

Trembor opened an eye and glanced at the time. For a moment he was confused as to why his clock wasn't on the side table, then he remembered he was in Marlot's home. He'd been sleeping here a few times a week for the last few months, and still, he wasn't getting used to it.

He grabbed his pad and checked the time. Still a couple of minutes to go. He thought about putting the family lock on, technically he was still working. He'd taken it off by reflex once he'd entered the house.

He eased himself out of the bed, making sure not to jostle Marlot, and limped to the bathroom, his pad in hand. It vibrated as he closed the door.

"Hello Palinox," he answered, keeping his voice low.

"You're there! Why are you whispering?"

"Marlot is still sleeping."

"Oh. Why aren't you sleeping with him?"

"Because I'm awake. I woke up a few minutes ago."

"Oh," his nephew sounded disappointed. "I didn't beat the alarm."

"It hasn't sounded yet. I just woke up early."

"You had enough sleep."

"Yes, I did. You have a good day."

"I will."

The call ended. He looked for his earpiece, so he could talk while grooming, but then remembered he'd left it in his jacket. He considered getting it, but if one of the morning calls came while he was moving about, he might wake his wolf. He'd have to groom one-handed.

He grabbed the brush and started on his mane as his pad buzzed again.

"Have you washed your ears?" Dayra asked.

Trembor chuckled. The youngest of his nieces had taken over making sure everyone properly cleaned, but unlike Issa, she changed focus from one week to the other. "Not yet," He replied. "I'm brushing my mane."

"I'm happy I won't get one. It's too much work. You better clean your ears, otherwise, it'll get full of icky stuff and someone else is going to have to dig it out."

"I'll be sure to do that, don't worry."

"Okay, bye."

As soon as she disconnected, the pad buzzed again.

"Hello," he answered when the other didn't say anything.

"Hey."

Trembor frowned and had to glance down at his pad to see the number. "Herelex, is everything alright?"

"Yeah, I guess. Palinox called to say you were answering today."

"I'm back in the city for today, so I unlocked it."

“Uncle, Am I supposed to feel this weird when I’m around females?”

“What do you mean?” Trembor stopped brushing and leaned back against the sink.

“My insides feel all weird, like they’re twisting around when I’m close to the one female at the academy.”

“A lioness?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re first heat is coming close.”

“Oh.” His nephew sounded disappointed.

“What’s wrong?”

“I thought I’d be feeling that for a male. Not a female.”

“That isn’t how you’re first heat works. You’re reacting to the chemicals in a female’s scent. Once it starts, then you’ll feel like that for anyone around you. Have you told your father?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t want him to think I’m weird. I already told him I preferred males.”

“Herelex, your father isn’t going to think that. He saw me go through the same thing, and once it was past, I was interested in males only again. You will too.”

“Is there anything I can do? I don’t even like her.”

“It doesn’t have to be her. There have to be other lionesses at the academy who are ready. Get to know some of them.”

“I guess.” His nephew was silent for a time, “I better let you go,” he said, then disconnected.

Trembor wished there was an easier way for the youth of these days to go through their first heat. Someone should build a matching program. Maybe he could get Marlot to do that, he was enough of a techhead he’d probably enjoy it.

By the time he finished brushing his body, Gansir, Miril, and Nerik had also called him. None of them had anything urgent to say, they’d simply learned he was taking called and had wanted to talk. He liked hearing their voices first thing in the morning.

He’d hoped Marlot could get used to it, because once they moved into their new house, it wouldn’t stop. Right now he was still terrified from that first time his wolf had slept at his home, right after Trembor’s shoulder had healed. He’d picked up the pad by reflex when it buzzed and had found himself bombarded with questions from young cubs who had yet to meet him.

Trembor brushed his teeth and made sure his ears were clean before leaving the bathroom. Marlot was seated and looking over his lion’s naked body. Trembor sat next to him.

“Is it safe?” Marlot indicated the pad.

“Yes. They’re having breakfast by now, and then they’ll have to get ready for their day. Only Dayra and Nerik don’t go to the academy yet, but they go to a care center for the day.” He could see Marlot try to place the names. “Dayra is one of Baytil and Ufen’s daughter.”

Marlot nodded. “Ufen is the one with the rings in his fur, right?”

“Yes, his grandfather was a panther.”

“Right, I still can’t place Baytil. I know I’ve met her at the family dinners we’re gone to, because I remember Ufen, but you have so many siblings, not to mention they’re mated and have children, that I just can’t keep them all straight.”

Trembor kissed the top of his head. “Don’t worry about it. You’ll manage it in time. Nerik is Elin and Juress’s son.”

“Oh, right, he came to the hospital with your parents, well, your father and mother. His sister and yours were there too.”

“That’s him.”

“He wanted my pad number.” He eyed Trembor’s. “That’s why you said not to give it to them.”

“They can be overwhelming.”

“Don’t I know it. They scared me out of the attic that first time.”

Trembor chuckled. He’d seen it, but Trembor had told him about all the cubs questioning him about their relationship. Something he hadn’t been quite ready to talk about at that point.

“But you get along with them now. I’d be willing to swear you’re becoming their favorite.”

“Yeah, I do like them. When they aren’t calling this early in the morning.”

“It isn’t that bad. If you’d talk to them, they’d get used to it, and what happened that morning wouldn’t happen again.”

“So you say.”

“I do.” He stood. “I’ll go get breakfast ready.”

“I should be doing that. You need to give your leg a rest.”

“It’s just sprained, and my arms only have a few scratches. You have stitches. Stay in bed, I’ll warm come meat and be right back.”