

TLK III Divided Kingdom Part One

by

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Timeline and Background Information

It has been about two years since the almost battle between the pride landers and the outlanders, and peace has more or less been abundant in that time.

King Simba has passed away due to an unknown sickness that Rafiki couldn't cure.

King Kovu has sworn to achieve what no other king before him has: he intends to unify all the animals, completing the circle of life.

King Kovu and Queen Kiara have two sons: Gainell and Elewisa.

Chapter One

The sun had long since made its way into the highest part of the sky, the rays warming the fur of the lions that were lazing around beneath it. In a shaded corner beneath the kajobe, several lions were partaking in the customary bathing and napping that was so often witnessed at this particular time of day.

- "Lie still, Elewisa." Tiifu murmured against the cub's ears, drawing her tongue over them as she continued to groom the little prince. The cub in question merely huffed, his fur still ruffled from his time spent playing with his good friend Areesa. Across from him and Tiifu was Zuri, the red lioness a vision in the sunlight, making quick work of dealing with his friend's knotted fur.

- "Honestly," Tiifu continued,

- "I don't know how you two manage to end up like this every single time you play together. I have half a mind to never allow you to be in each other's company just so that I don't have to deal with this every day."

Elewisa scoffed, though he knew she was joking. Still, a threatening glare settled itself onto his features as quickly as the anger inside him flared. How he would dare anyone to separate him from his favorite playmate!

- "You'd never live to tell the tale." He responded to the gentle lioness. Though she paused in her grooming of the prince, Tiifu elected not to respond to him. Her friend's son was often a spoiled and defiant cub, and she knew that she would only be playing to his whims if she continued down this path. Instead, the light lioness chose to pursue a different path of conversation. In between licks and nibbles she said

- "I found a nest of honey when I last went hunting."

That seemed to intrigue all the lions present. Her sister Zuri glanced up at her in surprise, and Elewisa squirmed in her paws till he had twisted himself away, now able to look into her sage green eyes.

- "Where?" The small cub demanded, and Tiifu barely managed to mask her laughter with a cough at the instantaneous mood change that had taken place. She shook her head down at him, and instead answered her inquiring sister.

- "Near the western river; there's a tree close to the bank buzzing with delight."

Zuri laughed at her choice of words but nodded her agreement before returning to the grooming of Areesa.

- "Enough!" Elewisa cried out as Tiifu attempted to pull him back into her embrace. She quirked an eyebrow at the prince, but he was clearly in no mood to relent. Tiifu sighed away her defeat- she was not Kiara, nor was her friend and Queen around to bring about the prince's compliance. Just as she was about to quip back with something sassy to the little prince, another voice beat her to it.

- "It's not enough."

Tiifu's head snapped up, her eyes meeting the disapproving face of her King. She sprung to her paws almost immediately, her sister Zuri following suit. The two lionesses bowed their heads and muttered a respectful greeting, but King Kovu's gaze did not once leave his son.

- "You're not in the least bit presentable, Elewisa. When Tiifu says that you are done, then you will be done, and you will thank her before running off to do more foolish things." The voice was scolding, and even Tiifu felt slightly uneasy. The little prince seemed to completely ignore his father, and thankfully, King Kovu didn't appear to be interested in hearing his son's reply. He nodded his head at the two lionesses, and, just as quickly as he had appeared, he was once more gone, padding away into the brush from the singular path into the secluded den.

Tiifu once more lay down, getting ready to grab the dark cub, but he darted away from her grasp, making for the path his father had taken.

- "Elewisa! Did you not hear your father?" Tiifu let out, slightly shocked by his choice to pursue the aggravated King.

- "I did!" The prince threw back over his shoulder, before disappearing completely into the underbrush.

Tiifu sat there in stunned silence, unsure of whether or not she should follow the little cub and drag him back, no matter how unwilling he seemed, or simply let him have his way.

As if hearing her very thoughts, Areesa piqued up from her spot in Zuri's arms.

- "Let him be, sweetest Tiifu." She let out, languid as she awaited Zuri to continue grooming her.

- "You'll never get him to come back if he doesn't want to."

Elewisa followed on quick steps the path through the long grasses that was clearly left by his father. If there was one thing Elewisa hated, it was being told or made to do things he had no wish to do. His defiance was nothing new- everything that his father disliked had been tried and tested, every mannerism that was looked down upon to be exemplified to the maximum. Originally, Elewisa's problematic behavior had begun as a means of getting attention from his never present father, but had quickly escalated into being an intrinsic part of the second prince as he witnessed more and more of his father's disregard.

When he had originally sprung to his paws and began following the king, Elewisa had assumed that he would quickly arrive at his father's meeting place, or perhaps be led to the spots most frequented by his mother. He certainly had not expected it to take more than a few moments. Alas, his paws were now beginning to get sluggish for how long he had been silently following his father's trail. Even the terrain began to change. Lush green grasses gave way to dirt and low lying weeds. The land he now walked on appeared parched, as if it had been weeks since the plants had last gotten any sort of water.

Now being in such an exposed area, Elewisa had to force himself to slow down, even though he worried that he might lose his father's trail if he did. The large lion was not too far up ahead, and all he had to do was gaze back for a second and he would spot his troublesome second son sneaking behind him.

Elewisa chose to stick closer to an area where the trees and bushes provided somewhat acceptable cover, even though that path was not the one his father now walked. All Elewisa needed to do was ensure that he didn't lose sight of the lion.

This was of course, easier said than done. As he made his way into the underbrush and attempted his best to not make any unnecessary noise, he found his thoughts wandering. Not once in all of Elewisa's life had his father ever met with anyone outside of pride rock. Being king also meant that he barely spent any time out near the borders, as his sister Vitani's lion guard took care of that area for him. The longer he trotted after his father, the more weary he became. He had never before been so far away from pride rock! Once more the dirt beneath his paws was beginning to change, shifting from a parched brown to a burnt red, and not a single tree or blade of grass was to be seen. Elewisa stopped at the border of the two terrains, debating whether or not he ought to risk being caught in order to follow his father.

Luckily for him, he didn't need to make the choice. Just before his father had walked too far into the red hills, a lithe lioness had sprung up to tackle him. Elewisa felt his hackles rising, wondering if his father was in any danger, until he realized that Kovu appeared to be smiling. Indeed, the king of the pride lands had a broad grin on his face as he nuzzled this strange lioness. Elewisa, ever the noisiest of his siblings, dropped to the ground and wormed his way forward, ignoring the dirt that was now beginning to smudge all over him, ruining the bath he'd taken not too long ago. Tiifu would be furious if she saw him like this! Elewisa pushed that thought aside and instead strained his ears, attempting to catch some of their conversation.

- "I'll be here as much as I can manage without drawing attention."

- "They'll be here soon you know. They should meet you."

- "I know...are you getting enough to eat? You're looking thin."

The lioness shook her head with a smile, her eyes sparkling as they looked at his father.

- "I'm fine! Worry about yourself- are you still having those nightmares?" When her only response was a sullen look from the king, the lioness sighed and beckoned for his father to follow her. Whatever else she might have said or done, Elewisa could not know, because he was still crouched in the little cover that he had found and was so shocked, that he had no idea what to think. His father had never been this gentle or affectionate towards anyone, and rarely did he display that behavior towards even Kiara. Here, however, he seemed a completely different lion. After regaining some of his composure, Elewisa decided to return to pride rock, lest his father find him hiding in the shrubs on his own way back.

When he had managed to find his way home, the sun was beginning to make its descent into the horizon, and soon enough the moon would be rising to take its place. Elewisa had mulled over all he had witnessed over and over, and couldn't find a single explanation for the strange behavior. Not knowing his father much, but not wanting to alarm anyone of his findings, Elewisa sought out his older brother Gainell.

He found the first born playing with his three friends. The other cubs contently acknowledged Elewisa and made their ways back to their own dens when he told them that he wanted to speak to his brother, alone. El was glad for their compliance, and instantly recounted the details of what he had heard and seen from earlier that day to his older brother, who appeared not one bit surprised or suspicious.

- "Father speaks to many lions and animals in all sorts of manners." His brother shrugged,

- "Besides- you said yourself you don't know who she is or what his relation is to her. We shouldn't go around throwing accusations. It'll only upset mother and father. Besides-" Gainell fixed Elewisa with his cold blue gaze,

- "-You may not remember because you were too young, but I was there before mother and father became rulers. I've seen the love they have for each other. Why do you think you're here now, if not for their love? If father didn't care, he wouldn't have bothered with another cub after he'd had me."

- "In short, I beg you not to stir up unnecessary trouble Elewisa." With that, his older brother marched away from El with the excuse that he wanted to go see their grandmother Nala, leaving the dark prince with nothing but his own racing thoughts.

Elewisa then resigned himself to admitting that for once, Gainell might be right.

