

Found

[Clover]

Last night, I'd gotten ahold of Talia, but she refused to give me Stanton's information. Later, I'd gotten a call from Queen Bellamy's assistant and she refused as well. I was so mad I wanted to throw my phone.

I stormed down to the shop. I had to work today. It was Emmalyn's day off and Jen would be on her own if I weren't there. We'd worked it out so that each person got a week day off.

Two days a week, I worked in the teahouse. On Thursday, everyone had been scheduled this week because Emmalyn needed to go to an appointment on Friday. It worked out for me a little.

My focus was better today. Even though I hadn't been able to reach Stanton, someone had to have let him know I was looking for him. I'd talked to several people who knew him and the Queen's assistant said she would let him know.

I met Jen outside the shop and we went to prepare everything for the day. I considered hiring a person who could wait between the teahouse and the shop. They would work four days a week and it would help for the times that I needed to be busy elsewhere.

After the first few people came in, we saw a larger influx. I was amazed at how many witches came in. We didn't have much downtime until after lunch.

"I didn't expect to see so many people. Do you think it's because it's right before the full moon weekend? Because we're closed tomorrow?" I asked Jen.

She looked down and away. I knew that look. She didn't want to say.

Part of Jen's anxiety was being able to hear things. She would be able to hear secrets and whispers. She could even call them up from weeks past. What she said was true, the air carried secrets. All she had to do was focus on a person and she could hear things about them.

"It's because Emmalyn isn't here." She whispered. "They don't want to come into the shop when she's here because they think dark energy follows her. You know, because of her sister."

"That's such bullshit. We don't have a say in who our soulmates are." I growled.

"No, but we have a say in whether or not we accept them. She chose to accept the vampire as her mate. Emmalyn didn't disown or disavow her for it. They see her as just as dark as Amelia." Jen said.

"Amelia isn't even dark, though! I met her. She's a very sweet girl." I insisted.

"You don't have to convince me. My parents are the epitome of mighty air witches, but they believe it's the witch who chooses light and dark. The goddess wouldn't have made her soulmate a vampire if she thought it would change the kind of witch Amelia is. And that has absolutely nothing to do with Emmalyn." She sighed.

"I hate them all for that." I said.

"Hate them quietly. Doing it out loud is bad for business." Jen told me and turned to greet the customers that came in.

I relied on the empty stock during the quiet time when we only had a handful of people. My anger at those bigoted witches boiled inside me. It reminded me of my old coven and how they treated me as an outcast when I refused Steven.

Soon, another influx of customers came in. I scooted back behind the counter to help with checkout again. I couldn't let them affect me. I put on my customer service smile and got right to work.

We did brisk business. I talked with people about the spells they were working and made suggestions for potions to people who needed to figure out what to use. A few humans came in for charms and we had a couple buy smudge sticks. More and more humans were using them for cleansing spaces.

An hour before closing time, I called up the last person in, what had been, a very long line. It was Steven. He was the last person I wanted to see today.

I rang up the ingredients he was buying. Mentally, I would try to figure out what spell a person was looking to cast when they bought small amounts of things, like he was. It was a protection spell.

"What are you making a protection spell for?" I asked, unable to quiet my curiosity.

"I'm making it for you, Clo. You're always thinking of everyone else. I figured you hadn't even thought of ways to protect yourself yet. I'll take care of you. You're my soulmate." He smiled.

"Steven. For the last time, I am not your soulmate." I sighed.

"You say that because you're blocked from seeing how perfect we are together. It was that beast. It took over your soulmate search. It blocked you from seeing that it's me. Don't worry. I'll get rid of the beast and we can be together." Steven said.

He grabbed my hand and held it. I tried to pull away, but he held tight. I tried again and he gripped even tighter.

"Steven. Stop. That hurts." I hissed.

Suddenly, a large, dark hand gripped his wrist. I looked up. I was so preoccupied with Steven that I hadn't even seen Stanton come in. He looked pissed.

"Don't ever touch my mate." Stanton growled and squeezed Steven's wrist, making him whimper.

"Stanton. Let him go." I said.

"He was saying he was your soulmate. He touched you without permission. By bear law, I can challenge him." He replied.

"He's not my soulmate, you are. I've told him I have no interest in him. He was my friend for a very long time, though. I would rather if he didn't get hurt because he can't let go of something he was promised." I pled.

"You're the one my mate was promised to? How could anyone think a weak little witch like you was worthy of my tigress?" Stanton scoffed and released Steven's wrist, causing him to stumble a bit.

