

## Saying Goodbye

The next day, Auntie Tonya and I had breakfast, then headed out to sign the papers and transfer ownership of the shop to me. We went to the bank and had me added to the accounts as an account holder. I started my own personal account at the bank with the money I'd brought with me.

My savings wasn't huge, living with my parents cut down on my expenses. Money was given to me on my birthday and holidays. I worked a modest oce job while trying to gure out my life and spent only a very little. Over the last four years, I'd managed to get a small nest egg of about ten thousand dollars. It was more than enough for this place.

Once that was all settled, we went to the shop and Auntie Tonya refreshed my memory on when which suppliers would deliver, where everything was, and what the combination to the safe was. We removed her wards and spells to replace them with my own. It would make it easier for me to create my own potions and spells in the backroom.

"I think that's everything. The shop is scheduled to be closed for the next week so you can get everything in order." She smiled as we left the oce.

"Thank you so much for thinking of me, Auntie Tonya." I said.

"You're the only one I could imagine taking over for me, Clover. No one else harmonizes with the shop as much as you do." Auntie Tonya said, taking my hand and patting it gently.

"I wish there was more time for us to hang out."

"I know, but you had so many things to wrap up and I didn't want to wait another two months to start my journey. I'll come home from time to time to check up on you. We have a lot of good friends and neighbors. Speaking of that, we need to get you registered in the collective so that you have the protection of the rogues here too." She replied thoughtfully as we headed upstairs.

"The collective?" I asked.

"Yes, in the last few years a lot has changed for this area. You should have visited sooner and I would have told you. There's a rogue queen who mated with the Alpha at Lune Rouge. Her collective spans most of the state and a little into Washington and western Idaho. She admits all supernaturals and offers her protection. It means that you can join her collective and reap the benets of their protection. She even allows us to go into the pack lands to collect plants for spells." Auntie Tonya told me.

"That's nice. There can be a lot of things on pack lands that are useful, since they rarely do bad things to the surrounding forest. How do I register?"

She went to her ancient computer and red it up. I made us some tea, since it could take a while to get it going. By the time I brought our cups back, she had logged onto the internet and was pulling up the application on a website.

I looked it over. It all seemed to be pretty basic. Description and vital information, a place to upload a photo, a place to enter in what I was and what I planned to do with my life as a witch in the region. At the end, I had to read through the list of promises I was making by applying and the list of promises the queen was making by accepting.

Though this all seemed a little odd, I went with it. The benets far outweighed the risks, and Auntie Tonya said everything was running smoothly for her. I wanted to have that sort of security. I would just keep telling myself it was worth it until I saw otherwise.

With my application sent off, I sat with Auntie Tonya for a little longer, sipping our tea. We had to nish her packing, and I would drive her over to Portland to check into her hotel. Her ship was leaving in the morning.

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When I nished my tea, she pulled my cup from my hands and looked at the leaves. I sighed. No one ever saw anything useful in my leaves. Just the same thing I always see.

"Hmm." She sighed.

"Just the beast. I have no future other than that. Even the water witches only see it. Everything will be ne. I have no idea when it's coming for me. I may be a little old lady by the time I have to worry about it." I assured her.

She didn't look entirely convinced. There was nothing to add any information. All we saw was a creature. We couldn't make out exactly what it was or how large it was. Only that it had claws and fangs. No one knew what it meant.

"I had hoped your abilities had grown enough that it would have changed. I hoped maybe this move would have changed it, or joining the collective."

I put my hand on her arm. "I'll be careful. It may not be a bad omen. It could be a good thing."

"I don't know how a monster like that could be a good thing, but I know you will do what you will do." Auntie Tonya said.

We cleaned up and nished up her packing. We loaded her cases into my truck. There would be a car service to help her get everything to the docks in the morning, so I didn't have to worry about her being unable to move her things.

On the way out of town, I stopped and took the u-haul trailer back to the local rental oce. I didn't want to have to pay for another day on the rental, or try maneuvering the thing through the busy streets of Portland. That was not the sort of adventure I was looking for.

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A few hours later, we arrived at her hotel. I helped her get checked in and take her bags up to the room. We went to have an early dinner at a restaurant down the road.