Chapter Two

Elewisa chortled with laughter as his paws became entangled with that of Areesa, who was giving him the most ridiculous face he'd seen in ages. The two cubs tumbled down a small hill together, both giggling.

- "Ouch!" Elewisa huffed out as he landed roughly on his back with Areesa on top of him.

- "Oh poor baby!" Areesa said tauntingly.

- "Can't handle a simple hill slide?' She peered down at him, eyes sparkling.

- "Yeah right!" He responded, pushing her off of him with a laugh.

- "You're the one who cried to the heavens just because a thorn got stuck in your paw." He told her with narrowed eyes, enjoying the explosion of anger he knew would surface with his words.

Areesa growled at El before pouncing on the cub's back, her claws digging into the fur.

- "Let go!" Elewisa yelped as his footing became uneven on the muddy ground.

- "Never!" Areesa cried, and the two once again went rolling down the plains. This was the third time in four days that the two cubs had found themselves so far away from pride rock. The two landed at the edge of a cliffside with the rushing sounds of the river not too far beneath them. El scrambled after Areesa, who was mesmerized at the edge of the cliff.

- "How far down do you think it goes?" She asked El without taking her eyes off the turbulent waves. Elewisa shrugged from his place beside her.

- "No clue, but we should get out of here." And when she wouldn't budge, Elewisa took a different approach.

- "Look!" The young cub cried out, his nose pointing down at the banks of the river. Areesa finally broke from her trance, spotting the shell that El was pointing at. She always did love shiny things.

- "Let's go get it!" She squealed triumphantly, happy with how their adventure was turning out.

The only issue was getting to the riverbank. The two cubs stumbled down to the one side and searched around, trying to find anything that they could use to safely cross to the other side. Elewisa

wandered about, poking at anything that stuck out of the water in the hopes that it would be stable enough to hold him and Areesa.

No such luck. From the corners of his eyes however, the young cub spotted the place where the river tapered off in two directions, and from there he could see that there were large bones scattered across the smaller stream that could be used to cross to the other side.

- "Areesa!" He called out and waited as the other cub approached. A moment of silence passed between them, and Elewisa contemplated the choice before him. He could simply go back home now, dragging an unfulfilled Areesa with him who was sure to complain about not getting the shell. That would be the smart decision. The princely decision. The type of decision his father and brother Gainell would approve of. Or, a voice in his mind whispered. You can be a true adventurer, regaling others with the tale of your crossing a bone bridge across an endless river to retrieve a shell for your beloved friend, and Elewisa had to give it to the voice. That idea sounded so much better. Far more interesting and rewarding.

Without another word, Elewisa headed in the direction of the bone bridge. As he traversed closer, he realized that the bones belong to several elephants. A small warning bell went off in the back of his mind, but the cub ignored it and continued onward, Areesa on his heels. The two cubs floundered, trying to get a good grip on the bones as they braved their way across the bone bridge and onto the other side of the riverbank.

Elewisa sighed in relief.

- "Go get your shell." He told Areesa as he stood guard next to the bones, their only way back to safety. The sun was beginning to set from where they were, and the sky was so cloudy that the riverbank seemed eerily dark.

- "It's so shiny!" He heard Areesa yell out as she finally made it to the shell. A smile crept up on the young cub's face as he watched his favorite playmate pick up the shell as if it were a prize and make her way back to him.

- "Let's go." He managed to make out from her mumbling, and he nodded his head at her, allowing her the chance to cross first.

The two cubs slowly clawed their way onto the bones and steadily began making their way across the bridge.

- "Ah!" El let out as the river water suddenly surged and one of his hind paws slipped from the bone

it held onto. Areesa turned to look at him with wide eyes, until she was sure he was safe. They had almost made it onto the other side when Elewisa felt his heart jump to his throat as he heard the curdling laughter. His fur stood on end as he frantically looked around, trying to pinpoint where the laughter had come from.

- "El..." He heard Areesa whisper as she retreated and bumped into him. In front of them both Elewisa could now see the hyenas who looked all too pleased to have found the two cubs.

- "Well, well, what have we here? Isn't that one of the little princelings?" One of them said, jabbing a paw at Elewisa who felt himself grow smaller, curling in around himself. The other two laughed maniacally, and Elewisa could feel the quickening of his heart, pounding so quickly he thought it might jump out of his chest.

- "I'd like me a piece of lion for dessert." Another growled, walking around the first hyena with glinting narrowed eyes. Elewisa gulped down his horror, unable to make his paws move.

- "How about it, boys?" The hyena asked her companions, and they nodded enthusiastically, giggling all the while.

- "Come here, you." The she-hyena said, swiping a paw at Elewisa's head. Elewisa curled in further in on himself whilst his mind roared of his cowardice. He was paralyzed with fear.

- "No!" Came the brave response, quickly followed by a scream of horror. Elewisa looked up just in time to see Areesa jump in front of the hyena's paw in his defense, and his terror only grew as he spotted the hyena's claws raking down the side of Areesa's face.

- "I can't see!" Areesa cried, her paws clutching at her eyes. Elewisa stood frozen, unsure of what to do. The cackling of the hyenas rang in his ears as he stood there awaiting his doom.

Except, it never came. In its stead came the fierce roar of a lion.

The three hyenas jumped and scurried off the bridge, their cackle's tone turning from bone chilling to frantic and afraid.

- "Halt!" Came the booming voice of Elewisa's golden cousin. The large lion padded over to the now still hyenas, encircling them. The hyenas wore a look of severe displeasure on their faces, as if they had just smelled something foul and could not escape it. Elewisa was finally able to force his paws to move, padding around Areesa, who's screams had died down into mostly silent sobs.

As he gazed upon the dark fur that was now stained in red, something in Elewisa clicked. His fear vanished, as if it were never there. He leaned down to help lick the blood from Areesa's fur, his purr comforting despite the circumstances.

This lioness, he decided, would never come to harm again. Not under his watch. While continuing to calm down Areesa, Elewisa listened to the scene unfolding behind him.

- "What, exactly, do you three wretches think you are doing on pride lander territory?" Arien was asking, to which he only received snorts of amusement.

- "Not your territory golden boy. This is our border too, and they crossed it!" The she-hyena let out with a growl. Arien didn't appear fazed, instead his frame seemed to grow ever so slightly as he bared his teeth in retaliation.

- "Tell your leader that if we see your kind here again, you won't even have the graveyard to call home." He spat at them, his claws flying at their backs as a warning. The hyenas scurried off with little howls. Despite the fact that he was saved, and they had on all accounts been defeated, El never forgot the looks on their faces as they had tried to harm him.

- "What were you thinking?!" Came the voice of Arien once more, as the lion made his way over to the two cubs and yanked Elewisa off Areesa.

- "If I hadn't been patrolling this bit you two would be hyena snacks by now!"

Elewisa looked up to his cousin calmly, a single eyebrow raised.

- "She's hurt." He muttered, pointing a paw in Areesa's direction.

- "You can lecture me about it all you want, but we need to get her some help first." And for a cub of only a few months, Elewisa's voice left no room for argument. Arien sighed, taking a closer look at Areesa.

- "That'll leave a nasty scar." He muttered, more to himself than anybody else. Then he picked up the sobbing lioness cub by the scruff of her neck and beckoned Elewisa to follow him.

It was night fall by the time Arien and the cubs reached pride rock. Areesa had been taken to Rafiki for the night, and Elewisa was left to his own devices when they neared the den. The dark cub padded up the rock side, his pelt allowing him to blend in perfectly in the shadows of the night. He had no interest in being caught sneaking back in. Oh, the lectures he would get! He slinked his way past the night watch. On his way into the den, he spotted a shadow of a movement. It was of a pelt that was all too similar to his, and Elewisa watched with mild interest as his father paced back and forth in the entrance to the den. Unsure of how to proceed, El stood there in silence for a moment, trying to come up with an excuse as to why he was just now getting back when it was well past sundown.

- "Psst!" He heard after a few moments. Elewisa turned to find his older brother Gainell hiding out behind the small outcrop of rocks that surrounded the den.

- "Why?" Was the only thing Elewisa could manage to say. After the day he had had, and the vicious lecture he was sure to receive once news of his adventure spread, El was in no mood to play his brother's games.

- "Dad's upset!" Gainell said in a tiny voice, peering cautiously over to where their dark shadow of a father still paced. Elewisa let out an exasperated sigh.

- "Father is always upset." He remarked to his brother. As far back as Elewisa could recall, his father had never been a particularly jovial fellow. Quick to anger, quick to lash out, and never one to apologize, Elewisa had few fond memories of the lion Gainell looked up to so much.

Still standing behind the rocks, Gainell scoffed.

- "He's stressed out. It's not like you're making his life easier. We should do something!" He insisted, finally finding his bravery and stepping out from hiding. Before Elewisa could argue against the idea, for he had no intention of interacting with his father, Gainell was padding out into the open and calling out to the king.

