Wulf regained his breath, gathered his strength to fight—and went completely still.

The black eyes of Luc Saint-Cyr came into focus.

Wulf didn't move. The heat of the man's body alongside his made sweat prickle everywhere they touched, from thigh to shoulder. Against all reason and sense, his cock reacted to their closeness. This was too much like the fantasies he'd had recently of himself bound and Saint-Cyr taking him repeatedly, forcing him to orgasm again and again. Making him beg to stop, stop...

He gulped air, dug a heel into the ground and tried to shove Saint-Cyr off him, but the man squeezed his wrists within one hand and held him as easily as if he hadn't struggled.

*Oh, stars, what would it be like in bed with this man?* He forced that from his mind and continued wriggling.

"Wulf, stop it." He brought one hand to his own mouth, a finger in front of his lips.

This felt too much like sex, too much like a game. His ears rang, heart pounding. Wulf bucked and twisted under him. "Lemme up!" He jerked and fought.

Saint-Cyr clamped a hand over his mouth again and brought his own down closer to Wulf's ear. "Stop fighting me!" The urgent whisper felt hot against his skin. "There's a killer loose down here. My men are trying to pin him down. Be quiet." He moved his hand.

"There's no—mmpf!"

Saint-Cyr's hand cut off the rest of his words. "Wulf!" Ice practically formed in the air from the tone of his whisper. "Will you be quiet! What the hell is wrong with you? I'm trying to save your life."

Wulf stopped fighting. Saint-Cyr's weight crushed his chest. The adrenaline racing in his system put his heart on overload. Sweat dripped into his eye. He tossed his head.

Running feet sounded just over from them. One set approached. "Mr. Saint-Cyr?"

"Did you get him?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Excellent." He released Wulf and went to his knees, then stood and held down a hand to him.

He knocked it aside and rolled over, getting up on his own.

Five Kin in black and green idBot uniforms dragged a human male in the uniform of a utility worker into view. Struggling between two of them, hands behind him, the human fixed him with a stare of pure menace. Wulf backed away, angling himself slightly behind Saint-Cyr.

"Thank you," Saint-Cyr told the Kin. "Good job."

The leader saluted him. All six escorted the human out of the area.

Saint-Cyr turned toward Wulf. "Stahlwell took out a contract on you last night. Apparently being seen with me only made you a bigger target." He dusted off his hands. "You could have been killed."

"A ... contract? T-to kill me?" Wulf dragged a shaking hand through his hair. "Are you sure?"

He twisted his mouth. "I wouldn't make that up." He brushed off his clothes and limped toward a low dividing wall. "Sure didn't expect you to fight like that."

"I—I didn't know it was you. I was trying to get away."

"I noticed." Saint-Cyr leaned against the wall. Pulling up his pant leg, he ran a hand across a skinned area on his shin. "You kicked the hell out of me. Where'd you learn to do that?"

"I took martial arts lessons from the time I was eleven."

Saint-Cyr snorted. "Figures. I probably paid for those." He grimaced. "And now I'm paying again. I think you broke my foot."

Wulf set a hand over his mouth.

"Lucky for me I heal fast." He tossed him the mobile. "Here. Call the driver. Press one."

Flipping it open, he did as requested. The driver's image appeared above the handheld. "Yes, sir?"

"We're in the service area. Mr. Saint-Cyr is hurt. Can you bring the car, please?"

"At once." The image faded.

Wulf tossed him the mobile.

"So, tell me." Saint-Cyr pocketed it and leaned back against the wall. "Where were you headed?"

"Does it matter?"

"Not really. The fact is you left my home after I told you to stay there." He shook his head. "Disappointed, Wulf. I thought you were bored and wanted to get out, but when your friend bought you tickets off planet, I..."

"You bugged me?" Wulf made fists. "How dare you?"

Saint-Cyr narrowed his black eyes. "How dare I what? Have idBot follow you? Bug you with trackules? Spy on you? Protect you?"

Wulf threw out his arms, speechless at the casual confession. He turned his back.

"Oh, God." He shook his head. "I can't believe I ever trusted you! Every time I get close to you, you do something to push me away." He whirled to face him. "How can you run roughshod over my life like that? As if I have no rights at all? As if I'm nothing."

"Nothing?" Saint-Cyr stood, wincing. "Is that what you think? That I don't value you?" He ran a hand across his hair, mouth tight. He tilted back his head and blew out a breath. "Good, lord, Wulf." When he finally gazed straight at him, Saint-Cyr had tears in his eyes. "I was trying to protect you. If I hadn't, you might be dead right now."

He flinched. Saint-Cyr angry he could handle; gentle undid him.

"Wulf, how could you even think I wouldn't care for you?" He closed his eyes and turned his head. "You are everything."

The car rolled into view and the driver hopped out and trotted over to assist Saint-Cyr. Wulf hesitated, then put himself on the other side of the Man and maneuvered a shoulder under his arm. Together they got him into the car.

Wulf got in on the other side. "I guess it's safe for me to go home, now. I'll come and get my things."

"That was only the first hit man. There are three more. Stahlwell wants to make sure you die."

Swallowing repeatedly, Wulf took in those words. His hands trembled. "Four?"

Saint-Cyr nodded, leaned his head against the seat. "Ultimately, it's me he's after. Turns out I put his uncle in jail. He knew he could get to me if he killed you. I believe he started threatening you so you'd ask me for help. Once he had me involved, the only use he had for you was over."

*I've been such a fool.* He sank back against the seat. "So... you were trying to protect me when you said I should stay inside."

Saint-Cyr rolled his head toward him. "What did you think? That I was keeping you prisoner?"

Wulf turned away.

"I see." His pained laugh sounded too loud in the car's interior. "You must truly hate me."

Stuffing a knuckle into his mouth, Wulf bit down. "I'm sorry. I..."

"Save it." Saint-Cyr lifted his right leg to the opposite seat and rubbed his knee. "You owe me no apologies. I should have known you couldn't forgive me."

"When I saw how alike my room was at your place compared to my own flat, I thought..." Wulf shut his eyes, unwilling to continue.

"So you thought I was stalking you?" Saint-Cyr tossed back his head. "I told you my house was exactly like yours and that Rae was my decorator. And in case you forgot, you had him decorate your place *after* he finished mine, not the other way around. Every room in my house is done the same way. He's notorious for his one-way designs. Beds are always on the north, couches on the south. You *really* didn't pay any attention to him, did you?"

Wulf shook his head, too ashamed to meet his eyes.

"Anything else you care to accuse me of while you're at it? Might as well get it out in the open. Maybe you thought I planned to murder you in your sleep."

Wulf clenched his fists. "That's not funny."

"Not in your sleep, then. Maybe I'd poison your food. I know." He snapped his fingers. "I was going to be out of town and a burglar was to break in..."

“Stop it!” Wulf rounded on him.

“...and kill you while you tried to defend your home. Just like your father.”

Wulf set hands over his ears. “Please stop!”

Saint-Cyr gripped his hands and pulled them away. “I didn't kill your father, Wulf! My only sin was I wasn't there to take the bullet for him. If I'd been there it would have been me who died. Not your father. I could've come back from death, but he couldn't. That's really why you hate me. Because it wasn't me who died!”

Wulf tossed his head, fighting to break free. When Saint-Cyr released him, Wulf withdrew across the car as far as he could and huddled in the corner.

“You were so damned determined that I could give your father one of my lives and bring him back, like I was some kind of cat with lives to spare. I would've given anything to protect you from that, Wulf. I loved your father like a brother. I loved you.”

Wulf braced elbows on his knees and cradled his wet face. His chest hurt, throat too constricted to breathe.

“That's why I made you watch the security vid of his death. I wanted to reach you. Show you that he couldn't come back.” Saint-Cyr's voice broke. “Oh, God, Wulf, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry for everything.”

Wulf pushed himself back against the seat, twisted to face him.

Saint-Cyr held one hand over his mouth, tears tracking down his face.

As if a dam had burst within him, warmth cascaded through Wulf's heart. He twisted around, kneeling on the seat as he leaned in and gathered Saint-Cyr in his arms.

The man lifted his head, his confusion plain.

“I'm the one who should be sorry, Luc. So sorry.” He drew Saint-Cyr's head against his chest and held him, rocking.

“Wulf...” He gripped his arm. “What are you...”

“Shh.” Wulf pulled him closer, using thumbs to dry the man's tears. “I hate seeing you like this. Especially when it's my fault. You came and saved me when I thought the worst of you.”

“No, Wulf. I don't deserve your forgiveness.”

“Hush.” He kissed his brow. “Let me forgive. I've been in pain so long.” He cupped a hand under his chin and tilted up his face. “Let me heal.”

The smooth dark skin and black eyes of the man who'd protected him lay beneath his hands. Wulf stroked him, smoothing away the frown, the worry. He kissed his brow, pressed his mouth against his temple and kissed across his closed eyes.

“Wulf.” Saint-Cyr gripped his wrist. “Don't. Please.”

“Let me forgive you, Luc. Let me love you.”

Saint-Cyr moved his head side to side, a silent plea on his lips.

“I love you, Luc.” He kissed down his cheek, hands caressing his face. “Love you. Love you so much.” Wulf pressed his mouth against his.

As Saint-Cyr's resistance faded, the man tilted back his head to accept the kiss. Wulf almost drowned in the wave of heat coursing through him at the thought of who he had in his arms. Luc Saint-Cyr, the Man, the Harbinger, the Sempervian known as Humanity's Friend—was surrendering to *his* kiss. Both arms wrapped around him, Wulf settled in for a good taste of the mouth he'd craved. Clean, fresh, as sweet and warm as he knew this man would be, with the faintest hint of cinnamon.

They shared a perfect kiss—long, unhurried, with plenty of time to lick and savor

and taste. Wulf pulled back long enough to catch a breath and then launched into another deep kiss.

Saint-Cyr dragged him into his arms and drew him across his lap, gazed down at him. Wulf could not miss the ridge of Saint-Cyr's cock against his hip.

Reaching up to his face, Wulf stroked his fingers along the man's cheek. "I love you."

Saint-Cyr offered him a tremulous smile. "You love me?"

Wulf bit his lower lip. "For a long time. I grew up thinking of you as my enemy, but lately I've had wet dreams about you. Hot fantasies. I couldn't understand what was happening to me. The man I hated was also the man I desired. I would have come to you eventually, even without all this danger." He smiled. "I wanted you so bad this morning."

Saint-Cyr laughed, ducking his head only to meet Wulf's eyes once more. "I thought my cock would never go down again. I had to jack off in the shower." He wet his lips. "Twice."

Pushing himself farther onto Saint-Cyr's lap, Wulf hooked an arm around his neck. He trailed fingers through his short, tightly curled hair. "How long does a Sempervian hard-on last, anyway?"

He groaned. "Forever."

Wulf reached over and depressed the pad to call the driver. "Are we there yet?"

Saint-Cyr chuckled.

"Yes, sir." The car darkened. "Entering the elevator now."

"About fucking time." Wulf stroked Saint-Cyr's hair. "Sounds good, doesn't it? 'Fucking time.' Has a nice ring to it."

Laughing, Saint-Cyr hauled him closer for another kiss.

## Chapter Nine

### The Loft

Saint-Cyr limped into the penthouse, his arm across Wulf's shoulder for support. Having him close after missing him for so long... Saint-Cyr crooked his elbow around the younger man's neck and hugged him, placing a kiss on his brow. Wulf beamed at him.

When McDoth came out to greet them, he gasped and pulled up a chair for Saint-Cyr. "What did you do?" The android knelt and removed his shoe.

Saint-Cyr shook his head at Wulf. "It's nothing, really. My men were chasing down Wulf's attacker and I got in the way."

McDoth raised his head and gave Saint-Cyr a droll stare. "I've cared for you more lifetimes than either of us care to admit. What made you think you'd be able to start lying to me now?"

Sighing, he smiled over at Wulf. "I have no idea."

"Just tell me how it happened."

Wulf squatted beside the chair. "I stomped on him as hard as I could."

The android swung his head toward Wulf, astonishment plain. "And you did this because..."

"He mistook me for the bad guy." Saint-Cyr looped an arm around Wulf's neck and hugged him closer. "Don't worry, McDoth, I'll exact my revenge later." He pressed a kiss against Wulf's temple.

McDoth laughed. "No doubt."

Wulf blushed.

The android tsked over the swollen foot. The top, where it met the front of his leg, was already puffed out and purple.

"Oh, Luc." Wulf clutched Saint-Cyr's arm. "I'm so sorry!"

Having Wulf gaze up at him, his brown eyes so full of concern more than compensated for the pain. Saint-Cyr leaned toward him and Wulf rose a bit to accept his kiss. "It's all right. I'll be fine."

McDoth stood. "You will be once I get some *triefan* in you. For now, let's get you into bed." He set hands on his hips. "I could carry you if you're in pain."

"S'ok." Saint-Cyr held up a hand for assistance and McDoth helped steady him as he stood. "Rather walk." He hung an arm around Wulf's shoulder.

Together they helped him into the lift and rode with him to the top floor. In Saint-Cyr's bedroom, Wulf stared at the richly appointed chamber. Hard to see it with fresh eyes but Saint-Cyr tried. He'd spared no expense on this room. Lush dark colors intermingled with gold shone from the tapestries and bed drapes. Black marble gleamed on the floor. Piles of pillows covered the head of the canopy bed.

McDoth pulled down the covers and helped Saint-Cyr lie down and put up both feet. He propped his right leg with several pillows along its length. "There. Now you rest while I go fetch some *triefan*." He shook a finger at Wulf. "Don't let him out of that bed. I'll be right back."

"I really am sorry, Luc. For everything."



“Hush.” He held Wulf’s hand and drew it up to his mouth, kissing the back of it. “I’ll let you make it up to me.” He winked and patted the bed.

Wulf kicked off his shoes. He climbed onto the bed from the other side and knelt beside him, knees wide apart. Saint-Cyr rubbed his lower lip, savoring the appealing pose on more than one level. His cock reacted with equal fervor.

Wulf’s pleased glance said he’d noticed.

Saint-Cyr withdrew his mobile from his pocket and flipped it open. “Work. Voice only.” The connection activated and seconds later his assistant came on the line.

“Yes, sir.”

“I won’t be back in the office the rest of the day. There are—well, let’s just say something really big has come up.”

Wulf bit a knuckle to keep from laughing, his eyes glittering.

Saint-Cyr grinned. “Check my calendar for tomorrow and see what you can push out. Message me with details later.”

“Yes, sir. Is Mr. Gabriel all right?”

“Yes, he’s fine. Thank you for asking.” He reached out and slid his fingers through Wulf’s fine hair, rubbing it between fingers and thumb.

“Is there anything you need my help with, sir?”

“No, no.” He smiled. “I think I can handle this on my own.”

Wulf grinned, his cheeks a dark pink. He leaned against Saint-Cyr’s hand.

“Very good, sir. I’ll be here if you need me.”

He closed the mobile as McDoth reentered.

The android set down a tray carrying an open decanter, a shot glass, a rubber-sealed bottle and a syringe. He poured from the decanter to the shot glass and handed it to Saint-Cyr. “Drink this. It won’t help with the immediate pain, but you’ll need it internally anyway.”

He drank.

Wulf clutched his hand. “Focus on me, Luc. Try not to think about it and maybe it won’t be so bad.”

“You think so?” He happily paid attention to nothing but Wulf, aware that McDoth was loading a syringe next to him.

“I know so.” Wulf flashed his perfect smile.

Saint-Cyr squeezed his hand, eyes shut as the syringe punctured his skin. The *triefan* stung like fire on entrance, then spread through his foot like a warm gel, soothing in its wake. He let out a sigh.

McDoth examined him once more. “Already looking better.”

Saint-Cyr lifted his head. The swelling was fading, his usual dark skin returning as the bruise faded down through the levels of purple, red, orange and brown.

“Smackers.” Wulf stared at his foot. “It looks almost normal already. You really meant it when you said you heal fast.”

“It’s the *triefan*. It accelerates Sempervian healing.” Saint-Cyr shrugged. “Without it, we’d still heal ten times faster than humans, but this gives us a true advantage.”

“Does it work on humans?”

“About as well as grape juice.”

Wulf sighed. “Too damn bad. You could make a fortune with this if it did.”

“Don’t I know it. I’ve had scientists working for years, trying to synthesize it. No

luck. It only comes from the nectar of one particular flower.”

McDoth picked up the tray. “I’d like you to rest for a few hours before you try anything, shall we say...” he glanced from Saint-Cyr to Wulf, “—strenuous.”

Saint-Cyr made a short laugh. “Fat chance.”

McDoth hmm’d. “Have you ever noticed, Master Wulf, to humans, a fat chance and a slim one mean the same thing? I’ll check on you in a few hours. Ring if you need me before then.” He closed the double doors behind him.

Wulf stretched out on his stomach, chin propped on his hand. He entwined the fingers of his other hand with Saint-Cyr’s. “Perhaps you should rest for awhile.”

“Wulf, my love. I’ll decide when I need to rest. Come up here. I want your head on my shoulder.”

Wulf snuggled up beside him as asked, one arm over his chest. “Am I hurting you?”

“No!” He pressed his lips against Wulf’s brow. “Not in the least. You feel wonderful in my arms.”

“Good. I hurt you enough already.”

“Don’t give it another thought. You were defending yourself. The last thing you expected was for someone to grab you.”

Wulf tilted his head and met his eyes. “Could we not talk about that? I’d rather not think about how badly I hurt you.”

“Shh.” He pulled him even closer. Wulf’s hair felt like the finest silk. He drew it between fingers and thumb. “Do you know when I fell in love with you?”

“When?”

“At your graduation.”

Wulf lifted his head and frowned at him. “College?”

“Mmm.”

“But you weren’t even there.”

He laughed softly. “So sure, are you?” Saint-Cyr brought up their joined hands and kissed Wulf’s fingers. “You were valedictorian. I wasn’t about to miss it, even though you didn’t want me there at the time.”

“I am so sorry! I sh...”

Saint-Cyr touched his mouth. “It’s all right, love. I don’t hold that against you. I didn’t want to make you uncomfortable, so I had idBot record it for me live. When you spoke about the future and how the empire was in the hands of the next generation ... that was the moment. You stood there,” Saint-Cyr turned toward him just a bit, “and you were so earnest and open. So convinced that the empire could be a better place.”

His young lover relaxed in his arms, head tilted back. “I still am.”

“I know. It’s one of things about you that I find endearing.”

“You don’t believe that, do you? That the empire could be better.”

“No, I absolutely do. It’s one of the things I’ve always tried to keep in mind. Being a Sempervian allows me to see the overall picture. I saw the empire’s birth almost 400 years ago, and I’ll likely see it in another 400 years as well. It gives one a different perspective.” He brushed back a lock of Wulf’s hair. When Wulf yawned, he drew him tighter to his side. “I’m boring you.”

“You are not! I’m tired, that’s all. It’s not every day I wrestle with a Sempervian.”

Saint-Cyr laughed. “Now that you know one of my secrets, I want one of yours.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“Ooh, now there's a loaded question.”

Wulf poked him.

“Ow!” He grabbed his hand. “Poking an injured man. Shame on you.”

Wulf's eyes flashed. “I need every advantage I can get around you.”

“Do you now? We'll see about that.” Saint-Cyr tangled his fingers in Wulf's hair, tilting back the younger man's head so he could enjoy every part of his face. “You have the strongest jaw.” He stroked his fingers along one side. “And the most tender mouth.”

Wulf gazed back at him openly, his expression serene.

“You're beautiful.” He cradled Wulf's head in one hand and leaned closer to kiss him.

Wulf parted his lips and pressed up against his mouth, lifting his arm to encircle Saint-Cyr's neck. Wulf responded with ardor, his body arching against him. Saint-Cyr moaned as they kissed deeper, his tongue sweeping inside the sweet mouth to lick and taste.

“Oh, my God. Wulf.” He drew back only enough to study his brown eyes. The glazed dazzle in them told him what he needed to know. With a satisfied smile, Saint-Cyr sank back against the pillows. “I love you.”

“Do you truly forgive me?” Wulf touched Saint-Cyr's mouth. “I need to know. I feel like I wasted so much time being angry with you. I don't want to waste any more looking back at regrets.”

“You're wise for one so young.” He savored the feel of Wulf's body against his. He fit within his arms as if he'd been made for him. “There is nothing to forgive. I feel as though you were meant for me. I don't want to waste any more time, either. Especially not on anything that would keep us apart.”

Wulf snuggled, hugging him. “I fantasize about you in the shower.”

Saint-Cyr's cock twitched at the thought of that. “You do?”

“Mmm. That's my secret.” He met Saint-Cyr's eyes. “You wanted a secret. That's mine.”

“Tell me more.”

Wulf pushed himself to a sitting position. “You know, I should call Fee.”

“No fair, changing the subject. And who's Fee?”

“Feeyona Joie. The friend who was helping me. She'll be worried if I don't call.”

Saint-Cyr pulled the mobile out of his pocket. “After you talk to her, I want to hear more about this shower fantasy. Maybe we'll have to try it out.” He handed it to him, pleased at the dark blush on Wulf's face.

He keyed in a number. “Voice only.”

Saint-Cyr held Wulf's hand while he waited. He turned it over and trailed his fingertips along Wulf's palm. Artist's hands, they had wide fingers and manicured, even nails.

“Fee? It's Wulf. Listen, I'm fine.”

A scrape on Wulf's first finger drew his attention.

“No, it was all a misunderstanding. I was nev...” Wulf wet his lips, nodding as he listened.

Wulf's scrape would take a day or two to heal; meanwhile, his own broken foot was almost completely restored. He kissed the scrape.

Wulf wrinkled his nose at him and blew a kiss. “No, listen to me. I'm ok.”

Saint-Cyr clasped Wulf's hand tighter. So fragile, humans were.

Wulf pushed himself back on the bed a little further. "Fee, honey, I swear I'm fine. Let me..." He cast a glance over at Saint-Cyr.

So short-lived. He must not waste time with this one. Enjoy him. Savor him. Love him.

"No, honey, get this. It turns out my agent took out a contract on me. I..." Wulf yanked the device away from his ear.

Saint-Cyr could hear her exclamation from where he lay.

"Listen, Fee, it's all a long story and I can't go into it right now." He winced and pulled the device away again.

Saint-Cyr had to smile. Whoever this woman was, she certainly wasn't afraid to lay into Wulf.

"I just wanted you to know I'm perfectly safe and that you don't have to worry about me." He nodded, glancing at Saint-Cyr. "I will, love. Call you tomorrow? Ok, sure thing. Kiss."

Wulf closed the mobile and returned it to Saint-Cyr.

He tossed it on the bedside table. "Kiss?"

"Luc, don't tell me you're jealous of a woman."

"Should I be?"

"Only if you're insane. She's like my sister."

Saint-Cyr lowered his brows. "That's what they all say."

"Next to Trink and Yvan, Fee is probably my best friend." Wulf curled back up beside him and picked at Saint-Cyr's buttons. "I've never made love to a woman. Kissed plenty, but it's all in greetings and the like." He lifted his head a bit. "You aren't really jealous, are you?"

He growled. "I'll decide that later. I'm very territorial."

"Father never told me about this side of your personality."

He slid down a bit to hold Wulf better. "He wouldn't."

Wulf rested a hand on Saint-Cyr's chest. "Did he know you liked men?"

He nodded. "I like women, too. Before he met your mother, your father and I used to go to this great little club and..."

"Oh, hell, no!" Wulf made a slicing motion. "Don't even tell me about you and my father partying with wild women." He shook his head. "Talk about making me feel like a kid again. I do not want to know anything about that."

Saint-Cyr kissed Wulf's brow and drew him closer, smiling. "Deal."

"Hmm. There was nothing in the Notes about it. But I guess there wouldn't be. The Notes don't keep details about sex."

"Notes?" He pulled back a bit to see better. "What notes?"

Wulf leaned on one arm as he sat up. "The Gabriel Notes. The chronicles we keep about you."

"Chronicles!" Saint-Cyr pushed himself upright and slid back against the pillows. His stomach felt hollow and agitated, as if he'd swallowed an angry ghost. "Your family kept stories about me?"

"I thought you knew."

He swallowed, ran a hand across his hair. "I had no idea. How long did your father do that?"

“Ever since he took over as your confidante, I imagine. He only recorded the big things, of course. The traditional stuff.”

Sweat trickled down his chest. “Traditional?”

“Main events. You know. Things the others needed to...” Wulf frowned. “Are you all right?”

“Do you mean to tell me your grandfather recorded notes, too?”

Wulf nodded. “You're pale. Maybe I should call McDoth.” He reached for the phone.

Saint-Cyr clamped a hand over his wrist to stop him. “How many generations of Gabriels kept written notes?”

“All of them. All the Chosen keep notes on their Sempervians. My father said it was the only way the Chosen could keep track of who's who and who's where.”

Saint-Cyr held his head; his temples throbbed. “All the Chosen keep notes?”

“Yes. I thought all the Sempervians knew.” He peered at him, rolled off the bed before Saint-Cyr could stop him. “I'm getting McDoth.”

“And you all read each other's?”

“Of course.” He frowned. “Why wouldn't we?”

*Indeed.*

Five hundred years of notes written by people who knew all the Sempervians. One hundred fled the planet Sempervia thousands of years before. Only the Chosen knew all ninety-two survivors. Plus the only surviving Creation, Sasha, and all fifty-two of the children some of the others had made a few years ago.

He shut his eyes, only half aware of Wulf opening the door and calling frantically for McDoth.

*Why the hell didn't I ever realize this before? Merciful gods—what if there are Chosen who know why I'm really with the Sempervians? That thought led to another, even more frightening. Should I tell Wulf?*

If he let Wulf in on the truth about himself, and the other Sempervians learned about it—if they found out who Saint-Cyr was and why he watched over them...

*No.* He shut out even so much as the notion of hinting the truth to him. *If the others found out they'd destroy Wulf simply to get to me. He must never learn the truth. Never.*

As if he dreamed it, he became aware of McDoth hovering near him. Saint-Cyr let the android move him so he lay flat on the bed. He couldn't answer, couldn't speak, exhaustion pinning his eyelids shut.

*The others will hack me to pieces. Hack me to pieces and then burn me.* The only death from which he could never return.

## Chapter Ten

### The Loft Sumertsag 24

McDoth had insisted he needed privacy to examine Saint-Cyr and locked Wulf outside in the hallway. He tried the door for the tenth time. “McDoth! Let me in. What's so fucking private I can't be there?” He beat on it when it didn't open. “Let me in, damn it! I'm almost his lover!” Wulf slapped himself in the forehead. *That sounded brilliant.*

The door opened.

“About time.” Wulf brushed past the android and raced toward the bed. He drew up short. The pillows and blankets seemed as though they'd never been mussed. He turned back to McDoth. “Where is he? Where have you taken him?”

“I'm right here.” Saint-Cyr exited the lighted bathroom, adjusting his cuffs, dressed for work. “What's wrong?”

