

# Enslaved

“Outside,” he shouts. “You shouldn’t be here. Don’t you know to call us and get out of the house?”

“But I—”

He forces me away from the closet, snatching the blanket from me, and tossing it across the room. Another man takes my place, ready with a hose pointed at the flames in the back of the closet. “Your aunt called an hour ago. Have you been doing that all this time?”

I blink at the man in his fifties with the salt-and-pepper mustache that I know will match what’s left of the hair on his head.

Terry, the chief of the Madden Grove volunteer fire department, leads me down the stairs and out of the front of the house into a night creeping into the early morning, the faintest hint of daylight barely visible in the surrounding forest.

“Briar?” My eyes snap back to Terry, who glares down at me.

“I had to put out the fire,” I say. “Before it spread.”

A heavy frown creases his brow. “With a wetblanket?”

He does nothing to hide how stupid he thinks I am, and he’s right. It was stupid. But I would do it all over again without a single regret. “I—”

“You could have been killed.” He marches me down the front porch steps of Aunt Mel’s house before seating me at the bottom. “Wait here. I’ll get something to warm you up.”

He stomps toward the fire truck a few feet away, and I know the blanket will come with at least a thirty-minute lecture on the proper way to respond to a fire outbreak.

Aunt Mel sits in the front seat, a silver blanket draped around her shoulders. Her eyes are closed, and exhaustion paints harsh lines across her face.

“I had to,” I whisper. “It was my fault.”

KEANE

“How long?” My eyes never stop scanning the dark forest.

“A week. Maybe.” The timid male voice sparks a fury that feels extreme even for me. But despite the growing need to smash my fist into the shifter cowering somewhere behind me, I choke down my rage and clear my throat.

I probably just need a drink. Another one.

“Show me.”

There’s no movement for so long that I’m losing the will not to pummel this guy when he heads into the forest. I follow.

It’s a brisk ten-minute walk to reach the stream, and along the way, we pass a dead campfire.

And for that, I’m eternally grateful. Because if the six wolf bodies had been beside the remains of the campfire, I’d have thought I’d traveled back in time. “How many witches?”

I stalk toward the body of a dark brown wolf half in the water, as if he were trying to escape an attack and just wasn’t fast enough.

“Two. But, Keane, there—”

“You don’t need to explain witches to me.” My voice is steadier than I’d believed it would be as I crouch beside the body and roll it over.

Dead silver eyes stare up at me, moonlight reflected in them.

Witches move into a town, and a week later, the local wolf pack is dead.

A week.

“Any bodies other than the ones here?” I ask as I move to the next wolf, and then the next.

A long pause. “No, this is it.”