

Enslaved

I lift my head, and through the window of the Wolfe Trattoria, my gaze clashes with Liam Wolfe. He studies me without expression, but I know what he's thinking. I know what everyone is thinking.

There goes Briar Fenix, a broken witch, killer, and the embarrassment of Madden Grove, who always sees things that aren't there.

Tearing my gaze from his, I turn to the source of my latest embarrassment. In a pretty pastel pink and green florist across the road, I meet three blue stares from the window of Calla's Cauldron.

The blonde women in pink floral dresses, with perfectly pressed glossy curls, lift their manicured fingers and flutter them at me. Daisy, Dahlia, and Delphine Calla. Their smiles appear warm and friendly, but the only thing real about them is their masterful ability to control fire.

A witch's strength lies in the coven.

What I'm looking at is part of the strongest, most powerful coven in town. The Calla sisters. Elementals. And the sort of witch I should be... if I could get my power to work the way it should.

I smile back, because that's what you do in Madden Grove.

You smile.

Always.

Can't let the tourists see anything that might make them think Madden Grove is anything but a picturesque town to rest and relax in for the weekend.

I force myself to turn away and hurry down the street, to a task that will get me eaten...now, or later.

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As I stare at the empty patch of grass—a patch that should contain white asphodel, the white starfish-shaped flower, otherwise known as narcissus, and the reason I braved crossing over into wolf territory in the Madden Grove Wood—I want to cry.

“No,” I breathe as I stumble closer.

There’s only one place where white asphodel grows in Madden Grove, and it’s here. I know because Sera cast a spell, and this...this exact spot was where her spell revealed that they bloomed.

Only, somehow, between last night and tonight, they’re not here anymore.

Which means someone took it.

But who?

My instincts scream that it was the Calla sisters, but I reject the idea a second later. It couldn’t have been them. They don’t need to risk their lives sneaking into wolf territory for white asphodel, since they have the most well-stocked flower shop on the East Coast.

If they hadn’t spent years tormenting me every chance they got, I would’ve gone to them. But then they’d know why I’d want a flower with only one purpose to a witch.

Summoning lost souls.

While not exactly a crime for a witch to do, it’s not looked at kindly. Summoning souls is only a step away from trying to control other things, like demons, which is a crime for a witch. Because if the demon doesn’t get you, you can be sure as hell any coven that learns what you’re doing will.

With Sera’s silver necklace now rendered useless, I stuff it back into the black velvet pouch.

Sera’s location spell worked like a charm. Everything worked like a charm. I didn’t bump into even one wolf as I wandered through the Madden Grove Wood, trying to make it look like I was just out for a walk.

Other than a couple of tourists who were too busy bird-watching to pay the least bit of attention to me, I saw no one as I crept into the north part of the woods, where the wolves like to run at night.

Two seconds. That’s all I thought I would need to grab a handful of the white asphodel, shove it in my pocket, and hurry back to the café—where I could give it to Sera, who would work up the spell I’d need to speak with Mom.

As my eyes scan the forest, a chill wind brushes the nape of my neck.

I don't know how I missed it before, but now the lack of birds fluttering in the leaves of the tall spruce trees and wildlife rustling among the grass gives me my biggest clue why I suddenly feel like this is no place I want to be.

Souls live here.

And then I realize where I must be.