

Trembor felt... He considered how he felt as he finished cleaning the kitchen. Last night's cleaning had suffered constant interruptions, and some of them led to more blood being spilled. He needed to look over the seals once he cleaned the prep table's reservoir. Nothing short of tipping the table over should have produced this level of spillage.

He felt settled; he decided. Calm. The night with Marlot hadn't caused him to doubt what he was doing, as he'd feared. Instead, it had increased his resolve. His action would cause pain, but in the long run, his family, Marlot, would get to live free of criminal interference because of them. He needed to write letters to his parents and to Marlot explaining his actions, his reasons for not telling them, especially Marlot.

He'd have to write one for the cubs. He'd have to be more circumspect, but they, more than the adults, would have difficulty understanding why he wouldn't survive this, the way heroes of stories always did.

His pad buzzed, and he headed to his office, a message from Derimak. *We need to talk, don't move, I'm heading over.*

So things were moving forward already. He placed the pad back on the charging pad as it rang. His father calling.

He sat. "Hi, dad."

Torim didn't reply immediately. "Hello, son."

"She told you." It wasn't that difficult to imagine. Serene wouldn't keep it to herself.

Torim laughed. "Son, unlike what you and your sibling seem to think, I do know about the net and I do spend time watching the videos on there. Serene didn't tell me, she tied me to my chair and took away my pad so I couldn't scream at you when I first saw the recording of you and Bo screaming at each other."

"I'm sorry, dad."

"Trem, I thought I taught you and your brother better than to scream at one another."

Trembor chuckled. "Let's remember you started the trend of screaming at Bo."

"Ah, yes. I did."

"About Marlot. I can explain."

"Son, I don't care about Marlot, I mean I care about him being in your life, but if you and him are working things out, then I have no business stepping into that. You were clear with Serene you didn't want us involved."

"I don't want her, or you, to get in the way, that's not the same as not being involved."

"Alright. Does this mean he'll be coming to the next family dinner? You'll want to warn your sibling so they don't tear him apart trying to protect you."

Trembor chuckled. "The cubs are who he'll need to be careful around. He hurt their favorite uncle, I'm not sure how someone goes around making amends for that." The humor left him. If Marlot was at the next dinner, it would be without him. He'd have to make sure his letter to them explained what he was doing had nothing to do with

Marlot. He didn't want them to hold him responsible.

"You and your brother aside, things looked to be heading well, Barany contacted me to let me know the paperwork was all filed and just waits for the judge's signature."

"Which could take months, the way the courts run," Trembor replied, trying to make his tone jovial. The court case no longer mattered. Soon he'd have someone to question and find out everything he needed to know about the crime family so he could start taking them apart, and somewhere in there, he'd die.

The finality felt good. No more wondering what to do. No more uncertainty. It would end with him acting, not just waiting for it to happen.

His father was still talking. Going on about how the court wasn't as slow as it seemed and that the delays served a purpose. Trembor had heard about all that over his youth. His father had never been one to keep quiet about the legal system at home. Trembor suspected that if he was pushed, he could pass himself as a lawyer with some success.

Still, couldn't let Torim keep him on the pad all day, which he was able to do. The buzz of the door gave him the excuse he needed.

"Dad, I need to go. I have things to handle, and she just arrived." He headed for the entrance.

"Alright, son. You take care, and if you need help with anything, pad me."

"I will, dad." He disconnected the call as he opened the door, surprised at those standing on the other side.