I looked around. Most of the customers had gone, but there were a few watching what was going on from a few feet away. I glanced at Jen, who was staring at Stanton in a mix of horror and awe.

"I don't know who the f**k you think you are, but you're messing with the wrong witch." Steven growled.

"I'm Clover's soulmate. We've marked each other. Any claim you ever had on her is worthless now. I suggest you leave this shop and rethink your life path." Stanton said, glowering down at Steven.

"Clo? That's not true, is it? You didn't let this... thing mark you, right?" Steven asked looking at me.

I glanced at Stanton. He found me. He came for me and he didn't seem to be mad at me for leaving him alone. I was thrilled and I wanted to end this.

Staring straight into Steven's eyes, I pulled aside the collar of my shirt to show the mark Stanton had given me.

"I'm his and he is mine. I told you, Steven, you aren't my soulmate. I was never going to marry you. If anyone had cared to ask my opinion before arranging our marriage, they would have known that I am not and will never be interested in marrying you." I insisted.

"No. This isn't right. You're mine, Clover. You've been mine since we were born. I know what this is! He's the beast and he's tricked you into thinking he's your soulmate! I'll protect you from him." Steven shouted.

A rebound ball landed in his hand and he got ready to throw it. I focused on the arm and snapped at it. It snuffed out in his hand.

Steven stared at his hand and looked back at me. He looked like a shadow the way his mouth opened and closed. Then he got a determined look on his face and tried to make another rebound. I snapped that one away as well.

"Stop, Clo! I need to do this!"

"If you don't leave my shop right now, Jen will call the police. In case you missed the giant f****g sign, offensive magic is not permitted in this shop and witches who engage in use of offensive magic in the shop will be banned from the property." I told him, pointing to the sign behind me.

He looked at me, then at the sign, and over to Jen, who had her phone out. Steven turned back to me. He shook his head.

"I won't accept this. Your animal magic has pushed you to this. Mating with a monster. With a creature. They aren't even human, Clo. You're a powerful witch. You need a powerful witch. The goddess intended me for you, not this... this... animal." He sneered.

"Get the hell out of my store, Steven, and don't ever come back!" I yelled and pointed at the door.

He huffed and tried to push past Stanton, but there was no give when his shoulder hit the mass of muscle that was my soulmate. Steven swore and grabbed his shoulder before rushing out of the shop. I pressed my fingers to my temples and rubbed in a circular motion for a few moments.

"Asshat." Jen muttered under her breath.

"Stanton." I smiled. "I'm sorry you had to deal with that."

Stanton moved closer to the counter and reached out to caress my face. I rubbed my cheek against his large hand.

"That was no bother to me. Did he hurt you, tigress? He was grabbing your arm roughly." He murmured.

I held up my hand. It was sore, but no bruises and it didn't feel like there was a break.

"I'm fine. I tried to contact you. No one would give me your number." I told him.

"Don't worry about it. I enjoyed the chase. It wouldn't have been fair if you caught me before I caught you." Stanton chuckled.

He picked up the hand Steven had grabbed and rubbed his face on it. I giggled. I knew this from the natural animals I'd met. He was scenting me. Trying to get the scent of the interloper off me and claiming me for his own.

"I still have an hour until the shop closes. I'm sorry. Can you wait for me?" I asked.

"I can wait forever, if I need to, tigress." He purred.

I pulled my hand away from him gently and went to the door. I grabbed my keys and returned. I pulled the house key and handed it to Stanton.

"Go up to my apartment. I'll be up as soon as I'm done here. We can talk." I said.

"Just talk?" Stanton asked, raising his eyebrows suggestively.

I laughed. "As far as anyone here needs to know. Go on."

He bent down and kissed me gently. I craved more, but knew I had to let him go. He'd be waiting for me after work. That was enough.

Stanton sighed a little and turned to leave the store, he had to duck a little to get out of the door. As soon as I could get the money together, I'd invest in some taller doors. I didn't want to risk him hitting his head.

"Damn, Clover. I hope the goddess picked a mountain for me too." Jen giggled.

"My mountain." I growled.

"And I'm sure you intend to climb it as soon as you get off work, too." She snorted.

"Damn straight." I muttered and put away all the items Steven had brought to the counter.

The next hour seemed to drag. All I wanted was to count out the tills, lock up, and head to my apartment. When it finally hit six o'clock, I rushed through the closing and shoed the girls out so I could lock up. I was finally going to have time with Stanton again.