We settled into our seats and looked over the menu. There wasn't much that didn't have meat in it. I ordered a salad and some sautéed mushrooms. When our meal was delivered, I was starving.

"I wanted to make sure you know that I hired two young witches to take on the work at the teahouse some time ago. They both have an anity for the leaves, even though they don't have plant magic. Once a week, I keep it open until midnight, unless that night falls on a full moon." Auntie Tonya said.

"Why?" I asked.

"Vampires. The girls have recipes for several types of blood tea. I found that keeping the shop open for vampires once a week can almost triple our sales for the week. They love to come in and order cup after cup of tea while socializing. Some of them even indulge in leaf readings. Not that they take it very seriously, but it's fun for them." She smiled.

"You serve vampires?" I gasped.

"You will too. Being part of the collective means that we serve anyone who comes into our shop. You'll see fae, shifters, other witches, and vampires. All of them will be your neighbors. You may even make friends with a few of them. I found some dear friends among some of the younger vampires. People who would be my age if they were still alive. Plus my oldest friend, Talia." Auntie Tonya replied.

"That's so cool. I can't wait to meet a vampire for the rst time. Are there a lot of different shifters or are they mainly werewolves?" I asked.

"Almost any tpe you could think of. More live out there than here in Portland. They don't like the busyness of the major cities. They would rather stay in the rural areas around home and come in when they need things." She told me.

"I wonder if I'll make friends with them. I just have to get over that fainting thing." I chuckled.

"I forgot about that. It hasn't gotten any better?" She asked.

"I get really dizzy now, but I faint around the more powerful ones, especially in their animal form. It's annoying. The positive about this move will be getting used to being around them. Then I'll be able to learn to function even though they're around." I grinned.

"Well, I hope it's not all bad. You should hire someone to help in the shop until you can control it. I have a lot of shifter customers there. On my desk in the oce is a list of witches who would be good options to hire and help you out. Don't try to be strong on this. I don't want you to end up hurt because you tried to handle everything on your own, dear." Auntie Tonya warned.

"I won't. I promise. I'll hire a couple people, just so I can be sure there is someone with me when anyone comes." I told her.

"You've made an oath to me. Don't break it. You don't want the bad luck that comes with breaking a promise to a fae." She said sternly.

"Auntie. I'm the good one. I never break my oaths and I don't lie. You can trust me." I laughed.

"I know. I just got all grumpy in my old age." She chuckled. "You're my precious one. I know you're a good girl."

We nished our meal while Auntie Tonya talked about her friends from the shop. She talked about the rogue queen, Bellamy, and what a stir she caused when she took over the territory two years ago.

I hadn't been to visit Auntie Tonya for three years. I was trying to start up my life and nd direction, but didn't realize this was the direction I was heading all along. The shop was always in my heart.

She went on about meeting every ranked wolf in the pack, as they came in for different things. The Gamma, Richard, was in all the time to see if the leaves would say something about his mate. He was the only one who didn't have one.

The Alpha would come by for different little charms for his mate. He would also get morning sickness treatments for her, since she was pregnant again. I thought it was sweet. Auntie Tonya told me it was her third pregnancy. They didn't seem to be able to go a year without another little litter being born.

Soon, we were nished with our meal. I took Auntie Tonya back to her hotel before heading home. If I was quick, I would be able to stop off at the electronics store in town and get a newer computer. I wanted a desktop to replace the one that Auntie Tonya had in her oce. I would use my laptop in the apartment.

At the store, I found an associate who was more than willing to help me pick out a computer for the business. I bought all the software that I needed while I was there as well. I wanted to make sure I had everything I needed for the shop.

The boy helped me take my purchases to my truck and load it up. The entire time he was irting. I couldn't help but be a little atttered, but there was no way he was over eighteen. I wasn't going to get involved in something illegal, no matter how cute he was.

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Once I was back home, I lugged the heavy box out of the back of my truck and into the shop. It took a little while to set up. I wasn't the most tech savvy, but I did well enough. I installed my anti-virus, oce suite, and bookkeeping software. I made a backup from the old computer and transferred it over to the new one.

After that, I worked on wiping the hard drive. I wanted to make sure the computer was clean of any personal information before taking it to donate to a second hand store. I wanted the computer to go to someone who needed it. It wasn't that it was bad, just old.

Newer than the one up in the apartment.