El plastered on a fake smile. If he pretended to have been hiding out with Gainell just outside the den, he wouldn't receive much scolding. That was how he ended up cheering on the father that he could care less for as Gainell pleaded for their father to smile.

Chapter Three

Gainell slipped silently behind his father, attempting to echo every paw step as if it would help him in emulating the majesty of the king. He had awoken that day before the birds had begun their singing,

and had sat patiently next to the sleeping king until he had arisen for the day. His father continued to ignore his presence, though Gainell could feel that he was beginning to get agitated with the smaller shadow that followed him. Gainell ignored the warning signs, however, and instead focused on not losing his father as the king continued to try and jilt him.

He had witnessed now at least ten different animals who had come in to complain to his father of this mess or that. A fight had nearly broken out between two rams when Gainell had suggested that they simply share leadership of the herd.

He had been 'escorted' out of his father's meeting place after that comment and once the rams had calmed down. Now, the oldest prince waited near the foothills of the kajobe, his temperature rising thanks to the persistent rays of the sun. He had been sitting there waiting for his father to reemerge ever since slightly after dawn, when he was made to leave, and still there was no sign of his father. Gainell wondered if it really took so long to settle one dispute, and then he concluded that this must be the reason his father was always so irritable. How could he not be, when he was forced to sit through such drivel for so long?

One day, that'll be my job. Gainell thought, though he didn't dread it. The first prince was actually looking forward to it, mostly because he believed himself more than capable of doing well.

This was why he was still sitting outside his father's meeting place, waiting. If nothing else, Gainell believed that this would showcase to his father his patience. A virtue that Elewisa often times lacked.

Hoofs sounded behind him, and Gainell barely had time to move out of the way as the two rams trotted out of the shadows, snorting at him as they went by. Not too long after their departure, his father finally emerged from the meeting.

Gainell looked up at his father with hopeful blue eyes, only to find the green glassy and dull. His father looked down and acknowledged his presence, but said something that sank Gainell's heart.

- "You're not to come to any more meetings. I'd ask you to leave, though you may sit here if you'd like, so long as you keep out of the way."

- "But father-"

- "No."

And that was that. It had taken Gainell weeks of begging and prodding to be allowed a single day to see his father in action, and he'd barely gotten a glimpse before he'd been kicked out. Tears burned in the corners of his eyes, but Gainell refused to cry. His father hated crying cubs. He gave his father a curt nod, before turning around and marching away from the kajobe.

He would find another way to show his father how serious he was about becoming king. There were many alternatives to simply sitting down for meetings, and Gainell contemplated all of them as he continued down a random path, too distracted to realize where he was going.

- "Ah!" Said a voice in surprise as two blurry figures tumbled on the ground in front of him. This was then followed up with giggles. Gainell rolled his eyes, mild irritation beginning to prick at him. That voice belonged to none other than Areesa, but it was not because of her that Gainell suddenly felt the urge to change directions. Wherever Areesa went, Elewisa was not far behind, and Gainell dreaded having to deal with his brother today.

Too late. He had been spotted.

Elewisa had Areesa pinned to the ground with a vicious grin, one that made even Gainell uneasy. The oldest prince often found himself questioning just how Areesa could stand to be around his obnoxious younger brother.

- "Point!" El declared, before Areesa kicked him off of her and motioned to Gainell.

Gainell sincerely contemplated running off, but felt himself glued to his spot.

- "Well well, brother. How goes the training with father? Shall I bow and refer to you as 'my liege' everytime you walk past now?"

Both El and Areesa snickered at the comment, but Gainell would not take the bait. Instead, he gave Elewisa a peachy smile in return and bit out with

- "Only if you'd like- as my younger brother I wouldn't dream of being so formal with you, El."

He hoped the comment would stop El from questioning him about why he was back so quickly, even though Gainell had proudly stated days earlier that he would be shadowing their father for the entire

day.

The trick worked, though Elewisa didn't appear to be completely convinced. The lion dropped the topic all together in favor of a new one. Turning back to his partner in crime, Elewisa said,

- "You should tell him the story."

Gainell of course had no idea of what the two were speaking of. He rarely spent any time around them to know what they might be referring to. Areesa gave Elewisa a smirk in response, then turned her attention to Gainell.

- "Zazu brought back news from home, and boy does it make for a grand story. I'll tell you all about it, if you'd care to listen."

She was giving him an option, and Gainell thanked her in his thoughts. Areesa might have been attached to the hip with his brother, but she was aware of his faults, and the fact that Gainell wasn't too fond of him. Seeing as he had nothing better to do now that he had been dismissed, Gainell decided to take a chance and spend some time with the two.

- "I'd be delighted." He responded to her.

This was how Gainell ended up hearing the story of the great Anan Dejen- an older half brother of Areesa who had taken on a vicious rhino (with the help of others) and defeated the rhino, though he lost a paw and gained many scars in the battle.

Gainell was of course only half-paying attention to the story. His mind wandered to thoughts of being proclaimed crown prince, and how he might achieve such a thing. Gainell wanted more than anything to prove to his father that he was able, but how was he to do that if his father was never around to see? He was still too young to achieve something like fighting off an enemy of the pride lands, and he had no knowledge in governance beyond what he had seen his father do. He entertained several thoughts, but ultimately dropped them all.

- "-At some point I'll have to go and meet him." That was Elewisa speaking. Gainell finally returned to the present, and watched as Areesa nodded to his brother.

- "I'm sure he'll want to meet you too. Perhaps we can visit him and the pride together when we're old enough to travel on our own!" She got a murmur of agreement from El, and then the two of them turned their gazes on Gainell.

The lion smiled sheepishly at the pair.

- "What's on your mind, brother?"

Gainell almost didn't tell him.

Almost.

- "How I might prove to father that I am the best option for crown prince."

El raised an eyebrow at that, but his face otherwise remained neutral. Instead, the lion yawned and stretched before making a comment, though it was directed at Areesa.

- "Didn't you say that some of the younger lionesses were having trouble hunting?"

Areesa nodded.

- "Seems to be a problem. They've been giving away their position and driving the prey away before they have a chance of catching it."

Elewisa then turned to look at Gainell again, as if to say 'well, here's something you could do'. Gainell considered it, and realized with slight envy that it had only taken his brother seconds to come up with a solution to his dilemma which he had thought over for weeks. Gainell entertained the idea of appointing Elewisa as one of his advisors when he took the throne, but quickly decided against it. El was too unpredictable of a lion.

- "This was fun. Thank you both for the company. I must go." Without waiting for a response, Gainell took off in the direction of the kajobe. He was beginning to formulate a plan, and he would need to rest up and awake early tomorrow if he was to execute it well.

Waking up at such an early hour was not something that Gainell did often. Of course, he definitely wasn't the first one awake. His brother El was beginning to go about his day just as Gainell stirred. Gainell wondered what his younger terror of a brother was doing up so early, but couldn't bring himself to ask. He couldn't get involved with El's shenanigans when he had such important plans to execute. He had barely enough time to get himself a drink from the water pool before the first hunting party had set off, and he diligently followed them.

Many of these lionesses were ones he hadn't really met- he only ever interacted with Zuri and Tiifu, his mother and the lovely Areesa. It suddenly dawned on Gainell that one of those young lionesses could be her. Of course, he was referring to the one and only Sutar- also known as his betrothed. The idea didn't sit well with Gainell, that his mate was already picked out for him, but the young lion had no intention of going against his father's wishes. If Kovu asked you to jump, you didn't defy him or question the order. You asked how high, and from where, and then you proceeded to go through with it.

So lost in his thoughts, Gainell soon lost track of the hunting party. Darn! the prince thought, sticking his nose up into the air with the hopes of catching a scent. He was never one for tracking. That was the domain of his dubious younger brother, and in any case, the wind was working against him.

Gainell opted instead to track the prints in the dirt. The freshest bunch belonged to large animals with hooves. He could smell their scent though- Zebra. The young lion padded through the grasses as quietly as he could manage, grateful that his pelt allowed him to more easily blend into the savannah. It didn't take him too long to find them. A large travelling herd, now surrounding a watering hole.

If the lionesses were nearby, he couldn't see them, but that didn't matter. He knew that they would be near enough to catch a member of the herd. All he needed to do was make certain that the herd was worried about the lion running after them, and they would never see the lionesses coming.

A perfect plan.

Or so he thought.

Gainell's eyes landed on the prize: an oddly colored zebra whose stripes were almost golden. What a catch that would make! Crouching low, the lion inched his way closer and closer, step by painfully slow step. He needed to get as close as possible without alerting the herd. He needed to jump up in their midst, for maximum scare of course.

The blood pounding in his ears made it impossible for him to hear anything, but he was loving every minute of it. The adrenaline was intoxicating, and he finally understood why his brother liked hunting so much.

