

TNE: Whispering Winds - Chapter 1

by

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ALLEGIANCES

Ndona Pride (Pridelanders)

King: Kovu - Muscular, dark furred lion with a dark brown mane

Queen: Kiara - Lithe lioness with light peach-ish fur

Shaman: Kobe - Small, sand colored caracal with a broken back paw

Hunters:

Nia - Sand colored lioness

Haiba - Scrawny gray-brown lioness

Lerato - Small, tawny pelted lioness

Nakato - Dark golden lioness

Selehe - Sleek brown lion

Talib - Gold furred lion

Malika - Slim, sturdy tawny lioness

Tuliza - Young pale furred lioness

Guards:

Mbali - Pale orange furred lioness with several scars down her muzzle (Trainee: Kito)

Vitani - Dark tawny pelted lioness with blue eyes

Imamu - Light orange-brown lion with a blind eye

Kwanza - Dark furred lion (Trainee: Safiri)

Rufaro - Red-brown lioness with a stumpy tail

Imari - Small, tawny lion with a sleek mane

Baraka - Grey-brown lion with deep blue eyes

Zawadi - Large brown lion

Trainees:

Safiri - Lean, pale golden lion

Kito - Sandy brown lion

Expecting/Nursing Lionesses:

Murua - Dark brown lioness

Elders:

Chumvi - Reddish-brown lion with a messy dark mane.

Kula - Slim, brown lioness with red eyes and colorless paws

Chapter 1

Soft blades of grass brushed against the cubs dark pelt as he padded forward. The peaceful plains seemed to draw him deeper, pulling his paws forward. The bright moon above him painted the lands below into beautiful shades of silver and the tiny fireflies fluttering through the grass looked like the shining stars. Although this place was unfamiliar to Asim he felt safe and calm, his mind silent. A night black bird fluttered out of the thick grass not far away from the cub and he parted his jaws to take in the scent. His whiskers twitched in confusion as a fresh scent travelled towards him, the familiar scent of his pride with a hint of prey in it. Carefully Asim followed the scent trail through the silver blades until he stood at the edge of the grass, a strong river churning a few leaps ahead of

him. He could see a few large branches being carried away and shattered to pieces by the force which sent a shiver down his spine at the single thought of falling in and being ripped apart. He stood there for several more heartbeats until the rustling of grass shook him out of his thoughts. The blades parted to reveal the lithe shape of a pale tawny lioness, the limp figure of a dusty brown hare hanging in her jaws. He pressed himself to the cold ground, hoping the lioness wouldn't be able to spot him in the dark. The lioness made her way along the shore, ears twitching as if she was making sure that she was alone.

Soon a much smaller frame appeared outlined against the dark sky. The creature took a step towards the lioness, flicking his torn ear in annoyance. Now closer Asim could make out the pale sandy pelt of the caracal, short tail and awkwardly twisted back paw. The caracal had ruffled fur which looked like it hasn't been groomed for several sunrises now. Asim had to screw up his nose as a soft breeze carried the caracal's scent towards him. The scent seemed to be a mix of plants with a tiny hint of prey however the smell was way too harsh for the cubs liking. The smell is so weird. He thought to himself. He pricked up his ears as the caracal parted his jaws to reveal the sharp row of fangs and let out a hiss.

- "What is it now Nala?" His voice was harsh and the caracal didn't hide his irritation which didn't seem to bother the lioness. The lioness carefully dropped her prey to the ground and licked her muzzle before replying to the question.

- "We are getting worried Kobe. You must warn the pride as soon as possible. We don't have any more time to wait for the fearless flame that you saw in your dream." Her pale blue gaze focused on the caracal. Asim could see the caracal's claws glistening in the moonlight as he dug them into the soil beneath in anger. The fur on his neck seemed to rise slightly and his dark brown eyes were narrowed in frustration.

