

Enslaved

I have to find Sera. Now. If I have to deal with these growls for too much longer, I'm going to be begging Keane to put me out of my misery.

My gaze returns to the window.

"First the window, and then Sera," I tell myself, as I try not to think about the reaction I'm going to get when I burst into the green witch coven meeting in my nightdress. "And Aunt Mel. If Keane Destin thinks she was responsible... I have to tell her to get out of town. Or hide. Or something."

I cross over to the long, narrow window on the other side of the room. The closer I get, the smaller it seems. "Oh boy, this will be tight."

But that's okay. I've been cutting back on the cookies, so it's okay. I'll fit.

I grab the bottom of the window and shove it up. Or, at least, that's what I intend to do. Muscles tense and strain with effort as I struggle. But does it move an inch? No. No, it does not.

What doesn't help is that I've never been the physical type.

I spent my childhood either failing at magic lessons with Diana Calla back when she still believed I was an elemental, or baking in the cafe. Neither were all that physically demanding, since magic lessons were all about the mental, and baking? Let's just say that carrying two trays of cookies to the oven is my limit.

But today I'm breaking that limit. Today—or tonight—I have to be strong.

I grip the wooden window frame and grit my teeth as I shove with everything I have. Sweat pops over my brow and under my hair as my muscles tremble with effort. A creak, a shudder, and a squeak, and bit by bit I slide the window up.

Yes.

Terrified that if I stop, it'll either fall back down or I'll lose momentum, I lean into it, my lips peeled back from my teeth as I push.

Wood scrapes against wood, and the window creeps up another couple of inches.

I take a second to examine the space I've created. Not enough. Not yet. I'd get my head and shoulders through it, but not my ass. I've eaten far too many cookies and cakes in my life for that to happen.

The next time I shove, nothing happens.

Why did you stop pushing?

"Come on, come on, come on," I mutter as I lean even more of my weight into the window. It sneaks up another inch and then grinds to a halt.

After that, no amount of shoving makes it move again.

It's like it's stuck. Which means I have to be in one of the older cabins just outside town, reserved for the tourists.

Since the wolves own about half of the property in town, and the witches most of the others, there are only a few businesses run by humans. The bar in town, grocery store, the cabins east of Main Street, and the Madden Grove Bed & Breakfast.

That's not because the wolves and witches didn't have the option of buying those businesses themselves, but no one wanted to be stuck dealing with tourists twenty-four hours a day.

The tourists bring money into the area which everyone needs, but they don't stay long, which is what everyone wants.

I eye the gap again. It's still going to be close, but I can't see myself getting the window open any wider, so I take a deep breath, release it and stick my head through.

A sudden image of the window slamming down on me and cutting me in half makes me jerk my head right back out again. I rattle the window a couple of times, just to be sure, but when it doesn't budge, I let out a sigh of relief.

But I still hesitate.

Maybe I could try to speak to the wolf souls. Maybe they could...?

"Are you listening to yourself? Speak to the souls? Ask for their help?" I mutter as I narrow my eyes at the window. "They are wolves, Briar. Wolves. Wolves do not help witches. They kill witches."

I get moving again. It doesn't matter that I have a bad feeling about this, I have to risk it.

My head, shoulders, and hips get through with room to spare, so I lean out even further and wiggle a little to get the back half of me out.

With my gaze focused on the grass just outside the window, I wriggle harder. The cabin must sit on a porch since the back is a little higher off the ground than I'd like, but a thump to the head is nothing compared to being eaten by a wolf.