

## Meetings

I decided to go to the store and get stuff for lunch with Josh. It would be better for us to have this conversation in private. Goddess only knows who could hear us.

The entire time I was focusing on everything I could remember about Stanton. I mindlessly picked out the ingredients for my mom's meatloaf. There was some plant-based meat that I was going to try working with. My parents always refused to try it because they said it couldn't be the same.

As I shopped, I replayed my time since I'd moved here. This had to be the direction the goddess wanted for me. If I had stayed in my coven town, I wouldn't have ever met Stanton.

I chuckled. When I rst heard the name Stanton.... Wait! I heard the name before! I suddenly remembered Talia's offhand comment about ipping for the beast against Stanton! There couldn't possibly be more than one.

Pulling out my phone, I dialed her number. I realized it was the middle of the day and hung up. I would have to wait until the sun went down.

It made me feel much better knowing that I had a way to contact him. Talia would tell me. She seemed like a really cool person, for being a vampire.

The rest of my shopping trip seemed to y by. I went home and started cooking lunch after I texted Josh that he should come up to my apartment for lunch. While it was in the oven, I worked on straightening things up and checked my email.

When the meal was done, I plated it up and set the table. There was a knock on my door and I went to answer it. Josh smiled at me and swept me into a hug. I hugged him back.

"You want to eat or fool around rst?" He murmured into my ear.

"We're not fooling around, Josh. Come in." I said and pulled away.

He followed me into the apartment. I led him over to the dining table and we sat down. Josh looked impressed.

"You made meatloaf? I thought you didn't eat meat." Josh chuckled.

"It's not meat. I've been told by people that it tastes and feels like meat, though. I hope you like it." I replied.

He looked a little apprehensive, but took a bite. After chewing thoughtfully for a few moments, he nodded and smiled at me.

"Perfect. If I didn't know it wasn't meat, I would have thought it was. This is really tasty meatloaf, Clover."

"It's my mom's recipe. I'm so glad you like it." I grinned.

We ate quietly for a little while. I knew what I wanted to say to him. With luck, Josh would understand and not be too upset with me. It had only been a week or two since we rst started talking.

"So, I'm guessing you didn't just call me over to return my things. What's up? You said we weren't fooling around. Do you need a domme session? It seems like something's bothering you." He offered.

"I need to talk to you about our relationship." I replied.

"Oh, god. Don't tell me this is the conversation where you say you can't do this without having a real relationship with me." Josh groaned.

I laughed. "No. I could have kept on doing this with you for a long time, but... I found my soulmate, Josh. I can't sleep with you anymore. I can't cheat on him."

He looked shocked. "I didn't realize you were looking for your soulmate."

"I wasn't. He found me while I was hiking. He saved me from a pretty bad accident." I told him.

"And you love him already?" Josh asked.

"I do. It's strange. I always heard there was a little tug and it made loving them easier, but I feel that love for him. Like it was always there, just waiting for him to show up and claim it." I replied with a blush.

"That's how it is for werewolves. One of my clients is a pack wolf. When he found his mate, it was all he could talk about. He said it was like there was a special spot in his heart where he'd always held her and, when he nally met her, it lit up. I'm happy for you. I'm sad for me, it's only been a little while and I'm already having to go back to doing without." He chuckled.

"Will you still be my friend, even if I can't be your f\*\*k buddy?" I asked.

"I don't really know what's in it for me anymore." Josh laughed. "Kidding. Of course. A wingwoman is better than a wingman any day. Women trust other women. Maybe you and your soulmate...? Boyfriend? Whatever, can come out with me this weekend and see what kind of girls we can snag."

"Oh, you don't want him standing beside you. Women will compare the two of you and you would lose." I answered with a wink.

"Just because you think he's hot, doesn't mean other women will. He's probably some submissive cave troll." He snorted.

I pulled out my phone and pulled up my 'safe for friends' picture of Stanton. Josh's eyes widened and he took the phone from my hand to look more closely.

"Damn. Lock him up and never let any other woman see him. He's going to ruin it for the rest of us. Are there more hot people in the pack lands? I might have to ask to go for a visit. If I could nd someone half as hot as him, I'd be one hell of a lucky man." Josh said, giving my phone back.

"I didn't know you were into guys." I smirked.

"I'm bisexual, actually. It's okay, I won't hit on your man. When do I get to meet him? He's obviously not here. Is he at work?" He asked.

"Maybe. I had to leave the pack lands by dusk. He probably went home after that. I'll see him again and we can plan it out." I smiled.

"You don't know if he has a job? What do you know about him, Clover?"

I blushed. "His name is Stanton Bruinwald and he's a werebear. He's not a member of the collective."

"That's not a lot. What did you guys talk about? Didn't you get to know each other better?" Josh pressed.

"We... um... got to know each other in a different way."

He laughed. "That sounds like you. Talk to him about going out to dinner. I'll make reservations for Sunday night. We can have Jen and Emmalyn come along too. That way we can frame it as having your friends get to know him."

