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“Mom was...” my voice trails off. “She was a witch.”

He pauses, but when I don’t continue, his eyes narrow. “What kind of witch?”

“I thought she was an elemental, because she could control fire by thought and gesture.” I frown as I cycle through old memory. “She rarely used her gift, but sometimes she would light the fireplace or candles in the house. All she had to do was will it, and it happened. For her, it was easy.”

When I think of how hard I would strain my mind, giving myself migraines that lasted for hours as I tried and failed to light a single candle in my magic lessons, all my old frustrations rise to the surface.

“But she wasn’t an elemental witch?” Keane murmurs. “Since you said something about being broken.”

Damn. He heard.

Of course he heard you muttering beneath your breath, Briar, he’s a wolf. He’s got big ears—all the better to hear you with. You remember the story, don’t you?

“Something like that.”

“So you were in the forest looking for a flower to speak to your parents in the afterlife, to discover why you’re broken.” His eyes are so full of doubt that it’s clear he doesn’t believe me.

“You know, when you say it like that, you make it sound like I’m crazy.”

The only response I get is a raised eyebrow, which only confirms that he does. I shouldn’t care what he thinks of me—crazy or otherwise—but I do. “Something is wrong with me. I’m not a green witch because spells don’t work when I cast them, and I have this fire ability that I can’t control. Years of magic lessons with Diana and her daughters didn’t help. I thought Mom could tell me and I could fix it before I kill someone else.”

“You tossed me into the dumpster,” he says mildly, “and burned most of my clothes off. You’re telling me you didn’t mean to do that?”

I shake my head no. “It’s like a burp. It just happens.”

His lips twitch. “A burp?”

“Or a sneeze.”

Before I can wonder for too long if there’s a sense of humor lurking beneath the surface, all his amusement disappears behind the gruff wolf exterior that seems to be the norm with all wolves everywhere. But most especially with this one.

After taking a step away from me, he tugs a crumpled box of cigarettes from his jeans pocket.

He wants to smoke now?

But he doesn’t light the cigarette he pulls from the packet. Just holds it with the butt pointing down—right in front of my face. “Light it.”

I blink at him. “What?”

“Light it.”

“I’m not a lighter, okay?” I sniff. “Someone already invented one of those.”

A second later, he’s stabbing wolf claws at my eyes.

Shrieking, I throw my hand over my face and a burst of... something explodes out of me.

I wait for death. But when it doesn’t happen, I assume I killed Keane this time, so I peel my hands from my face and peek over the top.

My eyes go to a still-living and untouched Keane, to the unlit cigarette in his left hand, and then back to Keane’s face. But his gaze isn’t on me. It’s pointed over his shoulder, so I follow it, and on the dining room table is a smoking beer bottle.

As I watch, the glass shatters and explodes.

When I feel Keane’s gaze probing one side of my face, I turn from the mess on the table. His expression is impossible to read. “I thought a witch learned to

control their powers so they couldn't destroy the world with their dangerous spells."

I glower at him. "We wouldnotdestroy the world with our spells. If anyone is doing the destruction, it's you wolves with your—" Wolf claws re-enter my line of vision and I snap my mouth shut.

"How old are you?"