

Getting Help

When I got back from dropping the old computer off at the donation drive through, I went upstairs. It had been a long day, and it was looking to be a little longer. I still had to nd someone to run the shop when we had shapeshifter clients in.

I pulled the paper with the names and numbers scribbled on it from my pocket. Sitting on the couch, I started calling the women. There were about eight names on the paper. Three already had jobs, one wasn't interested. The other four were excited to interview.

There wasn't enough business to hire all four, but I gured I would hire the two that were best suited for the job. They would come in the next day for individual interviews. All of them were light witches. We tended not to hire mundane humans and dark witches could taint the energy in the shop.

I would sell to them, if they came in, but having them in all day, several days a week, wasn't an option. I took my craft just as seriously as Auntie Tonya. Some of my cousins joked that I was next in line to be the spinster of the family. I just laughed and went on with my day.

There had been a time that I would get upset about jokes like that. Until my dad told me he had set up an arranged marriage between me and my childhood friend Steven. What I didn't realize, until I turned them all down, was that my parents had been talking with his parents about this marriage since we were babies.

Steven didn't take me turning him down well. He'd been planning on marrying me since rst grade. He sat through every relationship, every breakup, every crush, with the idea in his head that I would be his wife one day and was simply playing the eld until it was time. They had told him about the arrangement when he turned thirteen.

If someone had told me, I would have shut that down just as fast and he wouldn't have had to suffer as much as he did. I regretted the pain I had caused him, but it wasn't my fault. He'd known me my whole life. He had to know how I would react to the arrangement.

I xed myself a salad for dinner. I had to coax the tomato plants into ripening a little faster than they wanted to, but there weren't any in the fridge and I had a craving. It was one of the perks of being a plant witch. I could revive the wilted and ripen the under ripe. It made buying bananas pretty easy.

As I curled up with a book after my meal, I took a deep breath. I had basically cut off contact with my family and my friends after the Steven asco. No one seemed to consider my side of it at all. I was told how cold and heartless I was being after he'd loved me for so long. No one cared that I wanted to nd my own love and my own life that I controlled.

Sorrel told me I was throwing away one of the best chances I had at happiness. He was only three years younger than me, but had a fairly simplistic view of the world. I felt like I should have a say in my life, he thought that was selsh. Of course, mom and dad hadn't tried to marry him off to someone without his permission.

Only me and Yarrow got that privilege. Yarrow was a year younger than me and married the girl our parents had picked for him. He was born on Halloween and had spirit magic along with re magic. It was very rare and usually had a tendency to turn a witch dark.

They married him off to a water witch. Her family had no instances of darkness in their line. She was a cheerful and bright girl. Both accepted their arrangement easily. Maybe it was because he didn't want to have a repeat of the ghts I used to have with my parents. Maybe it was because he didn't want to risk being outcast.

Yarrow needed the support of the community more than I did. I would never become dark. I didn't have it in me. I couldn't hurt other people.

Focusing on my book seemed nearly impossible. I wanted to go to bed and move on to the next day. My excitement for the future was palpable. I couldn't contain my happiness when my alarm alerted me that it was time for bed. Soon, things were going to be even better.

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I ocially hated interviewing. One of my candidates was a nature witch. Like a weaker version of a plant witch. Like me, they could communicate with some animals, and they could speak to plants. They also didn't bathe because it 'wasn't natural'. They were basically the hippie-dippy low powered version of a witch. They couldn't do spells, only potions that used plants primarily.

The next had been some sort of super witch. Like me, she had more than one elemental anity. She was air and water. Two elements that were rather at odds with each other. Her spells were stronger on rainy days and her potion skills were barely developed. I needed someone who was more well-rounded.

Honestly, I knew that witches with two anities were rare, but growing up with my father and brother had made me immune to the awe other witches felt. I was a triple anity witch. We were the absolute rarest.

She wasn't expecting me to not give her the job. She fully thought I would just hire her on the spot after I knew she had more than one anity. She was totally unprepared for the interview.

My favorite had come in after her. Jen. Jen was a girl who I'd made friends with over all of my visits to my great-aunt's store. I hadn't seen her in three years, and she was a sight for sore eyes.

Jen was about 5'7" with wheat colored curly hair that always seemed to frizz out at the merest hint of humidity. She said she was cursed with sentient hair and it often tried to strangle her and those around her. I loved her humor. Jen was the girl next door type, sweet, funny, and often overlooked.

"I'm so glad you're back!" She squealed as I opened the door.

She threw her arms around me and squeezed me tightly. I squeezed her back. I'd almost forgotten what it was like to have a friend.

We got into the store and I locked the door again. I took her over to the teahouse side and xed us both drinks before we headed to one of the sofas for her 'interview'. I already knew I would hire Jen. I just needed to see the others so I could pick someone who would get along with her.

"So, tell me everything that's happened since the last time I saw you. Then, I'll tell you about all of the nothing my life has evolved into." Jen winked.

I laughed and told her about everything, including the Steven situation. She'd met him once when she came up to visit us. Jen and I insisted on her coming to spend two weeks with me. Her parents dropped her off on their way out to the Sawtooth Mountains for a retreat. They were all air witches and just as ighty as the name implied.

"Oh, dear goddess. I can't believe that! They just decided you would marry him? How could they do that? My parents would never dream of doing that.... Mostly because they would have to be way more organized than they are to arrange it. I'm glad you came out here. I missed you, Clover." She said.

