

Font Size: AA+A++

---

“Twenty-one,” I answer without hesitation.

“Twenty-one,” he echoes, “and you have no control of this ability at all. This is what you meant when you said you were broken?”

I nod.

“And the forest? You said something hit you?”

I inch back against the refrigerator. “I don’t want to tell you.”

His eyes narrow. “Why not?”

“Because you’re going to kill me.”

“Eventually,” he admits, “but you’re going to tell me, because spells don’t work for you and you can’t even light a cigarette. And the wolf I stopped from taking a bite out of you means your magic doesn’t work all the time, does it?”

No, because it does whatever the hell it wants.

A test. That’s what it was. A test. And I walked right into his little trap.

“Briar. I’m at the end of my patience.”

Just treat it like peeling a band-aid off. Do it quick, and it won’t hurt. Much.

I suck in a long breath. “Something hit me and I didn’t know what it was, but then later when I heard the growls in my head, I guessed it meant the souls had attached themselves to me.” I run out of air and have to drag another breath in before racing on. “So I think I have the souls of your pack inside me.”

Silence.

His hand grips my shoulder and I shriek. But when he nudges me to one side, confusion dawns.

What? Why isn't he...?

I watch as he retrieves a bottle of beer from the refrigerator before he pushes the door closed.

After taking a few steps away, he returns to his original position, leaning against the kitchen counter across from me. He twists the cap off and takes a long draw, his gaze never leaving mine.

For several seconds he doesn't speak, just studies me.

I hunch into myself so I look as small and pathetic as possible. Maybe then he won't kill me.

"The souls of my pack are inside you?"

I nod. "Yes."

He takes another long draw. "And are they speaking? Saying anything to you?"

I search his expression again, alert for any sign he's about to attack. "No, just growls." I pause, watching as he lifts his beer again. "And your name."

The bottle stops at his lips. "My name?"

"Back at the café, I don't remember if it was a voice I heard, but something told me you were Keane Destin. That's how I knew."

The silence extends as he sips from his beer. "And spells don't work for you?"

I shake my head no. "I'm broken."

"And if I killed you, what would happen to the souls then?"

My heart contracts. "There's no guarantee that will release them. They can be... clingy, which is why we're always warned not to play with forces outside of the natural realm." I try to look like I have more experience dealing with souls than I do. Considering my knees are shaking, I'm not sure how successful I am.