

*“Mother, Father? Why can’t I ever go with you? Why am I always stuck here with Sora?” A young liger cub asked his parents. His parents, who had stopped eating their dinner, stare at him. His mother looked more somber as opposed to his father’s outright disgust.*

*“We’ve already explained to you several times. It’s because...” His mother starts.*

*“You’re a hybrid, a liger. The world would never accept something so unnatural and unclean. Many would simply want to kill you for just existing because of your difference,” the father bluntly explains. The liger’s tail tucks between the chair, ears drooping.*

*“But, isn’t it possible that...” the liger cub stops mid-sentence. His father abruptly stands up from his chair, approaching his cub. He was already a sobbing mess before his father made it halfway towards him. His father slams his son’s face into the table, the cub’s face reflecting off a glass of water.*

*“Things don’t change. People won’t like or accept you. Nothing can change that. Be grateful you’re allowed to live.”*

The liger, now an adult in his early twenties, stands at his father’s grave. His wife had encouraged him many times to come here, as it would provide closure. Although why would he want closure? His father abused and tormented him his entire life. That was until his untimely death.

*“You’re gone. You have no power over me,” Maximus repeats to his father’s tombstone. With each repetition, his breathing became hollow and slow. He didn’t have long before he found himself reflecting even more on his upbringing.*

*Sora, his caretaker, had just disobeyed his parents’ wishes and took him outside. Unfortunately, she didn’t anticipate a sudden visit from either of them. As such, she hurried him home as fast as she could. Sadly, she wasn’t fast enough. She simply gave him a look of clear sadness and regret.*

*“Please forgive me.”*

*She moves for his father to tackle his cub to the ground. There’s a loud thud sound accompanied by the Maximus’s small work desk breaking. A closer look showed the liger’s*

*slight bleeding from the head. Not that anyone would notice immediately. Instead, Sora and his mother did nothing as his father presses his knee against Maximus's chest. Neither lifted a feather or paw to help the screaming, crying child.*

*"We've told you over a thousand times that you are never to leave this house. Yet, for some reason, you decide to disobey. For what? You're a freak accident! Be grateful you're allowed to live!"*

Maximus holds his chest, breathing haphazardly. He always despised this memory. That day marked the day Sora had left him. She'd come back several months later for his birthday to take him to train.

The owl might not have always been the most expressive, but she was certainly very affectionate to him. She was the closest thing to a mother he'd ever had. Especially considering how his actual mother was still very much alive.

"I'm always grateful you see me that way." Sora joins him and wraps a wing around him. Despite being only half an inch shorter than her, this always made him feel small. Small like the defenseless cub he used to be so long ago. Turning her head to him, she asks, "What's brought you here today?"

He looks at his mentor and surrogate mother with pained eyes. He didn't need to say anything. She already knew what her cub was fearful of.

"You married that feline and had a child with her?"

He nods.

"You're afraid you'll end up treating your cub the way your father treated you."

He nods. She turns her body around, bringing her student into a hug. He cried into her feathers whilst she rubs his back. The fear was understandable. Frighten by becoming the very thing that hurt him the most. This fear, while understandable, was also quite laughable. In fact, his sobs are stopped by her laughter.

"Excuse me?"

“Sorry, Maximus but you are nothing like your father. The fact you’re even *having* these thoughts prove otherwise.”

“But what if I get angry? I might hurt my child! I don’t want to be like...” His worries are silence with a feather to his lips. Her loving eyes wash over his fear.

“Leon Berger will always be your father. That can never change. The good news is that you’re free to live however you see fit. Be the father you never had.” A small breeze became a raging wind pushing Maximus away from Sora. He shields his face from a flurry of feathers. Lowering his guard slightly, he sees Sora moving further and further away from him.

He wanted to run after her. He wanted to tell her ‘thank you’ for comforting him. To tell her how much she meant to him, a sentiment he’d done many times. The Owl’s beak shifts into a smile, nodding at her charge... *NO* her child. He mouths off a ‘goodbye’ and the wind blows stronger than ever. Reflexively, he shields his face from the wind. At this moment, the wind stopped.

Sora was no longer here.

Maximus was all alone.

Well, not exactly...

A blue cat carrying their cub arrives. The cub’s body fur was blue like her mother’s but, covered in stripes like her father. The cub smiles at her father, flashing off her small fang. Taking her from his wife’s paws, he cradles his giggly baby.

*You were only right about one thing, father. I should be grateful to be alive. Otherwise, I might miss every important moment in her life,* he thought to himself. His wife, who probably read his mind, nods. They come together, pressing their lips together in a tender kiss.

Maximus Liger was happy with the life he’d been given. A life that, while certainly was littered with mistakes, wasn’t one he’d regret. He was no afraid of his future.

His future was here in front of him.