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Luthan had felt the desperation of Calli's son, Jetyer, at being left behind when his parents would sail away to invade the Dark's Nest. The boy had been adopted only a year before and still felt unsure of his place in the world. He was old enough and clever enough to try something foolish – like following the rest of the chosen forces and camping out near the manor house, then stowing away on the Ship. Luthan didn't doubt that the boy would be found, but it would cause more emotional ructions and could possibly delay the invasion.

One morning he watched as the boy and his small volaran casually left the Landing Field. It wasn't difficult to find them in a nearby copse, Jetyer practicing with his sword and shield on foot. The young volaran gamely practicing battle lift-offs and landings. Luthan's heart squeezed. Marrec and Calli had a fine son, one Luthan would be proud of, too. And deep in his heart he envied the boy, to love his parents so much. His first eight years might have been rough, but his latest had been the life Luthan had yearned for, warm, loving parents.

"Jetyer," Luthan said, deliberately deepening his voice with authority.

The boy flinched and fear came to his eyes first, then they narrowed and his mouth took on a stubborn jut.

"Put down your sword and shield, boy. I'd like to speak to you." He noticed that Jetyer wore the hat Luthan had given him. Testing the boy's and the volaran's Songs, he found that the youngster was tough, could blur the beat of his thoughts, keeping them secret. The volaran was all too easy to read. He gestured to the young volaran, turned to his own steed, bowed. "Would you be so kind as to take Jetyer's volaran to the sweet meadow reserved for the highest and let him nibble."

Ayes, Luthan, his winged companion said telepathically, swiping a tongue across his own lips. Come, youngling. Lightning volaran rose with infinite grace and Jetyer's tried hard to copy the lift, his brain fully occupied with the maneuver and his emotions focused on good food. Luthan waited until they were out of sight before he said, "Mute your connection with your volaran."

Frowning from under heavy brows of a deep brown, the boy did.

"Thank you." Luthan bowed to him, too.

Jetyer had leaned his sword and shield on a tree, put his hands on his skinny hips. "Whwhat d-do you w-w-want?" He flushed, more color coming to his skin than if he'd been a purebred Lladranan.

It was rare for the boy to lapse into stuttering.

"I want to prevent you from doing something foolish."

The boy turned a darker color, his skin wasn't quite as fair as the Exotiques, but the change was noticeable.

Luthan said quietly, "As you know, I can sometimes see the future."

Jetyer stilled, skin stretched taut over his face.

Seeking the mental thread he should have with this boy – Luthan was connected to all the Exotiques through Bastien and Alexa, and had participated in circles with both Marrec and Calli – he found it, held it gently, and sent, <u>You must not speak of our conversation to *anyone.* To</u> do so might change the future and, believe me, you do not want that.

Warily, but with curiosity growing in his gaze, Jetyer nodded.

Luthan offered his hand. Jetyer hesitated and took it. The link between them

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strengthened.

<u>In all my visions of the future, your parents have lived through the invasion.</u> One-hundred-per-cent. That is very rare, but when it happens it is True.

The boy's mouth dropped open his eyes widened. "B-b-but wh-what ab-bout—"

"That's all I will say on it to you and you are the only one to know. When your father asks for your word to stay behind tonight, you give it. And you keep this secret close."

Jetyer scowled.

"If Calli or Marrec believed they will survive they might take risks they shouldn't." Biting his lower lip, Jetyer seemed to mull this over.

"Ayes, think of that. Now get your sword and shield and we will have some one-on-one practice until the volarans return."

That definitely diverted the boy's thoughts. "With you?"

Luthan grinned. Nice to know he still impressed someone. "Ayes, with me."