

Enslaved

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PROLOGUE

BRIAR

My finger traces the worn pages of our family's grimoire. Every day they crinkle more and more, but they will never tear or crack because a witch made this, and what a witch makes can never be undone.

You'd have to kill the witch to do that.

The book is almost as big as I am, but that doesn't stop me from dragging it off the dining room table and into my lap.

It's a large, black leather thing, buttery soft from decades of use, but no other smell or touch is as comforting. Not even the sweet vanilla and sugar wafting from the kitchen comes close. I cradle it against me on the floor beside Dad's armchair, his leg warm against my right shoulder.

Mom is baking cookies because it's Friday and she likes for us to have a sweet treat on the weekends. We'll eat too much of it until we're almost sick.

Or maybe that's just me.

"Briar, careful with that." A warning laces Dad's voice, but I know behind his newspaper, a smile tugs at the corners of his mouth.

He's added his spells to the book, and those are the ones I go to first. When I have spells of my own, I'll scratch them into the back pages, right after his. Then one day there will be another eleven-year-old girl with red hair and blue eyes tracing my words with the tip of her finger.

Mom doesn't use spells because she doesn't need them. She calls fire to her and it comes. Always.

When she finds me crying under my covers because the spells don't work for me the way they work for Dad, she tells me that one day, I'll be able to do what she does.

That I'm special.

"A special kind of witch?" I sniff, as her words tempt me from my hiding place.

As she kisses my hair, the warm vanilla scent of her embraces me. "You don't have to be a witch to be special."

But I don't believe her because only witches and wolves are special in Madden Grove. Everyone else is a tourist, and there's nothing special about them.

"Dad?"

"Hmm?" He's pretending to be distracted with his newspaper, but he's not. He'll sneak a peek at the word I'm stuck on so that tonight, as I drift off to sleep, he'll explain what it means.

It's rare for me to stop on any page for long now. One day I'll know all the words.

Maybe then the spells will work for me.

"How come you know more spells than Aunt Mel? And shouldn't she have the grimoire because she's a girl?"

Silence.

I lower my finger from the page. "Dad?"

"Your grandparents taught them both," Mom says from the door. "We talked about this before, Briar, remember?"

I turn to her, but I never see her face, just as I don't see Dad's.

Because this is a dream.

But that doesn't mean this day didn't happen.

It always begins the same way. Mom bakes cookies, Dad hides behind a newspaper, and I trace a word I don't know in our family's grimoire.

The ending is always the same as well.

A fire eats at the husk of a destroyed house, the heat licking at my tears so fast they never have a chance to hit my cheeks.