Two more steps.

There!

Gainell jumped out of the grasses with a roar, his unsheathed claws managing to snag on one of the legs of the golden Zebra.

The zebra in question let out a high pitched scream, and two hooves flew in his direction. Gainell managed to duck, pulling his claws out of her leg and rolling away to safety.

The lion sat there in glee, waiting for the chaos to unfold, until he realized that the herd was not moving. No, the golden Zebra was shouting orders, and he was now being surrounded on all sides by angry faces. Gainell felt himself gulping, unsure of why this had gone so wrong.

They were supposed to be running. Screaming. Getting caught by the lionesses.

The golden zebra stomped her way over to where Gainell was still crouching in the grasses, snorting impatiently.

- "How dare you attack Dhahabu?" One of the standing Zebras directed at Gainell. The young lion sat there for a moment, his mind racing as he tried to piece together what was happening. He had heard that name before, spoken by his own father. The horror that began to shadow his face let the Zebra know that he had realized what he had done. Indeed, Gainell was mortified. He had attacked the leader of the herd, a zebra well known throughout most of the lands, and he knew that he would not be getting out of this one easily.

- "What's going on here?" A lioness called, shoving her way through the gathered zebras. Gainell looked up to see it was Zuri. The pretty lioness didn't need too long to figure it out. She let out a sigh and gave a small shake of her head to Gainell, knowing as well as he that his father would have words with him about this.

- "Dhahabu, on behalf of the pridelands I humbly ask you to accept my sincerest apologies. Gainell meant no harm- he likes to joke around." She emphasized those words with a quick glance of warning his way. Gainell nodded along to her story. The zebras were already upset, and that anger could very much be the end of him if they found out he had intended to hunt their leader.

- "I wish to speak to the king!"

He wished he had been trampled at the sound of those words.

Zuri had no choice but to comply, escorting the golden zebra and her guard to the kajobe with Gainell in tow. The young prince sat and watched in hopeless despair as the eminent Dhahabu recounted every painful detail of Gainell's assault. He couldn't even bring himself to look at his father's face, knowing full well that it was a mixture of apology for the zebra and rage for him.

When reparations had been made, and all were dismissed, Gainell was made to sit in wait for his father to finish all of his duties and then be dealt with.

He was not ready for what was to come.

Gainell was the GOOD son. Never went against his father's word or questioned orders. Never bothered his father or added any stress to the already stressed out king. His entire identity was founded on being the perfect son. It was El that always got into trouble, not him! What would happen to him now?

Tears stung his eyes, but he quickly shook it off. His father hated tears.

- "Do you know what I had to do to stop Dhahabu from demanding you get trampled on for what you did?"

The voice was quiet, but Gainell could hear the rage behind it. Refusing to meet his father's eye, the prince shook his head no.

- "I gave her herd freedom to roam the pride lands for the entirety of this season without fear of being hunted. Not a single one of them. You cost this entire pride a food source."

It was like getting his chest slashed by razor sharp claws. Gainell continued to stare at his paws.

- "Elewisa is a known trouble maker, but I expected more from you. And to think that you want to become king-ha!"

Those proverbial claws were now digging in deeper to his chest.

- "As punishment for your insolence, you will have no rights to eat a fresh kill. You may eat once everyone else has eaten, and only the scraps of what's left. If not everyone has eaten, then you won't be eating either. Understood?"

Gainell nodded his head, ears pinned all the way back and eyes holding back a flood of tears.

- "You have disgraced me, now go."

So Gainell went.

On his way out that Kajobe, the prince promised himself something: No matter what it took, he would become the king.

Chapter Four

It had been weeks since Elewisa's adventure-gone-wrong, and for those few weeks the little prince had been convinced that his father had simply not heard the news. He had continued on with his usual mischief and let down his guard, believing himself to be safe from his father's wrath. This morning had been no different than all the previous mornings since his adventure. He had awoken at dawn, because the birds were always so loud and he was the lightest of sleepers. He had gone and gotten himself a small meal to start off the day, and had then gone and checked up on his beloved Areesa, who was by now back from Rafiki's tree, her eye healing. He had then come back to wake up his mother, when he found her (to his surprise) already awake and with a frown upon her graceful features, eyes downcast and refusing to meet his.

The regal Queen had let out a sigh, stating with a very quiet and tired voice,

- "I will not lie and say that I expected any better from you, my sweet prince, but I am disappointed." And that had been all she had said to him. Thinking back about all that had transpired, Elewisa realized with a stinging pain that her refusal to speak to him had caused him more pain than any of his father's screeching or threats.

After her refusal to speak another word to him, Elewisa had found himself beckoned into his father's meeting place beneath the kajobe where the pride landers made their dens. It was there in that cave that he had received the expected scolding.

Elewisa cautiously stepped foot into the rocky cavern, unsure of what to expect. There would be yelling, of course. There was always yelling whenever he was called down into this place. This felt...different. When he was in full view of his father, the King bounded up to Elewisa and snarled, smacking his son across the face, though he kept his claws sheathed. El felt the stinging nonetheless. It wouldn't leave a mark, but it hurt.

- "Be lucky I do not brand you for your foolishness!" His father hissed, glaring down at his son with a fiery green gaze. Elewisa kept his head down, but a sneer had crept its way onto his face, out of the sight of his father.

- "I have heard of your little tryst out near the borders. You nearly got Areesa killed! What would I tell Mtoto if something had happened to her?"

Elewisa didn't answer. Answering only made things worse. His father would continue berating him, and turn any comment of defense against him. He had walked this path many times before, and even though his chest now burned with the rage of a thousand suns and his tongue prepared rebukes, he kept his jaws clamped shut.

His eyes began to water as he received another smack on his head for his silence.

- "Heed my warning, Elewisa. Stay out of trouble, stay within the borders, and whatever folly you choose to pursue, leave Areesa out of it. Understand?"

Elewisa gave a curt nod, his eyes narrowed and vision now blurry. He had folded in on himself ever so slightly, and all of a sudden it became difficult to breathe.

- "Good. Now get out of my sight." His father used a giant paw to shove him off in the direction of the cavern exit, and Elewisa didn't resist the push. He clambored his way out of the underground cave gasping for breath.

It had been hours since his father's reprimands now, and the sun was at its peak in the sky. Today had become quite the uncomfortably hot day.

The heat, however, was not what was fueling the raging storm within Elewisa. No, those feelings of

hot hatred were the work of his father, and not even the sun could compete with the heat of his heart.

Pettiness, ever had it been Elewisa's greatest flaw.

He was now swiftly and deliberately making his way to a far off parcel of land. He had been warned to stay within the borders, and he would, but he would stir up as much trouble along the way as he could muster. Stopping near what appeared to be a den of rabbits, Elewisa let out his most intimidating growl and scuffed at the ground, a tiny tinge of satisfaction blossoming in his chest as he heard the whimpers within. Happy with his work, the lion cub continued on, pausing to paw and scare any animals that crossed his path. By the time the sun finally began its descent into the sky, Elewisa had travelled much farther than he had originally intended. He was now near to the western bank, nearing the end of his father's borders.

Elewisa began to contemplate turning back, until a thought struck him and a wicked smirk spread across his face. This was the same place that Tiifu had spoken of weeks ago. Somewhere on this bank there stood a tree with a great treasure, and Elewisa wanted nothing more than to find it and pillage it.

A small voice in the back of his head whispered urgently that he ought to just turn back around, that this could be dangerous, and oh what if he was stung? The whispering didn't even faze Elewisa. How delighted Areesa would be to lick honey off his fur, and on such an occasion not even Tiffu would be upset at having to bathe him.

This was a very bad idea. His father would hate it. Knowing the reaction his father would give, Elewisa settled on his decision. He would find that honey if it was the last thing he did.

The sun was now hiding behind some clouds as Elewisa charged forth towards the bank, not once paying attention to his surroundings. His nose was thrust into the air, the cub sniffing around to catch the scent.

He had tasted honey only once, way back when he had been a tiny mewling newborn with a wicked cough. The elderly baboon Rafiki had come to visit him in his den and forced him to eat the thick golden sweetness. He had never forgotten the taste, or the way it had relieved his sore throat. Besides domination of the pride, Elewisa's only other large goal was the gathering of all honey- for himself of course.

He was so busy thinking about the taste and consistency of the honey that he barely noticed what

he was stumbling into until it was too late.

A snarl erupted forth from the creature. Elewisa screamed in surprise, stumbling back from the black and white pelt.

This was more than just a bad idea.

He had been fine with the idea of a few stings, and any who had heard his thoughts would have thought him fearless. Elewisa was not fearless. No, the second prince was more akin to a coward than anything else, and damn his legs for betraying him! They now refused to move as Elewisa's eyes widened in terror at the animal before him.

