

## Recovery

There was pounding on the divider between the shop and the teahouse. I grabbed a handful of the salt that made the magic barrier and threw it into the cauldron.

"What are you doing, Clover? You're supposed to put that oil on your eyes and wear the crystal over your heart to lead you to your soulmate!" Jen insisted.

"Do you really think it will lead me to my soulmate, Jen!? It will just lead me to the beast. You saw that thing! No, I'm not completing the spell." I told her and took the cauldron to the workroom in the back to clean it out.

When I came back from cleaning up, Emmalyn and Jen had cleaned up the workstation and opened up the divider. The blinds were up again and there was no trace of the spell I'd just cast. I shivered.

Was my future so powerful that it obscured everything? I had no future without it. Did this mean I didn't have a soulmate? I wasn't meant to have someone in my life? Would the beast kill him?

Emmalyn pulled me into my oca and gave me a cup of tea. She must have had Nixie make it up while I was cleaning the cauldron. I took it gratefully and sipped it slowly, letting it relax me.

"Are you alright? You were crying." Emmalyn said softly.

I shook my head. "I'm ne."

"You don't have to be strong about this, Clover. You should request an audience with Queen Bellamy and show her. I read the word 'beast', but I had no idea what it was referring to. That was one of the most terrifying things I've ever seen. Let the collective help." She insisted.

"I just got into the collective. I don't want to be too much trouble. What if she kicks me out for bringing something like that to her door?" I asked.

"Queen Bellamy isn't like that. She faces enemies head on. Even though she was safely here, she traveled out to where the hunters were attacking and participated in the ght against them last year. There were almost forty-ve hunters. She could have died. She was pregnant with her last set of pups, but she came out to support us. She'll support you, too. Come on. I'll show you how to request it." Emmalyn said and went to my computer.

I sipped my tea as she lled out the request on the website. She agged it as urgent. I really hoped this wasn't a bad idea.

"Stay in here until you're feeling more like yourself. We'll take care of everything. I can go pull tea if Nixie needs me. I'm going to see if Maya can come in early. You and I can close up tonight and let her go home early." She told me and patted my shoulder.

She left the oca and I found myself staring into space as I sipped my tea. I'd only ever tried a leaf reading once and I'd seen the fangs, but not everything else. My mind tried to process what that thing was.

How could an animal witch be under threat of a creature? I should've been able to talk it out of hurting me. It didn't look like that thing would understand anything I tried to say to it.

Tears slid down my cheeks. I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have tried to show off. I just wanted the vision to show someone other than Steven.

What did I do to deserve this future? I knew reincarnation was possible, but I didn't know what I could have done in a past life to have a completely innocent life punished. I couldn't even harm insects because I could talk to them.

I nished my tea and cleaned my face. I needed to take care of my shop and my people. I would deal with the beast when the time came. With luck, Queen Bellamy would be able to help.

Heading out to the teahouse, I found Maya was already there and helping Nixie. They waved me off when I offered to help as well. I went around, wiping tables and taking dishes to the back to be cleaned.

After spending some time in the back washing dishes, I went back to the shop. We were doing brisk business and I went around restocking whatever we were low on. I helped a few customers nd things and answered some questions.

I was feeling more myself by the time the last customer left. Emmalyn took care of the registers while Jen helped me straighten up and do a nal restocking. I wanted there to be very little to do when we came in on Monday.

Jen gave me a hug after she grabbed her things.

"Have fun on your date tonight." I said.

"I'll do my best. Are you going to be okay? You haven't really been yourself since the spell." She asked.

"I've never seen the beast so clearly. It was shocking. I'm better now. I'll be ne. Go, I want you to call me tomorrow and tell me all about your date with Paul." I smiled.

"If you're sure. I can always cancel and hang out with you and Emmalyn." Jen offered.

"Absolutely not. Get out of here." I shoood her away.

Jen shrugged and waved before she left. I started pulling the blinds down. Once we closed up the shop, Emmalyn came with me to go drop the deposit at the bank.

We stopped and picked up some Chinese food on our way back. It was a great option when avoiding meats and having dinner with someone who didn't have that sort of restriction.

When we arrived back at home, we carried our mini-feast up the stairs and unloaded it in the kitchen. We carefully sorted the containers, so I didn't end up with anything with meat in it, and went to the table to eat. We'd been chatting casually, but not really gotten into anything.

Halfway through dinner, there was a lull in the conversation. I think we were both pretty spaced out through most of it. There was a lot of getting to know you sorts of things. We were feeling each other out a bit more.

"So, the thing with Derrick last night." I said.

She sighed. "I was so drunk. I'm never drinking that much again."

