

Enslaved

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After tucking the pouch in my jeans pocket, I gaze down at the patch of exposed earth.

“I won’t fail this time.” I breathe so quietly that even a wolf wouldn’t hear me, eyes burning with tears I will never let fall. “Whoever did this, then and now, will pay. I’ll get them, Dad. I’ll get them all.”

I wasn’t here when I should have been, but now, I’m right where I’m supposed to be: dealing with the witch who destroyed my pack.

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I down the shot of vodka and slide the empty glass across the glossy varnished bar. I don’t bother telling the pale, blank-faced bartender what to do with the glass. He should be able to figure it out by now.

My eyes go to the clock on the wall over his head. One. The wolves in the restaurant must be finished eating by now. Which means I can follow that nice, straight path the witch took to the tearoom across the road.

One witch is no problem to deal with. A pack of wolves that are going to have a problem with the wolf who killed their last alpha back in town to stir a war between witches and wolves won’t be so straightforward.

I’ll give it another thirty minutes. Just to be sure. The restaurant will have cleared out by then.

“You just passing through?” a male voice at my side asks.

Once the bartender has refilled my glass, I drag it toward me.

“I thought I’d stay for a couple of days. Heard this was a nice town,” the man continues as if I’d spoken.

I pick up my vodka.

It’s been four, maybe five times that I’ve emptied my glass in the twenty minutes since I pulled up a bar stool in the Madden Grove Taproom, and the man at my side hasn’t stopped trying to get my attention.

After draining the glass, I push it back toward the bartender.

“Though I could be wrong. Or too nice. Some girl flashed her panties on Main Street earlier. Hot pink polka-dot ones, if you can believe it. No one knows why. Maybe she just wanted some attention.”

When the bartender pushes another vodka my way, I break our pattern and reach instead for the smokes in my jeans pocket.

My wolf snarls.

Pipe the fuck down. I won’t smoke the whole thing.

If I was wearing wolf fur instead of human skin, I’d snarl too since, unlike my wolf, he won’t have to walk around smelling like a fucking ashtray because some guy doesn’t know when to fuck off. But with the world knowing nothing about shifters, experience has taught me that going around snarling tends to make humans suspicious, so I throttle the need.

“Smoking, huh? Unusual.”

I’m not the only person with a cigarette in my hand in a dimly lit bar on a Tuesday afternoon, but that isn’t what the man at my side means. My nose told me what he was the second he slipped into the seat beside mine, just as his nose would’ve identified me.

Shifter.

With our heightened senses, smoking is something you’ll never see a shifter do. The acrid stench of burning tobacco blunts one of our biggest strengths: our ability to sniff out almost anything. Because of that, smoking is guaranteed to do the one thing I need it to do: drive away other shifters. It’s why I always keep a pack on me.

After reaching for the large, gold lighter in the same pocket, I light the cigarette and wait for the inevitable to happen.

“Name is Bodie,” the man beside me drawls. “By the way.”

“I’m not gay,” I growl, since he’s forcing me to smoke this cigarette that tastes like shit for no reason.

“Neither am I. Not that I have a problem with—”

For the first time since I sat down, I drag my gaze from the bar and to my right. A dark-haired, gray-eyed man in his twenties with laugh lines bracketing his eyes and mouth stares back at me. Unlike me, he’s been nursing the same drink, an ice-cold beer, all this time. “Then what did you want?”

He shrugs. “Just making conversation. Since this is supposed to be a friendly town.”

Returning my gaze to the front, I take another drag from the cigarette that means I’m going to have to brush my teeth for a solid twenty minutes, and gargle mouthwash for twenty more, to eradicate the taste. “Well, it’s not.”