

Been a long week so right to the story.

Sam led the way to Ian's apartment. He didn't say much on the way, other than that their brother had picked the location of his apartment with everyone else's location as much as his workplace in mind. It was a just short bus ride from their apartment. On entering the building Jeremy smiled at the realization his brother had moved to within blocks of the Thirteenth Floor.

An elevator ride later they were walking toward Ian's apartment. Sam knocked and looked up at Jeremy with an odd smile. The door was opened by Shirley. Jeremy couldn't help himself. He stared at the female that was clearly more than a few months pregnant.

She only smiled at Jeremy for a second before looking to Sam and greeted him with a hug. As she stepped back from his brother Jeremy looked to her and gave his congratulations. Shirley stepped aside with a smile letting Sam into the apartment and stepped further back waiting for Jeremy to follow. The entry area had a bedroom to the right that was clearly set up as a nursery and a guest bathroom to the left. From where they stood a hallway lead into the rest of the apartment.

"Jeremy." Shirley said from behind him as she closed the front door.

He turned to her and watched as she took a deep breath.

"I'm sorry for not greeting you properly." She finished holding her arms out for a hug and stepped up to him.

Jeremy shared a hug with her while looking back to see Sam had continued on into the apartment. Stepping back he looked down at Ian's wife. He was more than a foot taller than her. He had become used to being large enough to intimidate anyone her size. He smiled at her. "Not to worry. At this point, I've gotten used to that kind of reaction."

"That may be, but you should be able to expect better from family." Shirley said as she gestured for him to go into the apartment. "Its just that, well, I was there when you had that fight at the academy. I'm sorry but I just can't get past that every time I see you."

Jeremy stopped in the hallway looking to the side so as not to further intimidate Ian's wife. "Oh, I see. I didn't know that. I know thats kind of a horrible first impression but I'm not really the type to look for trouble. All that aside, just remember you're family now so you don't have anything to worry about. If anything you should feel confident that I'd do everything I can to help my brother protect his family." He looked to her making eye contact as he finished.

Shirley was smiling wide and said. "Ian's said that's something you'd do."

They came into the living area to see Jeremy's parents had already arrived. Steven was sitting on the sectional sofa by himself. He somehow managed to sit alone on the large couch and not seen small. As they shared a smile to each other Jeremy guessed it was his air of quietly supervising everything that did the trick. Sam had already joined Elisa and Ian in the kitchen and had started helping with the meal. Jeremy helped Shirley set another place at the table and counted a total of seven places. He guessed Eric had been invited and wondered if his brother had learned to show up on time. Jeremy's stomach growled at the smell of dinner cooking prompting Shirley to chuckle.

"It'll just be a few more minutes."

"Jeremy." Steven said to get his attention and patted the cushions of the couch next to himself.

Jeremy waited for Shirley to sit before taking a seat next to his father. For the few minutes before dinner started Steven chatted with Jeremy. His father didn't ask any direct question, as he always had he simply let the conversation take its own direction. Before long Sam came out of the kitchen and sat with them.

"Well, that didn't take long." Steven observed as he looked at Sam sitting on the other side of Jeremy.

Jeremy looked to his father and asked. "What didn't take long?"

"For Sam to get kicked out of the kitchen." He answered smiling. "The only reason Ian's still in there is because this is his house, as it were."

They shared a chuckle at Sam's expense. Steven continued smiling as he asked "So, when are the two of you settling down? Your mother is over the moon at the prospect of becoming a grandmother you know."

"I was holding off on that, didn't want you to feel old before your time." Sam shot back at him.

"You're lucky your brother's between us or I'd show you how 'old' I feel." Steven answered accepting his son's humor with a grin.

There was no announcement, Ian and Elisa simply started bringing the food out and setting the pots and bowls on the dinning table. Everyone moved to the table and took a seat. Ian sat at the head of the table as Steven deferred to him and Shirley as they were the hosts. Everyone was still in the process of helping themselves when the doorbell rang.

Shirley stood as she requested everyone stay seated. Jeremy half listened as she greeted Eric. As they came in Shirley headed back to her seat and Eric walked around the table. Jeremy couldn't help but stare. The aftereffects of his dream and Eric's actual condition compelled him to examine his brother.