- "Telling them won't make a difference! I know what I saw in the dream and I know it will be the solution. We have to be patient and clawing at me won't change anything." His lips were pulled back in a snarl now. The cub was curious now, crawling forward until he was hidden under the thick twisted branches of a bush. He heard a twig snap as he pushed himself deeper into the tangle. His

blood ran cold as the caracal took his gaze off the lioness and gazed out in search of the source of the sound. Asim held his breath. What would they do to him if they find him spying? The question burned in his mind and he hoped he wouldn't find out the answer. Soon the caracal turned back to the lioness with a hiss and relief flooded over the cub.

- "Kobe you have to listen to me. Rafiki trusted you to pass on our words to the pride when he took you on as a trainee and now you're going against it. If they don-

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- "Exactly Nala! Rafiki trusted me so why can't you? The fearless flame will light up the darkest time and the pride shall rise against the enemy." The caracal interrupted before the lioness could finish.

- "I saw it Nala. A bright flame that arose from night black ashes. I feel the flames presence! The time has come." The lioness stood silently for several heartbeats before slowly nodding.

- "I will trust you Kobe. I hope you are right or the pride has already lost the battle before it began."

Asim felt a paw jab into his side with tiny claws digging into his fur. He opened his eyes and found himself on the cold stone floor of the pride cave, spread out near the wall where he and his parents slept. A small shape sat in front of him, curiously poking him with a tiny dark paw.

- "Hello Kebibi." The small cub jumped slightly at his words in surprise however after a few blinks she padded up to him once more, excitement shining in her sky-blue eyes.

- "Asim look I have claws!" She pushed her paw towards his muzzle.

- "Do you have claws?" Kebibi tipped her head to the side in confusion.

- "Of course I do. All lions have claws. How else would we protect others in the pride without them?" He laughed. His dream seemed to creep away as he gazed down at the younger cub. Kebibi was born a month ago in a litter of three however she was the only one to survive their first night. She started walking not long ago but already managed to cause trouble without even leaving the cave. Her small dark pelt was spotted in cub spots and still felt as soft as a cloud on touch. Her mother, Murua, hasn't left the cave since Kebibi's birth and never lets her daughter out of her sight for a single heartbeat. Murua has lost several litters before and Kebibi was the first to make it through the first night. If it wasn't for the two elders, Kula and Chumvi, Asim wasn't sure how the lioness would manage with the hyper cub on her own. Asim was grateful for the company of the cub on lonely days inside the cave when his mother and father were away. She would always ask questions about being king which Asim wasn't sure he could answer. At least not now.

- "Asim can I come outside with you and queen Kiara tomorrow please? Mother isn't letting me go outside yet." She begged. Asim shook his head.

- "Sorry Kebibi but maybe another time." The cub let out a sigh, her sad gaze dropping to look at her paws.

- "It's so boring here! I want to go and see the outside but Murua says I'm too small." She mumbled sadly. You could be squashed by a hare! He thought. The cub's small size was unusual for her age and he overheard one of the lionesses saying that Murua wants Kebibi to start training much later than other cubs due to her size. He would become a trainee soon and couldn't imagine spending more time trapped in this cave while others hunt and patrol borders. A knot of worry grew in his belly as he imagined one day stepping up to become the king. What if I fail to lead the pride like mother and father?

- "Kebibi come back here right now! I told you to wait here while I bring some prey for us and the elders!" Murua's annoyed voice came from the opposite end of the cave where the two elders were resting side by side.

- "A cub stays a cub Murua. I hope you're not expecting her to sit in one place all day because that won't be happening anytime soon." Kula spoke through the prey in her jaws. Chumvi nodded in agreement.

- "Remember when Rufaro chased a mouse out of the cave and got lost in the tall grass around priderock?" Chumvi asked his elderly mate who nodded happily, memories flooding her deep red gaze.

- "You had to lead a whole hunting patrol to track her scent in the heavy rain. I remember how she told me that she would never leave the cave without me but a sunrise later she was out exploring again." A deep purr rumbled in her throat as she took a bite of the juicy prey. Murua shot an angry glare at the elders before padding up to her daughter and picking her up by her scruff.

- "Let's go eat. Your father should be back from the border patrol soon and you can ask him all about it." She muttered through the fur.