Wulf ran and threw himself into the man's arms.

“Here, now.” Saint-Cyr rocked him. “What's all this?”

Arms around his waist, head on Saint-Cyr's shoulder, Wulf pressed tightly against his chest. “I thought you were dead.”

The man laughed softly. “Not likely with a Sempervian, Wulf.” He kissed his brow. “Come sit down.” He drew him toward a low, velvet upholstered bench and sat down with him. Arms still around him, Saint-Cyr stroked his hair. “I had a reaction to the *triefan*, but I'm fine now. I'm sorry you were worried.”

“You looked like you were going to faint.” Wulf drew back. Spreading his hands across Saint-Cyr's shoulders and down his chest, he examined him. Hard, unyielding muscle and warm skin; his heart beat with a steady rhythm. “You turned pale. It scared me. I thought...” He bit his lip.

Despite the black lenses, Saint-Cyr's eyes revealed kindness and love; no pain evident.

“Luc, are you sure you're all right?”

“I'm fine.” He bent down and slipped off his right shoe. “I should've made sure you were present when I got dressed. See?” He pulled off his sock and stuck out his foot. “It's completely healed.”

“Wiggle your toes.”

He did as asked, wagging his foot back and forth as well. “Satisfied?”

Wulf punched him in the arm. “You scared the hell out of me, Sempervian!”

“Ow.” Saint-Cyr rubbed his arm, chuckling. “Are you trying to lay me out again?”

Wulf stood, fists clenched.

Saint-Cyr yanked his feet out of the way.

“Oooh!” Wulf stalked away from him, turned back. “Don't you ever do that to me again.”

Pulling on his sock, Saint-Cyr looked up. “Do what?”

“Do what?” He threw out his arms. “McDoth! Tell him. He was pale as a ghost.”

Saint-Cyr and McDoth both raised eyebrows on that one. Saint-Cyr finished

fastening the shoe. He held out one dark-skinned hand and looked at it askance. “As a ghost?” He gestured to himself. “Me?”

Wulf grunted. “You know what I mean!”

“McDoth,” Saint-Cyr stood, brushing off his clothes, “I believe our young friend has a bit of a temper.”

McDoth set his hands behind him. “Indeed he does, sir.”

“They locked me out of the room the night my father died. I never got to say good-bye. They took him away before I could see him. I thought...” He bit his lips together.

“Oh, Wulf!” Saint-Cyr took three big steps and hauled him into his arms, drawing Wulf’s head down on his shoulder. “I’m so sorry.”

He sucked in a short sobbing breath and clung to him, arms around his waist. He buried his face against the man’s shoulder. The feel of Saint-Cyr’s arms around him and the delicious warmth of his body made him woozy. He clung tighter. “I’m sorry I yelled at you.”

“Shh. Nothing to be sorry about.” He rocked him. “I’m the one who should be apologizing.”

McDoth exited the room and Saint-Cyr drew Wulf back to the bench to sit with him.

“It was thoughtless of me to exclude you, love. I’m sorry. I promise I won’t do that again.”

He lifted his head, blinking his eyes to clear them. “I just want to be with you. Don’t shut me out.”

Saint-Cyr gazed into his eyes—his expression a mix of love and lust that made Wulf shiver. “I will keep you with me from now on. Until we know you’re safe, I’ll take you everywhere with me. If you won’t be safe somewhere, I won’t go either.”

“You don’t have to do that.”

He set his brow against Wulf’s. “Yes, I do.” He pressed a soft kiss against Wulf’s mouth.

“I thought...” Wulf shrugged, unsure whether to speak. He lowered his gaze.

“You thought what?”

“That we were going to ... you know.” He peeked up to find the black eyes narrowed. “But you’re dressed to go out.”

“Mmm.” He took Wulf’s hand in his. “Sorry about that. Unexpected. We have to go to Kelthia.”

“What? Now?” Wulf rubbed away the dampness at his eyes. “We’re leaving the planet?”

“Yes.” He kissed Wulf’s hand. “I need you to come with me.”

He stood as Saint-Cyr did. “What’s up? Does it have something to do with Stahlwell?”

“Your agent? No. This time it’s my problem. I have an adopted son...”

“Senthys. You told me.” He tilted his head, trying to understand.

“Oh.” Saint-Cyr nodded. “Well then you know he’s always into trouble.”

Wulf smiled. “Don’t tell me. You have to go to Kelthia because your teen-ager got busted?”

He raked fingers back through his short hair. “Succinctly put, but yes. His school called and I...”

Wulf burst out laughing. “Oh, I would *not* want to be him right now. Making you

hop between planets has got to be worth one hell of a whipping.”

Saint-Cyr held up one finger. “You have no idea.”

\* \* \* \*

## **Deep space**

### **C-1, Saint-Cyr's private vessel**

#### **Sumertsag 24, late night**

Saint-Cyr introduced Wulf to the captain and crew, ordered dinner for the two of them—to be served in three hours, no sooner—and then took Wulf to his private stateroom. It held only a desk with a built-in bench seat and an oversized bed with a pull down mesh covering that protected sleepers during low gravity.

*Finally alone.* Saint-Cyr shut the door, locked it and leaned against it. *I've been waiting for this all day.*

Wulf ambled around the room, trailing his fingers across the built-in dresser. Dressed in conservative business clothes, he fit in the room as if he'd been born there. Wulf sat on the end of the bed and gazed back at Saint-Cyr with an appealing mix of shyness and come-hither seduction.

Saint-Cyr shrugged out of his jacket. “Is the room cool enough for you?”

“Mmm hmm.”

“Good.” He started opening his shirt. “I thought we'd start with a nice hot shower.”

Wulf blushed, as Saint-Cyr expected he would.

“I want to hear all about that fantasy you confessed to having.”

He cleared his throat. “Nothing much to tell.”

Saint-Cyr chuckled. “Oh, no. You're not getting out of it that easily. I want every delicious detail.”

Wulf stood and crossed to him, rested both hands on his chest. “We can do what you want first.”

“Absolutely not.” Bracing his feet wider apart, he drew Wulf between them and up against his body. “I want to hear what turns you on.” He unfastened the top button of Wulf's white shirt. “I'm going to do everything to you that you dreamed about.”

A small sound of pleasure left Wulf's mouth as he leaned up to kiss him. Saint-Cyr drew him close, hands sliding down the planes of Wulf's firm body to his hard ass. He lifted his hands and held Wulf's face between them as he took his mouth in a drugging kiss. Lips still connected, he traded places with him and pushed Wulf up against the door. He licked his mouth, sweeping his tongue inside to taste every part. He ripped open Wulf's shirt, shoved it back off his shoulders and down his arms.

Wulf let it fall to the floor and reached over his head to pull off the t-shirt.

“Don't move, Wulf. Let me look at you.” All that tawny bared skin, his chest rising and falling... “Mmm. You are luscious. Masculine. I love that about you.” Saint-Cyr ran his hands across Wulf's chest. His skin felt cool, the texture perfect, his muscles hard. “I never thought you'd be smooth.”

Wulf lifted his whiskey-colored eyes. “I shaved it the other night when I got drunk.” He gave a half-hearted laugh. “I have no idea what possessed me to do such a thing.”

“I'm glad you did. I like you this way. Keep it, love.” He bent and ran his tongue across one brown nipple, smiling when Wulf shivered and tossed back his head. “You



like this, don't you?" He swirled his tongue across it again, making it pebble.

Wulf made an incoherent sound and clasped a hand to the back of Saint-Cyr's head.

He laved the nipple and sucked it into his mouth. Dragging his teeth across it, he breathed on the pale, wet skin. Wulf arched his back.

"I'm going to make you writhe beneath me tonight, Wulf." He kissed his way up his throat. "I want to hear you cry out your pleasure."

Wulf held his lower lip between his teeth, head back.

"I want to know what you sound like when you climax." Saint-Cyr licked Wulf's throat, sucked a bit of his skin into his mouth and bit it. "I want to hear you groan. Hear you whimper beneath me."

Wulf whimpered now; the sound low and dark with the promise of passion.

"I'm going to take you again and again." He licked the outer edge of Wulf's ear. "My cock is going to fill you," he whispered. "Every part of you. It's going to be in your mouth, and in your sweet, hot ass." He gripped him there and tugged him hard against his groin. "I'm going to claim every part of you tonight. I'm going to make you mine."

Wulf moaned. He wrapped both arms around him and pressed his mouth up against Saint-Cyr's.

Accepting that yielding kiss, he treasured its meaning. That kiss offered everything. It surrendered all that was Wulf. Saint-Cyr pulled back, trailed kisses across his chin.

"Tell me about the shower. Are you naked?"

He nodded, tilting back his head as Saint-Cyr kissed all along his throat.

"How wet is your skin?"

"Soaked. Drenched." He kissed Saint-Cyr's shoulder, pulling open his shirt to press his hands inside. "The jets of water—you make me stand in them."

"Mmm, I like this fantasy." He opened Wulf's pants, pushed them down. "Where does the water touch you?"

"Everywhere." He kissed along Saint-Cyr's chin and jaw.

"Here?" He slid his hand inside Wulf's underwear, along the hard ridge of his wide shaft.

Wulf nodded, gasping.

He ran one hand down to his balls and the other around to Wulf's firm ass. "And here?"

Trembling, Wulf nodded, his lips parted.

"Tell me. Say it." He lifted Wulf's sac and tugged it forward.

Wulf shuddered, pinned between the wall and Saint-Cyr's hands. "Yes. The water touches me there." He wrapped his hands around Saint-Cyr's shirt and pulled him closer. "Kiss me."

"Anywhere you want, love." He took his mouth in a kiss made to possess. "You're mine, Wulf. All mine." He knelt, pulling down Wulf's briefs. He slid his hands down those hard muscled legs. "Does the water touch you here?"

"Yes. Oh..."

He wrapped his fist around Wulf's cock. "You're beautiful. I can't wait to taste you."

Wulf trembled.

Cooing to him, Saint-Cyr helped him step out of the pants and underwear, then pressed a hand inside each thigh.

"Part your legs for me. I want to see all of you."

Wulf widened his stance.

"Good. Good, love." Saint-Cyr bit the knuckle of his first finger, trying to slow himself down. Gain control. Wulf was six tradestandard feet tall and built like a ruckball player. His raw masculinity made him the most sought after model in the empire, and having him stand here, naked, posing for him... His senses reeled. "Tilt toward me." He touched Wulf's rigid cock with gentle fingers and dragged them from the base all the way out to the circumcised, rosy tip. "Perfect, Wulf. Stand there just like that. I want to feast my eyes on you."

Wulf's cheeks darkened but he remained still as Saint-Cyr stood and stepped back.

"Oh, yes." Saint-Cyr licked his lips. "I want you to pose like this for me tonight when we come back from dinner."

Wulf's cheeks turned a rough pink. "Pose?"

"Mmm. When we come back to our room I want you to strip without me telling you to and stand right there against the door. I want your legs wide apart and your hands behind your head." He gestured to them. "Put them there now."

Wulf obeyed.

"Perfect." Saint-Cyr smiled. "Remain in that position." He stepped out of his shoes, pulled off socks, slid off his pants and folded them across a chair, then folded his undershirt the same way.

Wulf chewed his lower lip, panting, not taking his eyes off him.

Naked except for underwear, Saint-Cyr crooked a finger at Wulf. "Come take them off me."

Wulf crossed to him at once and knelt. The brown-eyed gaze lifted to his, questioning. Saint-Cyr lowered his lashes in approval.

Wetting his lips, Wulf reached up to the waistband and pulled them down. His mouth formed an O of appreciation, although he flashed Saint-Cyr a glance that held a hint of fear.

Wulf shook his head, swallowing. "I could never take all of you."

He caressed his face. "Don't worry. Once I ready you, you will. After our shower."

Worry nagged at Wulf's fine features, but he managed a smile. "May I touch you?"

Saint-Cyr nodded, pleased at how quickly Wulf accepted a submissive role.

Wulf wrapped both hands around him, one above the other. The feeling of tightness shot a tingle through Saint-Cyr's balls; he rocked back his head and hissed.

Fingers in his lover's hair, Saint-Cyr drew him near. "Kiss me, Wulf."

Wulf pressed his mouth against the base and kissed along his length, all the way to the end.

Saint-Cyr reached down and pulled him to his feet. "Let's go get wet."

\*

Wulf let Luc lead him by the hand. The full bathroom adjacent to the stateroom had a shower uncannily like his own. Jets aimed at different levels, while a showerhead in the ceiling misted water like rain.

Saint-Cyr passed a hand across a panel and water sprang from the jets. He pulled Wulf in with him.

"This feels perfect." Wulf raised his face to the warm water.

"Mmm. It's set to my preference. Glad you like it." He made Wulf face away from him. "Are you standing in this fantasy?"

Wulf's cheeks felt hot; his shaft throbbed and pulsed. "You make me bend over."  
"Bend over, Wulf." Saint-Cyr's deep voice commanded obedience. "Hands on the wall."

Wulf braced himself as he complied.

"Keep your arms straight."

The water stung his skin. Wulf squirmed, caught up in the feeling of surrender Saint-Cyr imposed.

"Do you spread your legs?"

He nodded. The mist and jetting water made him close his eyes. Saint-Cyr's deep voice commanded him to spread his legs and not move.

"Legs wider. I want you open. Yes. Like that."

Wulf shuddered as Saint-Cyr ran one hand over his backside.

"You have a beautiful ass, Wulf. I'm going to spank it later."

He lifted his head but Saint-Cyr ordered it back down. "Have you ever been spanked, Wulf?"

He shook his head.

Saint-Cyr slapped one cheek hard. Wulf gasped. "Answer me aloud, Wulf. Have you ever been spanked?"

"No." He tossed wet hair from his eyes.

He slapped Wulf again. "Full sentence, please."

Wulf bit his lip, eyes stinging in the water. "No, I've never been spanked."

Saint-Cyr rubbed his hand in small circles over the place where he'd struck him. "Do you want to be spanked, Wulf?"

His cock jumped at the thought of being over Saint-Cyr's knee, at his mercy. He swallowed. "Yes, I want to be spanked."

"By whom?"

Wulf sucked in a ragged breath. "I want to be spanked by you, Master."

Pleased laughter echoed in the shower. "Excellent, Wulf. When we play, I want you to call me Master. Anywhere else, you may call me Luc."

He could not help the grin that crossed his face. "Thank you, Master."

Saint-Cyr angled the water onto his cock. The pulsing jets rocked him so hard they drove an ache through him. He bit into his lip.

"I think we want some of that water over here, too." He patted Wulf's ass, moving him into the path of a stream behind him.

He jumped when the water hit his hole.

"No, stay right there and take it." Saint-Cyr angled another jet to the same region.

Wulf gasped, crying out. "It stings, Master!"

"Yes, it does." Saint-Cyr wrapped a hand around his cock. "I want you to take it, Wulf. I want you to let it sting you."

"Oh..." He danced from one foot to the other as Saint-Cyr pumped his fist down his cock. The water stung; he longed to move out of its path. He dared not. He fought to breathe, to focus.

Saint-Cyr moved around to the front of him and knelt in the water. "Don't move, Wulf. I want to taste you."

"Yes, Master." The moment Saint-Cyr lowered his mouth over his cock, Wulf was lost. He screamed and arched his back. Luc swallowed his shaft and sucked.

Wulf threw himself forward, arms braced on the shower wall while he shot over and over into the sweetest, hottest mouth...

Shaking, his body pummeled by water, Wulf sighed. *Oh, stars. What if it's true Sempervians can do this for days?*

His black-eyed lover gazed up at him, mouth full of cock. He released him long enough to smile. Sliding his tongue along Wulf's shaft, he began to lick.

\* \* \* \*

**Kelthia, Miraj City**  
**The Harbinger's home**  
**Sumertsag 25**

Wulf held Saint-Cyr's hand as they walked down the sidewalk in front of the three-story house. Like other houses in the neighborhood, brown stone and beige marble trimmed the solid structure. Curtains fluttered in one open window on the bottom floor.

Still tired from the hours of loveplay onboard ship, Wulf leaned against his shoulder. "This is where you live?"

"While I'm on Kelthia." Saint-Cyr held open the gate.

Wulf stepped through and waited for him. "Never figured you for having the 'pink' gene."

He blinked. "How's that again?"

"This is not how I pictured you. White picket fence, pink flowers along the path, a pretty pink wreath on the door." He cupped a hand behind one ear. "Is that barking?"

"Neighbor's dog. Couldn't have a dog around Senthys. He's HalfKin." He wagged his hand back and forth. "Dog around a cat. Wouldn't be pretty."

Wulf snorted. "I'll bet." He walked up the steps beside him.

At the door, Saint-Cyr set his fingertips against the security panel and it unlocked.

"So, you didn't see me as the settling down type, eh?"

Wulf shook his head firmly back and forth.

Saint-Cyr threw back his head and laughed. "Come inside. Time for you to meet the family."

## Chapter Eleven

### Kelthia, Miraj City The Harbinger's home

Saint-Cyr stood aside to let Wulf enter his home. Across the street, one of his most trusted idBot guards sat in a hover; two more strolled along the opposite sidewalk walking a dog. One more stood in a cherry-picker utility truck, able to see the area from above. The one in the hover adjusted the driver side mirror, a signal that all were in place.

Satisfied Wulf would be safe, Saint-Cyr entered and shut the door, securing both locks. Wulf had already wandered into the family area and was perusing books on a shelf. Saint-Cyr joined him.

"Are these textbooks?" Wulf tilted them toward himself one by one. "Determining How to Charge for Field Work. The Use of Lockpicks in Emergency Situations. Bypassing the Vassindorf Security System." He pulled a wry face. "Who reads this kind of crap?"

"Note the publisher."

He checked each one. "A publication of the Kelthian Thieves' Guild. Sounds fascinating."

"Did you notice the author?" Saint-Cyr went up close behind him.

Wulf went back to each book. "Hmm. Some guy named Luc Saint-Cyr." He shrugged. "Never heard of him."

Saint-Cyr grabbed him by the waist, making him squeal and then laugh when he tickled him.

Wulf shoved his hands away and stood up straight. "Uh, hello."

Saint-Cyr turned to see where Wulf was looking. Senthys was standing in the doorway, hands behind him, studying the ceiling. He needed a haircut; his straight dark hair hung to his shoulders. *Oh well, one battle at a time.* Clearing his throat, Saint-Cyr adjusted his jacket and stood a bit straighter. "Senthys, I'd like you to meet someone. Come here, please."

The youth shook with Wulf when he offered his hand. "Wulf Gabriel."

"Senth Antonello."

"Senthys Antonello," Saint-Cyr corrected.

"Nice to meet you, Wulf." The boy smiled at him. "To my *friends*, I'm Senth."

"I see," Wulf began. "Do y..."

"No, you don't see." Saint-Cyr turned and shook a finger at Senthys. "You will not divide and conquer. You will call Mr. Gabriel by his last name and title, and you will not refer to yourself as Senth. Your name is Senthys. Are we clear on that?"

"Yeah." He shrugged. "Whatever."

"And not 'yeah' or 'whatever.' It will be 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' and nothing less. Do you understand me?"

Senthys stared at Wulf as if Saint-Cyr were not in the room, then rolled his eyes and sighed. "Yeah, whatever, *sir*. Yes, sir. Is that good enough, sir, yessir?"

"Senthys!" Saint-Cyr clenched both fists. "Go to your room."

The boy grinned at Wulf. "See ya." He saluted Saint-Cyr. "On my way, sir, yessir, sir." He laughed as he almost bounced from the room.

"Oh!" Saint-Cyr ground his teeth together.

"What's wrong?" Wulf took his arm.

"Did you see that?" He pointed toward the door. "The cheek of that boy. He has absolutely no respect for authority. None!"

Wulf tsked. "Lighten up a little. I thought he was rather cute."

Narrowing his eyes, Saint-Cyr snorted. "I was going to forgive the escapade that got him thrown out of school, but after that show of disrespect, I think he's going to need more discipline than I'd planned."

Wulf tugged his arm. "Hey. Chill a little. It's not that bad, is it? What did he do?"

He loosened his collar. "Never mind, Wulf. I'll explain it to you later." He gestured to the family room. "I don't allow Senthys to surf Imperinet. You won't have the same number of choices you had back on TARTH, so there's no more than fifty sports channels, but if you'd like to watch while I go talk to Senthys, you're more than welcome."

Wulf chuckled. "I think I can manage." He glanced around. "Anyone else in the house I have to contend with?"

"Not right now. I'll introduce you to the staff in a day or so, if we're still here." He leaned in and gave Wulf a quick kiss. "Sorry you didn't get a better introduction to Senthys than that."

"Don't worry about it. I have a feeling I'll be around to correct that."

"Be right back, love. Oh—idBots are everywhere outside, but I'd feel better if you didn't go near the windows."

Wulf gulped. "Ok."

Saint-Cyr went back into the foyer and took the stairs two at a time.

\*

Wulf seated himself on the sofa and put his feet up. So, this was the Harbinger's real home? It was like his own house had been, growing up. Nothing fancy. Plain slip-covered furniture. Not even a big screen to watch. Couldn't be more than 50 or 60 inches, tradestandard.

He aimed the remote and went googly-eyed at the porn that came on the screen. Something about a female copbot strip-searching two female criminals. He snickered. *Something tells me our Senthys has been a very, very naughty boy lately.*

He surfed around a bit until he found his favorite sports channel, and then settled in to watch a live rematch between the TARTHIAN FISTS and the KeltHIAN Killers.

The game was already past half-time but he didn't bother restarting it. The Fist offense had set up O'Brady Tyrell with the ruckball and he was running for the end zone. Killer Ensak Ssarg came out of nowhere and tackled him. They rolled out of bounds then back in as they fought for the ball.

Wulf swung his legs over the side and turned up the volume. "Tyrell! Don't you let that asshole get the ball!"

The wrestling aspect went on for almost two minutes, with neither side gaining an advantage. Finally, Ssarg threw himself over the ball. Tyrell grabbed the edge of his helmet and yanked him up and off it, kicked the ball over the end zone and threw both hands in the air at the same time as the referee.

Wulf jumped up. "Touchdown!" The holocam focused on Ssarg and Tyrell, who had

gone back to wrestling in the grass. “Hot damn. I love a good fight.” He perched on the edge of the couch to watch.

A boom of thunder rattled the vase on a table. Wulf turned down the sound and listened but heard no other sounds of a storm. He turned the volume back up and followed the game as referees pulled Ssarg and Tyrell apart.

Both players were penalized for fighting after touchdown—ten seconds time taken off both their record times for the season. “Damn. That much could cost 'em contract money.” He popped up and went hunting for a snack while the local announcers argued over who should have lost more time.

He found the kitchen, pulled a soda out of the cupboard and popped the top. It chilled instantly in his hand. He grabbed a bag of chips from the counter and did a double take at the type.

“Sweet potato chips? Prolly organic on top of it.” He tossed them back on the counter and headed back to watch some more.

Tyrell was back in the game, running all out for a touchdown when here came Ssarg again.

“Oh, shit. I don't believe it. Those two always play like they're the only ones on the field.” Tyrell was twenty yards from a touchdown when Ssarg tackled him around the legs. They both went down hard, totally out of bounds this time.

Ssarg slammed both fists into Tyrell's chest. Wulf felt the ground shake as if he were there. “Ouch! That had to hurt.”

Referees stood by, watching to ensure the fight stayed within rules. Ssarg had been known to draw blood on more than one occasion. Some idiots in the bleachers were chanting, “Ssarg, Ssarg, Ssarg.” How stupid could you get? This game was on Fist home territory. Likely be blood in the stands before it was over.

The deep rattle Wulf had felt before shook the house again. He muted the game and stood up. “What the hell is that?” He started toward the window, recalled Saint-Cyr's warning, and stood stock still in the middle of the room.

What if it was one of the hit men, trying to get in?

At that moment, the chandelier above rattled and swayed.

*Luc? What the hell are you doing?* He wouldn't hit Senthys, would he?

Wulf pounded up the stairs and listened at the top. It sounded like a game of ruckball was going on up here, with voices raised as something heavy hit the wall on his left. He ran down that hallway, yanking open doors. Bedroom, bathroom, bedroom, study room...

A thud jarred the next door. Wulf jerked it open only to see a boxing glove headed right for his face.

## Chapter Twelve

### The Harbinger's home

"Wulf? Wulf?" Saint-Cyr's voice intruded in the darkness. "Senthys, this is all your fault!"

"I wasn't the one who decked him."

Wulf opened his eyes to find Saint-Cyr and Senthys both hovering over him. "What happened?" He raised up on an elbow.

Saint-Cyr knocked it out from under him again and made him lie back. Was he on a bed? Whatever was under him felt soft.

"I'm so sorry, love. Why did you come in? The sign on the door said 'Knock and Wait.' You could've been seriously hurt."

"What sign? Ow." He rubbed his brow. "My head hurts."

Senthys grinned at him. Up close, his cornflower blue eyes had slashed catlike pupils and his fangs showed. Otherwise, he appeared totally human. "Your head hurts because *sir* decided to punch you in the nose."

"I did not!" Saint-Cyr shoved the youth's shoulder, knocking him sideways. "Damn it, Senthys! This is all your fault!"

"Hey, I said I wasn't the one who decked him." He moved to the other side. "You ok, Wulf?"

"Senthys!" Saint-Cyr stiffened. "That is Mr. Gabriel to you."

Wulf closed his eyes. "Could you two fight later? What happened? Why did you hit me?"

"I'm sorry he hurt you, Wulf." Senthys sat back.

"Mr. Gabriel," Saint-Cyr repeated. "You were in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"It's all right, Luc." Wulf laid a hand on his arm. "No one calls me mister. It sounds like you're talking to my father."

"Luc?" Senthys started chuckling. "You let someone call you Luc?"

Saint-Cyr glared. "You will not use my first name."

Senthys shrugged. "It wasn't me calling you Luc. I was saying Wulf calls you Luc. I know better than to call you Luc, sir. I know how much you hate it when people call you by the name Luc. Yes, sir. I sure wouldn't call you Luc."

"Senthys!" Saint-Cyr's teeth showed in a grimace. "Knock it off!"

The youth blinked his eyes, his face a picture of innocence.

Wulf reached up a hand to each of them. "Help me up, please."

The two guys hauled him to his feet. He'd been stretched out on the floor in some kind of mirrored work out room. He prodded the matting beneath him with his foot. Soft. Catching sight of himself, he touched a hand to his nose. His fingers came back bloody.

"What did you do to me?" He went to the mirror. "Oh shit! You hit me right in the nose." He met Saint-Cyr's eyes in the mirror. "If you broke my nose..." He whirled to face him. "Are you trying to ruin my career?"

"Wulf, I'm sorry, I..." He shot a menacing glance at Senthys. "You walked in during the middle of a boxing session."



“You were punching Senthys?” He turned to the youth. “Did he hurt you?”