How had it never crossed his mind that others may also be seeking the treasure he wanted to hoard? He certainly wasn't the only animal in the savannah who had tasted it before. He most certainly was not the only one who enjoyed the taste.

- "Get down!" A voice yelled from somewhere behind Elewisa. This much he could do. The cub dropped down onto his paws and closed his eyes, refusing to open them again until he heard the badger stumbling, confused. Teeth pulled at the scruff of Elewisa's neck, forcing his legs to move once more.

- "We have to get up! Can you climb?" Elewisa couldn't form a sentence, but nodded with blurry eyes as he followed his savior up a tree further inland from the bank.

The two animals panted as they climbed the large tree, stopping only when they had reached a high enough perch. Elewisa at last took a good look at his savior, and found himself staring at a leopard.

- "Thank you!" He blurted before he could think of a more eloquent response. The leopardess looked at him as if he had just spoken gibberish. She arched an eyebrow and simply responded.

- "That's it? I save your life and all I get is a thank you?"

Elewisa blinked, unsure of what to say. Luckily for him, the leopardess appeared to already have an idea in mind.

- "If you truly want to thank me, my prince," She said it in such a condescending tone that Elewisa had to fight back the urge to threaten to have her exiled. She saved your life! he reminded himself.

- "I want the finest gazelle your hunting parties have brought down this day. You can manage this much, can you not?"

Elewisa simply nodded. The two cats waited until they felt it was safe to descend, occasionally striking up conversation. The leopardess was called Penda, and after his many rantings she seemed to empathize with his situation. When they were sure of their safety on the ground, Elewisa led Penda back to Pride Rock where he was grateful to find only his mother present to deal with the situation.

The regal Queen said nothing to her son, but was still grateful to the leopardess cub for having saved the prince. She called to Arien and instructed the lion to help carry the Leopardess's prize back to her leap, and Elewisa watched as his newest friend proudly padded off with his cousin.

If his father heard, Elewisa would never see the light outside the Kajobe ever again.

The Queen nudged her sons forward, although Elewisa complained relentlessly. She knew exactly what he was doing. He wanted her to respond to him- say something, anything, but Kiara was not going to give in. She knew if she gave in now that her wily son would never again fall back into line, and she had promised Kovu that she would deal with Elewisa her way.

- "Move along you two." She said as she padded into the tall grasses. There was a hidden glade surrounded by the boulders from the kajobe where the Queen Mother made her den. Flowering plants covered the rocks, and the green moss felt heavenly on sore paws, its cool moisture easing the weariness of Kiara.

The Queen's face transformed into a wistful smile as she came upon the entrance to the glade, squeezing through the small opening to find her mother sitting near a shaded corner.

- "Grandma!" Her sons both screeched at once, and Kiara couldn't help giggling as she watched the two smaller lions throwing themselves at Nala, erupting with licks and purrs, each one more anxious than the other to gain the Queen Mother's attention.

Nala gave her daughter a wink as she happily returned their licks and purrs, and Kiara waited as her mother dealt with her occasionally obnoxious children.

She had news to speak of, and she hoped that her mother would be just as happy to hear of it as Kiara had been when she discovered it this morning.

When her two sons had had enough, they began to tussle with each other, finally relieving Nala from their well intentioned but burdensome attention. Her mother slowly got up and came forward to nuzzle Kiara.

A slight ache of regret spread within Kiara. Being Queen left her so little time for anything else, and leaving Pride Rock was rarely an option, meaning she hardly ever got to see her aging mother.

- "You have something to tell me." Her mother murmured against Kiara's ears, and a happy tear slid down one of her cheeks as she nodded in agreement.

- "I'm expecting again, mother."

Nala's purring only intensified.

- "I want-" Kiara stopped herself, contemplating what she had been about to say. What did she want?

- "Yes?" Her mother asked, blue eyes encouraging.

- "I hope it will be the same for us. When this cub is born I- I want him to be as happy as when we first had Gainell. He hasn't been the same ever since he took his role as King."

She didn't have to name the lion in question. Her mother instantly understood. The older lioness gave Kiara a gentle smile, but shook her head.

- "Leadership changes us, Kiara. Don't forget that Kovu was not born to be king. He had this thrust on him so quickly, and with little warning. He may never be the same."

Kiara nodded, and though her heart wished the words were untrue, her head knew better.

- "Cheer up, Kiara." Her mother suddenly said.

- "This one may turn out to be a daughter, and Kings adore their princesses." She said with a bell like laugh. Kiara smiled meekly in return, recalling her own father's overprotective attitudes to her

growing up.

- "I am almost certain it's another son." She responded, eyes turning to look at her growing cubs as they continued to tussle in the greenery.

Chapter Five

No one had bothered to tell him of what was going to happen, and Elewisa was furious. Not the dry, swift anger that he often felt when dealing with his father, nor the quickly dissipating bouts of moodiness that he was occasionally prone to. This was a wet sort of rage, like the darkest and most vicious of thunderstorms. It flowed throughout all of his limbs, cascading around him and enveloping him into its dark embrace completely, and he welcomed it.

The dark skies and foggy ground encapsulated the mood of the pride, for anyone who saw him knew just how furious he truly was. His eyes were narrowed to slits, and his teeth were bared. No comprehensible word came forth. Instead, his responses included snarls and growls directed at whomsoever thought it a good idea to stand in his way as he marched through the wet grass.

When he reached the clearing, his eyes landed first on the unfamiliar figure standing above his beloved Areesa. A large lion- even bigger than his own father, was beginning to bend down, clearly with the attempt of picking her up. Elewisa noted that the lion was missing a whole paw on one of his back legs, and realized that this was the Anan Dejen of Areesa's stories.

Famous or not, Elewisa was not going to allow this to come to fruition.

A roar escaped him that made him appear much larger and far more grown than he really was. Anan Dejen paused in his attempt to pick Areesa up, and all eyes swiveled to Elewisa's direction.

- "What are you doing?" The snarling comment was directed at his father. Elewisa's paws barely touched the ground as he all but flew to Areesa's side. Her eyes sparkled with secret tears, and Elewisa felt his heart wrench in response. All the world seemed to fall away until it was just the two of them, and El ignored any comments from any but Areesa. The lioness could barely meet his eye, and at length she stared at her paws, jaw trembling.

- "Aree?" El let out. Areesa let out a sob, but continued to stare at her paws. Elewisa felt a tear escape his own eyes, and shut them tightly to avoid letting on what had happened. A few months ago he had sworn to never shed an undeserved tear, but now he silently sobbed as he buried his head into the lioness's neck.

- "You promised me you'd never go away." He managed to mumble through the sobs. Areesa was

no better- her tears larger and bluer than his.

- "I'll come back to visit- whenever I can." She whispered to only him. Above the two cubs stood the older lions. Elewisa could feel his father's claws digging into his fur, until a stinging sensation began to spread through his tail letting him know that his father had drawn blood. Still, Elewisa refused to move, glued to the spot. If he didn't move, then Anan Dejen couldn't take Areesa away from him.

He hated seeing her upset, and it hurt him even more knowing that he was responsible. If they weren't such close friends, she wouldn't have a problem with returning home. She certainly wasn't crying such tears over Gainell.

- "That's enough, Elewisa. You've said your goodbyes." El wanted nothing more than to snarl at his father. Of course this wasn't enough! Areesa was the only one who understood him, how could he so easily be expected to let her go?

- "I'll find you." He spoke low, so that only she would hear him. Areesa nodded in response, eyes still shining with tears.

Elewisa could hear his father sighing, and the stinging on his tail disappeared, replaced by the sensation of calming licks on the back of his neck. The smell of wildflowers and earth washed over him, and Elewisa felt himself calm down despite his anger. He would know that scent anywhere. It was his mother. He wasn't sure what she was saying to him, as the tears clouded his vision and his thoughts drowned out the noise of the outside world. He could tell by her soothing tone that it was meant to be comforting, and Elewisa eventually let himself be dragged away from the wet grass as he felt the warmth of Areesa disappear.

The lion refused to open his eyes. If he opened them now, it would all be real. There would be no denying it. He felt himself go limp in his mother's jaws, and after a little while of swaying on the way to the kajobe he found himself growing tired and falling into sleep.

This place was new. Elewisa couldn't recall ever having heard of such a strange place existing in the pride lands. All around him, the dip of the valley looked sickly and black. The grasses crunched beneath his paws as he stumbled around, wondering how he had ended up here. The sky was an odd green grey, and not a single drop of sunlight was to be found, though he intrinsically knew that it was the middle of the day. El spent the next few moments investigating the edges of the dip, as the

valley seemed to grow in size and the dip sunk even deeper.

Everything was dead, and Elewisa worried that he was witnessing the first signs of the drought. Still, he couldn't be sure of it until he was out of that damned dip and onto higher ground, where he could witness the rest of the pridelands. He couldn't for the life of him remember why the guard didn't report such news to the rest of the pride- it wasn't like his aunt Vitani to withhold any information from his father.