Eric had gained a good deal of weight but wasn't any taller than he was before Jeremy had left for Chile. While it was true his brother had gained weight he'd gained it all around the middle. Eric now sported the typical paunch those that lifted weights seemed to develop. He didn't so much look stronger now as much as he looked pudgy and soft. High protein diets and little exercise other than lifting did it every time. As Jeremy watched he didn't stop at the empty seat. Jeremy noticed everyone was avoiding looking at his brother as he stopped to stand behind and to the side of Ian's chair. Eric even went so far as to put his paw on the seat back of his brother's chair.

"What are you doing?" Jeremy asked, staring at Eric.

Ian had shoved his seat back but stopped and looked at Jeremy when he spoke.

Eric stared back at his brother as well. "Oh, thats right, you were gone when I became the family alpha." He answered with a smirk while staring at Steven.

Jeremy glanced at his father and saw he was looking down at his plate. Looking back at Eric he let the anger he suddenly felt enter his voice. "Ian's the alpha of this house." Jeremy stated. Still staring at his brother he pointed to the empty chair and commanded "Sit there if you're going to eat at your brother's table."

Eric shifted his weight to move toward the chair for a moment before overcoming his reflexive obedience. "But, I'm the alpha of the family now." He asserted again only a whininess had entered his voice.

"Are you challenging me as an alpha?" Jeremy asked. He wasn't certain his brother had enough decorum to not get in a fight in his brother's house. He was more than ready to put Eric in his place should he try.

Eric's paw dropped from the back of Ian's chair. "No." Eric replied looking down at the floor.

"Then sit where I tell you, out of respect for your brother."

Jeremy noticed everyone's head had come up and they all watched as Eric moved to the empty chair and sat. Once he was seated Eric stared down at his empty plate. He was clearly waiting for the attention to shift from him. Jeremy had seen this from his brother before. He could predict he'd stay silent and sullen for the rest of the meal.

Jeremy looked around at everyone else. Taking a deep breath and exhaling he apologized. "Sorry everybody."

Sam was sitting next to his defeated brother openly grinning back at Jeremy. His father and mother were also smiling at him as was Shirley. Ian was staring at Eric with open contempt but looked back at Jeremy when he felt his eyes on him.

"Thank you Jeremy. Its good to see that only one of us has forgotten the respect for others father always tried teaching us."

Jeremy shrugged and sighed as he looked around the table. The mood had lightened in the seconds since his brother had sat down. "Well, anyway, thanks again for hosting."

Things got back to normal in only a minute. As everyone started eating Jeremy saw Eric help himself to plenty of food. His defeat hadn't killed his appetite. Jeremy wondered what had happened when he'd been out of the country. Glancing at Sam he could guess he'd get all the details soon. The meal went without any further incident, although Eric left soon after.

Jeremy excused himself and stepped out a few seconds after Eric. He caught up to his brother waiting for the elevator. Eric had glanced at him once as he approached and stared at the doors. Stopping next to his brother Jeremy said "If I hear you doing anything like what you tried tonight again I'll come and correct the shit out of you, understand?"

Eric looked back at him and asked "So, Ian had to go whining to you to knock me down a peg, huh?"

"They never said anything. Even if they had, what makes you think lording your size over them the right thing?"

"Oh, and you lording your size over me is different?"

"I wasn't, until you got out of line. Or did you fail to notice where I was sitting?"

"You're just like any other dominant."

Jeremy heard the ping of the cab stopping. Not wanting to get drawn further into an argument he said "Just, I don't really care what you do outside of family," He paused as the door opened to an empty

cab. "but they're off limits to any ideas of you asserting yourself as an alpha over them. Consider that a warning if you want."

Jeremy was ready to let the night go at that until Eric looked at him with a sly look in his eyes.

"And get the rest of your shit out of my apartment. I don't feel charitable to having your attitude around me at the moment."

Eric stared at him sullenly for a second before stepping into the elevator.

Jeremy waited until the door closed on his brother before going back to Ian's apartment. He was relieved that no one brought up his brief absence. They all settled in to watch a movie that they hardly paid any attention to. The conversation mostly revolved around how to name the new addition to the family.

