

Foraging

Monday seemed to y by. Josh stopped by with a rst aid kit, a gps tracker, and some mushroom jerky. I laughed.

"I love snacking on jerky when I hike. I thought you might like some. I have a vegan client and they told me where to nd this." He smiled.

"Thank you. I'll make sure to think of you when I eat it." I said with a wink.

"I don't know whether or not to be worried about that, so I'm going to go with being happy." Josh chuckled.

"Really, thanks, Josh. You're a good friend." I told him, gathering the items and taking them to the oce.

When I came back, he was leaning against the counter, talking to Jen. She was blushing like she had when we'd asked her about Paul before opening. I could hear him pressing her as I approached.

"Come on. Paul won't say anything. He's not a sharer. How was the date? Did he treat you right? I'm his boss and I'll kick his ass if he didn't." Josh said.

"It was ne. He was a perfect gentleman. I just... I don't know if I like him like that. Please don't tell him! I agreed to another date. I want to be sure before I break it off with him." Jen told him.

"Normally you would just nope on out mid-date." I said. "You must be growing up."

"I'm careful now. I want to be sure I feel no connection. There was something with Paul, but I'm not sure if it was a connection or if it was just a good date." She shrugged.

"I won't say anything to him. Just don't string him along too much. He's a good man." Josh smiled. "I better get moving. I have a meeting with a client in an hour."

I gave him a quick hug and he headed out. We didn't have as many customers that afternoon as we did when we rst opened. I was ne with that.

Around four in the afternoon, a good looking man came in. I felt a small wave of dizziness, so I knew he was a shapeshifter. He looked around brie y and then came to the counter.

He was a little over six feet tall with copper colored hair and a muscular build. I was getting good at telling who was a werewolf. All the males were pretty tall and looked strong.

"Can I help you nd something?" I asked.

"I heard someone here does a different type of fortunetelling. Something other than the tealeaves. I was hoping to get a reading done. I'm Richard Dubois. I'm the Gamma at Lune Rouge." He said proudly.

"Emmalyn, are you available for a casting?" I asked.

"Sure, if you can take over for me." She replied.

I nodded and moved behind the counter. Emmalyn led Richard to the teahouse and they sat at one of the tables. I looked over and saw Jen staring after him.

"You like him?" I asked.

"He's hot. I know all about him, though. You know the air carries secrets." Jen whispered.

"Auntie Tonya said he doesn't have a mate. I know werewolves are all about nding and cherishing their mates. I met a werewolf when I was a kid who said that's all they think about from the time they get their wolves until they nd their mates." I replied.

"His mate died. They were connected, so he felt her die. He's been waiting and hoping for a second chance mate. He just took on the role of Gamma full time, so he doesn't have a ton of time to search. They give him time off for the mate gatherings, but he still hasn't found her." She said.

I saw him nish drawing the crystals. Emmalyn turned them over one at a time and started talking to him. I saw his face light up.

"Can you hear what Emmalyn is telling him?" I asked.

Jen sighed. "The goddess wants him to focus on his pack and his mate will come to him when she's ready. He's pretty excited. He got his second chance mate. Now he just has to be patient."

"I'm happy for him. This can only be good for the shop's relationship with the local pack. I'm going to the pack lands on Wednesday, you know. I wonder what I can nd there." I said.

"Just don't get dizzy and go tumbling off a cliff or something. There's all sorts of terrain out there. The last thing we want is to lose our boss." She chuckled.

"I'll be ne, Jen. I've done trips to gather components before. Don't worry about me. Just worry about you and Emmalyn running the shop without me here to save you." I winked.

She laughed and we started checking out customers who nished shopping. When Richard left, Emmalyn came back. She seemed fairly content. I was glad to have her.

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When Wednesday rolled around, I got up early and packed my bag. It had plenty of room for whatever I could nd. I lled my canteens with water and slipped a box of zipper bags into the pack for holding all my ingredients.

After a little though, I went to the shop and gathered ingredients for a healing salve. It was a good idea to have on hand in case I did fall and got some bruises. Gathering ingredients could be dangerous, I wasn't foolish enough to think I'd get out of there without some pain.

I locked the shop up again and headed to my truck. Once there, I pulled out the email I'd gotten and looked at the instructions for how to get where I was going. I didn't want to get lost before I even got there.

The drive was lovely. I went from the lowland valley the city was in, to the tree covered hills. The vibrant green of the trees made me feel happy.

As I drove, I passed two spiraling trees and slowed. This was where I was told I would nd warriors. A couple men seemed to melt out of the forest on the side of the road. I stopped my truck and rolled down my window.

"Can we help you nd something?" One of the men asked.

"I'm Clover Harrison. I have permission to be on the pack lands today." I told him and showed him the printed email.