As he continued to ponder all of this, Elewisa found himself becoming frozen as several revelations dawned on him. The first, was that in all the time he had spent in the strange pit, he had neither seen nor even heard the smallest indication of life. No crickets chirped, no bees buzzed through the air. No animal but himself was in sight. This was of course odd. Even in the most secluded parts of the pride lands, he could never find a single place that was this quiet. El was sure of that- he had looked far and wide for such a place, as he despised having his thoughts or sleep interrupted. There was not a single parcel of land that could possibly be this lifeless.

The second thing he noted, after his gaze dropped to the crunching dead grass beneath his paws, was that he didn't have a shadow.

His heart sank into his stomach as he stumbled back, all of a sudden petrified. There was no sun, but everything else that surrounded him had a shadow. Everything except him. It began to feel as if ice was dripping on his spine, and he spun around with wild eyes. The silence of the valley was deafening, and he had not seen nor heard anything but himself since he'd awoken in this strange place, but he couldn't shake the feeling that he was being watched.

His eyes swiveled to the dead bushes growing uphill, and there they focused, frozen on the sight before him.

Something was standing there, appearing dark and faded. It looked like him, with its general shape resembling him. Everything was a twisting black smoke, except for its eyes. Its eyes were a ruby red, just like his. As soon as he locked eyes with it, the twisting black form gave out a high pitched screech that made Elewisa's fur stand on edge, and then it hurled itself towards him, black jaws opening wide and exposing glinting black teeth.

Elewisa awoke in a cold sweat. His breathing was ragged, and beside him Gainell stirred. El shook himself awake, eyes still a little wide. This was the second week in a row that he had been plagued with nightmares, though this one was particularly terrifying. Normally, he dreamt of Areesa- of seeing her again and having her disregard him. Of never escaping the pride lands or his father. The

sun had not yet risen, but he could see that already his father was gone from the kajobe. His mother slept alone, curled onto herself.

Elewisa decided he too would leave the kajobe. He needed some fresh air, and in any case, the birds were now chirping, and he was incapable of sleeping with all that irritating noise filling his ears.

Most of the lions were still asleep at this point, and Elewisa welcomed their absence. He was getting ready to follow a well trodden path down to a nearby watering hole when he caught a whiff of his father's scent.

Curiosity, thy name is Elewisa.

El cleared his throat, contemplating whether to sneak away to find his father or quench his mild thirst. Believing himself a rebel, Elewisa of course chose the former. His thirst could wait. There would be other watering holes around. With a nose akin to a wild dog, Elewisa quickly managed to find the trail his father was trying to hide and followed it. For a while it simply led him inland through the pride lands. As he continued, El was surprised to find that he knew this path- had walked it before several months back. Continuing on this path would lead him to the outlands.

This did not dissuade him from continuing. If anything, remembering what he had found out last time only made his paws move quicker in pursuit of his father.

The trail suddenly changed course, and Elewisa faltered in his steps as he was made to change directions from the dry sands of the outlands border to the crisp green savannah. Maybe he was patrolling? Elewisa thought to himself, unsure of what to make of the unexpected turn. He continued to follow the scent of his father, reminding himself to be as quiet as possible in case he was not too far behind. Elewisa could tell he was getting close- the trail smelt stronger now, fresher. His father had been here not too long ago. El began to slow his pace until he was slinking through the grasses, ears adjusted to catch even a whisper of lion-like sounds.

A giggle came from the bushes up ahead, and Elewisa froze in his spot, not wanting to alert whomever it was to his presence. He had been crouching in the grasses, but slowly he looked up from his hiding place. His father was there- though he had his back to Elewisa. On his father's paws there stood a tiny scrap of fur. It looked like...a cub? Elewisa was confused, though he continued to watch the strange scene from the grasses.

- "He looks just like you." His father spoke, and only then did Elewisa notice that there was another lion there- that same lioness he had seen several months before. She sighed wistfully, and nodded her agreement.

- "He has your eyes though." She countered to Kovu, before rubbing her face into the king's mane.

Elewisa's lips instinctively drew back, exposing teeth. What was happening? Since when did his father allow anyone to interact with him as such? Not even Kiara was seen being so affectionate with the irritable king.

Then it dawned on him.

She had said 'he has YOUR eyes.' His father's eyes. That tiny scrap of fur had his father's eyes.

That tiny scrap of fur was his father's son.

Elewisa's half brother.

- "I spoke to the old baboon." She said then, suddenly pulling back from his father and reclaiming Elewisa's attention.

- "He says there's nothing to be done. I only have a few more days."

His father stiffened.

- "Nothing?"

It was whispered, and in such an agonized tone that Elewisa for a second became convinced that whomever this lion was, it could not be his father. Since when did the king of the pride lands, the greatest tormenter of Elewisa whisper?

The lioness shook her head in response.

- "You must take him." She said simply.

- "He must grow up loved, and cared for. I know this isn't what you wanted-"

- "Nonsense!" His father let out then, jumping to his paws.

- "If that is your wish then I will see it done."

Elewisa felt as if he was intruding on something very private, and he knew then that this private meeting was not the first of its kind. A slimy thought began to take form in the back of his mind, one in which he would finally be able to cause his father some pain for allowing Areesa to be sent away.

He was going to tell his mother everything.

Elewisa whirled around, forgetting to take care not to make any noise. He hurled himself through the grasses and racked up speed, refusing to look back despite hearing his father desperately calling out his name. He was not going to let Kovu have this. Elewisa would be damned if he did. After all the screaming fits and threats, after sending his best friend away, after proving that he had no regard for Kiara, Elewisa would not allow him to get out of this unscathed.

He had managed to find his mother just as she was on her way to visit his grandma. In all his haste he spilled forth everything he knew about the situation. Everything he had inferred, everything he had seen, and everything he suspected his father had done.

Kiara's face, at first confused and disbelieving, changed into a look of heartbroken resignation. Tears would soon silently spill over her face. When Elewisa was done, he finally realized the gravity of what he had done as he witnessed the effects of it on his mother. She refused to meet his eye.

- "Mom?" He asked quietly, after she had stood there with tears silently streaming down her face. The Queen shook her head.

- "I don't want to speak with you right now. Go!" She snarled the last word, a paw of hers flying in the direction of Elewisa's cheek. El managed to step back, but then he stood frozen as he contemplated what just happened. Never before in his entire life had his mother so much as raised her voice at him, let alone reacted so viciously.

Elewisa felt his chest constricting. He couldn't wrap his head around the why. Kovu was the one who had betrayed her- why was she so angry with him? His mother didn't wait around for him to go. Instead the Queen stomped away in anger, refusing to acknowledge El no matter how loudly he called to her.

A frown crossed his face, and tears followed. He didn't dare to move for the entire day, sitting there with a dry throat and blurry eyes. His brother Gainell found him and managed to drag him to a den wherein he was given water from moss and the leg of a gazelle.

- "What were you thinking?" Gainell said to him as soon as Elewisa showed some signs of liveliness.

Elewisa stared at his blue-eyed brother.

- "It was my blind ambition." He started.

- "I was trying so hard to make him hurt- the same way he hurt me, but I never thought I'd be hurting her too in the process. I never meant for any of this to happen!" And he meant it- he had never once stopped to consider how his mother might take the news of her mate's infidelity. The thought had never crossed his mind in the slightest. He had just been so focused on ousting his father!

Gainell gave him an unimpressed look.

- "Why are you so upset?" He asked Elewisa, eyebrows quirked.

El returned the question with a growl.

- "I didn't do anything and yet I'm treated by my mother as if I'd helped facilitate this betrayal. How could I not be upset?!"

Gainell shrugged.

- "I don't think you feel bad that you hurt her, not really. I think you feel bad that she didn't accept your poor excuses and apologies. You say you're upset because she's hurting, but I think that really, you're just upset that she hasn't given you what you want. You're focused on the fact that she won't speak to you, not even taking into account all the horrible things she must now be dealing with because of what you told her! Your intentions might not have been to hurt her, but that is the result."

Deep down, somewhere in the pits of logic and reason, Elewisa knew that his brother was correct, but in his anger he denied this knowledge. Instead, he elected to continue blaming his father for everything that had transpired.

- "She wouldn't be dealing with so many horrible things if he'd just been a good mate to her. I didn't

decide to gallivant with another lioness and ignore my mate."

Gainell sighed and shook his head at Elewisa.

- "You're impossible." He said simply, and then left Elewisa alone with his thoughts.

Chapter Six

Elewisa often had a hankering for causing chaos, but on this day that hankering was especially strong. Mostly because he had barely gotten a wink of sleep the past weeks. He could barely keep his eyes awake. Every night he was plagued by that horrid dream. A shadow of himself that he couldn't escape. A shadow that consumed him. When dawn broke, those wretched birds began their endless songs. It was a wonder to him that he could still stand properly.