"You know that drinking lowers your inhibitions. It makes you do things that you wouldn't normally do. It also makes you do things you want to do." I suggested.

"Are you saying you think I want to sleep with Derrick?" Emmalyn gasped.

"Look, I have no clue what is going on with your relationship with him. You say he's a stalker and him showing up like that last night, twice, would have me believing it. You also spent half the night drunkenly ranting about how attractive he was and something about licking caramel sauce off his washboard abs. I have never thought about that with Steven." I shuddered a little.

"He said you almost kissed in seventh grade." She pointed out.

"I almost kissed him, but I felt the urge to throw up intensely and ran away. I was desperate for a boyfriend. I never had any trouble kissing any other guy, just Steven. But you never had that problem with Derrick. You said you kissed him last night." I countered.

Emmalyn growled in frustration and stabbed at the noodles in her box. I ate a little more while she sat with that. There was something about their relationship that didn't seem like it was entirely one sided.

"You don't understand. He's a womanizer, Clover. Every woman is a conquest to him. I'm attracted to him, physically. If not for the fact that I was so nervous, I wouldn't have been focusing on the fact that he was a womanizer. That was the only thing that gave me the strength to refuse him like I did. I just kept picturing my ex...." She said softly.

"Your ex?" I asked.

"I was dating this guy, Curt. We were together for three years. Talking about getting married and all those things. We lived together, Clover. We worked different jobs and I was only part-time so I could still take care of the house and have dinner ready when he got home. I was sinking into this role of perfect little witch wife. My life revolved around him. Being his girlfriend, his ancée, that was my whole identity. Amelia told me I was too young to dedicate my life to one man. Of course, she's with Finn now and plans to stay with him forever." Emmalyn explained.

"What happened with Curt?" I pressed.

"I got a call one day from a woman. She told me that she was Curt's coworker. I'd never been contacted by his coworkers before and thought it was an emergency. I freaked out a little that he could be hurt. Then, she told me that she slept with Curt."

"That bitch."

"She wasn't calling to rub it in. She overheard him and searched me out. No one at Curt's work knew he had a girlfriend or was engaged. At least, none of the women. He and his friends kept that quiet and he never took me to company events. I never even knew when they were. He would tell me he was going out with friends. I was never surprised when he didn't come home until the next day. His friends were all witches too. He would go to their houses to get remedies for the marks he would get with other women." She went on.

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I fed him a truth spell at dinner that night and asked him. He told me that he loved me, but I was boring in bed. He liked going after women and winning them. He liked the adventurous things they did in bed with him. He liked charming them into doing the things I wouldn't do. Curt told me I would do for his other needs and for having children with. He said I was acceptable to his family and my magic worked well with his. He was an earth witch, too, just not as strong as me." Emmalyn shrugged.

"Tell me you castrated him." I said.

Emmalyn laughed. "No. I cried. I cried and I pulled my runes and they told me to leave. So I packed up as much as I could carry and moved into Amelia's guest room. I was still recovering from it when we went to help with the curse. It had only been two months after I left Curt that I met Derrick. I was over being sad and I was full of anger at what he'd done to me. I didn't think Derrick would become obsessed with me when I turned him down. Just being in that situation made me feel sick for the entire day after."

"And the attempted kidnapping?" I asked.

"I think he knocked me out. I killed a hunter and, next thing I know, everything went black. When I came to, I was hanging over his shoulder and he was moving through the forest. I didn't know what to do. I started ghting back and he kept swearing that he'd free me once I calmed down and got to know him better. I was so angry. I wasn't even scared. I was just pissed that he would decide I was his." She said.

"You're attracted to Derrick, but you don't want to get involved with him because you don't want to be used like Curt used you again. Did I get it right?"

"Yeah. I can't trust him and I'm not going to. You were right when you did your soulmate search. It's the only way to get away from men like Derrick and Curt. I just wanted time to heal." Emmalyn told me.

"Are you really ready for that?" I asked.

"I'm twenty-ve, Clover. Most witches do their searches as soon as they're eighteen. They want to nd their perfect match and plan for their future. I had decided to wait until I was nished with school, then I met Curt and decided I didn't need to. Maybe it will help me heal. How about next weekend? We can do a sleepover at my place next Saturday. Maybe invite Jen and my sister." She smiled.

"That sounds great. We can order pizza and stuff. It's got to be better than how mine went." I laughed.

She chuckled and nodded her head. We nished dinner then sat in the living room and I had her tell me everything about vampires. I wanted to be prepared for everything and she'd lived with them for a couple weeks. Time seemed to y by and my alarm went off indicating that it was dusk. Time to get started.