

Enslaved

And then Keane Destin was gone. Just gone.

But now he's back. Why now, I have no clue.

"No one ever did discover who killed his pack," Aunt Mel murmurs.

I shake my head because the reason Keane is back in Madden Grove isn't as important as this need to do something about my power before I kill someone. Again. "Anyway, about my power..." My voice trails off because I'm not sure I'm doing the right thing. The thought of just... getting rid of it, doesn't feel right.

"Briar?"

I lift my head and meet her gaze. "Yeah?"

Her expression is soft, almost wistful. "You can tell me anything. You know I always have your best interest at heart."

Swallowing hard, I nod. I'll talk about this with Sera tomorrow, but I figure asking for Sera's help to remove the souls that have somehow attached themselves to me is a big enough ask already.

"Is there a way to put a block on me? To maybe..." My voice trails off at her furrowed brow. "There isn't?"

"Briar, your powers are..." She shakes her head. "Not like a green witch, so I don't know that a green witch spell—even if one existed—could block a power as strong as yours."

I search her expression and get the sense she's not being entirely honest with me. "But there's something else that might work?"

Her gaze drifts from mine. "It's extreme."

My gut clenches. "I want to hear it. What?"

After a long, searching look, she sighs. "It's permanent, Briar. You might not—"

"Tell me, Aunt Mel." I say the words, but I'm sure I already know what she's hinting at.

“Briar,” she murmurs. “It’s not your fault you have this power. You don’t mean to hurt anyone with it.”

But it is my fault. Every single time it bursts out of me, it hurts someone. Or kills them.

I push myself to my feet and, after wrapping my arms around my middle, I pace the thickly carpeted floor, my figure casting long shadows on the walls. “I know you say that it isn’t my fault, but it is. This thing inside me is a danger to everyone, and especially to you.”

She rises to her feet, her expression still blank. “I could speak with Diana. Maybe—”

I snort. “Diana Calla won’t help. All she cares about is the elementals, and I’m too much of a failure to be one. So even if she agreed to help, whatever she tried probably wouldn’t work. She’d just kill me if she realized how out of control this power truly is.”

“Layla, then. She—”

But I’m already shaking my head. “Layla might not be able to, even if she wanted to.” I’ve spent enough time around the green witch coven leader, Layla Markham, to know she doesn’t like me, and she doesn’t like that Sera wants to have anything to do with me when she’s busy molding Sera into the future coven leader.

Still, she doesn’t hate me, and she won’t try to kill me like Diana Calla will. At least, I hope not.

Aunt Mel’s frown deepens. “Then I don’t know that there’s anything I could do. Without the grimoire...”

I wince because that’s yet another thing I destroyed. “Maybe you could ask Layla at the meeting tonight? Quietly, but hold back on just how...” I take a second to think up the right word, “temperamental my power is. And that I want to get rid of it. Because that’s what you mean, isn’t it? When you said it would be permanent?”

“There was a witch before you were born. No matter what she did, she couldn’t control her gift. She tried, but she just—”

“Couldn’t.” I wrap my arms around myself. “So they took her power away?”

Aunt Mel nods. “She had to agree because a witch’s gift is a part of her. It takes the agreement of the witch to sever that piece of her.”

My smile is grim. “Sever. It seems so... final.”

A deep frown creases Aunt Mel’s brow. “But that’s not the only solution. There has to be another way. Perhaps—”