This morning the air smelled fresher, and it gave Elewisa hope, because he could scent the rainclouds on their way. If the sky poured, the birds would quiet, and he might be able to sleep for an hour.

- "EI!" That was Gainell. Elewisa stifled a yawn as he shot his older brother an irate look.

- "What do you want at this time of day?" He asked irritably, his face twisting into a frown as he heard his brother's reply.

- "Father wants to speak to us."

Elewisa dragged his heavy paws behind his brother, who was a little too chipper in the morning. The two lions quickly made their way to the cave underneath the kajobe where his father held his meetings. The sight was most unwelcome. EI had been hoping to avoid Kovu for as long as possible.

The two had spoken no more than a few words to each other since the weeks following Elewisa revealing his father's side hobbies (read: his infidelity to Kiara with a random, and in Elewisa's mind, worthless lioness).

The king of the pride lands turned around at the sound of their paw steps on the dirt, giving each of them a measured look, though his eyes lingered longer and narrowed when they met EI's.

Some scuffling alerted Elewisa that they weren't the only ones in the cave. His ruby red eyes landed on a bright pelted lioness with whom he had so little interaction.

- "Aunt Vitani." He greeted with a nod in her direction, and his brother echoed the greeting. Vitani nodded her head back at the two princes, but said nothing. Instead, she returned to addressing her brother with military-like obedience.

- "He'll be brought back without a scratch, you have my word."

Kovu bent his head ever so slightly to agree, then flicked his tail and just like that their never present aunt was gone out of the cave, leaving behind nothing but burning questions for the two sons.

- "Sit." The king ordered his sons. Elewisa, ever the spiteful one, took his time, whilst Gainell immediately plopped down.

- "Do you know why I've called you two here?"

Gainell piqued up, ever hopeful.

- "You wish to spend time with me-us? Show us how you lead the pride lands?"

- "No."

Kovu began to pace, stopping after a moment before his two adolescent sons.

- "Today my son is going to be brought to pride rock. I have called you both here because I wanted to ensure that you understood what was expected of you."

He had said 'you both', but El knew this meeting was more for him than for Gainell. The other son of Kovu had never once disobeyed his father, and El highly doubted he would begin now.

- "You are to behave. To treat him with respect. If I hear so much as a word of either of you mistreating him, believe me when I tell you that your mother will not be able to save you from my wrath."

El wore a face of boredom, while Gainell beside him appeared agitated.

- "You especially Elewisa. Don't think for a second that I've forgotten about all of the horrors you pulled in the past."

- "Do not test me." The King had risen to his full height, fur standing on end and eyes narrowed to slits. Elewisa plastered on a lazy smile and replied simply.

- "I would never dream of it, my king."

The two continued to stare at each other for a few moments more, neither gaze wavering. Eventually, Kovu was convinced. He gave them a grunt of acknowledgement, and was quickly called off to deal with something outside.

Pettiness. It was Elewisa's most fatal flaw. It was then, as Elewisa sat with a smirk on his face that he decided the first chance he got, he would be sure to screw over the little half-blood.

Gainell let out a growl as soon as their father was out of ear shot.

- "Why must he be so protective of some bastard child when he has three princes for sons?"

El let out a collected sigh, turning to stare at his brother as if the blonde lion had gone mad.

- "Gainell-" he began with a soothing voice. Velvet, it put anyone who heard it at ease.

- "He is our brother. We must show him kindness and love. Brotherly love. As the older siblings we must ensure that he is exposed to the harshities of the world."

- "We must take him under our wing and let him have a taste of reality outside the kajobe. There is of course, no guarantee that he would be able to handle such things, but who, I ask you, would ever blame us for wanting to protect the little one by showing him the world?"

Gainell might have been obsessed with following their father's orders and not questioning the rule of law, but he was by no means stupid. The older prince immediately got the hint, a wicked smile gracing his own features.

- "You are wicked, you know that?" he asked with mirth.

- "I am aware of my tendencies brother." El responded, flicked his ears.

Gainell locked eyes with his brother as he said

- "Still. You have a point. Mother's been miserable ever since she found out. That little scrap could use a lesson or two, so he knows exactly where his place is."

Elewisa felt a tinge of guilt, but it was overshadowed by the resentment he felt towards her for continuing to ignore him. The last time she had spoken to him was on the day that Khan had been born, and ever since then she had continued to act as if he didn't exist. She had barely left the safety of her mother's den, spending all of her time with El's youngest brother.

El said none of this outloud, instead choosing to focus on the brother he often thought of as spineless.

- "I look forward to seeing you defy father's rules, for once in your life."

Gainell shrugged.

- "It is as you said. We are merely helping our younger brother become acquainted with the world. We have no control over what might happen."

The two lions murmured their agreements to their plan, and each went his own separate way.

Elewisa was for the first time in his life, attempting to nap midday. He cursed himself for staying awake the previous night as he prowled the kajobe for a place to rest. How would he be able to get so much as a wink of sleep with all the noise? A permanent scowl adorned his face as he paced around, glaring at the birds as they twittered above him and anything else that dared to make a sound.

After about half an hour of searching, an idea came to him. Perhaps he ought not to sleep on the ground. The ground was filled with noises. The trees, on the other hand, offered him more privacy, and perhaps the leaves could help to drown out some of that incessant background noise of the savannah. The scowl was replaced by a smirk as Elewisa padded over to a bulky tree. Using the same climbing techniques that Penda had taught him, the lion quickly made his way up into the tree, settling onto a thick branch.

The second prince let out a vicious roar, taking pride in how he startled all nearby animals into flight. This, he thought, might just work.

El proceeded to spend the next few minutes in that tree slowly breathing, attempting to quiet his mind enough to fall asleep. As the sun warmed his pelt, the lion began to feel the exhaustion sinking in, and for a little while Elewisa managed to find himself drifting off to sleep.

The crackling of paw steps on twigs immediately brought El out of his nap. The lion's ruby red eyes snapped open, and he drew his lips back to reveal large teeth. He was more than just irritated. He hadn't slept in so long to avoid those darned night mares that he was even more irritable than ever.

Elewisa's eyes landed on a scrawny cub below him. The cub in question hadn't seen him yet. It looked lost, head turning this way and that.

Elewisa mildly recognized the coat of the cub and its markings. Below him was none other than Lapin, his half brother. A wicked idea immediately sprang forth into Elewisa's mind. His half-brother and he had yet to be introduced, and Elewisa was going to use that to his full advantage.

- "Hello there, little rabbit." Elewisa let out, taking joy in being able to startle the cub below.

Lapin looked up at Elewisa, eyes wide.

- "W-who are you?" The cub asked, folding in on himself.

Elewisa pretended to be uninterested, trying to set his half-brother at ease by playing the part of a sleepy potential friend.

- "My name is Adan, and I'm training to be a member of the guard." The lie flew out of his lips effortlessly, and the cub below was none the wiser.

- "Who are you?" El added, beginning to sheathe and unsheathe his claws on the branch.

The cub seemed calmed now, padding closer to the trunk of the tree.

- "My name is Lapin. I'm- well, I suppose I'm a prince."

Elewisa feigned interest, ears perking.

- "Well, you don't look like any of the princes that I know, and I know all three of them. What does that make you?" His tone never betrayed the malicious intent that he had to embarrass the little cub.

Indeed, El got the desired result. Lapin looked extremely uncomfortable, eyes shifting to a path away from the tree.

- "I-I suppose their half brother." the little cub mumbled.

- "Ah." Elewisa let out.

- "The half prince." He practically spat out the sentence, and anyone listening could hear the hatred dripping off the words. Lapin flinched.

- "I thinkI think I should get going." He muttered.

- "Not just yet!" Elewisa let out, smirking down at the cub.

- "You're going to be having your first meal with all the royal family tonight, aren't you?"

Lapin nodded.

- "Perfect! In that case, I should tell you that there is something you MUST do before attending the meal." Lapin tipped his head curiously.

- "Yes?" The cub asked. It took every ounce of Elewisa's self-control to not burst out laughing at how naive Lapin was, instead focusing on ensuring that the meal would be ruined by the cub.

- "It is tradition in the pridelands that any prince or princess must be coated in honey for their first meal."

Lapin did not appear convinced, his eyebrows scrunched together.

- "Why?" he asked Elewisa. Most other lions would have floundered at this stage, but being one of the most devious cubs growing up, Elewisa never tried to pull a prank without working out the kinks.

- "You see," he began with an all-important voice.

- "The tradition is symbolic of the bond of family. The prince or princess will be licked clean of the honey by their family. In that way they are fully accepted as a member, not to mention that honey is delicious!"

That was all it took to sell the story.

- "I had no idea! Thank you for telling me, Adan. I wouldn't wish to ruin the meal by not showing up in the proper way. Do you know where I can find some honey?" Lapin asked, worry mixed with relief on his features.

