

Enslaved

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They'll be there for at least an hour, which leaves me plenty of time to—

“Witch.” The low growl in my ear makes me gasp.

Spinning around, I trip over my foot and topple into the road, just as a gray station wagon hurtles toward me. Before I can even think of screaming, impossibly strong hands grip me, plucking me from death.

Swallowing hard, I force myself to meet the fierce, dark brown gaze of Liam Wolfe, the alpha of the Madden Grove wolf pack. “Liam,” I incline my head a touch. Enough to show I’m grateful that I’m not lying beneath the wheels of a car, but not enough that he feels superior about having just saved a witch.

“You’re jumpy. Why?” As always, he speaks in a low growl. The potency of his alpha stare makes every instinct in me scream to look away. I don’t, but I want to.

No wolf is stronger than a witch. We don’t fear them. They should fear us

Just because Liam only wears tailored shirts and has his chestnut brown hair perfectly styled, if I prove myself a threat to him, he won’t care how much of my blood leaves stains on his handwash-only silk shirt when he rips my throat out.

I laugh, mentally wincing at the manic edge there is to it. “Nothing. What would I be up to?”

He doesn’t respond.

He still doesn’t even blink.

A long time ago, I once watched a documentary about dogs being able to smell fear. I imagine a wolf’s instincts are a thousand times sharper.

He sniffs once. “Fear. Magic. And... herbs. The herbs don’t make me curious. But the fear...” His eyes narrow. “Why would you be afraid?”

Other witches might be less afraid because they have their magic as a defense against teeth and claws. I'm not so fortunate, so I pick one reason that won't make him suspicious. "Your teeth."

Briefly, I close my eyes.

Histeeth? Of all the reasons, you pick that one.

He cocks his head to one side, the way I've only ever seen a shifter do, and his lips part.

"Liam, is there a problem?" A male voice calls from across the street, drawing my gaze that way.

The man with dark hair peppered with gray, and a black stare to go along with his black jeans and t-shirt, shifts his focus from me to Liam and back again. Jonas. Madden Grove's pack beta.

In that one glance, I can read what the pack's second-in-command is asking: Is this witch causing trouble that you need me to kill her?

Even if Liam said yes, it wouldn't be now. I'd go to bed one night and I wouldn't wake up again.

Liam takes a step toward the road. "Lunch awaits." His eyes turn predatory. "It's lasagna today, but it could just as easily be witch. Whatever you're up to. Don't."

As I watch him stalk away, he smiles at a tourist who stops him to ask for directions to the antique shop.

The tourist, like most of the others milling about the main street, is an old gray-haired lady who smiles back. Just because Liam Wolfe can shift to a wolf and rip you apart in seconds, doesn't mean he isn't pretty to look at.

Jonas hovers outside the restaurant a little longer, his unblinking stare piercing me to the spot before he spins on his heel and follows Liam into the restaurant. One of the many businesses the wolf pack owns. Oregano, cooked meat, and rich tomato sauce waft into the street, and then the door snicks closed behind him.

Fire licks up my legs and hips. I suck in a breath, just strangling the blood-curdling scream that wants to erupt from my throat.

I've torn my pants down as I slap desperately at my legs before I realize there's nothing there.

I'm not on fire.

Which means I've just exposed my hot pink polka-dot panties on the Madden Grove main street on a mid-morning Tuesday, in front of everyone.

It's an elemental witch's game I've learned to hate: build an image of a fire in a person's mind that they believe is real. A game so simple, it's one I should've been able to see through at sixteen, but never could.

A blush prickles across my cheeks. It isn't easy to ignore the stares and the whispers from the tourists milling about on the street, but I tug my pants back up with shaking hands and try my best to do just that.