

## Doppelganger

Riley's POV

I survived. The next few hours were spent wallowing in pain and spitting up blood. Eventually, my father grew curious enough to come out and check on my condition. I felt him pick me up. His arms were not gentle as he carried me roughly back into the pack house. I was carried to my room. If you could call it that. Technically I live in the basement of the pack house. Where the dungeon primarily lies and where we put our prisoners and the rogues that we catch. My room is nothing more than a cell that contains a threadbare mattress, a blanket with holes in it, a dresser with clothes piled in it, and a small bathroom in the very back corner of the dungeon itself. They never bother to lock the cell door on me and keep me conned. What would be the point?

I had nowhere to go. No family besides my brother Damien and my father. Once before, I had tried to escape and been caught. I had spent two days, chained up outside like an animal, while the rain poured down on my open wounds and scabs. The pain had been excruciating. The pack members had spat on me, thrown food at me, and even hit me when the guards hadn't been looking. I had learned a valuable lesson that day. Escape was futile. The only way out of this pack was death. At my hands or theirs. I wasn't ready to greet the moon goddess personally yet, but at this rate, I wasn't sure if it was going to be much longer.

My father threw me into the cell that I called home, my body landing haphazardly onto the mattress with a soft thud. I guess I should have been grateful he didn't throw me onto the ground, with all the bruises and broken bones I had. As it was, I tightened my lips, glancing up to see him looking at me with darkened eyes and a strange expression on his face that I couldn't quite decipher. For a moment he surveyed me. Strange. His normal behavior was to look at me and then shake his head in disgust before walking away. My head turned and I eyed him curiously. I could not speak, but my eyes could speak volumes without even trying. He pointedly ignored my gaze.

"You look more and more like your mother," he said, narrowing his eyes and looking me over even more carefully.

It was not a compliment. I had heard on more than one occasion how much he despised my mother. How much he had hated her. That he had fought against the mate bond for so long until eventually, he took her life after she gave birth to me. I hated him for that. He could have just rejected her, like other shifters did. He didn't have to end her life, but he was cruel and a bastard. He chose to take something that was valuable and dispose of it.

I stared at him deantly. His lip curled. If I looked like my mother, I took it as a compliment, because it meant that I did not look like him or Damien. It meant that I had a part of somebody who did not possess the same qualities as them. I liked to think that my mother was kind and caring, even if the pack had nothing good to say about her, or nothing at all really. My mother was an enigma to me. A mystery and I would have given anything, to lay my hands on a picture of her, but my father had destroyed every single one of them in a t of rage and none had survived.

"Mark my words, If I didn't have a use for you" he murmured, coming closer and c\*\*\*\*\*g his head, a strange light in his eyes "I would put my hands around your throat and kill you myself."

A use for me? I wanted to laugh. There was nothing useful I could do. I possessed no wolf and could not shift. He had ensured that I could no longer speak. My eyes had to be changed with contacts and he had tried to dye my hair on numerous occasions only to give up when it changed back to its normal color within hours.

"You have no idea what you're capable of" he muttered, that strange light still in his eyes "What your mother was capable of. She was dangerous," he said with a snarl "and so are you. If you had shifted today, you would be dead already" he added, causing me to stiffen.

The irony. I was alive because I hadn't received my wolf, but he'd had me beaten and threatened to kill me because I hadn't shifted. Did he realize the hypocrisy? Either way, I lost.

"If you had been a shifter and the other, it would have been perilous for us" he continued to mutter in a low tone.

What other thing I want to scream at him, even as I stayed curled in the fetal position, my heart hammering in my chest. What was I? I was only a shifter, wasn't I? But the way he acted, the way he spoke to me, indicated that I was more than that. He almost made it sound as though my DNA was something to be feared and that made no sense to me at all.

He came closer and I cringed. His hand moved to tuck a loose tendril of hair behind my ear. I shuddered. His touch was gentle, which was even more frightening.