I didn't want to tell him that I didn't know how to reach Stanton, so I just nodded. I knew I would nd him soon. It shouldn't be hard to get him to agree to a date, unless he was mad at me. I could only hope that he understood my reasoning.

We nished our meal and chatted casually. It went a lot better than I thought it would. Josh really was a good friend. I couldn't believe I was worried. He had always seen this as a friends with benets situation. I loved him for that.

Josh left and I cleaned up from the meal. There wasn't much I could do but wait. I hated waiting, but I'd done all I could until the sun set and Talia woke up.

I sat down with my notebook and started drawing. I was planning to draw the beast for Talia. I wasn't a great artist, but I was good enough to get the image across. The beast was coming and I had to protect myself and my soulmate.

-

[Derrick]

-

Before the sun set, I got a call from Finn. He didn't say my name, so I assumed he was near Amelia. I wouldn't force the issue. I didn't want to get him in trouble with his mate.

"Hey, man. I got that information for you. I know we weren't supposed to meet until Friday, but do you want to get it tonight instead?" Finn asked.

"Yeah. That works for me. Same place?" I said.

"Sounds good. I can be there an hour after dark. I'll let you go and meet up with you there." He replied and hung up.

I was thrilled that he'd gotten back to me sooner than planned. It would push up my timeline. I could have my Emma soon. If nothing else, I could avenge her.

Whoever had hurt her must have gotten his ass whipped. If she was screaming at and hitting me, who hadn't been dating her, I couldn't imagine her doing any less to him. I'd still kick his ass for breaking my girl's heart. Just in case he forgot whatever lesson Emma taught him.

Once the sun was down, I got ready to head out to the vamp bar. I didn't want to be late and have him change his mind about meeting me. This was the most important job I had, at the moment.

I showed the bartender my ID and ordered a few drinks from him, including a blood and beer for Finn. It was the least I could do. He was being a huge help. I found a table near the back of the bar and waited.

About fteen minutes after I got settled, Finn came in. He looked around for a moment and I waved him down. Finn crossed the bar and sat in the chair across from mine. I pushed the beer toward him and he drank deeply.

"Thanks." He said as he set the mug down.

"No problem. What have you got?" I asked.

"Curt Hadley, twenty-ve, in advertisement for a company downtown. He and Emmalyn dated for three years. Amelia said they were talking marriage and moved in together after year two. They met in college." Finn said, sliding a photograph toward me.

I looked at the man who had hurt my Emma. If they were talking marriage, that meant she thought he was the love of her life. He looked like a smarmy f\*\*k.

He had black hair that was slicked back and a s\*\*t-eating grin as he talked to some woman. I wanted to punch him just for how he looked. One of those people I just hated on sight. Maybe it was because of what he did to Emma.

"What did he do to my Emma?" I questioned as I looked at the photograph.

"He was cheating on her. Slept with a ton of women. One of them found out he was dating someone and contacted her. Amelia said that Emmalyn did an honesty spell. Um... Heart's Truth... or something like that. He told Emmalyn that she was 'acceptable' but that he needed more variety in his bed. It was implied that he'd even intended to keep sleeping with other women after they were married. Amelia was pissed." He answered.

"What did Emma do to him?"

"Nothing. He broke her. She thought she had met her soulmate, found him without a spell. She cried, packed up her things, and left. That was two months before she met you. You understand now, right?" Finn asked.

"I understand. She had her heart broken by a womanizer and before she could heal, another was hitting on her. No wonder she hated me." I sighed.

"I talked to a few of this guy's friends. It turns out, he's been telling them that he dumped Emmalyn because she was boring in bed and he's been telling women that his girlfriend left him because she fell out of love with him right before he could propose to her. The wounded bird thing really gets women going. They want to help him heal. Frankly, I want to kick his ass too." He growled.

"Let me take care of this one. I'm already a known troublemaker in the collective. Queen Bellamy will just chalk it up to my crazy nature. I might end up in Goddess' Tears again, but I can deal." I shrugged.

"He's an earth witch. Don't discount his ability to protect himself. You didn't hear anything from me. Got it?" Finn said.

"Got it. What are you going to work on now? You wrapped this up pretty quick." I asked, sipping my drink.

"Emmalyn's boss has some sort of a beast after her. Talia and I are going to hunt it down. I didn't want to split my ability, so I got your stuff faster than I liked. With luck, Amelia didn't notice how interested I was in her sister's dating history and she just thought I was trying to get to know her family better." Finn muttered into his glass.

"Let me know if you need help with the beast. I'm always up for a ght and I owe you for helping me out. You got my number." I said as I polished off my drink and stood. "I'm here if you need me."

"I'll remember that. Goddess only knows what this thing is. This is a matter for the collective anyway, so I can explain your involvement away like that." He told me.

I nodded and headed out. The address for this Curt, was on the back of the photo. I was going to go watch him before I made my move. Maybe get in with him and his friends a little.

It didn't matter that he was a witch. I was going to avenge my Emma. She wouldn't be able to resist me when she saw that I gave this bastard what he deserved.