

Enslaved

I'm looking at the adult version of that witch killer. The muscles bulging in his arms tell me he hasn't been stretched out on a couch eating takeout, getting fat and slow in the ten years he's been away.

"I said leave her alone!" A tingle of awareness warns me that Sera is casting a spell.

"Sera, go. Now!" I can't let Keane hurt her because of me. Too many people have died already.

"Briar, I—"

"Just go," I cut her off, never taking my eyes off the wolf who's a second away from ending me. I read the thought clear as day in his head and I know there's no way I'm getting out of this alive. "Please."

The tingle of magic gradually fades, and steps move away. Finally, I can breathe. "I didn't do anything. But if you still want to kill me, then fine. Just leave Sera out of it."

He studies me for several seconds. "You think that's going to stop me? Acting as if you give a shit about anything other than yourself?"

I swallow hard. "I'm not acting."

His stare extends. And then a stillness settles over him.

That's the moment, the exact moment, I know I'm going to die.

He winds his hand back before stabbing those wolf claws at my neck.

A fire ignites in my gut.

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KEANE

Groaning, I grab my head with both hands as it pounds with a fury that makes me blind to everything but the pain.

It takes a second for me to work out that I'm just plain blind.

Get up Keane, get the fuck up.

What the fuck is burning?

Blinking rapidly, my vision soon shifts from black to a hazy gray before it settles on a vague outline of the world. I focus on an open door in front of my face as I fight to understand where the hell I am, and what just put me down with a force that knocked me clean out.

And then it all comes back.

The fucking witch.

Barely biting back the rumbling growl before it can emerge, my killing fury drives the last of the lingering pain from my head.

I shove myself to my feet, which turns out to be a big mistake when the world tips and the ground reaches up to smack me in the face. After I've picked myself up for the second time, I move a little slower.

I'm alone in the alley at the back of the café, so the witch must've cast whatever powerful spell I didn't see coming before she took off.

Or maybe it was the other one—Sera—who surprised me?

Doesn't matter. Both will be dead soon enough, starting with the one with the painfully bright clothes.

One glance behind me at the metal dumpster with a human-sized outline punched into it makes it clear why my head would hurt. Scratch that, why my whole goddamn body hurts.

I glance down before swearing as I locate the source of the burning. I slap at the embers on my pants and shirt until they go out, but there's nothing I can do about the holes they leave behind.

Ruined clothes mean a shopping trip is in my future, and there's nothing I hate more. I curse the witch again. If I'd have known what I was dealing with, I wouldn't have waited to chase her out of the café—I'd have ended her the second she approached my table.

A memory of the pint-sized witch forms in my mind, and I recall the surprise that flashed through me when I first saw her. I knew the second I caught her scent and lifted my head that it was her. That she'd been the one I was hunting.