“No, no, no.” Saint-Cyr began. “I was...”

“Yeah, he hurt me.” Senthys turned to show him his cheek. “See this cut? He did that to me.”

Saint-Cyr's eyes went round. “I did not!”

Senthys pulled a face. “Now who's the liar?”

“Oh, you are so asking for it.” He held up both hands, balled into fists. “Yes, technically I did hit you, but it was in self defense.”

Wulf folded his arms. “You are six five. How tall is Senth? Maybe five seven, five eight? You're going to tell me you needed to defend yourself from a kid by punching him in the face?”

“You do not understand, Wulf. Senthys is a HalfKin. He has twice my strength.” He bent to scoop up a pair of worn red boxing gloves and held them out “We both wear these. It's the way we work things out.”

Wulf touched his nose again, which was swelling enough for him to see it out of the lower part of his vision. He was starting to have to breathe through his mouth. “Could you two tell me about this *after* I get some ice?”

\*

The three of them sat in the small kitchen while Wulf held an ice pack to his swelling nose. Saint-Cyr got up, fetched a pain-stik from the first aid kit over the food-synther and brought it back.

“I feel terrible that you got hurt. It tore out my heart to see a scratch on your finger—to see you bleeding because I've been careless...” Saint-Cyr clamped down on his emotions and unwrapped the stik. “Here. This should help.”

Wulf held out his wrist and turned his head while Saint-Cyr stuck him. After a moment, he switched the ice pack to his other hand.

Saint-Cyr scooted his chair closer. “Better?”

Wulf nodded toward Senthys. “Why'd you hid hib?” He sounded as if he had a cold.

“Senthys and I disagree on so many levels.” Saint-Cyr leaned back in his chair. “Whenever I get home, we always bash each other around for awhile. Clears the air. He'll grow until he's twenty-five and his strength is multiplying every year.”

“He's right.” Senthys propped his chin on one hand. “I would clobber the human guys at school. They exempt me from sports because I could hurt somebody. But I can hit the Man as hard as I want. He can take it.”

Wulf questioned Saint-Cyr with his eyes; does he know? Saint-Cyr shifted his gaze to one side—no. Wulf gave a slight nod.

Senthys caught the look between them and squinted.

With his keen intellect, Senthys would soon figure things out. To distract him, Saint-Cyr pulled a debit bracelet out of an inner pocket and tossed it to him. “Order us some Kelthian Barbeque, will you? I've been missing that lately. Get some of everything and load up on drinks. Order extra for the idBot guys on duty.”

“Sure thing.” He stood, kicked in his chair. “You ever had barbeque Kelthian style, Wulf?”

He shook his head.

“Oh, you're in for a treat, then.” He tossed the bracelet in the air and caught it. “Be right back.” He bounded out of the room.

Wulf removed the ice pack and set it on the table. "Is id bad?"

"Fortunately, the gloves were well padded. I think it's mostly superficial damage that'll fade quickly."

He grunted. "Stob sugar coating id, dab id. How do I look?"

"Um..." Saint-Cyr rubbed a hand across his mouth to hide his smile. Wulf sounded like a cartoon character. "Actually not that..." At Wulf's pleading expression, he relented. "Like bloody hell. It's all swollen and puffy and yellowish."

Wulf groaned. "I cad believe you did this to be."

"I didn't do it on purpose. You should have knocked."

"Id sounded like a war! You two shook the whole house. The chandelier started swigging."

*Swigging? Oh, swinging...* He sucked in air over his teeth. "I had no idea we were that physical."

Wulf scoffed. "I thawd a hit ban was trying to break id or blow the house up or somethig."

"I'm so sorry, Wulf."

"Yeah, well you seeb to be apologizing a lot lately." He put the ice pack back on his nose.

Saint-Cyr grimaced. He'd had to apologize on the ship because with his Sempervian stamina, he'd remained erect long past the point of pain for Wulf. They'd compromised on positions to help Saint-Cyr find release, but Wulf hadn't confessed that even that hurt him. He hadn't realized what he'd done until after it was all over and he saw tears in Wulf's eyes.

*I will never hurt him again. Never, never, never.*

"It will take awhile for the food to get here." Saint-Cyr stood. "Come upstairs and let me tuck you into bed. I think you should try to rest and let the pain-stik have time to work."

After ensuring Wulf slept, he returned downstairs to find Senthys watching female on female porn.

"Damn it, Senthys!"

The boy leapt off the couch and shut off Imperinet. Back turned, he adjusted the front of his trousers.

"How did you get that station?" Saint-Cyr took the remote from him. "I specifically blocked anything like that from coming into this home."

The youth tossed back his dark hair as he backed away from him. "You're a fine one to talk about homosexuality, bringing home your boyfriend. You had a woman last time. Can't you make up your mind?"

"That's enough!" Saint-Cyr clenched a fist. "You are not in a position to point fingers. Don't try shifting the blame to me. And I was not speaking of homosexuals. I'm talking about sex. Any kind of sex. You are absolutely forbidden to engage in any form of it with anyone and that includes you by yourself."

Senthys growled like Kin, a deep rumble down in his chest. "You make damn sure I don't." He pushed up his sleeve and displayed the tracks in his inside elbow. "You fill me full of drugs every five days! No matter how much of this trash I watch I can't feel shit!"

"Seems to me you need more of it, since you're even trying." Saint-Cyr opened a drawer in a side table.

Senthys put himself on the other side of the couch. "I already had that stuff yesterday. The school gave it to me."

"Not enough, it seems." Saint-Cyr filled a syringe with the clear liquid. "Come here."

"No." He backed toward the kitchen. "I don't like that stuff!"

"Your behavior is evidence that you need a higher dose than I've been giving you." He did not chase Senthys, but allowed him to run into the kitchen. Saint-Cyr had anticipated his fleeing.

The sounds of a struggle ensued; Senthys snarled and growled. Saint-Cyr entered the room to find the boy held fast between two of the idBot guards he'd called in to assist him with Senthys. A third stood behind the youth, an arm looped around his neck to hold his head back.

Senthys glared daggers at Saint-Cyr, fangs bared. "I'll get you for this, you bastard!"

"No, you won't, Senthys." He pushed back the youth's shirtsleeve, baring his arm. "You won't even remember it happened."

Senthys jerked and tussled, sliding himself and all three guards on the tile floor as he fought to free himself. He roared at Saint-Cyr like a lion.

Saint-Cyr backed up a step. "Hold him better!"

All three guards were strained to the breaking point to restrain him already. Senthys hissed and spit like a Kin.

"Your doctor was right." Saint-Cyr nodded. "You do need a higher dosage to control you. After the stunts you pulled at school this week, it's obvious your old dose isn't affecting you any more."

"No!" Senthys snarled and growled with pure menace. "You let me go this instant!"

"Hold him steady," Saint-Cyr ordered. "Mind his feet."

The guards on either side each braced a leg between the youth's and held him in a death grip.

Saint-Cyr rubbed alcohol across the inside of his elbow.

"No!" Senthys pleaded. "No. Don't do this. I hate the way this shit makes me feel. Please don't do this!"

Saint-Cyr injected him, ignoring Senthys' cry of pain. This class of drug always stung. Slavemasters used them to control Kin aggression and remove the sex drive.

He rubbed alcohol across the pinprick and put away the syringe. By the time he'd finished, Senthys stood between his captors like a sleepy child.

Saint-Cyr motioned the guards to leave. As soon as they returned outside, he pulled out a chair for Senthys. "Sit down."

He dropped into it.

Saint-Cyr sat in the one nearest and gripped the boy's chin. "Look at me, Senthys." While he'd fought, Senthys' pupils had opened wide. Now they began contracting. When they reached their smallest size, Saint-Cyr held up a hand.

"How many fingers?"

"Two."

"Now?"

"Four."

"Excellent. Well done, Senthys." He released him. "Look into my eyes. That's right. Very good. You want to obey me." He brushed back the hair from his brow. "You fear

me, Senthys. You will not let me down. You want to obey me.” He leaned closer and took the youth's face between his hands. “This is for your own good, Senthys. You know the rules I've set for you and you'll obey them. You want to obey me. You feel good when you comply. Agree.”

“Yes, sir. I will comply.”

“Good. You want to please me, don't you, Senthys?”

“Yes, sir.”

“You want to obey me. You fear my wrath if you disobey.”

“Yes, sir! I would never disobey you, sir. I swear it.”

“Excellent.” He stroked the youth's cheek. “You always obey your teachers. You do as they say. Agree.”

“Yes, sir. I obey my teachers.”

“You will not argue with me. I'm your master. You'll do as I tell you.”

“Yes, Master.”

“Excellent. You may wake.”

Senthys blinked and rubbed his eyes. Off near the front of the house, a doorbell rang. “That must be the barbecue. I'll get it, sir.”

“Let idBot get the door,” he called after him, although he knew no one would've gotten past idBot's defenses without being cleared.

“Yes, sir!”

*Much better. Let's hope this dose works longer than the last one.* Saint-Cyr started up the stairs to wake Wulf and halted halfway there. Wulf already stood at the top, his expression unreadable. Saint-Cyr hesitated. Exactly how much had he heard?

He held out a hand. “Come downstairs, love. We're ready for you.”

## Chapter Thirteen

### The Harbinger's home

Saint-Cyr and Senthys cleaned the kitchen after dinner while Wulf napped on the couch. For once, Senthys didn't argue over homework and he completed his academic lessons without difficulty. Saint-Cyr practiced with him for the Level 14 Advanced Pickpocket exam he'd take next week. The doc had been right; this new dose worked great.

After he'd put him through his paces, he clapped him on the shoulder. "Excellent work, Senthys. No doubt you'll pass with a perfect score."

"Thank you, sir."

"According to the Headmaster, you have the highest aptitude in the Academy."

"Wow!" Senthys shut off the learning pad and picked it up. "He always talks to me like I'm a screw-up."

"That's because you insist on pranks and foolishness."

"Ok, yeah, I like pranks. But I'm no fool."

Saint-Cyr nodded. "I agree with you there. But explain to me what possessed you to steal ice cream from the lunch room."

"Oh, that." He made an off-handed gesture. "One of my friends got put on punishment for not studying, even though he knows the material perfectly. They told him he couldn't buy ice cream for a week."

"How does that involve you?"

"Well, they didn't tell me I couldn't buy it for him."

He rubbed his mouth. "From what I heard, you stole it."

"I didn't steal it until they punished me for buying it, then they punished me for that. That wasn't fair. There's nothing in the handbook about not stealing ice cream. I checked."

"Stealing is against the law, Senthys."

He snorted. "You're sending me to the Thieves' Guild Academy to learn to be a professional thief, yet you're telling me that stealing from the Thieves' Guild is against the law?" He folded his arms. "Explain that to me if you can."

Saint-Cyr opted for the answer that would end the conversation fastest. "The headmasters don't like anyone working the system and showing them up. Bottom line, don't get caught again."

Senthys grinned. "No, sir. I won't."

"Now go to bed."

"Good night."

He let Senthys get to the first step of the stairs. "Oh, and I'll take back my two debit bracelets and ID now." He held out his hand. "Well done, though."

With a growl and a muttered-under-his-breath "Shit," Senthys slapped them into his hand and climbed the stairs to bed.

Saint-Cyr waited until the house was quiet before he stooped beside Wulf, still asleep on the couch. He touched his shoulder.

Wulf pulled away, eyes still closed. "Not time to get up yet."

"No, love. It's dark outside. Time for bed."

He murmured unintelligibly and turned over on his side.

"Come on, love." Saint-Cyr shook him. "Time to get up and go upstairs."

More mumbling. Wulf snuggled further into the couch.

"I guess I'll have to carry you."

Wulf turned onto his back. "I can walk."

"Faker! You had me believing you were out of it."

"I am out of it." The whites of his eyes made a sharp contrast against the brown in this light. "I'm just getting up so you won't carry me. How would that look?" He sat up. "One grown man carrying another." He got to his feet alone but staggered and Saint-Cyr had to grab him.

"That's it. I'm carrying you."

Wulf climbed over the back of the couch and bolted for the stairs. "Have to catch me first."

Saint-Cyr ran up after him.

Inside the bedroom, Wulf was already stripping. He tossed his clothes on a chair, crawled into bed and pulled a pillow under his chest.

Saint-Cyr picked up after him and then undressed, laying his folded clothes aside. He slid in behind him and started massaging Wulf's back.

"Mmm." He relaxed under his hands. "Higher."

Saint-Cyr sat up and dug in a little deeper with his thumbs.

Wulf moaned. "Don't stop. That's wonderful."

"Your nose looked a hundred percent better by the time we'd finished dinner. You sounded better, too."

"That pain-stik really helped."

"Good." He worked the muscles around his neck. "This feel ok?"

"Nnn."

He chuckled. "You're so articulate."

"Mitsulplikit."

Laughing, he bent closer. "What?"

"Nothing." He opened one eye and peeked at him. "Just harassing you."

Saint-Cyr swatted him and dropped back onto the bed.

Wulf lifted his head. "Are you serious about spanking me?"

Simply the thought of it brought Saint-Cyr half-way erect. He stroked one finger across Wulf's chin. "Why do you ask?"

"I'm kind of sore from last night. I didn't want to be sore from that, too."

"I see." Saint-Cyr concentrated on Wulf's position and features, reading his intentions. What a perfect submissive he was, yet so completely unaware of it. No doubt he'd never had a lover who could master him properly. "So, you think you have a say in whether you're spanked."

Wulf swallowed, his eyes widening.

"When I decide you'll have your bottom smacked, it will happen. Not until." He stretched out and put his hands behind his head. "I'm aware of your soreness. I also know you refused to tell me how much it hurt you." He turned his head toward Wulf. "You'll never do that again. You're to tell me the instant something hurts you. Is that clear?"

"I didn't want to disappoint you."

"You disappointed me more by not being honest with me." He sat up in the bed. Wulf copied him, sitting cross-legged. "Do you think all I want from you is ass? That I'm so intent on satisfying myself that I don't care if you're bleeding or in pain?"

"I..." Wulf closed his mouth. "No."

"It wasn't brave of you to suffer in silence, love. I would never ask that of you. You are *never* to do that again."

"Yes, Master."

*Excellent. He remembered.* Saint-Cyr scooted back against the middle of the headboard. "I think I'll have to spank you tonight to make sure you've learned this lesson."

Wulf's cock rose a bit. Perfect. Just as Saint-Cyr had hoped.

"Put yourself across my lap." He patted one thigh.

Wulf crawled over to him and moved into position. He stretched out as told, lying with his head on Saint-Cyr's left side.

"Good. Now put your hands over the side of the mattress. You're to keep them there. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master."

"We will not be having sex tonight. I want you to heal. I can feel your erection against my thigh, Wulf, but I want you to know you will not be allowed to come tonight."

"But why? I..."

Whack! A hard slap on one cheek silenced him. Wulf jerked as if he'd been branded. A bright pink mark showed instantly.

"When I give you permission you may ask a question. Not until."

"Yes, Master."

"As to why, because I know what's best for you. This will not be a hard spanking, love, but I am going to heat up those pretty cheeks of yours. I intend to see them bright pink all over before I stop." He laid his hand over the imprint he'd left. His own dark skin against the pale white of Wulf's ass made a strong contrast. He moved his hand.

Wulf clenched his cheeks.

"Ah, now, you see, love, you're anticipating each blow. That's not good. I want you to relax." He patted his cheeks. "Come on. Relax. There you go. That's better."

Wulf twisted toward him.

"Head down. In fact, I believe I want you to put your hands over your eyes. Do it now."

He complied.

"Good, good. That keeps you from seeing when I lift my hand. I want you totally open to my touch, Wulf. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master."

"We're about to begin. Do you have any questions?"

"Senthys won't interrupt us, will he? Can he hear us?"

"My bedroom is sound-proofed and the door is double bolted. Not even a thief as good as Senthys can get in here tonight."

He felt tension go out of Wulf. He set his left hand on Wulf's lower back and raised his right. Softly, he rained ten fast blows across the lower half of Wulf's cheeks.

He could feel him jerk beneath the blows but he forced himself to relax afterward.

Wulf gulped air, but didn't move his position.

"That wasn't so bad, was it?"

"Are you through?"

"No, love. That was the first of three sets of warm up swats. If I spanked you on cold skin I could hurt you."

Wulf squirmed, his cock a hard ridge against Saint-Cyr's thigh.

"You're doing very well, love." The moment Wulf relaxed his cheeks, he repeated the gentle blows to the middle. Pausing while Wulf uncurled his toes and tried to unclench his cheeks, he rubbed the pinkening skin.

When Wulf allowed his cheeks to separate, Saint-Cyr added ten blows to the top of the rounded ass. Stroking Wulf's skin, he murmured reassurances. "You're so beautiful like this, Wulf. I love seeing your body open to my touch."

"I love you, Master."

Saint-Cyr tapped him on the shoulder. "Sit up and hand me two pillows, love." When he did, Saint-Cyr put them over his lap and had Wulf lie across them. "This puts your ass at a higher angle. Think of each blow as a kiss. I warn you, I won't stop even if you beg me. *I will decide when your bottom has had enough. Do you understand?*"

"Yes, Master."

"Do you trust me?"

"I do, Master."

"I'm proud of you, Wulf. You may cover your eyes now. I'm going to punish you."

When Wulf obeyed, Saint-Cyr brought down three medium hard swats, one after the other. Wulf sucked in air, his entire body stiffening.

Saint-Cyr did not speak, merely waited for Wulf to lie limply across his lap again. He repeated three swats to the other cheek and waited again. Wulf complied much more quickly this time.

"Excellent. You're surrendering to the spanking. I'm very pleased. Just a little longer, my love."

"Thank you, Master." His voice showed strain.

Nine more blows, one after the other around his entire ass left Wulf whimpering, his skin a bright pink and glowing with heat.

Saint-Cyr rubbed a hand across his cheeks. "This is the effect I wanted. Nice and hot without bruises anywhere. You've done very well for being a novice at this game, love."

He sniffled. "Thank you, Master."

"Only a few more."

Wulf let out a whimper and put his head down. Saint-Cyr patted his cheeks to remind him to let them relax. They tensed, loosened a bit and then tightened once more. Wulf lifted his head, took a deep breath and let it all out as he allowed his muscles to go limp.

*A shame I can't take him farther tonight.* Saint-Cyr rubbed his hand across the burning skin. *All in good time.*

He delivered the next nine swats without pause. Wulf arched his back, legs kicking.

Saint-Cyr held him in place. "You clenched up so tight I think I might want to repeat those."

"Oh, Master, please." Wulf twisted toward him, his cheeks wet with tears. "I will obey you, but I'd really, really like it if you didn't."

How could he not smile at such a sweet plea? Saint-Cyr helped him sit up. "That was



eloquent, Wulf. I'm very proud of you." He held out one arm. "Come and let me hold you."

Wulf angled himself to be close to him, head on his shoulder. He didn't quite let his bottom touch the bed, and Saint-Cyr had to chuckle when he noticed.

"Master?"

"I'm enjoying seeing you learn how to deal with all this, love." Saint-Cyr stroked Wulf's face, gazing into his warm brown eyes. "You are my joy."

Wulf knuckled his eyes, smiling with such an air of sweet innocence Saint-Cyr had to clench his hands to keep from ravishing him. "You may lie down and go to sleep now, Wulf."

"Thank you, Master." Wulf was still erect, a bit of pre-come glistening at the tip. He bundled up the pillows and dragged them back to his own side, then lay down on his stomach.

Saint-Cyr turned out the lights, fluffed the pillows on his side and stretched out on his back, hands behind his head. "Good night, Wulf."

"Good night, Master."

For a while, they lay in silence, Saint-Cyr listening to Wulf toss. At last Wulf did as expected.

"Master?"

"Hmm?"

"I can't sleep."

He grinned into the dark. "Why not, Wulf?"

"I'm too hot."

"Take off your covers."

"No, not that kind of hot. I really need you, Master."

"I told you we weren't having sex tonight, Wulf." He waited.

Wulf turned over on his side. Quiet resumed. At last he sighed. "I can't stand it. My cock is throbbing like you'd spanked it instead of my ass. Please make love to me."

Saint-Cyr bit his lips to keep from chuckling aloud. "I'll compromise with you." He turned the light on low.

Wulf sat up and then moved to his knees.

All that perfect, naked skin lay exposed and open to Saint-Cyr's eyes. It drove heat straight through him. "I would enjoy seeing you come for me, so I'm going to allow you to pleasure yourself while I watch."

Wulf chewed his lower lip. "I've never done that in front of anyone before."

"Good, then this will be your first time."

"But if you watch I won't be able to come."

"Wulf, you were naked in my bed for all of last night. You came in my mouth, then lay flat on your back on the table while I spread honey on your cock and balls and then licked it all off you. You held your legs wide apart in the air while I fucked you. You watched in the mirror while I slammed into you from behind. There is nothing to be embarrassed about with me." He smiled. "Shall we do this in the shower?"

"No, no." Wulf held up his hands. "I'm fine here."

"Excellent." He opened a bedside drawer and pulled out lube. "Here. Don't want you to be sore." He squeezed a generous amount on Wulf's palm. "How do you like to start?"

"I'm usually in the dark."

Saint-Cyr smiled. "Not tonight, you're not."

Wulf's cheeks darkened, lashes drifting down.

"You're going to please me by playing with yourself, remember? You can't do that in the dark. Now stroke on the lube, beautiful one."

A sweet smile rewarded him as Wulf lowered his head and closed his eyes. He slid his right hand from the very tip of his cock to the base and back.

"Do you touch yourself anywhere else?"

His eyes flew open and he stopped moving. "What?"

"Do you touch yourself anywhere else? Do you play with your nipples?"

"S-sometimes."

"Then do that now."

His cheeks darkened. "I—I don't usually..."

"I want you to." Saint-Cyr folded his arms. "Do it, Wulf. Play with your nipples. I want to see you pull and tweak them."

Wulf shuddered as if an orgasm had passed over him. He lifted his left hand to his right nipple and stroked it.

"Very nice." Saint-Cyr moved up closer, making a show of examining the way Wulf touched himself. He could feel Wulf's heat, the quick intake of warm, shallow breaths. *Mmm. You like to be watched. I'll remember that.* Saint-Cyr took a deep breath, inhaling Wulf's masculine scent. "You like short, feathery strokes."

Wulf's pupils had dilated fully, only a ring of whiskey-brown surrounded the dark of his eyes, open wide and taking him in. The lush lips parted. He lowered his lashes.

"Yes..." He breathed the word like a confession.

"Mmm. Delicious, Wulf. I'm going to enjoy doing that to you."

Wulf tossed back his head, eyes closed.

"You are the most sensual being I've ever had in my bed. I love watching you bring yourself pleasure." Saint-Cyr blew softly on the areola and it pebbled. He wet his lips, longing to increase that texture, taste it, and feel its gentle hardness on his tongue. "Pull on your nipple."

Wulf held the dark round button with two fingers and a thumb and tugged.

"Oh, yes," Saint-Cyr whispered. "You like that, don't you?"

"Yes." Wulf's breathless response sent shivers through Saint-Cyr.

"Twist it."

Wulf obeyed. His compliance itself stoked Saint-Cyr's inner fire. Yet hot as he was, he would not violate Wulf's trust. He would not touch him. Not tonight. He sat back and enjoyed the visual feast in front of him.

Wulf, naked in his bed, as he should be. On his knees, his legs spread. Hard cock getting stroked and squeezed, balls up tight against him. Ready to shoot. His nipples hard little buds.

Saint-Cyr wrapped a hand around his own cock and pulled. Up over the head, down, back up, his thumb crossing the slit on top. Firm, squeezing at the tip, the way he liked it.

Wulf took long strokes on his own cock, rubbing the center and then up near the tip.

Saint-Cyr gripped the pillow beside him, his legs outstretched. His balls tingled with that familiar going-to-come pulse of deep, deep pleasure.

Wulf rose on his knees, arching his back. "Oh, oh! Luc!" He spurted white cream into the air, his balls jumping as he came.

Saint-Cyr followed him, crying out Wulf's name.

The gentle warmth of Wulf's touch brought him back to the moment. Wulf had stretched out on the bed between Saint-Cyr's legs and wrapped a fist around his cock. Wulf's head bobbed as he sucked.

Saint-Cyr drank in the view of his own dark skin next to Wulf's fairness, tight little ass still a rosy pink. Wulf's lean, hard strength evidenced itself in firm muscle.

Eyes shut, Saint-Cyr cupped a hand around his lover's head, fist tightening in his hair. He leaned back against the headboard and let himself enjoy one of the best blowjobs he'd ever had.

Belly down on the bed, Wulf flicked his tongue all the way around the head of his cock. Saint-Cyr tightened his fist, sucking air in over his teeth as Wulf used his lips on the crown. Wulf pulled and pushed over it while he darted his tongue against the slit. He wrapped both fists around Saint-Cyr's penis, stroking and squeezing at the same time.

Wulf continued to suck and lick until Saint-Cyr once again shot hard, his mind shattering under the onslaught of pure, intense pleasure. He shivered like a virgin while Wulf licked up every drop of come.

"Oh, fuck. Wulf." Saint-Cyr gripped him by the arms and dragged him up close for a kiss.

When they broke apart, Wulf pulled back a bit. "Open your mouth." He stroked his tongue along Saint-Cyr's lips, licked across his tongue. As Saint-Cyr tried to kiss him, Wulf shook his head, their mouths inches apart. "No, keep it open. I want you to taste yourself on me."

Lust poured over Saint-Cyr, burning him with its intensity.

Wulf wrapped a hand around Saint-Cyr's stiffening cock, glanced down, back up to his eyes. "This thing doesn't know when to quit." A lazy smile spread across his face. "I like that about you."

Saint-Cyr laughed, hauling him flat against himself. "I love you, Wulf." He slid down in the bed. "Cover us up."

Wulf drew covers over them and snuggled into his arms.

Saint-Cyr wrapped his arms around Wulf to keep him close. He rarely slept and never more than a few short hours at a time. His Sempervian stamina required little. But tonight—he had that delicious, stupid feeling that always came on right before a good sleep.

Held in his lover's arms, Saint-Cyr drifted into rest. The last words he heard were whispered. "Master, dream about me."

\*

Wulf came awake all at once in the darkness, his heart pounding. A hand clamped over his mouth and a man's breath came hot against his ear.

"Easy, love. It's me."

Saint-Cyr. Wulf almost sobbed with relief.

"Shh." The whisper held dread in its wake. "Someone's in the house."

Wulf pushed himself to a sitting position, squinting. "It's so dark in here!"

Saint-Cyr held a finger to his lips and signaled him not to move, then slid open a drawer beside the bed and withdrew a gun. He clicked some part of the device and it hummed to full power.

Faint light showed under the door of the windowless room, illuminating a few

highlights. A glimmer of pale light glinted off the bedside lamp, a ring on Luc's hand, the barrel of the gun. Luc glanced back at him. His inhuman eyes glistened like wet black pearls, two spots of reflected light in the darkness.