Shirley's family was much like theirs in not naming offspring after a previous family member. A large number of names were bandied about, mostly male names. Ian seemed unsure as to what sex his offspring was going to be but Shirley had an air of confidence it was going to be a male. They'd had all the prenatal tests and since it was a healthy pregnancy they'd both decided at the last second to keep the sex of their kid a surprise.

Once the movie ended Jeremy said his farewells and Sam joined him. They walked back to their apartment and decided to stop for some groceries on the way. They returned loaded down with bags only to find Eric on the couch watching television.

On his way to the kitchen Jeremy noticed the stuff of Eric's that he'd piled on the couch hadn't moved. He helped Sam put everything away and also helped clean up where their brother had obviously fixed an after dinner snack. As Sam went to his room Jeremy went back in the living room and picked up Eric's clothes and dropped them next to the front door.

"What the hell? Why do you have it in for me all of a sudden?"

"Don't you have a place of your own?"

"What do you care? That's something you should have asked before throwing me out."

"No, that's something you should have taken care of months ago."

"Well, I wasn't about to stay here to keep Sam company and pay rent for somewhere I wasn't staying at." Eric asserted, his voice becoming even more belligerent.

Sam interrupted from the door to his bedroom. "I never invited you, you just pushed your way in, and before you imply anything else you haven't even offered to pay a portion of the rent."

Jeremy turned back to Eric "I thought as much. Find a place, I'll let you stay for a week, but after that I'll throw you out on your ass whether you have anywhere to stay or not."

"Now you sound like dad. Just throw me out with no consideration for me or what I need."

"Really? You're going to try guilt tripping me now? Maybe if you'd acted a little more like dad you wouldn't be mooching off the rest of us. And don't even think of trying to push your way into dad's or Ian's place like you did here."

"Sure thing, dad." Eric said with as much scorn in his voice he could muster.

"For someone who pretends to be an alpha you're sure acting like you're still ten."

"What do you mean pretends? I am an alpha."

"What make you think that? Those muscle heads at the gym? Yeah, I remember how they acted. They all assume that because they worked at getting thicker that makes them alphas."

"And what the fuck would you know about it?" Eric asked, suddenly genuinely angry. Jeremy had obviously hit a nerve.

"Seriously? Well, fine since you asked; you're not an alpha. First off, if you were you wouldn't feel the need to go around asserting yourself over your own family."

"You don't know shit. You don't know the first thing about me." Eric almost shouted.

Jeremy walked over to Eric as he started projecting pheromones. Holding out his paw in greeting he said "Stand up and touch pads if you're an alpha. Surely an alpha can share a simple greeting with a dominant."

Eric managed to stand up from the couch but once he stood in front of Jeremy he couldn't hold eye contact. Looking at the floor he mumbled "That's not fair. You're a dominant."

"That's a poor excuse. Touch my pads, we're brothers so that should make it even easier." Jeremy lowered his paw to where he held it right in front of his brother's own paw. He knew from his mentors that even an alpha wouldn't be able to make eye contact but would have no trouble touching pads with him when projecting.

Eric looked away from his paw and stepped back as far as the couch behind him allowed. He mumbled "You're trying to intimidate me now. How's that for family."

"Pfft. Just showing you you're no alpha." Jeremy said backing away from him. He walked toward his room and paused next to Sam. Holding out his paw he said "Goodnight, Sam."

Jeremy watched as his brother looked from him to Eric. Without any further hesitation he reached out and touched paws with him. Sam was even able to look up to meet his eyes for a brief second. He too looked away, forced to by the remaining cloud of pheromones surrounding Jeremy.

"G'night Jeremy." Sam replied with a smile.

Jeremy turned and looking back at Eric stated. "That's how an alpha is able to greet a dominant."

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There was even more speculation about PATOMES last week. I'm not going to add anything for now. it fades into the background for the next few weeks anyway. It needs to remain a mystery for a good deal longer. Besides, this chapter gives a glimpse not the hierarchy between alphas and dominants. And yes, Sam truly is an alpha. More on that will be explained eventually.