Elewisa couldn't help but snort.

- "Yes of course!" He said, nodding his head in the direction of the western bank.

- "There, near that river is a tree along the bank with plenty of honey to spare."

- "What if I can't reach it?" Lapin questioned, staring up at Elewisa with hopeful eyes. El shrugged his shoulders.

- "That's your problem." He said.

- "Just make sure you do it. You don't want to disappoint your new family on the first day, do you?"

Lapin shook his head and sighed.

- "I suppose I'll figure something out. Thanks again!" Lapin stated, running off in the direction of the western river.

- "Happy to help!" Elewisa yelled at the receding form.

Today was a marvelous day for chaos.

Elewisa continued to lift his tail and swish it this way and that. Behind him, Khan squealed with glee, trying his hardest to catch the tail of his older brother. The two continued on with this for a while, until Khan managed to catch the tail of his older brother and Elewisa dramatically pretended to die.

- "You! How could you do this to your brother? I can feel the life ebb away from me..."

- "I got you! I got you!" Khan screamed, giggling as Elewisa mimicked a dying moan. The second prince laid there for a few moments, eyes closed and holding his breath. His youngest brother, still far too young to truly understand that El was playing make believe, let out a shriek.

- "I killed El!" the little cub squeaked.

- "No! Come back!" Khan said with a broken voice, paws prodding at Elewisa's much larger form.

El let out a roar as he jumped back to his paws, landing on top of Khan.

- "Lesson number one, only a fool believes everything without question. You should have waited longer before assuming you had done me harm."

Below him, Khan giggled, paws pushing against his face.

The moment was soon after interrupted by Gainell, who was much more irritable than Elewisa had ever seen him. The first born son marched over to El and Khan, scoffing at the cub. Khan quickly tumbled away towards their mother, leaving Elewisa with Gainell.

- "I don't know why you bother with him." Gainell snapped, tail flicking to where Khan had run off.

Elewisa shrugged, Clambering back up to a sitting position.

- "I happen to like our little brother, and you ought to as well. There is strength in the bonds of brotherhood." El spoke.

- "Now more than ever, since our family has been infiltrated by others." He spat the last bit out, and it was now Gainell's turn to shrug.

- "He's so....happy." Gainell let out in reference to Khan.

- "You were that happy once too." El countered, losing interest in the conversation. This exchange was not the reason he decided to have dinner with the family. No, he was waiting for his petty plan to come to fruition once the little rabbit made it to the gathering.

As the brothers settled into a comfortable silence, the regal Queen made her way over to them. She greeted Gainell with a nuzzle, and then turned around to Elewisa. She could barely hold the eye contact, but regardless she padded up to her most disobedient son.

- "I am happy to see you getting along with your younger brother. Khan always speaks so fondly of you."

El offered his mother a genuine smile.

- "I'm glad that I can be of help. I know how persistent the little furball can be. If you'd like- I could watch over him tonight? So that you may have a day to breathe without worrying so much about his every move?"

El couldn't recall the last time he had spoken so softly.

The Queen did not immediately agree, eyes following the movements of her rambunctious young

cub.

- "We will see." She responded, padding away to get Khan out of whatever predicament that he had landed himself in.

- "Now I see why you insist on being so kind to our youngest sibling. I have to give it to you brother, it is a brilliant plan, and quite possibly one of the easiest ways to get back into mother's good graces."

Elewisa scoffed at the comment, shooting Gainell glare.

- "That is not why I'm doing this." He defended. Gainell raised a brow, a look of disbelief on his face. El clicked his tongue and looked away, adding

- "Though the benefits of these actions crossed my mind..."

- "I knew it!" Gainell let out.

Their conversation once more came to a halt, but for reasons other than not having anything more to say to each other. In fact, as the brothers watched the newcomer stumbling into the grove, Gainell had a thousand things he wanted to say, and Elewisa had to work very hard to contain his laughter.

Lapin, puffy and dirty, was making his way shamefully into the clearing. As he locked eyes with Elewisa, the young cub looked surprised.

- "Adan! I didn't think you would be joining the royal family for dinner..."

Gainell immediately turned around to give Elewisa a pointed look.

- "Adan?" He questioned. Elewisa shook his head and replied.

- "A practical joke. I'll tell you all about it later."

While the two found the ragged look of their half-brother hilarious, their father did not.

- "What is the meaning of this?!" The king roared, padding up to his third son with brewing anger.

- "Who did this to you?" He questioned. Lapin shrunk to half his size, very clearly afraid that he had angered the king.

- "I'm-I'm sorry. I tried to get the honey, I really did! There were so many bees and I-I couldn't take the stinging anymore so I grabbed what I could but then it....it was ruined..." The cub began to sob, and above him the king let out a sigh.

- "Since when do you like honey?" He asked. Lapin looked up through the tears, and with a trembling voice said

- "I-I don't. It was Adan. He told me that it was a tra-tradition."

- "Adan?" Kovu echoed. Lapin nodded, pointing a tiny paw in the direction of Elewisa.

The look on his father's face would have sent the entire population of the pride lands running for the fear it could have invoked in them. All it did for Elewisa was provide him with satisfaction at being able to invoke such emotion so easily. That was until his mother piped up.

- "My expectations of you were so low already. It appears however that no matter what, you always find a way to disappoint me. Come, Khan. I have lost my appetite in the face of such despicable manners."

The Queen then picked up her youngest son by the scruff of his neck and swiftly exited the clearing.

- "If you wish to see the light of day again, I would advise you to leave. NOW!" The king roared out the last bit, and El happily obliged, jumping away to wallow in his thoughts.

It had been hours. The moonlight streamed down on the land, lighting Elewisa's path as he prowled the savannah. He had managed about an hour of sleep, and soon daybreak would bring with it the sound of birdsong. Oh how he hated the chirping of the birds.

El considered going back to the kajobe, but decided that it would be best not to show his face around his father for a few more days. Instead, the lion made his way into the surrounding plains, where a majority of the other pride landers made their home.

Just as El was about to turn back and wander away from the plains, the sounds of quiet sobs caught his ear. The lion followed the whimpers, staying low in the grasses as he came closer to the source.

Through the savannah he could spot Lapin, the little cub clinging onto a much larger cub of a grey pelt.

Elewisa watched curiously as Lapin continued to sob and hiccup.

- "Kel, I've-I've done nothing to them. I didn't even know them. It's-it's not my doing. I didn't ask for this."

- "I know." The other cub- Kel, responded, nuzzling his friend.

- "I wish-I wish I'd never been brought here, you know? They're - they're just so cruel. After the one who lied to me left, the other one- Gainell- he kept making fun of me." The last few words El could barely catch as they came out as a squeak.

- "I miss my mommy."

Something inside of Elewisa cracked. He found himself having to hold back his own tears as he thought over everything that he had done this past day. The thoughts raced quickly through his mind, and for the first time in his life Elewisa came to the conclusion that he was wrong.

Lapin had nothing to do with Kovu's infidelity. He was a product of it, not an active participant.

Lapin had nothing to do with Kiara's refusal to speak to her son. That was his own doing.

He remembered how terribly he'd felt when Areesa had left, and El came to the realization that if it had been his mother that was gone, he would be hysterical.

He should have done better. He could have done better. The guilt surged through him so quickly that he felt like he was choking on it. The lion shook his head to clear it of all thoughts, and leapt out of his hiding place to where the two cubs were sitting.

- "Back away!" The grey pelted one screamed, immediately going to shield Lapin from the intruder.

- "Relax, furball." Elewisa snapped.

- "Adan....?" Lapin asked, eyes blue with tears.

- "It's actually Elewisa. There is no lion in the pride lands with that name."

Lapin stayed quiet, only the occasional hiccup coming from him.

El sighed, padding closer to the pair of cubs.

- "I promise you little rabbit, you have nothing to fear from me any longer. I mean you no harm."

- "Did you mean me no harm when you sent me to get stung for a tradition that you made up?"

Elewisa shook his head.

- "That time I did. But that time I wasn't thinking clearly. Still, I wanted you to know that I will no longer trouble you."

Lapin slowly nodded, still hiding behind the other cub.

- "A piece of advice," El added before he took off.

- "I may no longer bother you, but I would stay away from Gainell if I were you. He has had an awful idea implanted into his mind that you need to be taught your place."

- "An idea by you?"

The little scrap was smart, and El was very tempted to give him props for it. Instead, he nodded.

- "Yes, I tend to have a lot of awful ideas."

And with that he left. El wasn't really sure where he was going at first, but then the thought struck

him. He thought about the only other lion that he got along splendidly with. The only lion who did not judge him for his misdeeds or made him feel guilty for what he'd done.

As the sun began to climb up the sky, Elewisa decided that he was going to find Areesa, and the whole of the pride lands be damned.

END OF PART ONE