A soft scrape sounded near the door. They both waited motionless, no other sound in the room. Two dark areas blotted the door's small light—the feet of an intruder. Wulf held his breath.

Saint-Cyr lifted the gun, arms braced, a lethal shadow in the darkness.

Wulf stuffed a knuckle in his mouth. *Oh, God! Luc, please. Don't take any chances.* He shut his eyes, quickly opened them again at the scratch of metal in the lock. He sucked in a shallow breath, his chest an ache of fear for the man he loved.

Saint-Cyr rose from the bed in one smooth movement, stalking naked to the left of the door. He nodded to Wulf, made a hand motion. Wulf slid out of bed on the other side and huddled out of the way behind the nightstand, his heart beating wildly in his ears, throat tight.

The door unlocked.

Wulf almost choked, unable to catch a breath.

Saint-Cyr flattened himself against the wall as the door started to ease open.

“Master?”

Wulf clapped a hand over his mouth, only then realizing he wasn't the one who had spoken. He ducked as Saint-Cyr and someone tussled briefly at the door. A light came on to reveal Saint-Cyr holding a gun at the intruder's head.

“Senthys?” Saint-Cyr released his son and stepped back. “I almost shot you!”

Wulf stood. When Senthys did a double take, Wulf grabbed the sheet to cover his nakedness.

Saint-Cyr made a circular gesture. “Turn your back, Senthys.”

“Sorry.” He did as told. “You guys better get dressed. Someone's trying to get in on the ground floor.”

Saint-Cyr grabbed his pants and stepped into them. “I set off the silent alarm when I heard you, so help should be on the way soon. IdBot has three guards out there. That should slow them down.”

“I wouldn't count on it.” Senthys jerked a thumb toward the door. “I checked the perimeter sneak-cams just before the power went out. All the idBot guys are dead.”

## Chapter Fourteen

### The Harbinger's home Sumertsag 26

*Damn it, I hate it when I'm right.* Saint-Cyr had planned for big trouble; hoped for an easy solution.

Wulf stared at Senthys with a blank expression that faded slowly to one of terror. He lurched backwards, glancing about the room like a rabbit with foxes after him.

Saint-Cyr dashed forward and dragged him up against his chest. “Easy, love.” He motioned to Senthys to keep his back turned and then braced Wulf against himself. “It's all right. I won't let anyone hurt you.”

The young man trembled, but he drew himself up and controlled his chattering teeth. “I—I'm ok. You take care of S-Senthys.”

“Hey,” Senthys winked. “Don't worry about me.” He gave him thumbs up. “But you might want to get some clothes on.”

Saint-Cyr handed Wulf his pants. “Shirt and shoes, too. We may have to run for it.” He couldn't resist adding, “Now you see why I always fold my clothes. Easier to dress and run.”

“Run where, Master?” Senthys folded his arms. “There's no way out from up here except the windows in the other rooms.”

That truth brought home the fact that Senthys had known they were trapped, but had joined them anyway. Saint-Cyr smiled at him. “So sure, are you?” He tucked the gun in his pants pocket, opened the drawer and pulled out the extra power clip. Full charge. Good. “Wulf, do you know how to shoot?”

“I could learn.”

He smiled at him. “That's my boy. You may have to. I don't want to arm Senthys if I don't have to.”

“Master!” Senthys faced him. “I can fire a weapon. I've had training. He hasn't.”

“And if I need you to shoot I'll give you a gun without hesitation, but I don't want to jeopardize your guild standing if I don't have to.”

Senthys nodded in understanding. The Thieves' Union took a *very* dim view of any thief using a weapon except in self-defense. Armed robbery, at least on Kelthia, didn't exist.

A sad truth that came about due to the death of Wulf's father.

“Wulf, love, open the closet door. Go to the third set of shoe cubbies on the left, then the fourth hole up from the bottom right. Reach into the back of it and push.”

The rear of the closet swiveled open.

“Oh, cool!” Senthys rubbed his hands together. “A secret passageway.”

“Senthys, you lead the way. Here.” He tossed him a flashlight from the drawer. “No noise.”

“Yes, Master.”

Wulf followed him without prompting. Saint-Cyr closed the closet door, entered the narrow brick passageway and shut the secret door behind him.

Wulf waited for him just ahead. "Why does your adopted son call you master?"  
*Well, he's past his initial fear, I see.* Saint-Cyr grinned. "Long story, Wulf. Later."  
He directed him forwards.

Wulf planted both feet firmly and refused to budge. "Not a chance, Luc. I want to know now."

The light Senthys held flashed in Saint-Cyr's eyes. He threw a hand up to shield them.

"I'll tell you." Senthys tugged Wulf's arm. "But let's be walking while we're talking if you know what I mean." The smooth passageway tilted down.

*So much for no noise.* Saint-Cyr followed, bringing up the rear. *Lord knows what Senthys will blab about this.*

The youth leaned toward Wulf. "You noticed my last name's not Saint-Cyr, didn't you? It's Antonello."

"Yeah, why is that?" Wulf shot a suspicious glance over his shoulder.

"When he finishes with his version," Saint-Cyr put in, "I'll tell you the real story."

Senthys pointed the light toward an angled stairwell with concrete steps. "It's a 'working adoption,' not a full one." Their voices echoed in the bare chamber. "I'm not his legal son. I'm his slave."

"Slave?" Wulf halted and turned to face Saint-Cyr.

"Shh! Would you two kindly keep in mind that a killer has entered the house above us and is searching for us at this very moment? Keep your voices down."

Wulf growled but he moved ahead.

Senthys stopped in front of a metal door. "Wow. I've never seen so many locks in one place before."

"Excuse me." Saint-Cyr turned sideways to fit into the cramped space and moved around Wulf. To dry his fingertips, Saint-Cyr brushed them against his pants and then stroked the topmost lock. "Senthys, hold the light."

"Yes, sir. What system is this, Master?"

He keyed a pattern on the second lock. "A Cyr de Tomasson. Very old, made before the planet Kelthia was part of the Tarthian Empire." He caught Wulf's knowing smile over Senthys' head.

"Wow." Senthys squinted at the locks. "I never thought I'd get to see one of these. Was Cyr de Tomasson related to you?"

Saint-Cyr fumbled the lock sequence and had to start over. "What in the worlds made you think that?"

"The 'Cyr' in the name. Seems like a lot of Kelthian history is about people with that name. I run into it all the time when I'm researching the guild archives for Grand Master de Laney."

"Do you now?" He flashed a quick peek at Wulf, who shrugged. "So Master de Laney has you doing research for him, eh? What kind of things?"

"Mostly stuff about Uncle Gnat and Flea lately. He's planning a retirement party for them and wanted to make a scrapbook of their best pulls."

"Retirement?" Saint-Cyr almost fumbled the sequence again. He faced Senthys. Jean Paul Suixel and James Philemon, aka Gnat and Flea, had been rescued by him from a children's home the same way as Senthys—as toddlers. Although not his Chosen, they did know he was the same person who'd rescued them and kept it their secret. He turned

back to the lock. "Two of the finest thieves ever to walk the empire. They can't be old enough to retire."

Senthys made a rude noise. "They're eighty if they're a day."

"Still young." Saint-Cyr concentrated on the last two locks. "People aren't considered old until they're over a hundred and ten. Can't imagine why they'd want to quit."

Senthys leaned against the wall. "Maybe they're going to teach in the academy. I'd rather take classes from Gnat than de Laney any day."

"Never happen." Saint-Cyr worked over another lock point. "Gnat hates the Academy. He'd never teach there."

Senthys shone the light on the last lock. "Did you put this thing down here?"

Saint-Cyr hesitated. "It came with the house." Not a total lie. He'd built the house too, in another life.

"Geez. Don't you think it's time to upgrade?"

Saint-Cyr would have laughed if he hadn't known the danger they faced. "Modern thieves have no idea how to operate the system. It isn't just a series of locks, Senthys. There are small switches and catches as well." He released the final lock. "Virtually pick-proof. It's safe to say no one in the union these days could break into it. Let's go. We'll be safe down here." He pulled open the door. A scent like stale beer rose to him.

Wulf sneezed. "What stinks?" He passed through ahead of Saint-Cyr.

Senthys sneezed as well. "Maybe it's mold. It turns nasty in an old place like this, I bet."

Wulf stayed beside Saint-Cyr. "If you lock us in down here, how are we going to get out?"

Saint-Cyr pushed the heavy door shut behind him. "Vaults are made to keep people out, not in. Besides, McDoth will come for us within the next twenty-four hours and I know an alternate way out if he doesn't." The door clicked shut, bringing an eerie silence. Saint-Cyr's eardrums felt the change in pressure. He activated the single interior light. "The air and lighting system down here runs separately from the house. We should be fine."

While Wulf wandered about the barren room, Saint-Cyr and Senthys seated themselves on the floor. The place was little more than a series of caves. Saint-Cyr had used it only a few times over the centuries. A convenient bolt-hole with reinforced walls and roof, it served as a decent hideaway and a place to keep stash. A flushable toilet sat in one of the outer rooms, a cooking area and food storage section in another. The interior lay open, the rooms more like alcoves.

"May I borrow that light?" Wulf held out a hand to Senthys. "I want to explore a little."

Senthys cut it off and stuck it in his pocket. "We need to save power."

"Senthys." Saint-Cyr shook a warning finger at him. "That battery would last ten years if you left it on day and night. Give it to him."

After taking the flashlight from Senthys, Wulf meandered out of sight.

Senthys pulled a handheld game out of his pocket and started playing.

"What is that?"

He glanced up, went back to playing. "An educational game."

Saint-Cyr snorted, held out a hand. "Let me see that." The front panel held mathematic equations. He scrolled through a few screens. Satisfied it was suitable, he

handed it back. "Here you go."

Wulf came back into the room, the flashlight shining on his face. "When was the last time you were down here, Luc?"

Senthys looked away, biting his lip.

Saint-Cyr rubbed his chin. "Six months ago, maybe. I replenished food supplies in case of an emergency. Why?"

Wulf motioned to him to follow and in the farthest sleeping area, shone the light around the room. Posters of naked women adorned the walls, beer bottles balanced atop each other in a pyramid, a set of headphones and a stack of music chips lay scattered on the cot. Another handheld game had fallen on the floor.

Saint-Cyr picked it up and turned it on. "Naked women." He pressed one of the controls and the screen switched to mathematic equations. "Why that little..." He slipped the light from Wulf's hands and went back to where Senthys sat.

The youth stood, pocketing the game.

"Hand it over." He snapped his fingers. "Don't play coy. I know it's not what it seems."

Senthys growled but he obeyed.

"Well? I'm sure you know what we found."

Senthys shrugged. "I was bored."

"That's it? That's all you have to say for yourself?" Saint-Cyr felt Wulf brush his hand in a silent plea for attention, but he ignored the gesture. "You broke into an area that is completely off limits."

"Luc." Wulf nudged Saint-Cyr. "You're training him to be a thief. What did you expect?"

Saint-Cyr acknowledged him and turned back to Senthys. "You broke into a Cyr de Tomasson. I can't believe you did that, and without even knowing what it was. That's a huge accomplishment. Way to go, Senthys."

The youth beamed.

"Wait." Wulf blinked at him. "You're proud of that?"

"Proud as a papa." Saint-Cyr slapped Senthys on the back. "What's all this 'I've never seen so many locks' crap? Why didn't you show off your skills and open it yourself?"

"I thought you'd be angry."

"Wait a minute." Wulf stepped between them. "I can't believe you're proud of him for breaking in." He set fingertips against his brow. "What am I saying? Of course you are. The head of the Thieves' Union would find this kind of law breaking just another day at the office."

"Former head," Senthys and Saint-Cyr said in unison and then laughed.

Saint-Cyr threw an arm around Senthys. "Out-damn-standing, but you're still grounded for a month and I am definitely going to whip you."

"Whip me?" His shoulders drooped as he pulled away. "But..."

"Excuse us, Wulf." Saint-Cyr pointed to the left. "Senthys, let's you and I go have another little talk about why you don't watch porn."

Senthys dug in his heels. "But, Master, don't you think Wulf needs our company?"

"Not nearly as bad as you need a whipping."

"But, I..."

"Enough." Saint-Cyr clamped a hand over Senthys' arm and hauled him off to the



side. "We'll be right back, Wulf. Have a seat."

\*

An only child, Wulf had no experience with hearing a sibling punished. Listening to Saint-Cyr's stern reprimand of Senthys made him long to be anywhere else.

The basement—er, cellar—vault? whatever—was far too small to get away from the harsh words. Wulf sat on the edge of one of the simple cots and leaned forward, elbows on his knees, fingers in his ears. It didn't help.

*How can he be so rigid about Senthys not having sex and yet train him to be a thief and think nothing of it?* He flinched at the crack of a belt on flesh. Senthys yelped. It sounded as if Saint-Cyr had put everything he had into it. *Ooh! That kind of force on a bare butt had to hurt.*

Another stroke fell. Wulf jerked as if the belt had bitten into him. At the third, he lurched to his feet and started toward the room, determined to stop it. He halted halfway. Saint-Cyr seemed to have quit. Wulf listened, senses stretched to their limits. Sniffing, the sound of pants being pulled back up. The slide of leather against cloth; Saint-Cyr putting on his belt.

Wulf returned to the cot and sat down to wait. Being whipped bare assed was bad enough. Knowing someone else listened had to be the worst part, no matter how few swats you got.

Senthys—head down and eyes averted—passed by rubbing his rear end on his way to the porn stash. Next came the sound of paper ripping and bottles being dumped into the trash. Stifled sniffing mixed with the chink of bottles.

Luc stood in the door, as serene as if he'd just returned from a morning stroll.

"I don't understand, Luc."

"What is it you want you to know?"

"Why is it ok for him to be a thief, but not ok to look at naked women?"

Saint-Cyr entered the room fully and seated himself on the single cot, patted the area next to him.

Wulf slid over beside him.

"Senthys is a HalfKin. He appears human on the outside, but he is a bundle of raw energy inside. The Kin are ferocious when aroused, emotionally or sexually. If Senthys had a mind to, he could pick me up and throw me. He doesn't because I drug him and force him to obey."

"You drug him? Why?"

"I told you. He's dangerous. I can't grab him by the neck with my fangs the way a Kin parent would. The drug I give him is similar to one used for hyperactivity. He needs it." Saint-Cyr pressed his brow. "Hell, by the end of the day, I need him to be on it. It's exhausting keeping up with a fifteen-year-old human, let alone a HalfKin. Besides, it gives me an advantage. Helps ensure I'm the alpha."

"Are you saying it's like a pack mentality?"

"Exactly." Saint-Cyr took Wulf's hand and linked fingers with him. "As long as I'm the alpha, he'll obey me. Sex can trigger a HalfKin's aggression. He's not human, Wulf. You can't think of him that way no matter how human he appears."

"Well, he's not an animal."

"I didn't mean to imply he was. He's extremely intelligent. If there's a way around things, Senthys will find it." He glanced down at their linked hands and then back at

Wulf. "Did I tell you how I got him?"

Wulf shook his head. He turned a bit, so their thighs lay against each other, Saint-Cyr's warmth a comfort. He leaned his shoulder against him.

"I'd gone to a children's home to help locate the missing child of a friend. He'd been separated from his daughter and I had a lead that I thought would pan out. I found her, and while I was talking to the headmaster, I felt Senthys pick my pocket." His fond smile spoke of good memories. "The little scamp would have gotten away with it if he'd targeted a lesser trained thief, but I knew instantly. I also knew he'd only taken a single piece of candy. I'd put several in my pocket—a treat for the girl."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing. Came back two days later to visit again with only one piece of candy in that pocket. The little scamp took it without my being aware he had. Next day, I arranged to adopt him."

Wulf snapped his fingers. "Just like that? I think I'll adopt a kid?"

"I had five others at the time." He rubbed at his brow. "I've often wondered what I was thinking, but he had such potential."

"Five? You had five kids? When was this?"

"Right after your father died."

Wulf moved back from the edge of the bed. "I don't remember anything about you having kids." He lowered his voice. "Were they to be your Chosen?"

"No, no." Saint-Cyr drew Wulf's hand onto his lap. "One of my friends had died and they were all his apprentices. I took them in. All of them are grown now, four of them professional thieves and the fifth one a cop."

"Cop?" Wulf laughed despite himself. "Talk about being the black sheep. How does that make you feel? You being a thief and having a cop for a son? Do you see that as a failure, or a success?"

He made an off-hand gesture. "Both, actually."

"I'll bet." Wulf licked his lips. "How old was Senthys?"

"When I adopted him? Three."

"I have a little trouble picturing you as the 'daddy' type." Wulf rested his head against Saint-Cyr's shoulder, loving the man's warmth. "What happened to his parents?"

Saint-Cyr bit his lips together. "We know his father was Kin and his mother human. He was given to slavers by an elderly Kin female who said her people were going to slaughter him because he was half human. She said she rescued him because she couldn't stand to see a newborn killed. Apparently he had a brother, but we don't know whether he's human, Kin, or HalfKin."

"Has Senthys tried to find him?"

"I've never mentioned it. No point in raising hopes when the child may already be dead. In any case, they were separated at Senthys' birth, so he has no memory of him."

"I'd heard rumors that master thieves adopted children and trained them." Wulf pushed himself farther back on the bed. "Is that what Senthys meant by a working adoption?"

"Yes."

"But how can you adopt a child and keep him a slave?"

Saint-Cyr smiled, his teeth a flash of brilliant white in the dim light. "I'm not heartless, Wulf. There's a reason for everything I do with Senthys. To start with, the law

provides that anyone enslaved under age five will be freed at age twenty. And, by keeping him a slave, it ensures he keeps his last name. Should it ever come about that his brother is alive, it may help them find one another.”

Before Wulf could ask more, Senthys appeared in the doorway. “I’ve thrown everything away, Master.”

“Good. Come in and sit down.”

“Uh, I’d rather stand if it’s ok with you, sir.” He set both hands behind him.

Wulf winced, hurting for him. He’d felt the strength in Saint-Cyr’s hands only hours ago. The Man had held back with him. Senthys hadn’t been so lucky.

“Fine.” Saint-Cyr folded his arms. “I want to know how you found the tripwire in my closet.”

“I didn’t go near your closet, Master.”

Saint-Cyr rose.

Senthys retreated, hands out behind him, his gaze locked on Saint-Cyr.

“I already punished you for coming down here. If you lie to me you’ll earn yourself another whipping.”

“I’m telling you the truth. I came down here through the tunnel in the pantry.”

Saint-Cyr jerked back.

“You didn’t know about that one, did you?” Senthys bounced like a kid proud of a secret, his head nudged a bit higher. “I found it three months ago.”

“I’ll be damned.” Saint-Cyr dragged a hand through his hair. “Please tell me it’s well hidden.”

“Hell, yeah. I didn’t want you finding it.” He grinned, a flash of white fangs in the darkness. “Hey. I guess you didn’t. How long have you lived here and yet you didn’t know it was there?”

Saint-Cyr made a grunt. “Longer than you’d believe.”

Senthys shrugged, smiling at Wulf. “I thought I had this place all to myself.”

“Hmm.” Saint-Cyr paced into an even less well-lit area. His dark skin faded into the darker background, as if he’d become a white shirt with a baritone. “And yet you said nothing, even when you found the Cyr de Tomasson.”

“I wanted to tell you about it, sir, but…”

The shirt set hands on hips. “But?”

“But I thought you’d beat me.”

“Hmm. Still seems like a good idea to me.”

Wulf stood. “Please. I’ve had enough family violence for one night.”

“Violence?” The shirt folded its arms. “That was discipline, Wulf. Very different.”

“I see your point, Wulf.” Senthys crept closer to him. “I feel the same way.”

“Oh, no you don’t.” The shirt’s arm pointed. “You will *not* play divide and conquer games with us.”

A distant boom rocked the floor. The single light dimmed. The full force of the explosion’s blast wave hit, right through the stone, knocking them all to the ground.

Senthys’ catlike eyes glowed in the dark right next to Wulf. They each scrambled over and clung to Saint-Cyr.

“It’s all right.” Saint-Cyr hugged them both. “Stay right here while I go check this out.”

Wulf waited with Senthys, neither of them speaking, while Saint-Cyr walked around

the room with the flashlight. At last, he rejoined them, sitting between them both on the floor. He turned off the flashlight.

“Is everything ok?” Senthys put his shoulder beneath Saint-Cyr's arm.

“There's no damage to the vault. We're perfectly safe.” Leaning back on the wall, he put his other arm around Wulf and pressed his mouth against Wulf's ear. “I hope.”

As a sprinkle of dust rained down from the roof of the cave, the light faded down to black.

## Chapter Fifteen

### Beneath the Harbinger's house

Wulf dozed on Saint-Cyr's right shoulder; Senthys slept on his lap. How angelic his son seemed when asleep! Saint-Cyr stroked his left hand through the youth's long hair, tucking a strand behind his ear. From this angle, none of his Kin characteristics showed. At three, Senthys had been full of promise, intelligent and playful, eager to try everything, wanting to take on more, in awe of his new life and all the things Saint-Cyr taught him.

Unfortunately, the adorable kitten had grown into an independent, spit and claw, scratch-your-eyes-out tomcat.

Saint-Cyr sighed. Unlike the Sempervians, who could no longer reproduce, growing up was a natural progression for every species of mankind. Every generation clawed its way to freedom at the expense of its forebears. So why did it hurt so much every time he went through it with one of his Chosen?

He blew out a long breath and tilted his head back against the wall. Would Senthys ever come to the point where he could be trusted with the Sempervian secret?

His butt and thighs almost numb from hours of sitting on the floor, Saint-Cyr shifted position, trying not to wake either of the boys. The cave had several cots, but when Senthys fell asleep on the floor with his head on Saint-Cyr's lap, Wulf refused to leave their side. He and Wulf shared a few kisses, but it soon became apparent that would lead to things they'd rather not share with Senthys in the vicinity.

Wulf jerked awake and sat up. "What is it?" His whisper sounded loud in the dark.

"Just wanted to stretch a bit." Saint-Cyr drew up his right leg.

Wulf scratched his jaw and yawned. "You stand up for awhile." He motioned toward Senthys. "I'll be the pillow."

Saint-Cyr worked to change places with Wulf without disturbing Senthys. He supported his son's head while Wulf slid in to take his place. Switch made, Saint-Cyr stood and stretched both arms over his head, brushing his knuckles against the rock ceiling.

"I'll be right back." He took the flashlight with him, not turning it on until he'd moved out of the immediate area. The shelter hadn't been touched by the explosion, though who knew whether the Cyr de Tomasson would ever work again. Still, it had done its job. They were alive.

He brushed his fingers across the metal door. Definitely one of his better inventions.

There was no longer any doubt in Saint-Cyr's mind whether someone wanted to kill Wulf. Although Stalkos might have hired hit men, it was Saint-Cyr they were after. Question was, who the hell wanted to kill him badly enough to blow up his damn house? Even Stalkos wasn't stupid enough to go that far. No, this was starting to feel more and more like another Sempervian messing with him.

The Empress was his ally in this round of Peril and in an odd sort of way, so was the Sempervian on the Rebel side, playing against her. Neither of them had grudges against him. Neither of them wanted him to lose this round. Their wins each depended on his

success.

Had to be another player in the mix. Surely not the Dark Lord of Peril. Saint-Cyr's mind shied away from the thought of Pietas gaming against him. If the Bringer of Chaos had a hand in this, it could mean almost anything.

The air worked and the water supply still ran. He used the toilet and returned to Wulf and Senthys.

His son pushed himself up, stared from Wulf to Saint-Cyr in surprise, and then got to his feet.

"Good morning, Senthys. Wulf. Take turns relieving yourselves and then we'll clean up and eat. I know another way out of here, but we're not taking it until twenty-four hours have passed. I don't want anyone waiting for us when we come out."

"Fuck that." Senthys shoved back his hair. "I'm not sitting around down here wasting my life so you can hide out and play games with your boyfriend."

Saint-Cyr drew back his hand, but checked the movement. "Senthys." He took one step toward him, a finger extended. "Do not ever speak to me like that again."

"Or what?" Senthys closed the gap between them, head tilted back to glare up at him. "You'll hit me? Go ahead. I'm getting used to it. We don't have boxing gloves down here but I doubt that would stop you." He turned his face, showing the cut on his cheek from the night before. "Why don't you make it match?" He turned his face the other way.

Saint-Cyr unclenched his hands and kept them at his sides. Apparently, the drug he was using no longer had any real affect. Time to switch to something far more powerful.

"Son, do *not* push me. You and I are going to have some serious discussions when this is over." He jerked his head toward the door. "Get out of my sight for awhile. And stay inside the vault."

Senthys shot Wulf a glare, shouldered past Saint-Cyr and strode from the room.

"Wow, what's up with him?" Wulf reached up a hand.

Saint-Cyr hauled him to his feet. "I told you. He pushes back every single moment. It's exhausting. I'd thought boxing with him was a good idea." He rubbed his face with both hands. "Apparently not. Sorry, you're stuck with us for the day."

"Oh, joy." Wulf dusted off the seat of his pants. "Quality family time in the Saint-Cyr household. I can hardly wait. Do we get to sing songs, too?"

He groaned. "Not you, too."

"Do you at least have some playing cards down here, or books or ... something?"

"Must you be busy every single moment? Can't either of you simply 'be'? Just relax for a change. Sleep. It wouldn't hurt either of you to get some extra rest."

"Are you kidding?" Wulf set hands on his hips. "Some asshole blew up your house! People are going to think we're dead. That might be something you're used to, but it will have a *really* bad effect on *my* career. I can't sit down here all day. I vote we leave."

"You think you have a vote, do you?"

Wulf lowered his brows, folded his arms. "Damn straight."

"Is that right?" Saint-Cyr set one finger in the middle of Wulf's chest and pushed until he'd backed him against the wall.

Wulf dropped his hands, looking up at him with more than a little fear.

"You are *mine*, Wulf." Saint-Cyr shoved him flat against the wall and leaned into him. "You'll get what I give you and you'll give me what I want to take. Is that clear?"

Wulf swallowed, eyes huge and unblinking. His head bobbed forward once.

“Good. I want to hear no more talk about leaving.” Saint-Cyr stroked a finger along his jaw line. “Now, shut up and give me your mouth.”

\* \* \* \*

Wulf turned over on the cot and gazed toward the Cyr de Tomasson. *I wonder how it feels to invent something and still be using it centuries later.* He turned onto his back and folded hands behind his head.

Right now, Saint-Cyr and Senthys were playing a game on one of the other cots, throwing down cards one after another in some kind of bidding war. For once, Senthys wasn't sniping at anyone, though Wulf suspected being the slave/son of a man like Luc Saint-Cyr would be reason enough to drive anyone to sarcasm or frenzy. Maybe both.

Definitely both.