"So much like Andrea" he murmured, his voice lled with a hint of longing that made me glance at him sharply.

Andrea was my mother's name. Was he confusing me with her? I held my breath, as he knelt next to me. He stroked my cheek and my hair. I blinked up at him, not daring to move or break the spell he seemed to be under. I didn't want to be hurt for reminding him of who he was speaking to. I was hoping that he might let slip something about my mother that he hadn't told me about her.

"Why did you have to lie to me?" he murmured regretfully "If you had told me what you were, I may have accepted you in time. I may have loved you instead of fearing what you could do" he muttered, sounding slightly angry.

I'm not Andrea, I wanted to shout. I'm your daughter. His hand drifted down my collarbone. I began to feel uncomfortable. This was not the touch of a father, but rather the touch of a man and his mate. This was not his usual behavior. His eyes were blank. His expression chilled me to the bone.

"So beautiful" he whispered "But that's part of your tricks isn't it" he snarled suddenly out of the blue, gripping my throat as I struggled in his grasp "Using your beauty to lure men. I won't fall for it" he growled ferociously "you will not lure me to my death you disgusting creature" he roared.

I beat at his hands, my eyes bulging. He continued to strangle me, his hands tightening even harder, staring down at me, and then suddenly his eyes began to focus and become clearer. His expression changed and he looked bewildered. He let go of me hastily and stood up, retreating backward. I looked at him, struggling to draw some air into my lungs. I was confused as to what had just happened. I was certain that he had thought I was my mother. He gave a low growl. "Be grateful that your punishment was not worse. Your brother did well in choosing and you got no less than what you deserved" he spat out venomously.

He slammed the cell door shut. I heard the loud clanging noise it made, but he made no attempt to lock it. He sneered, as I remained helpless on the mattress, my eyes watching his every move. I was wary of him now. More afraid now that his behavior had turned so peculiar. "You're expected to resume your normal duties the moment you're able to move properly" he snapped "If I nd you down here loitering then I will further punish you" he threatened "and it won't be a lenient one."

It never was. I nodded slowly. He looked as though he wanted to say something else, opening his mouth, hesitating, and then slowly closing it. Whatever it was, it appeared he had changed his mind. "I guess I don't have to worry about you saying anything about what happened here tonight," he said mockingly.

What had happened? He clenched his jaw and turned around, moving away into the pitch darkness. I heard his footsteps moving steadily away from the cells and then making their way slowly up the stairs. I heard the basement door open and close. Then all was silent. I gazed around the darkness of the basement, feeling a sigh of relief. I was in pain, my body throbbing and I was barely holding onto consciousness but at least my father was gone. He had frightened me when he called me Andrea. I knew that I bore a passing glow resemblance to her, but I didn't think I looked so much like her that he would grow confused between the two of us. I tried not to shudder, tried not to think about the way he had touched me. It had been almost loving. But he had hated my mother, hadn't he? Despised her? Why had his voice been so gentle then and so remorseful? Did he regret that he had killed her all those years ago? Did he miss his mate?

I rolled over onto my back, wincing at the pain. The mattress had springs in it, some of them broken and digging into me. I was used to it and ignored the discomfort. I stared up at the ceiling. I could hear the sounds of mice nearby scurrying around as they looked for food. I was grateful there were no prisoners in the other cells to share the basement with. At least I would not have to deal with the sounds of screaming and crying as they were tortured for information or because my father enjoyed it. There was nothing but the sounds of the animals and the sounds of the wind outside.

I would take one day to recover, at most. I gritted my teeth. My bones would knit together, my bruises would fade till they disappeared. The heat in my stomach would eventually dissipate and the throbbing would lessen. But the pain in my soul would never fade. The pain in my heart would remain along with the desire for revenge against those who hurt me. I close my eyes, and it seems like only seconds have passed before I hear the sounds of the basement door open again and feel the freezing cold water as it's tossed all over me, waking me up from a deep sleep and causing me to jerk into a sitting position in a panic.