"I missed you, too." I told her.

"Plus, that Steven wasn't nearly good enough for you. Your husband will be a big manly man. Not some milquetoast whiner." Jen scoffed.

Jen and Steven hadn't gotten on well. Fire and air witches were usually friendly, but Jen was more daring and adventurous than Steven. She hated how often he tried to talk us out of whatever stupid thing she'd thought up for us to do. It hadn't been a one-way dislike, either. Steven called her impulsive and reckless.

I told Jen she was hired if she wanted to work for me and she bounced happily. I did have to tell her that she needed to act responsibly while at work and she agreed quickly, informing me that she was really good at focusing when she needed to. I was glad to have her with me.

After she left, I cleaned our cups and went to the counter at the shop to wait for the last candidate. I really hoped she would be better than the other two. I worked on straightening out some shelves while I waited.

There was a tap on the door an hour later. I opened it up and was met with the most adorable little woman. She wasn't more than 5'3" with stick straight orange hair and a spray of freckles. Her blue eyes were silently judging me from behind thick glasses. She was wearing a summer dress and sandals. I thought she was very sweet looking.

"I'm Emmalyn Grove." She said, sticking out her hand.

I accepted it and received a rm handshake. She was stronger than she looked. I liked it. I could imagine being so short probably meant climbing around a lot to reach higher items.

"Clover Harrison, nice to meet you. Please come in." I replied with a smile.

I locked the door behind her and we walked to the oce. She took the seat I indicated and I sat across from her. She seemed really well put together.

"What kind of magic do you use?" I asked.

"I'm an earth witch. I can read runes and I have an anity for crystals and stones." Emmalyn told me.

"That's great. We would have almost everything covered. Do you think you can get along with an air witch?" I questioned.

"If I have to. I'm better with water and plant witches. I know how air witches can be. My cousin is an air witch." She sighed.

I chuckled. "She promised to be as focused as possible while working."

Emmalyn nodded. "I'll do my best."

We continued the interview. She wasn't great at making tea and told me she couldn't work in the teahouse, but would be willing to do rune readings for people in the shop, if they wanted.

Like most earth witches, Emmalyn was serious and down-to-earth, no pun intended. They were solid and focused. They weren't humorless, per se, but it took a while to nd the things that made them laugh.

"I think you will work out perfectly, Emmalyn. Are there any questions you have for me?" I asked.

"May I read runes for you? I like to have a sense of who I'm working with." She requested.

"I have to warn you. Everyone sees the same thing for me when trying to see my future. It's a beast with huge teeth and claws." I told her.

"Runes aren't like tea leaves and water. I don't get images, I get words. Maybe it will clarify your future with this beast." Emmalyn offered.

"Please. I would love to know more. Maybe I can protect myself a little."

She pulled a pouch out of her purse and shook it. I had never seen a rune reading. Emmalyn set the bag on the desk and reached into her bag, coming out with a crimson silk square. She laid that out at and opened the cloth sack.

"I want you to reach in here and pull out ve runes one at a time. You'll place the rst in the center of the cloth, the next nearest you, then one near me, one on your right, and, nally, one on your left. Place them face down." She instructed.

I took a deep breath and put my hand into the bag. The stones were smooth and cool. I dug around until I felt the urge to pull one. I placed it on the center of the cloth and joked the others as directed. They weren't stone, but crystals.

When Emmalyn turned them over, there were runes carved into them. I didn't know thing one about them, not even what they all meant. It seemed pointless. Like all water witches couldn't see in water, not all earth witches could read runes. The stones didn't speak to them. Some re witches could see the future in ames, too.

My father was one who could. He'd tried a seeing the rst time the beast had shown up in my leaves. All he saw was the beast. He told my mother it was angry. I was hiding behind the door and heard him worry about what it could mean.

"I see. This is truly interesting. I have never seen runes cast quite like this." She murmured.

"What is it? Is it bad?" I asked.

"I see pain in your past. Darkness in your present. Your future is a mix of death and life. I would have to say, this beast you spoke of is coming for you. What you do with it will lead to a life or death situation." Emmalyn said.

"What about the darkness? I'm a light witch. I haven't even had dark thoughts." I told her.

"That doesn't mean darkness as in light and dark. It could be as simple as losing a connection, like you did when you came here from your home. The light from that connection is now dark. It could be a mood you're experiencing, like sadness or depression. It could even be an outside inuence that will appear in your near future. There are a lot of ways to interpret it that have nothing to do with your magic. If I were to take these at face value, I would say there is a stranger in your future who will lead you to the beast. There will be some connection with your past, based on the placement of the rune." She explained.

"So, don't talk to strangers?" I chuckled.

"I wouldn't advise that. Like I said, the beast is coming for you, no matter what you do with strangers. Don't lock yourself away just because of this casting. I want to work with you. I would love to see how this all plays out." Emmalyn replied with a smirk.

"Good to have you aboard. We'll have training the day after tomorrow. I have some cleaning up to do and some other things to get arranged before I can focus on that." I said.

"Great. I'll see you then. Don't worry, I'm a fast learner and I want nothing more than to do this job well." She said and cleaned up her runes before standing.

I led her out to the front door and locked it behind her. Leaning against the door, I let out a deep breath I didn't know I was holding. The beast was coming for me? I didn't know what I was going to do. I saw it, it was terrifying. I couldn't ght something like that. Maybe I could talk to it, though.