He sighed. *What the hell time is it, anyway? How long till we can leave?*

They'd eaten two meals today and spent hours playing some insipid board game requiring players to monopolize on Imperial locations. Senthys had acquired Tarth City and Tarth City Park and charged exorbitant rent every time Wulf and Saint-Cyr landed on them. Saint-Cyr owned all the starship lines and Imperinet. All Wulf got was undeveloped property out on New Mjuka, some housing on Kelthia, and he kept landing on the square marked “Tarth City Jail” and losing all his cash. But would the other two let him quit? Of course not. They'd loaned him play money at good interest—NOT—and refused to let him simply watch.

What the hell was it with these two? As long as they had him to pound between them, they got along fine. The moment he stopped playing, Senthys lost all semblance of patience and ended up picking a fight with Luc that had the two of them all but shouting. And now they were at it again.

Senthys growled like a big cat. “That was my card! You can't take my card.”

“Yes, I can. You lost a turn.”

“No, I didn't! You're always changing the rules! Why can't you play fair?”

Wulf shut his eyes. *Please, God, get me out of here.*

As if on cue, random tapping sounded.

Wulf rolled off the cot and onto his feet. Senthys beat him to the center of the vault, his head tilted as he listened. Saint-Cyr brandished the gun, glancing up and around.

Wulf edged closer to Saint-Cyr. “Where's that coming from?”

“Shh!” He ushered the two of them back to the farthest alcove. “Stay here. We don't know who's out there.”

Three taps came, then two, then three again.

“What if they're here to rescue us?” Senthys almost bounced, he was so eager. “At least let them know we're alive!”

“I'll take care of this. You stay here.” Saint-Cyr laid a hand on Senthys' shoulder. “Whatever happens, promise me you'll protect yourself and do what you can to keep Wulf safe.”

Senthys gave Wulf an odd glance, but nodded.

Saint-Cyr bent to whisper in Wulf's ear. “If anything happens to me, find McDoth. I'll come back for you.” He nudged up Wulf's chin and kissed him. Louder, he said, “Watch out for Senthys.”

Wulf's heart stuttered at the thought that he could ever lose this man. He grabbed

Saint-Cyr's shirtfront and drew him back for another quick kiss. Wrapping his arms around Senthys from behind, Wulf backed away. Senthys put out his arms protectively, shielding Wulf.

He chewed his lip, dying inside to see how matter-of-factly Saint-Cyr crept toward the back of the vault, away from the door. He cradled the gun in both hands, the barrel pointing upward near his cheek, black eyes vigilant in the gleaming darkness.

With a creaking groan, part of the rock wall began to slide inward.



## Chapter Sixteen

### **Beneath the Harbinger's house Sumertsag 27**

The darkness magnified the false door's screech against gritty sand to a crescendo of eerie squeals. When it ceased, Saint-Cyr steadied his gun hand, so aware of his own heartbeat he could barely hear anything else.

A wash of light searched back and forth. "Mr. Saint-Cyr?"

With a silent prayer of thanks, he put away the gun. "Here, McDoth."

The small light grew to a wide beam as it illuminated the room. McDoth stepped into view, dressed in a clean white jumpsuit. He lifted an eyebrow. "I told you no good would come of traveling without your valet."

Saint-Cyr scratched his scalp. "McDoth, you are totally correct."

Laughing, Wulf joined him. "Mick-Dee!" He grabbed the android and danced around him. "You don't know how glad I am to see you."

Senthys eyed the happy reunion, keeping his distance.

"You certainly seem well, sir." McDoth frowned as he examined Wulf's face. "But you'd better let me take a look at that nose of yours." He drew Wulf aside, into better light.

Nudging his chin toward McDoth, Senthys crossed his arms. "Who's the android?"

"My servant, McDoth. He serves me on Tarth. Most people can't tell he's not human. What gave him away?"

"Didn't smell right." Senthys shrugged, rubbing his nose. In the light, a smear of dirt showed on his face. "So how soon can we get out of here? I want some clean clothes and decent food instead of this freeze dried crap you keep down here."

"I'm ready now." Resting an arm across his son's shoulders, he hugged him and ruffled his hair. When Senthys smoothed his hair and pouted up at him, Saint-Cyr laughed and ruffled it some more. *Life is just so damn good.*

\* \* \* \*

### **C-1, Saint-Cyr's private vessel Sumertsag 28**

Showered, dressed, fed, his injured nose tended to, Wulf killed time with Senthys while they waited for Saint-Cyr. The young HalfKin paced around the lounge on the ship, energy apparent in every movement.

At last he faced Wulf and stuck both hands in his pockets. "So, Wulf?"

Wulf leaned back against the couch, arms spread along the back. "Yeah?"

"How did you meet the Man?"

"He was a friend of my father's. I've known him most of my life."

Senthys plopped onto the couch next to him. "You know he's all the time coming here with some new lover."

"Last time I checked, Luc Saint-Cyr was an adult. He doesn't answer to me."

The cornflower blue cat-like eyes darkened as his pupils widened. "So you're content to be one of his toys, is that it? You don't care what he does?"

*What is it Saint-Cyr keeps accusing Senthys of doing? Oh, yeah—divide and conquer. Damn good at it, too.* "Are you jealous?"

"Jealous?" Senthys stared for a moment and then laughed. "You're kidding, right? Anything that keeps him out of my hair is a good thing. Question is, are you?"

*This kid won't quit.* Wulf smiled. "Keeping him out of your hair? I guess so."

Senthys rolled his eyes. "No. Are you jealous?"

"Let me think about that for a nanosecond." He tapped a finger against his cheek. "Uh ... no."

Senthys leaned an elbow on one knee and propped his chin on that hand. "It doesn't bother you that he's not even gonna think about being faithful to you?"

*Why do you care?* Wulf let that one go. Knowing Senthys, it would only start a fight. "Right now, we're not sure where our relationship's going. I'll deal with all those issues as I come to them."

"I see." Senthys stood. "Is that because you've had so many lovers it doesn't matter?"

"Are you asking because you're curious, Senthys, or are you hitting on me?"

The youth wrinkled his nose and shook his head, sneezing like a cat. With a disdainful snort, he turned his back and stared out the window.

Wulf closed his eyes. *What's taking so long, Luc?* The police on Kelthia had arrested two men in association with the attack on the house and the murder of the guards. Saint-Cyr was answering questions and signing papers while Wulf and Senthys rested.

*Rest? Around Senthys? Hah! Need your wits about you every second.* Wulf opened his eyes as he felt Senthys sit down on the couch again.

The youth tucked one leg under him, facing Wulf. "Why not?"

His mind raced back over the last bits of their conversation, trying to understand his question. "Uh..."

"Why don't you care?" Senthys braced an arm against the couch. "It's obvious as hell that he cares about you. I was lying, you know."

*Luc cares about me?* Wulf fought the grin that wanted to plaster its fool self across his face. "What do you mean? Lying about what?"

"He never brings lovers here. He had a woman with him last time, but she didn't mean anything to him. Just a co-worker. You could tell. You're the first person he's ever introduced me to."

Wulf let that grin show itself. "Yeah?"

Senthys squinted, frowning. "So, you do care."

"Hell, yeah."

"I knew it!" Senthys pushed himself back on the couch. "What are you going to do about it?"

"Do?" Wulf swept a hand through his hair. "Play it by ear, I guess."

Senthys lifted his gaze heavenward, shaking his head. "For being a smart guy, you're acting pretty stupid right now."

Wulf folded his arms. "And I suppose you're qualified to tell me what I should do?"

"Hey." Senthys gestured to himself. "If anyone can clue you in about which of the Man's buttons to push, it's me."

Wulf laughed. "That is so true."

“Do you love him?”

Wulf didn't need that nanosecond. “Yeah.” He wet his lips, nodding. “Yeah, I do.”  
Senthys leaned closer. “Here's what you need to do.”

## Chapter Seventeen

### Kelthia, Thieves' Guild Academy Sumertsag 28

Saint-Cyr shook hands with Grand Master de Laney and followed him back to the waiting room, where Wulf and Senthys came to their feet.

"Everything's signed." Saint-Cyr put one arm around Senthys and walked him to the opposite side of the room. "You'll only have to stay here until I buy another house." He'd been waiting for fireworks since the moment he'd announced his decision.

"Ok." Senthys slipped both hands in his pockets. "How long d'you think it'll take?"

"Perhaps a month."

His son shrugged. "Ok."

Saint-Cyr rubbed his mouth. "I have to say, Senthys, I didn't expect you to take boarding school this well."

"Hey." Senthys spread his hands. "Not your fault they blew up the house. You'll come visit won't you? Take me out of here now and then?"

"Of course. Wulf and I have some details to tend to on Tarth, but after that I intend to return. The Fists are playing on Whinbrice, the last game before the old stadium is torn down. I thought I'd pick you up and we'd all go."

"Cool! You're taking me off the planet?" He bounced a little. "My friends will die when they hear that."

"Um, listen, Senthys." Saint-Cyr withdrew a debit bracelet and handed it to him.

"You're going to need new clothes. I've already paid for your school uniforms and books, but you'll want some things for when you're out of class. Buy what you want. If you need more money, call me. You know how to get hold of me."

"Sure." He slid the bracelet onto his left wrist. "That's cool. Thank you."

Across the room, Wulf spoke in low tones with de Laney. Neither paid them any attention.

"Senthys..." He paused, then finished before he could change his mind. "Wulf gave me a suggestion about you and I'm going to take it."

The youth glanced toward Wulf, pursed his mouth slightly. "Yeah?"

"He said I should let you call yourself Senth if you want to." When Senthys went wide-eyed, he added, "But that does not mean I will call you that. Nicknames..."

"Lack dignity. Yeah, I know." The youth grinned. "No problem." He shot a smile toward Wulf. "Thank you. Sir."

Saint-Cyr folded his hands behind him, rocked slightly. "So, I guess this is good-bye for a few days."

Senthys threw his arms around Saint-Cyr's waist and grinned up at him, then stepped back to walk away.

"Senthys." He reached out and touched the youth's arm. The boy turned back to face him. "I never got to thank you properly for warning us the night of the break in. You put yourself at risk. I..." He stopped himself from lecturing about safety and simply said, "—appreciate what you did."

His son nodded and walked away, back toward Wulf.

"Bye, Senthys." Wulf offered his hand.

Senthys took it, then stepped in closer and hugged him briefly. "Thanks, man. You take care of yourself."

Wulf brushed a hand across Senthys' cheek. "You know it." He lifted his head to meet Saint-Cyr's eyes, back at Senthys. "I guess we'll see you in a few days." He and Senthys made fists, rocked them into the air and then slapped their hands together.

Saint-Cyr gestured to Wulf and started toward the door, not looking back. In the hallway, four heavily armed idBot guards came to attention.

Wulf joined him, then stopped to turn around as they exited. He raised a hand in farewell before accompanying Saint-Cyr and the guards to the elevator. "I don't think Senthys will like it here, Luc, but he was very gracious about it, don't you think?"

"Yes. He surprised me, in fact. I'm actually starting to wonder if he's planning some scam." Saint-Cyr rubbed at his eyes. "But he'll be fine and it's only for a few days."

"You really think he'll be ok?"

"I've had to leave him here twice before. You'd have thought I was boarding a puppy new to a leash." He chuckled at the memory. "He did everything but bite me and wet on the floor." He pressed fingertips to head. "The whining and griping alone gave me a headache for a week."

"He's a good kid." He smiled up at Saint-Cyr. "You've done a hell of a job with him."

Unsure what to say, he hesitated. "Thanks."

The idBot guards slowed the elevator and called the contingent on the ground floor. When cleared, the elevator completed its journey and opened. Wulf walked beside him to the car and entered it ahead of him without being told.

Saint-Cyr joined him and darkened the windows. "Finally! I haven't had you to myself for days." He held out an arm and Wulf slid over next to him for a kiss. "Mmm. You taste so good." He teased Wulf's mouth, trailed kisses down along his jaw, onto his throat. "I want to taste more of you. Every part of you."

Wulf clutched the front of his shirt and pulled him close. Rising, he straddled Saint-Cyr and then leaned against him, chest to chest. One arm around his neck, the other hand in his hair, Wulf took control of their kiss.

Sitting back to enjoy the attention, Saint-Cyr allowed Wulf to touch him as he pleased. Hands busy stroking and petting, Wulf feasted on his mouth, licking, nipping, sucking at his lips and tongue. The sensuality of the moment, locked inside a car with this breathtaking, beautiful man who made such sweet love with his mouth and hands...

Saint-Cyr shuddered, his thoughts captive to Wulf's touch.

Wulf devoured him, hungry kiss after hungry kiss, his handsome, perfect face contorted with want, with need. Saint-Cyr rested his head against the seat, surrendering to the hot lust Wulf awoke in him. He gloried in the feel of his lover's insistent fingers rubbing against his nipples, pulling open his shirt so he could reach inside, sliding over his skin with feather light caresses.

Wulf moaned, low in his throat, the vibration of it transferring to his mouth and tongue. Saint-Cyr rubbed his tongue against the roof of his mouth, assuaging the tickle, only to have Wulf moan again, insistent, long, demanding.

Shirt open, Saint-Cyr tossed his head as Wulf ducked to lick across his nipple. The

hot tongue slid across him, then flicked and licked. Cool breath blew against his skin. Saint-Cyr bit into his lower lip, his entire body tightening with desire. The lazy pleasure of the moment took his breath away.

"I love your chest." Wulf nuzzled his chest hair. "You're all soft and furry." Wulf sucked the hardened nipple into his mouth, making Saint-Cyr cry out in painful lust, his cock so hard it felt like he'd gone to stone.

Wulf transferred to his other nipple, teasing and kissing, biting and licking until Saint-Cyr clenched his fists. Wulf opened Saint-Cyr's pants, their mouths still connected. He stroked the hard cock and rubbed his thumb across the slit on top. Saint-Cyr jerked and groaned.

"Yes." Wulf kissed his way down Saint-Cyr's throat, onto his chest. "I want to hear you moan." He slid his fingers down to cup his balls, and wrapped his hand around them. "Yes, like that. Louder." He squeezed—gently—tugging forward a little bit. "More. I love it when I can make you groan like that."

Saint-Cyr screamed hoarsely, unable to contain the heat that swept him. He tilted Wulf backward and slid one hand between them, down the front of Wulf's body to the hard proof of his arousal.

"I want to feel you. Want my hands on your skin." Saint-Cyr unfastened the pants, pushed them down as much as he could with Wulf on his lap, and pulled out his cock. "You're even perfect down here, love. Just look at you." He stroked the head. Pre-come glistened at the tip. "You're going to come all night long, Wulf." Wrapping a hand around Wulf's shaft, Saint-Cyr leaned in and took his mouth.

When he pulled back, Wulf panted, breath shallow and hot.

"I love your body, Wulf." Feeling the fine shiver that went through his lover, Saint-Cyr drew him closer. "I can't wait to fuck you. I'm going to pleasure you until you beg me to stop." He connected his mouth with Wulf's, stroking his tongue inside his lover's wet, velvet heat.

When the kiss ended, Wulf put both hands on his chest. He seated himself on Saint-Cyr's lap, one thigh on either side of him. Their cocks were tight, hot, and right up against each other like two men in love.

Saint-Cyr wrapped his right hand around as much of them as he could grasp. Wulf matched him on the other side. Their shafts, his dark and Wulf's light, stood within their joined hands.

Wulf lifted his gaze to Saint-Cyr's. "I love you, Luc. I love you so damned much."

"Kiss me."

Soft brown eyes closing, he leaned in and pressed his lips gently against Saint-Cyr's. He stroked Saint-Cyr's cheek. "Tell me what you want, Luc." He kissed his chin, licked across his lower lip. "Tell me, dirty boy. Tell Wulf what you want him to do to you."

"I want you to suck me. Take my cock in your mouth and lick every single inch of it."

"Oooh." Wulf squirmed. "I like that, dirty boy." He licked along Saint-Cyr's jaw. "What else?"

"I want you kneeling naked on this seat, giving me your ass. I want to plunge my cock into you. I want you to ride me. Take every bit of me inside you and beg me for more."

Wulf wrapped his arms around him and took his mouth in a kiss that promised

heaven. Saint-Cyr dragged him down hard, bruising him in his lust. Rough, biting, demanding more, taking more, wanting to swallow Wulf whole, possess, own and claim him.

“Need to make you mine. Mine, now.” Saint-Cyr stripped off Wulf’s clothes, Wulf helping him, opening his pants and squirming to get out of them.

When Saint-Cyr pulled a travel-sized pack of lube from an inner pocket, Wulf laughed. “You were prepared to get lucky, weren’t you?”

“Hell, yeah.” Saint-Cyr tore open the pack and squirted some onto his fingers. “I’m already planning what I’ll do to you once we board the ship.” He turned Wulf away from him and slid two fingers inside him. Wulf panted, pushing back, hands braced on the other seat.

“Fuck me!” Wulf wagged his hips. “I don’t want foreplay, damn it! Fuck me!”

“Easy, my beautiful young lover. I don’t want to hurt you.” The tight opening spread as he worked his lubricated fingers deeper inside. “I intend to fuck you for hours once we’re home.” Saint-Cyr guided him back, angling Wulf’s hips toward him. “Let’s make sure you’re up to it.”

Wulf moved side to side, pushing back, impaling himself on Saint-Cyr’s hard shaft. He spasmed inside. Saint-Cyr knew it hurt him, yet Wulf forced himself back, hands braced on the other seat to shove himself further down.

Wulf’s cry spoke of pain and lust, heat and fire. He moved on his own. Up, down, wiggling side to side. Back. Hard, harder. Thrusting when Saint-Cyr would have waited, demanding more cock with his body. Taking it, keeping it. Filling himself.

“Want you ... ah! Luc. Oh, Luc.” Wulf tossed back his head. “Give...” He screamed, ground himself against Saint-Cyr, his back against Saint-Cyr’s chest. He laid his hands over Saint-Cyr’s on his own hips and writhed, sobbing with desire. “Fuck me. Oh, Luc, fuck me so hard...”

Saint-Cyr reached around and gripped Wulf’s shaft, pulled and pumped it, making him shiver and shake. His body afire, Saint-Cyr shot into him, mind splintering with lust. Hot cream jetted over his hand as Wulf tossed his head back against Saint-Cyr’s shoulder. His lover’s legs splayed wide across his lap, Saint-Cyr held Wulf while he bucked and twitched in wanton abandonment.

“Yes, Wulf. Come for me. Give it to me. Let me take it.”

Wulf’s hot, tight ass spasmed hard, milking come out of Saint-Cyr, making him sob with residual pleasure. He gulped air, senses so overloaded he couldn’t think, couldn’t speak, only react to the sensations coursing through his cock and balls.

Curse words flowed from Wulf’s lips as he eased down, both of them panting after the incredible, sexual high. He reached a hand up and back into Saint-Cyr’s hair, held onto him as they kissed.

“Wulf, love. Wulf.” Saint-Cyr pressed a soft kiss against his ear. Holding him on his lap, so close, so much a part of him. “You’re mine, love. Mine. Mine.”

He gathered Wulf tighter against him, stroking down his chest with one hand while the other still gripped his wet cock. Wulf shuddered beneath his touch, mouth open to take his kiss, his breath shallow, fast.

“I love you so much.” Wulf’s mouth felt cool to the touch. He spoke softly, his lips against Saint-Cyr’s, each word a sweet kiss. “Promise me you’re mine. Promise me you won’t leave me. Promise me, Luc.”

“Yes, Wulf.” Saint-Cyr slid a hand down Wulf’s naked chest, his own cock still engorged and deep inside his lover. “I’m yours. Every part of me. My heart, my mind, my soul. All of me is yours. I love you.”

“Oh, Luc.” Wulf snuggled back against him, eyes closed, his face relaxed, serene. “Marry me then.”



## Chapter Eighteen

### Kelthia, Miraj City Luc Saint-Cyr's hoversine

Wulf's request echoed in Saint-Cyr's head. Marry me... Marry me...

After the heat and fire of their lovemaking, those words slapped him like a bucket of ice water. His erection faded. The heat of their bodies brought about sticky, uncomfortable sweat, fogging the windows of the hoversine. The leather seat felt wet, slippery. Removing his hands from Wulf's body, he sat back.

Wulf stiffened. He disengaged from Saint-Cyr's embrace. Avoiding his gaze, Wulf climbed off his lap and used his t-shirt to wipe off and clean himself. He hooched around in the car, pulling up his pants.

Saint-Cyr tugged his up, buttoned his shirt and tucked it in before fastening the pants. He straightened his cuffs, ran a hand through his hair.

Leaving his button-down shirt open at the throat, Wulf held his wet t-shirt, the only evidence of their passion. He balled the shirt up in his fists, glancing around as if seeking a place to put it. When Saint-Cyr held out his hand, Wulf ignored him. He wadded the shirt tighter, mouth a straight line. Abruptly, he turned his head and covered his eyes with one hand.

Saint-Cyr turned his head the other direction, trying to ignore Wulf's hiccups, pretending the scent of lovemaking did not fill the hover's cabin. When the car slowed and then stopped, the driver barely had time to open the door before Saint-Cyr leapt out and headed for the ship.

\* \* \* \*

### C-1, Saint-Cyr's private vessel

Wulf leaned against the shower wall, hands over his eyes. He'd used every drop of hot water on the ship taking a shower, yet he couldn't wash away the betrayal left from every touch of Saint-Cyr's hands. His silent rejection played over and over, the lies he'd told moments before stabbing his heart. *"I'm yours. Every part of me. My heart, my mind, my soul. All of me is yours. I love you."*

He'd practically run from him afterward.

*How could I be so stupid? How could I have listened to Senthys? Oh, God, how he must be laughing at me right now. He knew Luc would never marry someone like me.* Wiping tears from his face, Wulf shut off the now cold water and exited the stall.

He wrapped himself in thick towels and opened the door to the bedroom, peeking out to ensure no one was present. Saint-Cyr had sent a note with one of the droid crewmembers that he'd had to return to Kelthia and wouldn't come back until tomorrow. The man had lied so often he didn't expect him to live up to that either.

Wulf had wadded up the handwritten note and thrown it against the wall. Not content with that, he'd grabbed it, torn it into tiny shreds, thrown it into the toilet, and made damn sure he pooped all over it before he flushed it.

It hadn't helped. Much.

Wulf had begged him, *"Promise me you're mine. Promise me you won't leave me. Promise me, Luc."*

Saint-Cyr had left him. Left him after he promised he wouldn't. *"I will keep you with me from now on. Until we know you're safe, I'll take you everywhere with me. If you won't be safe somewhere, I won't go either."*

Throwing himself face down on the bed, Wulf pulled a pillow under his chest. *If I was home right now, I'd break out some whiskey.* He sat up and reached for the holophone beside the bed. "I'd like two bottles of Kelthian whiskey, please."

"Right away, sir," the droid purser promised. "May I do anything else for you?"

"Yes, I want to make a call to Tarth."

"Certainly, sir. How may I direct your call?"

He knew the number by heart.

\* \* \* \*

**Kelthia, Miraj City**  
**idBot Headquarters, Kelthian Region**  
**Saint-Cyr's private office**

Saint-Cyr stifled the urge to visit Senthys. If he did, he'd only throttle him. Now that he'd thought about it, there was no doubt the lad had put Wulf up to asking him about marriage. Small wonder Senthys had been so easy to coax into boarding school. He'd been plotting to break them up. Divide and conquer. The little bastard was a damned genius at it.

Right now, Wulf likely pouted. Or cried. Saint-Cyr brushed a hand across his face. *Please don't let me have fallen in love with a man who cries. I can't take it.* Tears turned him into mush. No matter what, he couldn't let the Harbinger be seen falling apart.

McDoth entered the room, securing the door behind him. Few other places on Kelthia afforded the level of privacy Saint-Cyr would need for this call.

McDoth seated himself and initiated the connection, using a device within himself to link with Uurah, the android Master Referee of Peril. In turn, Uurah would contact Pietas, the Gamemaster. Depending on his mood, Pietas would answer immediately or get back to him when he felt like it, anywhere from an hour to a year to never.

Saint-Cyr crossed his fingers.

McDoth made a gesture, indicating he was in contact with Uurah. A moment later he sat up stiffly and nodded once.

Saint-Cyr stood, moved out from behind the desk into an open area near the door.

Pietas ap Lorectic shimmered into view, life-sized. As tall as Saint-Cyr, with waist-length silver-blond hair and brilliant turquoise eyes, Pietas possessed the beauty of an angel and the soul of a devil. If he still had a soul after all the horrors he'd committed over the centuries. Seeing him like this it was almost possible to forget the worlds he'd ruined and the millions upon millions of lives he'd destroyed.

*Focus, Luc. Remember why you're in this nest of vipers.* He bowed deeply.

"Cyken Tomarus, my old friend." Pietas gestured him to rise.

The name he'd been given among the Sempervians sounded alien, though Saint-Cyr used some part of it in almost every name he took.

The technology the Sempervians used made that of the empire seem like toys. When Pietas offered to shake his hand, Saint-Cyr felt the man's warmth and smooth skin as if he stood there in person instead of on a planet far outside Tarthian space.

"Thank you for seeing me, my lord." Saint-Cyr bowed again.

"I've been expecting your call." Pietas turned and walked away, hands behind him as he faced the windows. "This isn't nearly as lovely a view as your Tarthian office. Why didn't you call me from there?"

Saint-Cyr chewed over his words. "Expecting my call? Why?"

"Mmm." Pietas turned and stared, then came back toward him. "You've surely been aware another player has been moving your tokens."

"Who is it? Did you know they blew up my house? I want them to provide restoration and damages."

Pietas chuckled. "I'd grant it if I hadn't told them to do it myself."

"What!"

"You're angry. How wonderful!" Pietas clapped his hands and laughed. "I love it. I knew you'd be upset. I so rarely get to see you—how do you say it, 'lose your cool.' That's right, isn't it? Lose your cool?"

"Yes, Pietas." Saint-Cyr made himself stand still. Turning his back would only irk Pietas, and a peeved Gamemaster was likely to set him up to lose. "Why? They killed people. Caused havoc in my life. Put my son in danger."

"Son?" He tilted his head. "Oh, yes. The young thief. You know, I *like* him. He's most interesting to watch. Have you decided to make him your Chosen yet?"

"No. Not yet. He needs a few more years before he's mature enough to keep the secret. Senthys is off limits to everyone. You gave me your word, my lord, and whoever it was that attacked me put him in grave danger."

"Mmm." He patted his mouth. "Senthys is talented for a human, but he has a temper. Likes to have his way, doesn't he? I imagine he ... um..." He made a gesture, and Uurah, the massive android who served him, moved into sight. "What is that phrase about buttons?"

Uurah inclined his head. "Pushes his buttons, my lord."

"Ah, yes!" Pietas smiled and turned back to Saint-Cyr, his beautiful face radiant. "I imagine Senthys pushes your buttons."

