

Enslaved

“Weren’t feeling well,” Aunt Mel gently interrupts. “And you’re still not well. Don’t worry about the café, we’ll manage. We always do.”

I shift a little so I can meet her gaze. As always, she gazes down at me with a gentle smile. It isn’t the wide one she saves for the tourists, but just like always, there’s one curving her lips. “Don’t you ever get tired of smiling?”

I know I do.

A small frown creases her brow, but the smile doesn’t budge. “No, why?”

“Because sometimes there isn’t much to smile about.”

She shakes her head. “Someone out there in the world will always have it twice as bad as you do, so why not focus on the positives?”

Sometimes I search her expression because I refuse to believe anyone that has gone through what she has could still have a reason to be so positive. She lost everyone in her life. Her parents died in their sleep when their carbon monoxide alarm failed to go off and they died in their sleep, leaving her to run the café with Dad occasionally helping out.

And then I come along with a messed-up power that kills her brother and sister-in-law, loses her arm, and leaves her to raise me alongside running a business that she refuses to accept is failing. It’s the reason I force myself to step foot in the café when I would much rather hide in the kitchen. Because of her.

Because I owe Aunt Mel everything.

My gaze sweeps the contents of my bedroom. It’s full of all the comforts any girl would need, and it’s all because of Aunt Mel. After I destroyed my house, there was nothing left.

But Aunt Mel took me in and now I sleep in the room that once, a long time ago, belonged to Dad. While we were both still in the hospital, Aunt Mel recovering from much more serious injuries than my cuts and bruises, she hired someone to re-decorate this room. The dusky pink walls and white frills are girlier than anything I would have chosen for myself, but what it looks like isn’t the point.

I'll take all the frills and bows because they show how much she cares.

My eyes skip over the framed picture of Mom, Dad, and Aunt Mel grinning outside the café. The picture was taken before I was born, Aunt Mel says, and they were all working together. Back when it was still doing well. Before I ruined it all.

But since guilt stabs at me every time I look at the picture and any of the countless others spread over the walls and side tables in the house, I try never to look at them, at least not for long.

"Something happened today," I murmur, with my gaze on the wall beside the picture frame. "With my power. Again."

For a long moment, Aunt Mel doesn't speak. "I thought I felt something in the air. And when I took the trash out at closing..." when her voice trails off, I know she must have seen the human-shaped outline in the dumpster.

My power tossed a wolf so hard it knocked him out cold and burned holes all over his clothes. And I have no idea how I did it, or even if I could do it again.

It was a wolf trying to kill me today, but what if the next person I throw into a dumpster is less deserving? Someone like Sera who doesn't have the benefit of wolf healing to take a hit and get back up again.

What then?

I turn to meet her gaze. Dad was the most powerful witch in the family, which isn't normally what happens. In a witch family, the gift is always strongest in the women. But not with Aunt Mel and Dad. It's why my grandparents gave him the grimoire and not her.

After Mom and Dad died and I started living with Aunt Mel in her small house just outside town, I learned how the witches in town treated her.

Since I'm not a green witch, I don't go to their Tuesday night meetings. Sera says that Aunt Mel's power is so weak that Layla, the coven leader, doesn't select her for any of the spells they work, that she's just in charge of serving up the cakes and teas.

How she can still summon a smile is something I could never understand. I would just point blank refuse to go, if the coven treated me as if the only reason I was there was because they wanted refreshments.

"It burst out of me again," I admit in a quiet voice. "I couldn't control it."

Aunt Mel studies me in silence for a beat. "That wolf who ran after you? Sera came back inside close to tears. She didn't tell me what was going on, but I'm guessing it's something serious?"

I lower my gaze to the white bedding with ruffled bows on them. They almost match my silk nightdress, which has a line of bows along the straps. Again, it's not something I would have chosen for myself, but I'm not about to complain about it.

"He's Keane Destin. I don't know why he's back in town, but I think I can guess." I had plenty of time to think after I ran through the café like a crazy person, briefly yelling that I wasn't feeling well and I needed to go home.

The only reason he could be back in Madden Grove is to find out who killed his pack. On my long, exhausting run back to our house, a journey that took nearly an hour since Aunt Mel has the car and drives us to and from work, I thought about everything I'd ever been told about the Destins.

There were two packs then—the Wolfes and the Destins. Ordinarily you wouldn't find two packs sharing the same territory, but back then, the wolves hated us witches more than they hated sharing, so they must have worked some arrangement with each other.

But after Keane killed the witches, he must have killed Amos Wolfe, because Sera said there was a new alpha, Liam Wolfe, Amos's son.