

Pride

By Kyle Donahoe

The darkness was stifling in the jungle, as if a black curtain blotted out the sun. Various critters and wildlife roamed in the dark, making soft noises as they scuttled through the foliage. All seemed well... but it was not true for one pair of lions, who were apparently having a heated and intense spat in their own animalistic language. The two of them appeared aged, but still mobile, like they were at the end of their respective "golden years."

"Why do you keep doing this?" the larger, big-maned lion snarled, glaring at his mate. His face bore an expression of exasperation and weariness. His mate, on the other hand, a much smaller and leaner female, was looking annoyed and disgruntled. "It's a bad idea, I keep telling you that, but you keep doing it."

"Well, get over it?" she suggested, looking away and frowning. "He's still safe, isn't he? No harm done."

"No harm done' my left paw," he said with a roll of his feline eyes. "Why do you think he bolted the minute he saw you with blood on your face and smelling of something freshly killed?"

"He's a growing cub, he'll have to get used to it," she answered with a tone that sounded disinterested, and eager to just end the conversation. "We're lions, dear, we do this for a living. Don't tell me you're getting soft just for our cubs?" She looked at him expectantly.

"That's not the point," he said sharply, flashing a fang with his frown. "He's still a cub, he's not ready for that. Don't you remember when you were a cub?"

"That was different, I wasn't scared of blood."

"Because you grew up hardened by it. Ours isn't, yet. He's too innocent."

"So, you want him to stay naïve and innocent until he gets killed by some random predator that isn't us?"

He sighed. He was an old, tired male, and it showed in the way his body sagged as he slouched. "Look... all I'm saying is, seeing his own mother covered in blood will make him terrified of you. He's not aware of what this sort of thing is like."

"Yeah, and?"

"He's scared of you," he said simply. "Can you at least try to approach him and explain? In a way that makes it clear you still care about him?"

Her expression softened, and she sighed. He was right. She knew it...

"Yeah, yeah, I'll do that, okay..." she said after a moment, looking away and moving to leave. She was stopped when he came up next to her, and nuzzled against her tenderly. Perplexed, she looked in his direction, raising an eyebrow.

"Thank you," he whispered. "I'm sorry for getting angry.... It's just..." He trailed off.

“I know,” she said in reply, leaning against him. Her tail reached over and gently entwined with his, and she could hear him purr softly. “You care for him. I should too...”

“Would you like for me to come with you?” he asked tenderly, looking at her.

She shook her head. “No, no, I think it’ll be okay if I went by myself. It’s me who he’s scared about, not you.”

“But...”

“No buts, mister.” She leaned over and licked his nose, chuckling. “Now, let me go talk. You just wait, okay?”

“Alright.” Nodding, he watched her go... and smiled softly. She looked like she genuinely wanted to help their son... and so, he waited for her to return, satisfied that she considered his words. The trees of the jungle rustled idly as he sat in silence, a smile on his face.