Saint-Cyr resisted the urge to demand Pietas keep his distance. That would only put the Gamemaster fully onto Senthys' trail. "You don't know the half, my lord."

Pietas cocked his head to one side. "So you only called me to complain?"

"No, lord. Actually, I called for personal reasons."

"Oh, good. I hope it's dramatic. I love drama." Pietas gestured to Uurah. He scooted a chair near him and Pietas seated himself. The android stayed directly behind him, silver eyes watchful. Pietas waved a hand. "Go ahead, Cyken."

"One of my Chosen has returned to me, my lord."

"Ah..." Smiling, he motioned to Saint-Cyr. "Pull up a chair, my friend."

He rolled over one of the chairs in the office and sat down facing him.

"Good." Pietas crossed one leg over the other, smoothing his black silk pants. "Now, tell me about Wulf."

Saint-Cyr held his breath. "You! You set all this up."

The Gamemaster leaned back in the chair, one eyebrow quirking. "You didn't

suspect?”

“You put Stalkos up to harassing Wulf and had Stahlwell threaten him. You sicced them on me. Destroyed my home.”

Pietas smirked. “I did it for your own good.”

Saint-Cyr set both elbows on his knees as he leaned forward. “My lord, if you weren't my sovereign in all things I would be furious with you.”

He laughed and glanced back at his servant. “In other words, Uurah, he *is* furious with me but he's too polite to say so.” He leaned forward and patted Saint-Cyr on the arm. “I love the way you put things. So tactful, Cyken. You're not nearly as timid as the others.”

Clenching his jaw, Saint-Cyr smiled. “You've always shown me grace, my lord. Perhaps that's why.”

“Would you like to know my reasoning?”

“Of course.” He sat back.

“When your last Chosen died and his son blamed you, you were so distraught that several of the others begged me to intercede. Through their reports and others, I watched you struggle to continue. There are times, my friend, when inaction is what's needed most.”

Saint-Cyr shut his eyes, suddenly back at Batchelors, telling Trink the exact same thing about Wulf. How much easier it was to say those words than to hear them.

“Pietas, my lord, what could you have done? You didn't cause his death.” He caught his breath. “Please—tell me you didn't.”

“The Chosen are sacrosanct. Inviolable. No one, not even I, may touch them. The Chosen must not fear any of us, especially me. You should not have to ask, Cyken.”

He shook his head. “I'm sorry, my lord. I—Your words shocked me. But why did you wait so long?”

Pietas quirked a smile. “How long was it?”

“Twenty years!”

“And how many years have we been alive, my friend?”

Saint-Cyr turned his head.

“You've begun thinking like a human. Next lifetime I think you need to spend some time with me. Get to see the universe as it should be seen.”

*By all that's holy...* Saint-Cyr swallowed. “You're right. My perspective was off.”

“You see?” Pietas stretched out a hand. “I couldn't have done anything. Not then. But now? You desired Wulf Gabriel. It was a simple matter of nudging him in the right direction. This is why I sent Erryq.”

No wonder he'd had erotic dreams.

Each Sempervian had a unique ability or gift. Erryq's enabled her to finely tune the minds of those asleep. Dreams, daydreams, fantasies... She only needed proximity. His was to heal other Sempervians by looking at them with his natural eyes, and he could tell immediately if a person—no matter how well disguised—was a Sempervian.

Pietas clapped his hands like a child playing. “You understand it all, don't you? That I sent her to make Wulf dream about you, and you to dream about Wulf. It was only a matter of time before one thing or another nudged you two together.”

“So you want me to join with Wulf?”

“Yes! I threw Erryq and the others into the mix because you seemed to think you

couldn't have your Chosen as a lover.” He shook his head. “Where you got that idea I don't know. I've had plenty of mine.”

Saint-Cyr slapped himself on the forehead. “Pietas, why didn't you just tell me?”

“And ruin the fun of manipulating you into it?” He glanced heavenward. “Come now.”

“Then I have your permission to join with Wulf.”

He flipped a hand. “Do whatever you like, my friend. He's *your* Chosen.”

Saint-Cyr stood as Pietas did. “What about these hit men who tried to kill him? Kill me? And Stalkos? He's still out there.”

“Of course he is. Must I do everything for you? Go back and protect your lover. Kill the bad guys. If you want to win, take action to defend yourself. I may have set all this in motion, but it's part of the risk of playing the game.” He laid a hand on Saint-Cyr's shoulder, turquoise eyes staring deep. “After all, my friend, that's why we call it Peril.”

## Chapter Nineteen

### C-1, Saint-Cyr's private vessel Sumertsag 29

The tradestandard clock beside the bed clicked over to midnight as the holophone rang. Wulf hid the half-empty whiskey bottle and reached for the bright red answer button.

Feeyona Joie popped into view. "Wulf? Hi, babe. What's up?"

"Fee, honey, I need a friend."

"Uh oh." She set a hand on her cheek. "I had a feeling something was wrong when I saw your pic-mail. You didn't look happy at all. Especially when all you said was 'call me'. Not like you."

"Oh, Fee!" Wulf sank to the floor beside the bed and leaned back against it.

"Everything's fallen apart. Everything!"

She sat cross-legged across from him. "What happened?"

He covered his eyes, pressing the heel of his hands against them to stop himself from crying. His eyes hurt from crying. "I never want to cry over another man ever again, Fee. Never."

"None of them are worth one single tear, Wulf, except you. Not one. Now, you talk to me, sweetie. Where are you?"

"I'm on his ship." He lifted his head. "I wish you were here. I could really use a hug right now."

"Oh, baby, I'm so sorry. What did he do? Did he hurt you?"

"Only my heart, Fee. It's broken right in two."

"Aww, Wulf." She reached out.

He reached back in response, but his fingers passed through hers as she were a ghost.

"There were people trying to kill me, Fee."

She covered her mouth.

"At least one person is still out there. Maybe two. He's taking care of them."

"He?"

"Saint-Cyr. The Man. The Harbinger." Wulf wiped at his eyes. "They blew up his house. We could've all been killed. He promised he wouldn't leave me if it wasn't safe but now he's gone and I hate him! I want to go home, Fee, but I'm trapped here. Trapped."

"Someone blew up Saint-Cyr's house? What do you mean he left you? Where is he?" She shook her head. "You're not making sense. Have you been drinking?"

He hiccupped. "Scuse me. Only this much of a bottle." He measured with fingers and thumb.

"Whiskey?" When he nodded, she set both hands on the floor and leaned toward him. "Wulf, you need to be able to think clearly. You're making decisions here that will affect you the rest of your life. I want you to promise me you won't drink any more of that stuff. Pour it down the drain."

"I can't."

"Why?"

"It's Kelthian. It's expensive. Saint-Cyr would kill me."

She sat up straight. "Did he threaten you?"

"No." Wulf shook his head. "I meant..." He hiccupped, "—he would hate it if I did that."

"Why do you care, Wulf? Besides, I'm sure Saint-Cyr can afford to throw out whole cases of whiskey." She wagged a finger at him. "Now I want you to go get that bottle and pour it down the drain right now."

"I..." There was always the second bottle. He shrugged. "Ok." Putting his weight on the bed, he got to his feet, picked up the bottle and poured it into the toilet. He returned, plopped down on the floor and held up the bottle. "Empty. For you, Fee."

"Thank you, Wulf." Feeyona smiled at him. Her eyes glittered with unshed tears. "I worry about you so much. Wulf, please promise me you won't drink any more tonight."

He cast about in his mind how to get around promising that, finally sighed and nodded. "I promise. No more tonight."

"Ok, now let's get down to the details." She leaned to one side, propped on her hand. "You said he left you. Do you have a way home? Do you need me to send you money, sweetheart?"

He shook his head. "No." He hiccupped and braced a hand against his stomach. "That's ok, Fee, but I appreciate it."

"Are you sure? Do you still have the tickets I bought you?"

He nodded, picking at the royal blue carpet. "I packed them. They're in my bagbot."

"Ok. Wulf, are you sure you're not in physical danger? A man like Saint-Cyr... I just don't know what to think about him. I want to be sure you're safe."

"He wouldn't hurt me, Fee." Wulf pushed one hand back through his hair. "He may be an asshole, but he wouldn't hurt me." He sucked in a deep, ragged breath. "He just won't marry me."

She covered her mouth. "Marry you!"

He frowned at her. "What's wrong with me? Why wouldn't he marry me?"

"It's not that he wouldn't, Wulf. It's just... Oh, honey, marriage is a huge commitment. Saint-Cyr doesn't enter into anything lightly. He analyzes everything in minute detail. He researches every business deal he makes. I don't know a lot about him, but he's on Imperinet News every single day with a different business deal. Haven't you ever watched one of those specials about him? You have to know he isn't going to jump into marriage after you've only spent a couple of days around him."

"A couple of days? Fee! I've known him since I was a kid."

She rubbed her neck. "Yeah, I know. That kind of creeps me out, if you want to know the truth."

Wulf blinked. "Why?"

"How old is this guy? How old was he when your father died?"

"I don't know." Wulf rubbed his brow. "Um... lemme think." Even tipsy, he took care to guard Saint-Cyr's origins. He skimmed back over the Chosen Chronicles in his mind, trying to piece together the "official" details. "He was born in 4601."

"So he's sixty years old. Twice your age."

"Please." Wulf shook his head. Age certainly had nothing to do with it. Saint-Cyr would age to the point where his body could no longer heal itself rapidly and then he'd "die" and be reborn, younger, vital, ready for another hundred years. "Age doesn't matter

to me. Besides, humans don't even reach middle age until they're seventy. He's in great shape. You ought to feel the muscle on him.”

“Uh... that's ok. I'll pass.”

“His age doesn't have anything to do with this, ok?”

“If you say so. He never touched you when you were a child, did he?”

His mouth dropped open. “Feeyona Joie! How could you even think such a thing! I'm his...” He stopped himself from saying Chosen.

Feeyona had her hands up, but was watching him closely. “You're his what?”

“I'm his best friend's son. Besides, if you knew him, really knew him, you'd know he'd never do anything to hurt a child. He's taken in foster children, you know. He's got an adopted son on Kelthia.”

*Ok, Wulf, better leave out the part where Senth's a slave and Saint-Cyr drugs him. Might not make your point very well.*

“I'm glad you think he's so wonderful. How does all that jive with him breaking your heart?”

He covered his eyes, tilting back his head to rest it against the bed. “I don't know. It's just that we had such great sex and the next minute he was all ice and grit. Like he'd shut me out completely. I don't know how to deal with that.” He lifted his head. Feeyona was studying him. “I'm sorry. More detail than you wanted, I know.”

“It's ok. We're friends. I cried all over your shoulder the night my former best friend stole my boyfriend, remember? You got to hear how much I hated the way he fucked anyway.”

He chuckled, shaking his fingers as if they burnt. “Yeah.”

Feeyona leaned forward again. “Wulf, honey. Are you sure you're safe where you are?”

“Yeah.” He reached out, trailed fingers down where her face would be. “I miss you, sweetie.”

She smiled at him. “I miss you, too.”

“Let's get together when I get back. We'll go get drunk together. I'll buy all the drinks if you let me whine about how hung my big hot stud is but how badly he treats me.”

She giggled. “Only if you promise not to tell me how badly he fucks.”

“Oh, honey. That is one thing you will absolutely never hear. He is a god in bed. Does me till my eyes roll back in my head.”

“Ok.” Feeyona held up one finger. “Let me get this straight—no pun intended—he's filthy rich, loves kids... uh, is he a sports flake like you?”

“Go Fists! He practically owns the team.”

“Hmm. And you say he's hung?”

“Like a bull.” He made a cross over his heart and held up a hand. “I am not making that up.”

“Ok. *And* he fucks like a god. Tell me again why you want to leave him.”

“Hmm.” Wulf set a hand over his mouth. “You know, since you put it that way, maybe I don't.”

Feeyona threw back her head and laughed.

\* \* \* \*



**C-1, Saint-Cyr's private vessel**  
**Sumertsag 29, mid-morning**

Saint-Cyr tiptoed into his darkened cabin. Wulf was curled up on the far side of the bed, his naked back to the door. The reek of whiskey filled the air, discarded clothing lay strewn across the floor, and two empty whiskey bottles sat on the table.

*Great. I'm in love with a lush.* He picked up the clothing as he passed through the room and deposited it in the laundry chute, grabbed the bottles by their necks and carried them into the bathroom to toss in the trash. He unzipped in front of the toilet and almost gagged at the brown water in the bowl. The smell of whiskey rose in pungent waves.

*Wait a minute.* The water was the same color as the whiskey. *No way.* He leaned down toward the toilet. *I can't believe I'm doing this.* One sniff told him: whiskey, all right. *Wulf poured two perfectly good bottles of whiskey down the commode. What the hell for?*

He relieved himself, flushed, and washed his hands. Above the sink on the mirror, Wulf had scrawled a message. Saint-Cyr turned up the light to read it better.

“Fuck you,” it said, with the word “you” mostly smeared out and “ME” written in its place, followed by the word “please”, as if Wulf had started out angry and then forgiven him in stages.

He grinned. Stripping off his clothes, he turned out the light and headed for the bed.

## Chapter Twenty

### C-1, Saint-Cyr's private vessel

Saint-Cyr slipped under the covers and slid up behind Wulf. Taking his sleeping lover into his arms, he pulled Wulf against him.

"Nnn." Wulf mashed his face into the pillows and rolled away.

Chuckling, Saint-Cyr gathered him close once more. Wulf's cologne seemed familiar, but not like his usual. He buried his nose against Wulf's neck and drew in a breath. *Delicious. Sweet. What is that?* His skin felt smooth to the touch. Saint-Cyr rubbed his fingers together, testing. *Oil? Very faint, if so.*

Taking a handful of Wulf's dark hair, he drew it back from his ear and nuzzled closer. Like a snap, the scent registered. *Baby oil.* He grinned into the darkness. *Lots of good uses for that.*

"Wulf. Love." He pressed his mouth against Wulf's throat. "Wake up."

"Nnn. Wan' sleep."

"Wake up." He rolled Wulf onto his back and slid his hand down the smooth chest, brushing fingers across his nipples. They pebbled immediately. *So responsive.*

The brown eyes fluttered open, dazed and sleepy. His lashes stuck together in endearing points around them. He yawned, hooching around in the bed as he knuckled his eyes. "I'm still mad at you, Sempervian. And after you make love to me I'm going to kick your ass."

"You think so, do you?"

"Yeah." Wulf lifted a hand and stroked it across Saint-Cyr's hair, his fingers lingering near his brow. "So you'd better be good or I'll make you regret it."

"I'm always good." Propping his head on one hand, Saint-Cyr stroked the warm skin beneath his other one. "You're so sensual. I love touching your body. Staring at you. You were made to be enjoyed, Wulf."

His lover arched his neck, sighing. His languid submission made Saint-Cyr's body pulse with the sensation of power. His balls tingled with that wonderful I'm-so-hot-I'm-going-to-shoot pleasure. The sight of Wulf's body aroused him in ways no other lover had. The raw sex appeal of having this beautiful man in *his* bed sent his mind reeling.

A longtime dream come true just being here with him.

Saint-Cyr leaned down and kissed the nipple nearest to him, stroked the brown button with his tongue, using the tip to tease it into rigidity. "I'll let you do anything you want to me later. I was an ass and I can never make it up to you." He drew Wulf closer and licked the other nipple, breathed on the wet skin to pebble it into an elongated shape. "But I want to try."

Wulf gripped him by the hair on the back of his head and pulled his face up close to his own. "You'd damn well better, Sempervian. I expect major kissing up."

"Would gifts be appropriate?"

He lowered his gaze to Saint-Cyr's mouth and then returned to his eyes. "You think you can afford what it would take to buy me off?"

He traced a finger along Wulf's jaw line. "What would you like?"

“How about the Fists?”

Saint-Cyr choked on a laugh. “You mean the ruckball team?”

“If you had something bigger you wanted to offer, go ahead.”

*The little tease is serious!* Saint-Cyr suddenly caught what this request truly was—and the truth that lay behind it. Nothing he gave Wulf would make up for the way he had treated him. He sat up. “Wulf. Wulf, love. Sit up.”

His lover pushed himself back against the head of the bed and drew up his knees, wrapping arms around them. A muscle twitched in his jaw.

“I infuriated you by the way I reacted and you don't want to forgive me. In fact, you really would like to kick my ass.”

Wulf dipped his head lower, a corner of his mouth twitching.

Saint-Cyr folded his legs and leaned forward, one hand braced against the pillows. “Maybe it would be good if you just did it.”

The brown-eyed gaze turned on him sharply. A flash of anger tightened into a squint.

“I spanked you one night. Maybe it would help if you hit me.” Saint-Cyr wet his lips. “I can take anything you dish out, love. I was senseless and heartless to be so cold. I shut you out completely. I'd die if it would show how much I love you.”

The resounding slap across the face hit him so hard and fast it almost toppled him. Resisting the urge to touch his face, Saint-Cyr turned back to Wulf and was struck again. The third blow brought the taste of blood to his mouth.

Wulf shoved him backwards, pushing him off the bed. Saint-Cyr clambered to his feet and staggered backward. He let Wulf pummel him. No one could ever accuse Wulf Gabriel of hitting like a girl. He'd paid attention in class during all those years of martial arts. Saint-Cyr felt the proof of it in every blow.

He resisted nothing, allowing himself to be beaten. Wulf knocked him to the ground, made him get up and then knocked him down again.

“Get up, damn it!” Wulf stood over him. “Stand up and fight me, Sempervian. Defend yourself.”

“No.” Saint-Cyr stuck his tongue against a loose tooth. His jaw ached. He rose unsteadily on one knee, pushed himself to his feet and faced Wulf. “Hit me again.”

“No!” Wulf shoved him away. “You'd like that, wouldn't you? Think I'm going to give you the easy way out?” He set a finger in the middle of Saint-Cyr's chest and pushed.

He staggered, almost fell. His jaw hummed as it healed his loose tooth. Saint-Cyr wished it would stop, so Wulf could have outside proof of his suffering on the inside, in his heart. No amount of blood could suffice.

“Why did you do this to me, Luc? Why did you have to make me hate you again? I wanted to love you, damn it. I wanted to open my heart to you and you tore it out of me.” He pushed Saint-Cyr so hard he hit the wall.

Throwing out his hands, he braced them against it and stood there, silently accepting whatever punishment Wulf threw his way.

“Damn you, Luc!” Wulf balled up his fists. “I forgave you for my father's death. I forgave you for living when my father died. But I can't forgive you for taking away my trust. I opened myself to you. I gave you everything and you just ... walked ... away.” He pressed the heel of his fists against his eyes and rocked unsteadily.

Saint-Cyr reached out a hand to support him.

Wulf yanked away from his touch and almost fell. He gained his balance and moved away, turning his back. "Damn you to hell, Sempervian. Damn you!"

Saint-Cyr sank to the floor and tilted his head back against the wall. "I wish I was human enough to go there for you, Wulf. If I have a soul, it's in torment right now over what I did to you. You have every right to hate me."

Wulf turned and lost his footing, falling to his knees before him. "Luc, I wanted you so bad. I wanted to love you. I wanted you."

"I've never loved anyone the way I love you, Wulf." Saint-Cyr blinked, the room blurring. "It scared me. A man who knows he can't die, that he can take a bullet in the heart and live—scared off by two words. I had to face my demons, Wulf." He wiped at his eyes. "I called Pietas."

Wulf recoiled as if he'd been struck.

Saint-Cyr understood his fear. The universe knew Pietas by many names. Soul Ripper. Impaler. Slayer of Innocents. Destroyer of Worlds. The Hound of Hell. In the entire universe, the only creatures safe from his wrath were the Chosen.

Yet even *they* trembled at his name.

"You—you called..." Wulf clutched his throat. "Why?"

"To ask permission to join with you. To bring you back as my Chosen." He blinked hard, trying to clear his vision. "To bring you back as my mate."

Wulf sat on the floor, naked, facing him in stony-faced silence in the dim light. He shook his head. "No."

"No? No to what?"

"I can't marry you, Luc."

Those words froze his heart—he tightened a hand over his chest. "Wulf..."

"It's not because I don't love you." Wulf stroked fingertips down Saint-Cyr's face. "I do. I love you with all my heart." He crawled toward him, his knees against Saint-Cyr's. "But you can't make me a Sempervian. When I die..."

"Wulf, don't!" He grabbed his hands. "I won't listen to that kind of talk."

"Yes, you will." Wulf leaned forward and pressed his brow against Saint-Cyr's. He pressed a kiss on his mouth. "Let me tell you what's in my heart."

"Wulf, please. Please, don't."

"Shh." He lifted a hand and cupped Saint-Cyr's cheek. "I love you. I'll be yours as long as you'll have me. But it was a moment of foolishness to ask you for marriage. I will be your Chosen." He pressed his cheek to Saint-Cyr's. "I'll love you as long as I live. I'll be yours as long as you want me beside you."

Hot tears splashed Saint-Cyr's cheeks. With Wulf so close to him, he couldn't tell whose they were. He closed his eyes and blindly pulled him closer.

"Wulf, Wulf, I love you. I love you."

"While you were gone, I realized something about myself. I've been waiting for you to act on my behalf. For you to save me. To rescue me from my situation. I've been waiting for you to be the hero."

"Oh, Wulf." He took Wulf's hands in his and brought them to his mouth. He pressed kisses against his fingers and laid his cheek in Wulf's palms. "I'd like nothing better than to always be your hero."

Wulf bent to kiss his other cheek, then drew away from him and dragged both hands through his hair, pulling it back from his face. "I've been waiting for others to save me all

my life. Not just you, but everyone. I'm not going to wait anymore. It's my life. I need to be my own hero."

Scrubbing away tears, Saint-Cyr rested against the wall, pressing his back flat against it. "You've never truly *needed* me, Wulf. You might be a born-to-it submissive, but that doesn't mean you can't stand on your own." Saint-Cyr squeezed his eyes shut and rubbed them. "You only have to decide what you want." He groaned when his eyes stung and burned. "Damn it."

Wulf made a soft gasp. "You tore your lenses. Oh, no! Did I do that?"

"No, love. I've had them on non-stop." He closed his eyes. "I'm amazed they didn't fail while we were in the vault. I don't know how I'd have explained these eyes to Senthys."

Wulf stood and held down a hand. "Come on. Let's get you out of those so you'll be more comfortable."

Saint-Cyr reached up and let Wulf assist him. In the bathroom, he turned on the light and leaned both hands on the sink.

Swelling marred the left side of his lower lip. He touched it with his tongue. The tooth had already resettled itself.

"Do you have more lenses with you?" Wulf opened drawers and rummaged through them.

"Yes. In my shaving kit over there." Wulf put the shaving kit within reach and met his eyes in the mirror, his face a mask. "I'd like to leave them off for awhile if you think you could stand it."

A smile softened Wulf's features. "Stand it?" He set his hands on his hips. "You're such a clown, Sempervian. I could stare at you all day. Your eyes are beautiful."

He snorted. Even set against his dark skin, most people noticed his black eyes, but with the lenses cracked and splitting...

He removed the protective lenses and the room went dark.

\*

Wulf covered his mouth in awe of Saint-Cyr's true eyes. Nothing in the Chosen Chronicles mentioned anything about them. The Chosen kept their Sempervian's secrets, yes, but not from each other. Except in the case of Cyken Tomarus, it seemed. Few wrote anything about him on the personal level. Why was that?

"Wulf?"

"I'm here, Luc." He came up beside him. "For a moment, I forgot you couldn't see me. I wish you didn't have to hide your eyes. They're amazing."

Without their covering, they glowed with brilliant, radiant white light, enough to illuminate the room.

"Does it hurt?"

"The light?" Saint-Cyr made a noncommittal shrug. "When I'm around people who have intense personal drive, they burn."

"You mean, like the empress?"

"Oh hell, yes. She almost sets me on fire. I have no idea why, but people with her personality, the strong, dominating types make my eyes feel like they're ablaze. I use drops sometimes but it doesn't help much. The heat is inside me." He reached for Wulf.

"Here." He moved to within Saint-Cyr's grasp. "Want to lie down for awhile?"

Saint-Cyr linked his arm with Wulf's as they returned to the bedroom.

Wulf guided him into bed and crawled in beside him. He put himself in Luc's arms and rested his head against the man's shoulder. "Are there other Sempervians with eyes like yours?"

"None recorded. No one knows why mine are different."

"What makes them glow?"

"No idea."

Wulf tilted back his head, resting a hand on Saint-Cyr's furry chest. The soft hair sprung up between his fingers as he caressed it. "Maybe it's kind of like a firefly."

He played with Wulf's hair. "Fireflies and other animals that glow do it in spurts. They only glow for a moment. If you could see my eyes all the time, they'd always be glowing. The only time they don't is when I'm physically satisfied."

"And then you can see."

"Yes."

Wulf grinned. "I'll bet I can make you see again."

Saint-Cyr chuckled, shaking his head. "It's not as easy as it sounds. You're talking about hours of lovemaking. Intense lovemaking."

Wulf chewed his lower lip, considering. "More than we've done before?"

The man stroked Wulf's arm as he held him. "Mmm. I'm afraid so."

"I almost kept up with you before. If we were careful, I could do more."

"No. I don't want to risk hurting you."

"Come on, Sempervian." Wulf leaned up on one elbow. "Live a little. Let's see how far I can take you."

## Chapter Twenty-One

### C-1, Saint-Cyr's private vessel

#### Mid-morning

Snuggled into the plush bed, Saint-Cyr lifted a hand, found Wulf's cheek and caressed it. "You have nothing to prove to me, Wulf. You don't have to do this."

"Bullshit." Warm lips pressed into his palm. "Give me a chance to gaze into your true eyes."

"I wish I could see yours right now." He lowered his hand. "But I don't want you to think you have to make up to me about this. I know I teased you about it earlier, but..."

"Oh, shut up." Wulf stretched out alongside him. "You think I don't know that?"

Saint-Cyr jumped as Wulf trailed cool fingertips across his chest

"Just let me love you, damn it. I shouldn't have to fight you for the privilege of getting screwed."

Saint-Cyr laughed. "Fine." He slid one hand up Wulf's back and into his hair. "Suit yourself, but we'll do this my way."

"As you wish, Master."

"Oh, I see how it is. Now that I agree with you it's all, 'Yes, Master'."

"I can't help it, Master. I feel so close to you. I forget myself."

"We'll work on that, Wulf." He tightened his fingers in the silky tresses. "First things first. How much sleep have you had?"

No answer, then, "About six, maybe six and a half hours. But I also had a heart to heart with Fee and soaked for almost an hour, too. I feel good. Rested."

"Mmm. Then we'll order some food before we begin."

"You're hungry?" He could hear Wulf's pout.

"Sempervians are always hungry." Saint-Cyr tugged on his hair. "Call McDoth. Dial one."

When the android came online, Saint-Cyr sat up. "Deliver a few trays of those 'special foods' we brought on board, will you? How many bottles of champagne are on hand?"

