

The Songbird

For as long as Sona could remember, the birds had loved her music as much as she had loved theirs. Swooping outside the window was a lovely blue songbird, trilling its love to the world. With each beat of its wings a new verse spilled forth and Sona could not help but mimic it back, her fingers strumming the chords of her *etwahl* without thought. The bird flew higher, its *aria crescendo*-ing as the light glinted off its golden wing tips. Sona felt her magic resonating with it, pulsing at her fingertips to be free to shape the world's symphony. And she was unable to stop it, swept away in the music of the world as she watched the songbird soar higher and higher, the world seeming to stop as it reached the climax of its song. There it hung, wings shadowing the sun, before it dove with a strident cry at a brown bird barely within Sona's line of sight. With the bird's cry the music's spell was broken, and Sona, her fingers suddenly clumsy and unsure, slipped on her strings, producing an unnaturally loud and dissonant note as her magic slipped out of the tenuous control she had on it.

"My darling, is everything alright? Your *sforzando* seemed a bit too loud, and that's not like you at all," Lestara said, looking slightly pained. Sona, nearly dropping her *etwahl* in her haste, signed back "No, I mean yes, everything is fine, the birdsong just startled me. I think I need some air." Unable to keep Lestara's gaze, Sona quickly secured her *etwahl* in its case and made for the door, thoughts filled with the sudden bloodlust of the songbird.

"Dear, if you change your mind; you can always talk to me, about anything."

Sona's hand hovered over the doorknob for the briefest of moments before her eyes caught a small jagged cut in the doorframe, still radiating with the chords of her magic. If she'd been facing towards Lestara...

Horror shining in her eyes, she yanked the door open and fled the music room.

Sona's feet tapped a steady tempo, a stark contrast to her thoughts, as she walked back to the music room. As she was about to sleep she'd noticed her *etwahl* was no longer in its case. It had never gone missing before, but she couldn't help but feel that it had to do with the magical *furia* of that morning. Panic surging within, her tempo accelerated, feet barely touching the floor as she looked for the music room, but in the pale moonlight every hall and door looked the same. Her heart beat *incalzando* as her panic grew and her eyes searched desperately for the right hallway. She knew deep in her soul that if she didn't find her *etwahl* soon something horrible would happen.

And then she hears it, the quietest *bisbigliando* she's ever heard, but unmistakably the whisper of her instrument. Following the sound, her footsteps became slower and softer, afraid of what she might find with her instrument. Turning a corner she saw it, her *etwahl*, floating in midair at the height she would normally play it, unmoving.

The sheer strangeness of the sight was enough to stop her in her tracks, but, as if that was the cue it had been waiting for, it began to move, gliding steadily forward. Sona could only follow.

The slow movement of the air over her *etwahl*'s strings created a *sofnando* like sound that was nearly hypnotizing. Sona felt her heart and mind slowing, soothed by the comforting sound of her *etwahl* despite the strange circumstances. When they reach the open doors of the music room, she had almost forgotten why she'd felt so panicked about the instrument being gone in the first place, but then she saw Lestara's back.

The *etwahl* was completely silent now, like a predator stalking its prey, unwilling to give even a hint of sound that might alert Lestara. Sona immediately tries to run forward, that horrible panic welling back up, the terrible thing she knows will happen but isn't sure what it is lurking in the back of her mind. But her legs won't move, her feet feel glued in place and her arms won't rise, only her fingers allowed movement, but completely out of her control. She opened her mouth, tried to force a sound from her throat no matter how futile she knew it would be, but not even a whisper of air left her lips. She could only stare, completely powerless, as her instrument moved forward. Her forefinger lifted from a *sordino* position, no longer inhibiting the string's vibrations, and then struck forward.

A *staccato* of noise. Air tinged a brilliant blue as it strikes. Blood splattering her face and gown. Lestara fell forward and suddenly Sona is shaking and on her back, heavy sheets constricting her as hands pull her forward into a comforting embrace that is so achingly familiar.

"Shh, shh, it's okay my little songbird. It's alright, I'm here." Lestara's voice is calming, reassuring just by existing and Sona clutched her tighter, afraid that if she let go Lestara will disappear. When she is finally calmed, she looked up and saw Lestara's disheveled hair, her night gown and her tired eyes. She brought her hands up to apologize but Lestara stopped her before she could.

"Sona, when I adopted you from Ionia, I knew that you might have magic." Sona's breath caught but before she could do anything Lestara continues. "And I accept that. But you'll need to learn to control this song inside you. Demacia would not approve, but they didn't approve of a noble adopting outside the country either."

Sona smiled, and despite the echoes of her magic lingering in her torn apart bedroom, she didn't feel daunted by it, only determined. Out the window she caught a hint of movement as the songbird from that morning flies by the moon, an old brown songbird following calmly.