- "Bye Asim!" Kebibi mewed as her mother carried her away to their resting place where a limp shape of a small hare laid. Hunger clawed at his belly as he realized that he hasn't eaten yet. Slowly he pulled himself to his paws, stretching out with a yawn. He gave his pelt a shake and turned away to the entrance of the cave. The bright morning sun seemed to blind him and it took a few heartbeats for him to adjust to the bright light. He sat down at the mouth of the cave, letting his gaze travel out in search of the hunting party. He sat up straight as the small figures of lions made their way towards priderock. Now closer Asim could make out the lithe shape of his mother at the head of the party, Talib padding at her heels and Nakato and Maliba at the rear dragging the prey. The group made their way up the rocky path leading towards the cave with prey in their jaws. The loving gaze of the queen fell on Asim as they reached the top of the path and after a few quick words with the hunters headed towards her son.

- "Hello my little prince." She gave his ear a lick and sat down beside him. Asim brushed against his mother's paws, her familiar scent flooding him.

- "What did you catch today?" He looked up at her, belly growling at the thought of prey.

- "We tried our luck with zebras but," she paused, glancing over her shoulder to look at Nakato who was now resting beside her sister Murua near the cave entrance before continuing.

- "Nakato nearly got kicked by one of them and barely managed to escape. The leader of the herd I'm guessing. After that we decided to leave the herd and travel further south where we managed to catch an antelope. Are you up for some prey or would you rather wait for your father to get back?" Although Asim wished he could share the prey alongside the king the clawing in his belly pulled out the words before he could think.

- "I wouldn't mind having some right now." His mother nodded briefly. She heaved herself to her paws and led the way inside the pride cave. The queens pelt turned into deep shades of browns as she entered the dark cave where the eldest and youngest of the pride were resting. They quietly made their way towards the shape of the antelope, nearly untouched, lying in the centre of the cave. His mother nodded towards the prey and he happily dug in. The fresh scent of prey reminded him of his dream this sunrise and although the memories were slightly blurry he could still make out the lioness and caracal. What did they mean by the fearless flame? Although he tried to shrug it off as a weird dream but curiosity pricked at his paws until he couldn't hold it anymore. Swallowing the piece he was chewing he turned towards his mother who was now washing her paws with quick licks.

- "Is there a caracal with a twisted paw somewhere around here mother?" He asked, lowering his voice to make sure that no other lion could hear his question. Kiara stopped the grooming and turned to her cub, eyes round with curiosity.

- "How do you know about Kobe? You haven't even learned to walk the last time he visited priderock." He shuffled his paws under him, unsure if he should really tell his mother of the dream. It was just a strange dream. No need to worry her. He searched his mind for possible answers and panic rose when he couldn't think of anything. How will I explain this? He caught a glimpse of the now sleeping elders, paws tucked in and lying side by side. Soft snoring was coming from the lioness however Chumvi's sounded as if he was choking, letting out rasping breaths ever so often.

- "Kula and Chumvi told me about him. They said he gets annoyed easily." At least that's what it seemed like in the dream. Relief flooded over him as he heard an amused purr rumble in the queens throat.

- "Chumvi always complains about how rude he is to him. To be honest I think Chumvi should be a bit more patient with him. Kobe forced him to take short walks near the priderock every day to clear his throat and although it isn't completely healing his illness it seems to keep his breathing at ease for some time. He still isn't sure what caused it though. It began not long after the fire that happened on my first hunting assessment." She replied. The queen returned to the grooming and Asim dived back into his thoughts. How could he dream of someone he shouldn't even remember? Who was that lioness with him? He took his gaze away from his paws and let his eyes travel around the cave, stopping on each of the lions present. This was his pride and he should focus on them instead of worrying about a dream. What did they mean by the fearless flame? He wondered. His thoughts were interrupted as he felt his mother flick his ear with her tail tip. Glancing up he realised that a large shape of a lion stood at the mouth of the den. Two smaller shapes figures pushed their way into the cave, muttering something as they left. He straightened out his back and puffed out his chest as he padded away to meet his father. The queen pressed her muzzle against her mates cheek in greeting. The king let out amused purr as his son approached him. He lifted his paw to ruffle his dark brown tuft on his head.