"We have several of each size. Do you want a Nebuchadnezzar?"

*Twenty bottles worth...* "Yes. Two should do it. And bring up a half bottle and some wine as well."

Beside him, Wulf sputtered a laugh.

McDoth accepted the order without comment. "Right away, sir."

"Disconnect." Saint-Cyr stretched until his muscles felt the burn.

"What are you planning with all that liquor?" Wulf's doubt rang clearly in every syllable. "You could get way beyond drunk. Hell with that much booze, you could get comatose."

"We'll only drink some of the wine and the half bottle. The champagne is for playtime."

Silence hung in the air, followed by low laughter. "Oh-m'god. I don't think I even want to know."

“Second thoughts, Wulf?” He rested his back against the cool leather headboard.

The sounds of movement among the sheets and the shifting of the bed told him Wulf had moved to sit beside him. “If I want to stop at some point, are you going to force me to continue?”

“Of course not!”

“I thought so.” Wulf slid his hand into Saint-Cyr's. Its coolness spoke of nerves, a fine tremble underscoring its depth. “That's why I'm not afraid. I trust you.”

He lifted Wulf's hand to his mouth and kissed the back of it. “I will not disappoint you, beautiful one. While we're waiting, let's rest.” He scooted down into the bed.

Wulf snuggled with him, curling against him as naturally as if he'd always belonged there. “I love that you like to cuddle.”

“Mmm.” He curled his fingers in Wulf's hair, savoring the clean scent of it. “How could I not want to be close to you every single moment?”

“I've had lovers who didn't.”

He pressed a kiss against his brow. “Whatever failing others had with you, share with me. I want to fulfill you, my love. I never want to be guilty of taking without thought.” He pressed a hand against Wulf's lips. “And I want to love you so well that you'll forget my own wrongs. I want to take away any pain I've caused and give you pleasure tenfold in its place.”

Wulf kissed his fingertips. “Geez, Sempervian. You're mushy in bed.” He chuckled. “I really love that about you. Don't ever stop.”

“Kiss me.”

Wulf turned a bit and rose half over him to press his mouth against Saint-Cyr's. They kissed, nibbled, and tasted one another's mouths until the doorbell rang.

Saint-Cyr motioned Wulf to stay in bed. He rose, pulled on a robe from the closet and walked to the door as easily as if he were sighted. He knew the number of steps from any point to another in every room. If only he could navigate to Wulf's heart so easily... He closed his eyes and opened the door.

“Good morning, sir.”

“McDoth.” The airflow of a hovercart cooled his shins as the android entered. Saint-Cyr shut the door behind him.

“Do you want this anywhere special, sir?”

“The table will do.” He returned to the bed and sat on the edge.

The precise clink and clatter of dishes being placed on a hard surface rose. McDoth would lay out everything in a specific order so Saint-Cyr could find whatever he needed.

Wulf slid over and went to his knees behind Saint-Cyr, wrapping his arms around him from the back. Wulf's warmth, the heat of his rod along Saint-Cyr's spine, the closeness, all served to titillate and energize.

“Master, what's with all the plates? There must be twenty different things over there.”

“Aphrodisiacs.”

“Looks like food to me.”

“It is food.” He turned his head to one side. “Each one was chosen for specific properties. I'm going to stuff you full of the most exotic, erotic, and libido-enhancing food money can buy.”

“Oooh.” Nibbling on Saint-Cyr's ear, Wulf spoke in hushed tones. “I like that,



Sempervian, but is that all you're going to stuff me with?"

He couldn't help but chuckle. "Behave yourself for two minutes and I'll show you."

"All right, but I'm counting the seconds." Wulf lay back down and curled himself around Saint-Cyr.

"I'm worth the wait." The poke in his side made him grunt.

"You'd better be." Wulf brought Saint-Cyr's hand to his mouth and sucked his middle finger into it. Wulf swirled his tongue around that finger like it was a cock, teasing, tasting...

Saint-Cyr tightened his thighs, his shaft twitching.

Wulf let go of his finger. The bed jiggled as he sat up. "Why is McDoth taking the big bottles of champagne into the bathroom? Don't tell me he's... Is he..."

A soft "pop" preceded the hollow sound of trickling liquid as it poured.

Wulf swore under his breath. "He's pouring it into the tub!"

"Yes."

"We're not going to bathe in champagne, are we?"

"As you said, 'live a little.' You'll love what it does for your skin."

"Oh-m'god. Are you serious? Isn't that expensive?" Wulf curled up beside him.

"What am I saying? You could practically buy a planet."

Saint-Cyr shook his head. *What a cross between youth and man Wulf has turned out to be. Nothing like his classy, elegant image on Imperinet.* He grinned. *Thank goodness. We can't both be stuffed shirts.*

Wulf burst into giggles. "Sorry, it's just totally not what I expected. You're amazing, you know that?"

"I try." Saint-Cyr rubbed the back of his fingers across Wulf's chest.

"What's the regular sized one for on the table?"

"I'm saving that one to use on you."

"Use on me?" He snuggled closer. "Uh ... to do what?"

"You'll see, love. Patience."

"Oh, fuck, Sempervian. You have got to be the most frustrating man in the empire."

"Why, thank you, Wulf." His young lover bit down on his arm. "Ow!" He grabbed Wulf by the hair and pulled him closer, amused but wary. "And what was that for?"

"Time for you to be frustrated."

"You think so, do you?" Saint-Cyr tugged Wulf across his lap face down and delivered three stinging swats while Wulf struggled. "Don't make me paddle you for real. I have every sex toy, whip and paddle known to man in this room."

"I guess you bring all your lovers here."

"No. I do not." He stroked his right hand across Wulf's bottom and cupped one cheek. The left hand kept him pinned in place. "I had them brought here for you when I knew we had to leave for Kelthia. I was hoping for a chance to use some of them to pleasure you. Just like the food and the champagne."

"Oh." He lifted his head a bit. "You did all that for me?"

"Yes."

McDoth coughed politely nearby.

Wulf tried to sit up, but Saint-Cyr held him fast. A small whimper left Wulf's mouth. He squirmed beneath Saint-Cyr's hands.

"Hold still." When he didn't, Saint-Cyr gave him another swat. He stayed quiet after

that. "Well, McDoth. Is it all ready?"

"Yes, sir. Everything is in order. Will there be anything else?"

"Not a thing. Good work, McDoth. I appreciate your speed."

"My pleasure, sir. Call if you need me." The door opened and closed.

Saint-Cyr released Wulf and let him up. "I hope you're ready for this."

Wulf swallowed audibly. "What are you going to do?"

He stood and reached out a hand. Wulf hesitated, but finally put his hand into it.

"Wulf, my love, I'm going to take you to heaven."

\*

"Mmm, I'm ready to go." Wulf took two steps closer and slid his arms up around Saint-Cyr's neck. Reaching up, he trailed his fingers into the short, dark hair. "Kiss me."

The glowing eyes fluttered shut as he bent his head.

Wulf lifted his mouth and pressed up against him. The warmth of this man's arms around him almost made him swoon—he leaned into him and held on tight. Saint-Cyr spread his big hands down Wulf's back and fanned them out across his behind, tugging him closer.

Smooth lips, a gentle tongue, teeth that nibbled delicately... "I love you." He put his head on Saint-Cyr's chest, directly beneath his chin. "How do we get to heaven from here?"

"Slowly." The deep voice rumbled beneath his ear. "One step at a time. We can take as long as we want."

Wulf pressed his mouth against Luc's chest, ducked his head to kiss his chest hair. It clustered mostly in the center, narrowing to a trail that led to down to where his cock lay half-erect. "May I ask a question?"

Saint-Cyr trailed a hand along his arm. "Of course."

"I—Do you—Am I..." He sighed.

"Relax, love." Saint-Cyr tapped Wulf's chin. "It's all right to ask me anything."

"You said I should call you master, so does that mean you think of me as your slave?"

Saint-Cyr curled a finger beneath Wulf's chin to lift it. "What do you see in my face?"

The eyebrows arched naturally, without tension. His mouth was closed, the full lips curving ever so slightly in a smile. His deep brown skin stretched smoothly across his forehead.

"I see gentleness."

He smiled wider. "Do you now?"

Wulf nodded, then remembered that Saint-Cyr couldn't see that. "Yes, I do."

"That's because you're not seeing me as the Harbinger, or the Man, or even really as Luc Saint-Cyr."

Wulf held his breath a moment. "I'm not?"

"No, love." He unerringly traced his fingers across Wulf's mouth. "I'm standing before you right now as my true self. As Cyken Tomarus." The single tear sliding down his cheek brought answering tears to Wulf's eyes. "A man who has had countless lovers he wants to forget, and knows he's finally found the one who'll never be forgotten. I only want you to call me master in play, Wulf. You are more than my equal. You're my heart."

"Oh..." Wulf clasped a hand to his chest. "That's the most romantic thing anyone's

ever said to me. I—I don't know what to say.”

“Just love me.” Saint-Cyr drew him against his hard body, wrapping Wulf in his arms. “Trust me. Let me lead you on a sensual journey.”

“Lead me, Master. I'll follow you anywhere you go.”

## Chapter Twenty-Two

### C-1, Saint-Cyr's private vessel

Sumertsag 29, Noon

Luc knelt beside the tub and dipped his fingertips into the champagne. The glow from his eyes made the fine bubbles on the bottom and sides of the tub stand out. "Perfect temperature, my love. It smells wonderful."

Wulf dragged in a deep breath. The fruity scent prickled his nose. "Sure beats whiskey in the toilet."

Saint-Cyr's laughter warmed Wulf's heart. *I don't think I'd ever grow tired of that sound.* He trailed fingers across Luc's short hair. "I've never been around so much open champagne before, even at Draap shows."

"How much do you know about choosing champagne?"

"Not much. I've never had to do the choosing."

"I'll teach you. It's something you should know, now that you're mine."

*Now that you're mine.* Wulf hugged those words to his heart. "I'd like that."

Saint-Cyr held up his other hand. "Take my hand and step in."

He slipped his fingers into Luc's and stepped into the tub. Bubbles immediately burst around him and tickled their coolness all the way up his calf.

"Ooh, that feels strange." With every motion, more bubbles rose to the surface.

"Have a seat, love. Careful, the bubbles make it slippery."

The liquid—just a little below skin temperature—made him gasp. The rising bubbles teased his legs and popped on the surface, making the rest of his skin wet. "This is amazing. I think I could get drunk sitting here without taking a single sip."

"So, you like it?"

"Yes." Wulf sat back against the sculpted area behind him. "Do you do this often?"

He shrugged off his robe and leaned on the outside edge of the tub. "Not really."

"I see." Wulf slid forward. The movement broke thousands of bubbles around him. He rested an elbow on the edge of the tub next to Luc. "You don't want to admit you only do it when you want to seduce someone. Why not just say it?"

"Wulf, love. I don't want to remind you about other lovers I've had."

"Master." He took Saint-Cyr's face in his hands. "You've lived thousands of years. How could I ever expect that there weren't lovers before me?" He smoothed Luc's lower lip. "Never apologize for who and what you are. I'm your Chosen. You can be real with me."

The sudden grip of his master's hands on his shoulders made him suck in a shallow breath.

"Wulf." Saint-Cyr closed his eyes with an expression of pain. "Knowing you accept me as I am..." When they opened, the glow seemed hotter, brighter. "You have no idea how much I love you."

With a sigh, Wulf threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. He pulled back enough to brush his lips across Saint-Cyr's. "Show me."

Luc made him lie back against the sloping edge of the tub, tucking a small inflatable

pillow behind his neck. Wulf allowed himself to be bathed by hand. Luc scooped up handfuls of the champagne and dribbled it over his chest, down his arms, across his belly, following it with gentle caresses and strokes. The combination of warm hands and cool liquid played havoc with Wulf's senses. He shut his eyes, his mind too inundated by the sight of Luc tenderly bathing him to bear it.

"Luc..." He roused himself and sat up, pressing as close to his master as he could. "I thought this was about me pleasuring you."

"Oh, it is, love. It is." He slanted his mouth across Wulf's.

The rest of the universe faded away, his awareness too full of Luc to allow distractions. The coolness of his lover's mouth, the warm dance of his tongue, the seductive nibble along Wulf's lower lip—it drew him, bound him to this man.

Wulf opened his heart and bared it, invited him inside, welcomed Saint-Cyr with his entire being.

At some point, he'd closed his eyes. When the kiss ended, he opened them. "Master." He whispered the word as if it were a prayer. "I love you. I love you."

Luc slid his arms beneath Wulf's and drew him up, held him, kissed him while he climbed into the tub and stretched himself out. Wulf spread his thighs, making room for Saint-Cyr atop him. Tiny bubbles burst around them like wet fireworks celebrating the union of their bodies. Wulf clung to him with abandon as they kissed, giving more of himself, opening more of himself.

Wet hands gripped Wulf's hair and pulled it back. Saint-Cyr turned Wulf's head aside and kissed below his ear, stroking it with tiny licks.

"Say my name, Wulf." He bit the lobe, held it between his teeth.

"Luc."

"Mmm. I love the way you say it." The warm whisper against his ear made Wulf shiver. "Another name."

*How many of his names do I know? Is this a test?* Wulf took a deep breath. "Neene."

"More." Saint-Cyr nuzzled his throat.

"Cyr. Ran. Donsa. Timorus. Jensarr."

Saint-Cyr lifted his head. The glowing eyes and tranquil smile lulled Wulf's concern. "Go on, love."

"Lucas. Sandel. Marston. Tencyr. Sondis. Luther. Stomahr." He stopped when his lover pressed two fingers against his mouth.

"Now, tell me which one of them you love."

"Oh, Master, I c..."

"Yes, you can." With champagne scented fingers, he stroked back Wulf's hair.

"Think about it for a moment before answering. Which one do you love?"

"All of them." Wulf adjusted himself in the tub so they faced each other, their wet skin making them slip. How could he ever choose one? Each name represented a man who had given his all to help others. "I love every aspect of you, Master."

He smiled. "You must choose only one."

Wulf shook his head. "I can't."

"You must." He kissed Wulf's mouth. "Choose, love. One."

His eyes stung, throat tight, chest hurting. "But—why?"

"Because you can only truly be in love with one person at a time, Wulf. You need to choose which one of my selves that will be."

“Oh.” He relaxed against the tub, sighing deeply. “That's easy.”

“Is it?” He trailed a fingertip along Wulf's jaw.

“Yes.” He smiled. “I love you, no matter who you are or where you go, but I am *in love* with the man who's in this tub with me right this minute. The one with pure white eyes who's holding me. Who bathed me in champagne and is about to make love to me for hours on end. I am absolutely head-over-heels in love with Luc Saint-Cyr.”

His perfect teeth showed in a huge grin. “Wulf, love, that's exactly what I was hoping to hear.” He kissed him. “Now let's go rinse this off and get you fed.”

Showered and shampooed, Wulf wrapped himself in a thick, white terrycloth robe and climbed onto the bed as Saint-Cyr directed. His lover pushed the table over to the bedside and sat next to Wulf.

“Ok, love. I'm going to feed you and I want you to relax and simply enjoy it. All right? Are you ready?”

“Yes.” Tears of happiness slid down Wulf's cheeks. *How did I ever get this amazing man in bed with me? Taking care of me like I'm worthy of him?* He knuckled away the tears and smiled. “I'm ready.”

“What is it?” Saint-Cyr touched his face, spreading his fingers across Wulf's cheeks. “Tell me why you're crying.”

“I'm soooo happy.” He sniffed.

“No, no, no! Baby, you can't cry.” Saint-Cyr pressed his brow against Wulf's. “I couldn't stand it if you cried. It'd make me want to cry, too.”

He hiccupped and rubbed his nose. “It would not.”

“Yes, it would. How would that look?” Saint-Cyr shook his head. “The Harbinger, crying.”

Wulf chuckled. “I guess that wouldn't do, would it?”

“Not at all.” He rubbed a thumb across Wulf's lower lip. “I wish I could see you.”

He rubbed his nose against Luc's. “I can help you with that, Sempervian.”

Saint-Cyr laughed. “You are already.” He scooted over toward the table and dragged it a little closer. “Ok. First up, a bit of sweet, dark chocolate.”

Wulf opened his mouth and accepted the flat brown wafer Luc set on his tongue. The familiar taste soothed. “Delicious. Dark chocolate is my favorite. Especially with cherries inside it.”

Saint-Cyr licked his fingers. “Mmm, mmm, mmm. Some ancient societies called chocolate 'nourishment of the gods'. It's easy to see why, and that was only a small taste.” Saint-Cyr touched the outside of a tiny, flowered teapot. “Good, still hot.” He lifted it and poured into two tiny cups.

Wulf took the cup and saucer, sipped it carefully. Sweet, creamy and hot, it had an underscore of coffee and chocolate. “Oh, this is wonderful! What is it?”

“Chocolate Espresso Crème.”

“Yum.” He allowed the warm liquid to rest on his tongue. “So good.”

“Coffee, especially espresso, can boost the body and the mind. In preparation for lovemaking...” Luc leaned toward him and Wulf moved to accept his kiss. “Mmm, I love the way you taste.” He frowned. “Where was I?”

Wulf smiled. “Preparation for lovemaking?”

“When preparing for sex, it's best to take coffee in small quantities. Don't want it to make you nervous.”

When Wulf finished the drink, Saint-Cyr took his cup and set it aside.

Wulf tilted his head. "Are you sure you can't see?"

The glowing eyes showed as he turned. "I make myself memorize where everything is in every room. McDoth lays out things for me in a certain order so I can find them. And I'm listening to you, aware of you on every level." He lowered his lashes. "Without my lenses, I'm quite blind, I assure you."

"Only for awhile."

Saint-Cyr smiled over at him. He reached into a deep white bowl and withdrew a brown, bulbous shape that dripped with water.

"Ooh! What is that?" Wulf rose a bit, but the table made the bowl too high to see into it. "I've never seen one of those before."

"They're not grown in the empire. They're called figs." He dried his fingers on a napkin and picked up the fig once more. "Some consider them a sexual stimulant. Men who love women find them especially erotic."

"Why is that?" He scooted closer so he could see.

"Watch." Luc held the fig between his hands, both thumbs on the thick bulb. He pressed down and pulled, opening the fruit. Inside, thick dark fruit glistened with moisture.

"Oh-m'god. It's like a woman's..." He swallowed, unexpectedly stirred by the sight. His shaft thickened. "I never expected..."

"What? That the thought of a woman could arouse you?"

Wulf leaned into Saint-Cyr's shoulder with his own. "Yeah. Seeing you do that, though, in this context... Wow." He shivered.

Saint-Cyr leaned down to kiss him on the lips. "How open are you to threesomes?"

"Are you kidding me?" The expression on Saint-Cyr's face said he wasn't. Wulf hmm'd. "You mean you and me and a woman?"

"Yes." His open expression invited Wulf's comments.

"Who does what to whom?"

He laughed softly. "My love, we can decide that when the time comes." Saint-Cyr kissed him again. "I would enjoy seeing you being made love to by a woman and I think you'd like her to watch while I take you."

Wulf fanned his hot cheeks.

"You liked that image, didn't you?" He used one hand to cup Wulf's chin and lift his face for a kiss. "Do you know how I pictured you? Shall I tell you?"

Wulf fought to breathe, his face hot, cock hard and aching. "Yes, Master."

"I could see you lying face down on my bed, your smooth round behind in the air and my cock thrusting between your tight little ass cheeks."

Wulf swallowed, a hand at his throat.

"The woman who's sharing you with me is lying on the bed in front of you while you tongue her."

The image burned itself into his mind with absolute clarity. Wulf held his breath.

"She's writhing with pleasure, all the while savoring the sight of you being taken. She likes seeing you submit to my mastery."

Wulf sucked in a gulp of air. "Why do I get the impression you're referring to Her Majesty?"

Saint-Cyr's naughty grin said she had been the one.

Wulf covered his eyes. "I—I've never wanted a woman before and now here I am lusting after the Conqueror." He rested against Saint-Cyr and lifted his face. Luc's eyes glowed even brighter. "It's you that's really making me hot. You and your words. I love the way you talk about sex."

"Good. I enjoy seeing you blush and squirm." Saint-Cyr kissed him. "I've lived far too long not to have tried just about anything sexual, Wulf." He lifted one shoulder. "There are a few exceptions, things I'll never do for personal reasons, but there are so many I *would* like to share with you. Now, time for a bite. Open up." He tore off a small piece of the fig and placed it on Wulf's tongue. "Hold it against your teeth and flick it with your tongue. Think about how it feels. Do you like it?"

The wrinkled texture on the outside felt like skin; the sweet fruit inside had a gritty feel against his tongue. "Mmm. Love it. Tastes sort of like dates."

"I'm glad you like it." He lowered his lashes. "Kiss me. I want to taste it in your mouth."

He lifted his mouth to his master, parting his lips for the kiss. Saint-Cyr swept his tongue inside. Wulf tilted back his head, moaning at the tender invasion.

"Mmm, Wulf." He wrapped his arms around him. "I love the way you give yourself to me. You're so trusting. So sweet."

Wulf pressed his mouth against Luc's and held onto him, needing closeness, wanting to hold him like this forever. "Love you, Master. Love you so much."

"You're mine, Wulf. I will always love you." He changed the angle with which he held him, pushed them both back against the pile of pillows. "Let me feast on your mouth for awhile."

A hot whimper escaped Wulf's mouth. He clung to his master's shoulders while Saint-Cyr teased every corner of his mouth. The man darted his tongue along Wulf's lips, licked the corners, and delved deep inside, stroking his tongue. His master's warmth soothed, all along Wulf's body.

He arched his neck as Luc nibbled down his throat, pausing to lick here and there. Melting, Wulf panted, his thoughts aflame. Though his master kissed him and caressed his body, he hadn't yet touched his nipples, balls, or cock. Yearning for his touch made Wulf clutch him harder, pulling him back up to his mouth.

"Kiss me, Master. Please..."

Saint-Cyr lifted his head, his eyes radiating brilliant light.

"Your eyes—The hotter you get the more they glow."

"Yes..." he hissed, in a breathless confession. "You burn me, Wulf. My lust for you has me on fire inside."

"Do you..." Wulf swallowed. "Um, Master, if you want to take me, you don't have to do all this. I'm yours."

"Yes, you are, Wulf." He placed a soft kiss on his nose. "And when the time is right, I will take you. Again and again."

"But, your eyes..."

"Are supposed to glow hotter and brighter during sex. It's part of making the glow reverse itself."

"Oh, well then by all means, let's light the world on fire."

A smile spread across Saint-Cyr's face. "Then I'd better make sure you're well nourished." He sat up and turned toward the table. "Do you like avocado?" He picked up



the dark green pear-shaped fruit and a paring knife.

"I've had it in dips and as a face mask." Wulf rested a hand on Saint-Cyr's thigh.

"It's delicious all by itself." He ran the knife around the avocado lengthwise, twisted it and pulled it apart. He set one half down and squeezed the other one like a lemon wedge, forcing the green fruit inside to push out. "Here. Taste this." He used two fingers of his other hand to scoop up the soft fruit and offer it on his fingertips.

Wulf leaned forward and placed his hand beneath Saint-Cyr's, bringing it to his mouth. He licked all of it from his fingers, stroking his tongue across the fingers and up along his palm. He pressed his lips against the center. "I love you, Master."

"I'm glad I have you, Wulf. You're precious to me." He pinched the avocado skin to push out more of the green fruit. "Have some more. It's good for you."

Wulf took the avocado from him and brought it to his mouth. He sucked the fruit into his mouth, leaned forward and pressed his lips against Luc's. When he opened his mouth, his master licked the avocado off his tongue and ate it.

"Mmm," Wulf sighed. "Where else would you like me to put this?"

"Allow me." Saint-Cyr scooped some of it from the outer shell and rubbed it across Wulf's chest. He bent to lick it clean, flicking his tongue across Wulf's nipples in turn.

"Oh..." He leaned back his head. "I thought you'd never get to that."

Chuckling, Saint-Cyr circled his tongue around each nipple. He sucked at first one, then the other.

Wulf writhed. "Oh, oh more."

Saint-Cyr stretched out beside him and put his hands behind Wulf, pulling his chest forward. "Put your hands over your head for me, love."

He reached back and gripped the edge of the mattress.

Luc clamped his mouth across one nipple and sucked.

Wulf cried out, digging his heels into the bed and arching toward him.

"That's right. Let me hear your passion." He teased the other nipple the same way, then held it between his teeth and battered it with the tip of his tongue.

"Oh, god..." Wulf sucked in a breath and let it out raggedly. The heat in his cock and balls pushed thought far from him. The sensual bites and licks drove him over the edge. His back bowed.

Sobbing his release, Wulf came, his hot seed spattering his own chest and belly.

"Oh, yes, love." Saint-Cyr wrapped a hand around Wulf's cock and pumped it until he drained him. "That's right," he cooed. "Come for me."

Wulf trembled, his body still stiff as his cock. He accepted his lover's kiss, wrapping his arms up and around him as Saint-Cyr bent over to kiss him.

Saint-Cyr pulled back a bit. "You're so sensual. So open." He stroked a hand down Wulf's wet belly. "Look at you. Coming from having your nipples teased. You're going to be such a pleasure in bed tonight. I can't wait to get inside you."

"Fuck me, Luc. Take me." He rained kisses all over his face. "Please, please take me."

"I will love. Over and over. In good time." He pushed his fingers down Wulf's belly and into his thatch of curls, down underneath his sac.

Sensitized from his climax, Wulf gasped. "Oh..."

Luc cupped his hand beneath Wulf's balls and cradled them. "Your balls belong to me, love. Every time you empty these, it will be for my pleasure."

“Yes, Master.” He spread his legs wider. “All of me is yours.”

He bent to lap lazily at each nipple.

Wulf sucked in a sobbing breath.

“Your nipples belong to me, too.” He pressed a soft kiss against each one. “When I want them, you’ll bare them for me.”

Wulf choked, so hot he could barely breathe. “Yes, Master.”

“Open your mouth for me, Wulf.”

He parted his lips, closing his eyes as Saint-Cyr leaned down to kiss him.

The sweet invasion of tongue sparked such heat inside him Wulf groaned. He arched his neck, head tilted back to lift his mouth.

“Mmm, you’re luscious, Wulf.” Saint-Cyr ran his tongue along the edges of his lips, pausing to stroke inside, along Wulf’s tongue. “You taste so sweet to me. Your mouth is mine, love. When I want your mouth, I will take it. Any way I choose.”

Wulf nodded, too breathless to speak.

“This mouth...” Saint-Cyr trailed one finger along his lower lip. “This mouth was made to kiss me.”

“Yes, Master!”

“And lick my skin.”

“Oh, oh yes.”

“This mouth is going to suck my cock.”

Moaning, Wulf bobbed his head forward. “Yes, Master. Yes.”

