

Songstress

Riley's POV

I was only six years old, but my father had drummed many cardinal rules. I never thought the day I broke the rules would get so awful.

Lost in the warmth of the summer's sun, enveloped by the cheerful atmosphere as pack members and other children ran around playing recklessly, my spirits had risen and unbeknownst to me, my father had watched from the pack house as I skipped forward, my voice rising in majestic angelic tones as I sang from a space in my heart, where all of my pain and all of my hurt was washed away in a sea of calm and serenity. I had never felt so at peace or so in tune with myself.

A hand clasped itself around my throat, strangling me in mid-song, effectively cutting me off. I clawed at the hand, trying to frantically break its grip, my nails scratching and gouging, my legs kicking futilely as I was lifted or rather hoisted off the ground with remarkable ease. He turned me to face him.

I was speechless. I had never seen my father so furious before. A child singing should not be enough to warrant a punishment. At least, that's what I imagined. I was young, foolish, and hadn't realized the extent of my father's rage or hatred of me. I was still innocent. I was still naïve.

My eyes slid to my brother Damien, beseeching him to help me, but he shook his head and looked away, a resolute expression on his face. It was not the first time my brother had failed to come to my aid, but it was the first time I realized how much he hated me as well. In this instance I was well and truly alone.

Tears poured down my face, while I struggled to gasp in air. I could feel my heartbeat racing, my forehead beading with sweat. I couldn't breathe. My eyes bulged in panic. My father's eyes narrowed as he brought me close to his face, his lips inches from my ear.

"What did I tell you about singing? I told you before that it's expressly forbidden" he snarled, shaking me like a limp rag doll as I silently cried, my eyes begging for forgiveness.

"I'm sorry Father" I wheezed, as his hand loosened ever so slightly, allowing me to draw in some much-needed oxygen.

"Sorry" he roared, the pack members turning to face us all with curiosity, some even shocked by the Alpha's animosity towards his own daughter, something that would no longer shock them in the years to come

"You're sorry?" he repeated dangerously while still holding me firmly in his grasp, his eyes glittering "You have no idea what you just came close to doing" he breathed.

Confusion warred inside of me. How could singing be considered so dangerous? Why did it warrant such a strong reaction from my father? I didn't understand. The other children could sing, why couldn't I? Was it because it reminded him of my mother? He never spoke of her, and I had no photographs or clear memories of the woman who had died giving birth to me. My father refused to answer my questions and eventually I stopped asking about my mother altogether.

"It won't happen again" I stammered, as he slowly lowered me back onto the ground, his breathing heavy and his eyes blazing "I promise. I won't forget next time."

He continued to study me, his eyes darkening, an indecipherable expression on his face. I wrung my little hands together, feeling anxious. The pack members went back to their business, but my father never took his eyes off, off me. My brother Damien left, heading for the pack house, as though he had some inkling of what was about to happen and couldn't bear to witness it with his own eyes. Only two years older than me, but Damien was by far the favorite of the two of us. My father never had an angry word for him, only for his daughter, me.

"It can never happen again" my father murmured, a strange gleam in his eyes "The power you yield, can only end in the destruction of our pack. You are an abomination. A disgrace to my family name. Your temptress mother fooled me but you, you will not" he vented out loud.

Tears trailed down my face. I struggled to comprehend what he was saying. What he was telling me. I took a step back and fell, grazing my palm on the ground and letting out a cry of pain.

It stung. My father's body towered over me. I could feel my thin frame shaking as he tightened his lips. I held up a hand, desperate to prevent him from doing something to hurt me. He knelt, shaking his head. My breath hitched. His eyes ached between his normal color and black. His wolf surged to the surface, only to be brought back under control. He was struggling internally with something. As young as I was, even I could sense his wolf's distress at whatever he was about to do. I slid backward, but my father grabbed my arm, stopping me from running away. I couldn't move. My eyes slowly slid down as I heard the distinct sound of his nails growing into claws. Fear turned my mouth dry. I began to panic.

"What are you..." I whispered, my voice shaking.

I gave a shriek as I saw his hand raise up high in the air. I saw him clench his jaw and grit his teeth. "This is for your own good and the good of the pack" he warned me solemnly.

"Don't" I screamed, the sound bloodcurdling and loud, echoing across the grounds.

I felt the pain first. The excruciating pain as he plunged his claws into my throat, aiming directly at my vocal cords. It felt like my throat was on fire. My screams were abruptly cut off. I felt blood as I swallowed, my throat convulsing. I felt him drop me hard on the ground, my hands scrabbling uselessly at the hard grass. I thought I was going to die. I thought for sure that he had killed me for real this time. There was so much blood, so much pain. My father never said a word. He just watched as I curled up in a fetal position, in so much agony that at one stage I wished for death in order for the pain to be over.

Eventually, it stopped. My wounds had slowly healed. The pain faded until there was nothing left. I gingerly sat up, weeping. I touched my throat, surprised to feel nothing shredded or torn. My father watched as I opened my mouth. Fear took over. I tried to form a sentence, a word, a sound. Nothing. Utter silence. The harder I tried to speak, the more my father looked amused, satisfaction taking over his face.

"You can heal but even your body has limits" he murmured "I guess you're too young to be able to heal something as extensive as vocal cords" he added nonchalantly.

I stared up at him feeling betrayed. He looked pleased as he straightened up. My mouth opened and closed. He chuckled. "We no longer have to fear you forgetting my rule," he said as I began to awkwardly climb to my feet "and you've seen what the punishment is for forgetting the rules I have in place. If you think that this is unjust" he paused and pinned me with a gaze so hostile that it paralyzed me "then consider what might happen to you, if you forget any of the other rules I've told you."

Silence. I understood the implications of what he wasn't saying. I shuddered. In one day I had lost what little childish innocence I had and what stood in front of me, resembled nothing more than a monster, instead of my own flesh and blood. He looked at me impatiently and waved a dismissive hand, wrinkling his nose "Go and get cleaned up. You're covered in blood and smell disgusting" he grunted.

I began to hobble towards the house, aware that everyone's eyes were on me, some of them sympathetic, but the majority of them were cold or suspicious. I thought that day was the worst day of my life, but as the years passed, there were so many of them that it was impossible to pick out which day was worse than any other. By the time I turned sixteen, not only did my father torment me, but so did my brother Damien and the rest of the pack as well.