He looked it over carefully and asked for my ID to conrm who I was. I pulled out my wallet and gave it to him. He eyed it suspiciously.

"I just moved here from Nevada. I haven't had a chance to get an Oregon driver's license." I explained.

The warrior handed my ID and the email back. He got a distant look in his eye for a few moments, then nodded.

"My captain conrmed everything, Miss Harrison. Just follow the instructions on the map and park in the assigned area. If the afternoon shift doesn't see you leave by dusk, we'll send out a search party." He said.

"Thank you." I replied and put my things away before driving off.

I carefully followed the directions, pulling off at a little dirt road and driving down the rutted path until I reached a dirt covered clearing. According to my print-out, that was where I was to park. I found a spot that looked mostly level and set both my parking break and my emergency break. I didn't want to risk my truck rolling anywhere.

Getting out, I slipped my pack on before locking the truck doors. I took a deep breath and straightened out my outt. I had khaki shorts and a bright orange t-shirt. It made me more visible if something happened.

There was a path leading into the forest. I walked along it and soaked in the feeling of being around free growing plants. They were always so happy.

Bush branches reached out to touch me. I gave them a gentle pat as I made my way deeper into the tree line. Some would tell me where interesting plants were. I wandered off the path and clipped a few.

Clipping was more gentle than pulling. I wanted to cause as little trauma to the plants as possible. I sought out plants that were overgrown and couldn't support the branches, leaves, and owers they put out. It was like I was pruning the forest.

After a couple hours, I came out of the forest to see some hills with dry grasses. This was a mix of forest and high desert. Jen had been right about the differing terrains. I would be able to get so many more things than if this were entirely forest.

I took some clippings and dug out some mushrooms before I headed over to the grassy area. I decided I would sit and have my lunch once I got to the top of the rst hill. It would give me a better view of the land.

As I walked, I came across a family of ground squirrels who told me there were some tasty berries on the other side of that hill, but falcons and hawks patrolled the skies. I thanked them for the information and gave them some of my trail snacks. It would cement my relationship with the wild animals in the area.

At the top of the hill, I could see the bushes the squirrels were talking about. There was a wild blackberry patch there. I could see the birds of prey circling, looking for something to hunt.

I smiled and set out a cloth to sit on while I grabbed my sandwich and fruit from my pack. It was a really nice day. There were clouds, which broke up the sunshine a bit, but they weren't rain clouds, just cheerfully puffy white clouds.

When I nished with my meal, I put everything away and headed down the other side of the hill. I met a snake along the way who told me about some rocks he liked to sun himself on. Getting directions from animals was always a little dicult. A lot of landmarks that you can't really see from my height.

Heading off in the direction he told me, I was excited. There were plants that really enjoyed rocky, cliff like areas. I could get some good stuff that way.

I reached the area he told me about a half an hour later. I could only imagine how often he really got to go out there. It was another hill with big at boulders. As I crested the hill, I saw that the other side was a steep drop off.

The craggy area was full of life. It was protected from the sun for most of the day and I could practically hear the bustling of the creatures who lived there. Birds nested in some of the divots in the rock, centipedes and other insects lived under those rocks and in the smaller crevasses.

It was about a twenty foot drop to the bottom. I would have to be careful while I was collecting. I took a deep breath and called my power. I needed to let the inhabitants know I was coming, so they wouldn't attack.

"Hello, everyone." I said. "I'm Clover. I am not a predator. I am here to gather plants. I promise to be as careful in your home as possible, but I apologize in advance if I accidentally cause harm."

Some birds eyed me suspiciously from their nest. "Stay away from our chicks and there won't be any problem. You come close to our babies and we'll peck your eyes out."

"Got it." I replied.

I carefully began climbing over the edge. There were a lot of decent foot holds as I made my way to some owers I saw growing out of some rocks. When I reached them, I held on to the rock above me while I carefully stepped onto a lower ledge. I took off my pack and got out my bags and shears before I pruned off some leaves and a few buds.

There was some lichen growing on a stone within arm's reach. I got a little scraper tool from my bag and scraped some into a zipper bag. I was excited about nding so much good stuff, that I didn't pay attention to where I was stepping.

A part of the ledge I was standing on started to crumble away and I jumped, gripping the rocks in the wall as the rest of the dirt compacted around the stony ledge began to crumble. My pack tumbled down the ten foot drop along with most of what I had been standing on.

I tried to get a foothold again, but nothing below my feet seemed to be stable. I tried swinging up to get a higher handhold, but couldn't nd anything stable directly above me. I needed to either get back to the top, or get down to the bottom, hopefully in one piece. I decided to move sideways and see if I could nd a stable place to climb from the top.

My hands and arms were getting tired of trying to hold my full weight for so long. I realized that I didn't have long to come up with an idea. I was going to fall and the rocky ground below me would not be very forgiving. I needed help.