He slid one hand behind Wulf’s head. “Kiss me, love.”

Cradled in his master’s arms, Wulf pressed his entire body along Saint-Cyr’s, presenting himself like a gift to the man he loved.

## Chapter Twenty-Three

Resting alongside his master, Wulf Gabriel closed his eyes. *Who'd have thought a few days ago I'd be in the Harbinger's bed? And be happy about it?* He turned on his side and snuggled against the man's chest. They'd made love for hours, each time in a different way, and Luc had yet to tire. Until the Sempervian sated himself, his eyes would continue to glow and he'd remain unable to see.

"Are you ready, Wulf?"

He opened his eyes. "Yes, Master." He pressed a kiss against the man's chest. "May I have some more water?"

Luc held the crystal goblet for him. Wulf swallowed the cold liquid gratefully, finishing all of it.

"If you're too tired, love..."

Wulf set a finger against Saint-Cyr's mouth. "Hush. I'm more than ready."

"Are you sure? We c..."

"Shh." Wulf cut off his words with a kiss and pulled Saint-Cyr over on top of him to complete it. "Believe me now?" Wulf stretched his arms above his head. "How are you going to take me this time?" The white glow of Luc's eyes provided no outward heat, no change in temperature, yet they made Wulf shiver.

"What would you like?"

"Something you like, Master. A position you don't use often?" Luc's sudden smile made Wulf laugh. "Oh, I think I'm in for it now."

"Yes, you are." He rolled onto his back. "We'll need lube for this."

Wulf crawled toward the chest beside the bed and opened it. The racks inside held dildos and toys of all shapes and sizes. He withdrew the organic lube Saint-Cyr preferred.

"On you, Master? Or me, this time?"

"Me." He tucked his hands behind his head, a sensual smirk on his face. "Be generous, love. Remember where that's going."

Wulf chuckled. "Oh, I will!" He slipped the smooth gel over every bit of Saint-Cyr's cock, from the base all the way to the tip. He'd been half-hard when Wulf started, but by the time he'd coated the cock thoroughly, his member stood at rigid attention.

"Straddle me, love." Luc held out his hands. "Hold onto me while you put my cock inside you."

Wulf's knees felt like rubber, but he managed to put himself into position to begin sliding down. He'd been well stretched several times; now it was simply a matter of accepting the thick, wide shaft once more. He inched down it, legs shaking, leaning both his hands on Saint-Cyr's upheld ones. Wide open, he lowered himself onto the heated shaft.

When he reached the bottom, Saint-Cyr's coarse thatch of curls tickled his anus. Wulf pressed a hand over his abdomen; he could feel the hard rod inside him.

Saint-Cyr was whispering, his eyes closed.

He tucked a strand of hair behind his left ear. "Master?"

Saint-Cyr held up a hand and opened his eyes. "Basking in the feel of you, Wulf." He set his mouth in a placid smile. "The way you seem to love being penetrated, you'll

enjoy this.”

Wulf squeezed the shaft inside him, making Luc flinch.

“Here, love.” Saint-Cyr handed him two pillows. “Put them behind you.” Bracing a hand on either of Wulf’s hips, Saint-Cyr held him still. “All right, love. Slowly, I want you to lean back until you’re lying on flat on the bed with the pillows beneath your head.”

He made a choking laugh. “You’re kidding. It’ll break you in half and smash our balls together.”

“Not at all.” He showed his teeth in a quick smile. “This is the Pelvic Tilt position. It’s extraordinary.” He offered his hands. “Hold onto me for balance.”

Wulf leaned back, aware of the hard shaft inside him. Saint-Cyr rocked forward a bit, allowing Wulf the freedom to move. He cried out as the length and thickness of his lover’s rod made his ass constrict. Luc gasped at the hard spasm, but continued to guide him. Wulf swept his legs out and lifted his knees a bit.

“Very well done.” Saint-Cyr adjusted himself amongst the pillows.

The entire length of the other’s body lay before each of them, but little more than their fingers and genitals touched.

“Relax, Wulf.” Luc rested his hands on Wulf’s thighs and then used them to tug him against himself. The intense pressure and fullness made Wulf pant, unable to speak. By flexing, Saint-Cyr drove himself into him.

Wulf pressed the flat of his hands against his abdomen as Saint-Cyr rocked up into him. The hard rod inside him pressed against his palms. The length came up almost to his navel and in a different position, who knew how far?

Wulf gasped as Saint-Cyr sat up, changing the pressure entirely. The man gripped Wulf’s cock with both hands, sliding lube onto him as he worked his length. The spasms throughout his abdomen ignited afresh. Wulf barely knew whether to laugh or cry.

Saint-Cyr came inside him a moment later, ending the position for now. Wulf rose up on one elbow.

The eyes still glowed. With a sigh, he fell back against the bed.

After a shared shower, Saint-Cyr insisted on feeding Wulf once more. McDoth delivered fresh plates and took away the used ones. Wulf gulped hot coffee and savored the warmth of it in his stomach.

Saint-Cyr removed the domed lid over a large plate. “Ah, this is just what the doctor ordered, my love. Come and taste these.”

A bed of purplish rock salt and crushed ice supported four large shells. Wulf sniffed. “It smells like that hot spice the Tyrans like.”

“Wasabi?” Saint-Cyr nodded. “The green, crumbly wet paste on top is a mixture of wasabi, lemon zest and crushed garlic.” He picked up one of the lemon wedges and handed it to Wulf. “Squeeze this over the top.”

“What’s in the shell?” The lemon juice smelled tart, but when he licked his fingers, it was quite sweet. His cheeks tightened. “Done.”

“Giant oysters.” Saint-Cyr lifted one of the shells. “These are Kelthian. Picked fresh a few hours ago.”

“I’ve never had these before.”

“They’re excellent. You’ll want to chew them a bit, but they don’t need much. Kelthian oysters are the finest in the empire.”

“Ok.” He accepted the shell from Saint-Cyr. “How do I do it?”

“McDoth already loosened them from their shells, so all you have to do is look for a good sipping point. A place where the shell is smooth.”

“Got it.” Wulf turned the shell a bit. “Want me to help you?”

“You can feed me, how's that?”

“That would be a nice change.” Wulf placed a kiss on his cheek. “Now what?”

“Lift the shell to your lips.”

Wulf held it there. “Ok.”

“Now, in one swift move, tip the shell up and slurp both the oyster and all its juices into your mouth.”

The smooth texture had a briny taste mixed with lemon and wasabi. Wulf shuddered a bit, but he chewed the oyster. As he did, the flavor of cucumber came to the fore.

“Mmm.” He swallowed and licked his lips. “After you get past the first bite, it's actually pretty good.”

Saint-Cyr reclined against the headboard. “My turn.”

Wulf chose the largest and turned it to face him. “Here you go. Ready?” He held it against Saint-Cyr's lips. The man placed a hand beneath Wulf's and helped him tip it up.

Luc chewed it, making appreciative noises. “Excellent.” He patted a napkin over his mouth. “The fresher the better.”

They shared the next two the same way. Wulf wiped his mouth. “I've learned so much from you today. New foods, new positions, new attitudes.”

“I'm glad to hear it, love.” Saint-Cyr stroked his fingers up into Wulf's hair and drew him down for a tender kiss. “Lift the last domed plate. Tell me what you find.”

“Yum. There are small chunks of different melon and strawberries.” He picked up the silver plate and placed it on the bed. “There are three small bowls of sauce in the center. Let's see what they are.” He stuck a finger in one and licked it. “Honey.” He dipped again and offered it to Saint-Cyr. “Taste.”

The man stroked his tongue along the length of Wulf's finger. “Delicious.”

Wulf dipped into the second. “Mmm. A sweet vanilla crème.” He pressed a bit of it against Saint-Cyr's lips.

He pulled Wulf's finger into his mouth, cheeks hollowing as he sucked. He released Wulf with a naughty smile.

“Oooh. You're a dirty boy.” Wulf tapped him on the nose. “I love that about you.” They both laughed. Rich dark melted chocolate filled the third. Wulf dipped a strawberry into it, twirled it, and held a hand under it as he held it before Saint-Cyr's mouth. “Taste this.”

Luc bit into it. The strawberry's juice dripped into Wulf's palm. Luc ate the fruit, then brought Wulf's hand closer and licked his palm.

A hot shiver ran through him. “Oh-m'god, you do that so sexy.” He picked up another strawberry and twirled it. “Have another one.”

Luc licked Wulf's fingers clean afterward, then picked up a berry and dunked it in the vanilla crème. “Here.”

Wulf maneuvered himself to where Luc held it. He sucked the entire berry into his mouth, crushed it with his teeth and leaned forward to kiss Saint-Cyr.

The mingled taste of vanilla, chocolate and fresh strawberries had them licking each other's mouths. Wulf dunked a chunk of green melon into honey and dribbled it across the plate before he got one hand under it.

Saint-Cyr slurped the honey from his fingers. "Remember our first night together when I rubbed this all over your cock and balls and then licked it off?"

Wulf shivered again. "Do I!" He leaned in and licked a bit of honey from the edge of his lover's mouth.

They picked up melon simultaneously and each dipped it in a different sauce and fed each other.

"Oh, fuck." Wulf threw himself against Saint-Cyr, tossing him back against the headboard. "Want your mouth. Gotta have it." Wrapped around him, Wulf kissed with greedy enjoyment, licking and biting.

Saint-Cyr chuckled. "I adore the way you abandon yourself to passion, my love."

Wulf arched his back like a cat as Saint-Cyr rubbed him. The feeling of being helpless to resist this man made his stomach flip-flop; an enjoyable exhaustion from constant desire to submit.

They fed each other a few more bites and then Wulf put the tray back on the table and pushed it aside. With a companionable holding of hands, the two returned to the bathroom to relieve themselves and wash the stickiness off their fingers and mouths.

"Now," Saint-Cyr told him as they climbed back into bed, "there's a position I want to teach you that will likely take me over the top."

"You mean, you're close to seeing?"

"Yes. Are my eyes still bright?"

"Not as much." He turned Saint-Cyr's head to one side. "I can see a bit of dark color."

"Good! That means it's working." He pulled a few pillows down away from the head of the bed. "Lie on your back, head on the pillows, and pull your knees up to your chest."

*My ass will be permanently wide-open after tonight.* Wulf grinned despite himself. *But I'll finally know I can do this.*

Saint-Cyr knelt and lubricated himself and Wulf. "I'm going to enter you, only a little at first." He made slow but increasingly firm thrusts. Once buried to the hilt, he paused and did not move.

Wulf wiggled, urging him on, but Saint-Cyr remained still. The feeling of being stretched wide by this huge, gorgeous cock drove lust straight through Wulf. He lay exposed to his lover's eyes and hands.

"Fuck me, damn it!" He clenched his ass against Saint-Cyr.

With a grin, Luc began to move, alternating long, slow strokes with hard, full-length thrusts that made Wulf cry out.

Saint-Cyr hooked his arms beneath Wulf's knees.

Wulf clutched the bed as Saint-Cyr began to pound into him, jarring him with each hard thrust. Every part of him inside felt the pounding rhythm. His master slowed, moved so he could lower his face and touch his nose to Wulf's. He smiled.

"I love you, my Chosen." He wrapped a fist around Wulf's cock and slid it down with painstaking slowness, moved back up the same way. Still kneeling, he released him, lifted Wulf's legs so his knees hooked across Saint-Cyr's shoulders. His master leaned back, resting his weight on his arms. He rocked his hips forward, bouncing Wulf against himself.

Whimpers filled the room, and it took a moment for Wulf to grasp that they escaped from his own mouth.

Saint-Cyr's face wasn't visible in this position. The hot stretch of the man's cock inside him made Wulf burn. He clenched his ass, buttocks atop Saint-Cyr's groin.

In response, Luc sat forward and gripped Wulf's ankles, dragging him upward. Wulf moaned, unable to silence his cries even by biting his knuckles. He tossed his head, beyond speaking or rational thought.

Saint-Cyr held him captive, legs slightly apart, plundering his hole with rapid thrusts that went on forever, until Wulf could bear no more. He sobbed true tears, resigned to being rammed mercilessly and pummeled, his ass torn apart. He felt the pain but without regret. It didn't matter. Wouldn't matter.

Not if it gave Luc freedom.

Saint-Cyr suddenly let Wulf slide down and drop his legs apart, then leaned in closer, nose to nose. "I am so in love with you, Wulf. Open your eyes, love. I want you to see me."

He sucked in a ragged breath, so battered he could barely comprehend, to find a pair of love-filled brown eyes staring back at him.

"I've hurt you, Wulf. I'm so sorry."

He couldn't yet speak; only trail his fingers across Saint-Cyr's face. His lover's eyes were clear and bright, the whites white, the browns a deep chocolate. "You—can see?" He wiped the back of a hand across his own eyes.

"Yes." He withdrew and lay beside Wulf, cradling him. "Thanks to you, I can see."

Wulf didn't move—it hurt when he moved. "How long does it last?"

"A day at best."

He sobbed a laugh. "If you want to stay brown-eyed, Master, I'm afraid you'll have to find someone else to do it with for a few days."

Saint-Cyr chuckled. "One day is fine." He rolled over onto his back and reached for a bottle of beer. "Here. Sip this."

Wulf took a long drink. The aftertaste seemed familiar. He drank a little more when it was offered.

"That's good, love." Saint-Cyr tucked the covers around him. "Now, I want you to rest and try to get some sleep."

Wulf yawned. "Couldn't sleep if I had to. Want to look at you instead."

"I'm right here, love." He smiled down into Wulf's eyes. "Can you see me?"

He yawned again and let his eyes shut for a moment. "Nnn." Warm lips against his cheek made him smile.

Wulf slept.

\* \* \* \*

## Kelthia

Luc Saint-Cyr exited the Infirmary at the Thieves' Guild Academy. He'd overseen Senthys' first dose with Shackle, a powerful derivative of *shenkel vole*. A plant used on Tyrus for purely medicinal purposes, slavers often dosed their human and not-so-human cargo with it to ensure docility.

At the level he'd given Senthys, the lad would not be trouble again for a long time. Cruel, after a fashion, but he could not afford to have the youth's intellect attacking his secrets. If Senthys deciphered information about Peril and Sempervians in general, and

then let even one word slip—Pietas would have the boy for supper. Literally.

No, far better to have him drugged and impotent for a few more years.

In the Grand Master's office, Saint-Cyr handed de Laney a small plastic case filled with pre-measured syringes. "There's enough Shackle here to keep Senthys compliant for the next month."

"I hate to do this to him, Luc." De Laney locked the box in a drawer of his desk. "But you're absolutely right. We can't risk him finding out you're a Sempervian. Pietas would take him apart, piece by piece, and the lad's far too smart not to figure it out unless we intervene."

The Chosen of one of the other players of Peril, de Laney had been trained in the thieves' craft by Gnat and Flea. How ironic that the pair never knew the secret shared by both their patron and the one they sponsored.

Saint-Cyr offered a short bow to de Laney before taking his leave. Inside his hoversine, he shut his eyes and tried to rest for a few minutes.

The drug in the beer should enable Wulf to sleep a few more hours. In the meantime, Saint-Cyr headed across town to meet with an outworlder consortium seeking to market a new fuel source that would put crystal powered ships out of commission within fifty years. Possibly twenty. Just the sort of leverage he'd need for his next life.

He'd not anticipated having the option of meeting with them. For whatever reason, they insisted on dealing only with humans. Since they were from outside the Tarthian Empire and not under tradestandard requirements, they could market to whomever they pleased without restriction.

The Tyrans were already up in arms over refusal to deal with them. After all, if it was technology, the Tyrans invented it, owned it, or marketed it. The human requirement cut them completely out of the picture.

But now, thanks completely to the adorable Wulf, Saint-Cyr had a chance to compete.

The car stopped in front of one of the tallest buildings on Kelthia. When the door opened, Saint-Cyr stepped out into the middle of a clutch of reporters. Like himself on most days, they wore contacts that covered their eyes—in their case, to serve as cameras recording everything they saw.

Eerie sight, having a dozen pair of blank, black eyes staring back at him. No wonder people shivered and looked away when they met him.

He lifted his head and smiled at all of them, letting them record him in public with his human eyes in view. He spoke with them only briefly before excusing himself and entering the building.

When he returned a few hours later, the crowd of reporters had grown tenfold, all of them anxious to hear what plans he had for this new and most remarkable source of energy. He'd been the highest bidder, far outpacing any competitor. With his exclusive marketing rights and his understanding of the energy's true nature, he would one day own every form of travel in the empire.

Far from new, the same technology had existed thousands of years before. Then, as now, the short-sighted had missed their opportunities. No amount of money was too much for the kind of power this technology promised.

For today, Saint-Cyr merely smiled and promised a press conference later. He climbed back into his car and leaned against the seat, loosening his collar.



Time to get home to Wulf. Time to pamper the Chosen who had made his next life a guaranteed success.

## Epilogue

**Tarth City, Di Lusso District  
Nizamrak Building, Penthouse—"The Loft"  
Sofftem 22, 4659 Tradestandard**

Wulf held out his arms while the top designer from the Tarth Fashion Company went over the fit of his tux one more time. Icia Teoh had been his friend since he wore her designs on his first modeling gig ten years ago.

"So," Icia smoothed the front of the jacket. "When's the big day?"

To begin their public life together, Saint-Cyr had insisted on throwing a private Commitment Ceremony. Feeyona Joie, Trink and Yvan, and one hundred and twenty of Luc and Wulf's friends would attend.

"I can't say when." Wulf lowered his arms. "You know how it is. It's a media circus. They're practically camping on our doorsteps already. Luc smiles but I know he's gritting his teeth. He loves his privacy."

She stepped back, eyeing the overall fit. "I see this kind of thing all the time. Two high-profile people get married and bang!—it explodes all over Imperinet."

"We're not getting married, Icia." He waited until she met his eyes. "We're committing to each other. We're happy for now but we're not promising forever. There's a difference."

"Doesn't matter." Icia motioned him to turn around. "Linking the richest man in the empire with the hottest male model known to man has got to be the story of the year."

Wulf laughed. "With all the fuss they're making I'd almost believe you." He stood still while she ran her hands across his shoulders and down his back. "It's just Luc and me, darlin'."

"I did a society wedding last year on Kelthia that had three thousand guests. Security was a nightmare."

"Three thousand?" He turned his face toward her. "How'd they even know who was supposed to be there?"

"They didn't." She shook her head. "It ended up being a free for all."

"Well, we made our guest list and Luc went over it with me at least a hundred times." Wulf turned for her as she adjusted the hem. "He's so sweet. He wanted to make sure everyone who's important to me is on it."

"Wulf, honey." She laid her hands on her chest and looked him straight in the eye. "I don't want to break your heart, but you've got to know Saint-Cyr is all about appearances. There's no one in the empire right now who could give him more publicity than you. All the things you've been through lately?"

*Oh, stars, not you too? Doesn't anyone believe we're in love?* He cocked his head and smiled. "You do know you're on my personal list of closest friends, don't you?"

Icia kissed him on the cheek. "Forgive me. I don't want to see you hurt, that's all. There's no way I can thank you enough for using my designs."

"Oh, pooh." He fluttered his fingers at her. "You think I'd wear Draap to this thing? Honey, *please*."

She snickered. "After they dropped you for their ad campaign?" She picked up a small brush and whisked it across the jacket. "I still think you ought to sue them."

He lifted one eyebrow. "No need. Luc bought the company, fired all their marketing people and threw their new 'Face' out on his pretty little ass."

Her hands stilled; Icia met his eyes. "Are you kidding me?"

"Hell, no." Wulf gave her his most serene smile. "I love that man."

She tossed aside the brush and pinched a section of his jacket. "Well, he's certainly smart, keeping the ceremony all hush-hush. Must make it hard to plan anything though."

"Yeah, but everything's being done far ahead so we can throw off the media at the last possible moment."

"Sneaky, aren't you?"

"Have to be." He smiled. *Devious, sly and downright underhanded, more like. If anyone knows how to keep a secret, it's one of the Chosen.*

"Almost done." Icia sat to adjust the hang of the tux's tails. "A third of the empire's in an uproar over the Harbinger having a relationship with a man half his age, you know."

"Oh, please." Wulf rolled his eyes. "I can't tell you how unimportant our age difference is to either one of us."

Icia paused and looked up at him. "I saw a piece on Good Morning Tarth with that Androg ... hmm, what's his name? You know, the one who's always doing exposés."

"No clue, sweetie. I hardly have time for Imperinet any more. Luc's got me working for him over at Lucsondis Entertainment. It's usually midnight or later once we get home. All these parties and clubs... Can you believe it? He's a damn fine dancer."

"The Harbinger dances?" Icia wrapped her necklace around one finger. "Hard to picture that. Oh! I remember now. It's Chaffer." She picked up a chalk marker and rubbed a spot onto the hem. "Anyway, he called you a gold-digger and said he thinks you're only interested in Saint-Cyr for his money."

"What an idiot. I don't need Luc's money. I inherited plenty and made my own fortune modeling. I'll just be glad when we're old news. Luc and I can't get a minute's peace. Between the publicity over our relationship and my agent's trial..."

"I hope they threw the book at him." She tossed aside the chalk.

"He'll be in prison forever." His agent's uncle, James Stalkos, had escaped conviction for lack of evidence. Luc could have arranged evidence against him, but his honor precluded him from doing so. Still, the man wouldn't get away with it forever. Luc seemed particularly careful that the man did not go anywhere near Senthys.

"Go ahead and take off the jacket." Icia folded her arms. "I'll finish the last bits tonight."

He shrugged out of it, folded it carefully and laid it aside. "Thank you so much. Having an Icia Teoh tux to wear—I know I'll look good." Holding out his arms, he wrapped her in a brotherly hug.

\* \* \* \*

**Tarth City**  
**Palace District, Jade Park, Destine Pietan Pavilion**  
**Sofftem 30**

The glorious splendor of autumn bathed Jade Park's vast woods and gardens in

brehtaking colors. An early rain had left a line of young saplings naked along the entryway of the main pavilion, red and gold clothing wet and scattered at their feet.

Saint-Cyr leaned against the window, arms folded as he waited for Wulf to come up the short flight of stairs outside. Wulf paused and laughed, hugged the young woman accompanying him and kissed her on the cheek. He glanced up over her shoulder and did a double take as he saw Saint-Cyr was watching him. He waved and then pointed when the woman turned to see whom he'd greeted.

*So that's Feeyona Joie.* Saint-Cyr narrowed his eyes. *I've seen her before.* Her milk chocolate skin and pale golden eyes seemed as familiar as an old friend. *Where?*

Feeyona covered her mouth with one dainty hand as she giggled, then lifted it and fluttered her fingers at Saint-Cyr. Hugging Wulf, she continued up the stairs ahead of him.

Trink and Yvan arrived and Wulf hurried back down the steps to greet them.

"Sir?" McDoth stood at Saint-Cyr's elbow. "I believe it's time to dress for the ceremony."

"Very well." He turned from the window. "Send Wulf to me after he dresses, will you?"

An hour later, Saint-Cyr paced the floor of his dressing room. Senthys was out there in the audience, seated with Gnat and Flea as chaperones. He paused and grinned at the thought of the irrepressible Gnat chaperoning anyone. In his day, he'd caused as much trouble as Senthys—if not more, but having him around to fine tune Senthys' skills made any trouble worthwhile.

Wulf finally entered and shut the door behind him, leaned against it and smiled. "Did you see Feeyona? Isn't she beautiful?"

"She looks familiar."

"I hope so. I've only modeled with her forty-seven times. Fee's the number two female model on Tarth. Only Chi has appeared in more shows."

*I should tell him.* The thought came to him unbidden. *I should tell him why I'm really among the Sempervians. Tell him the truth about my life.* He chewed the inside of his lip. *And risk seeing him die because of me?* He sighed. *No. No matter how much I trust him. I can't risk his death. I won't. I must walk this path alone.*

Wulf set one hand on his hip. "Are you listening to me?"

"Of course I am, love." He rubbed a hand over his mouth. "My stars, you're a vision. Icia Teoh outdid herself."

The black tux and tails molded itself to Wulf's frame. A white shirt sported layer upon layer of white lace at the throat and down over his hands. Few men could claim beauty and masculinity at the same time. Wulf Gabriel personified it. From his dark, glossy hair to his trim waist and all the way down to his shiny shoes, he was perfect. Every single inch of him. Saint-Cyr wet his lips. Especially his favorite inches that lay beneath those clothes.

Wulf grinned. "I can read your mind like a billboard."

Saint-Cyr clasped his hands behind him. "I'm that transparent?"

"Oh, yeah, baby. My dirty boy wants to do the nasty with his Wulf." He held his lower lip between his teeth. "I like that about you."

He chuckled.

"So you think you want to commit yourself to me, huh?" Wulf ambled toward him,

taking his time.

Saint-Cyr stood stock still, savoring the sight of this gorgeous young man he adored. “Indeed, I do.”

Wulf stopped in front of him and smoothed a lace-covered hand down Saint-Cyr's lapel. “I want you to know that when I say those things out there in front of everyone...” He lifted his face, dark brown eyes studious and wise, “—I won't be lying.”

Saint-Cyr dropped his hands, standing before him with all humility. “Wulf, love, I know. I love you for it.”

“When I say that I will honor you, and cherish you above myself, that I'll seek to understand you and to share my heart and life...” Tears welled in his eyes. “I will really mean it.”

Cupping a hand beneath Wulf's chin, he tilted back his lover's face and bent to press his lips against Wulf's mouth. “I love you. I can never tell you how much. I only hope I can show it in every word, every touch, every kiss.”

A tear rolled down Wulf's cheek; he trembled even though he smiled. “I want you to know that my heart is truly yours, Luc, even before I give myself to you in the Chanoyu of the Chosen.”

The Ceremony of Faithfulness linked a Chosen One to his Sempervian in a bond of trust forever.

Pietas himself would officiate. Every Sempervian possible would be there. Even the Conqueror planned to attend.

“This ceremony here today...” Wulf glanced over his shoulder, “—is only a shadow of my commitment to you.”

He took Wulf's hands in his and drew him near. Resting his brow against his young lover's, Saint-Cyr brought their linked hands up against his chest, then to his mouth. He kissed Wulf's fingers.

“Wulf, I have chosen you for my confidante, for my friend, and for my lover. I will hold you in my heart for eternity.” He pressed a small kiss against his lips. “For you and I, my love, romance lives forever.”

Wulf reached up, curled his fingers into Saint-Cyr's hair and drew him down for a kiss.

## **The End**

### **About the Author:**

Kayelle Allen designed and maintains [www.kayelleallen.com](http://www.kayelleallen.com), a sprawling site which features a tour of the Tarthian Empire, the setting for her books. Her ebooks have received “Five Angel Recommended Read” ratings from Fallen Angel Reviews, the 2005 EIRRCA for Most Memorable Paranormal Romance of the Year, and been a Romance Junkies Book Club Staff Pick.

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