

## Calling Home

I headed upstairs to have my dinner and call my mom. She wanted me to call her rst so she didn't interrupt me while I was getting everything settled. I was happy that my parents hadn't stopped talking to me after my episode a couple months ago.

They'd applied a lot of pressure about the arranged marriage and we'd had full on screaming matches. I didn't want to marry Steven. They didn't understand why I wasn't cool with having marriage to my best friend forced on me suddenly. They seemed to think they could argue until I agreed.

We fought so much, I was starting to feel like they would only love me if I would agree to the marriage. For some people, that would be enough to change their mind. I didn't think like that. I decided I would rather die than live a life I didn't choose. I took a poison mixture that was supposed to feel like falling asleep.

It really did. I started getting groggy almost immediately. I just had time to nish my note before it pulled me into unconsciousness. My parents came home early because Auntie Tonya called them and said I was in danger. They found me and the note.

My father ran to the room where our potion ingredients were held and looked up the antidote to the poison. He managed to get it back up to me before the poison nished killing me. It took me two weeks to recover from the dose I'd taken.

They broke off my engagement and encouraged me to accept my great aunt's offer. They wanted to get me out of town so no one else would try to pressure me into accepting Steven. I appreciated it and started getting things put together.

The reason it took me another month to be ready was that things kept happening. My u-haul reservation was cancelled three times, my boxes were mysteriously unpacked while I was away one weekend, I lost my keys for three days, and someone put me on the ingredient gathering rotation after I'd taken myself off to prepare. I got a lot of angry calls telling me to go out and help gather for the coven because I had signed on for it.

Living in a coven town was like living in any small town. Everyone knew everyone's business. They all knew I was engaged to Steven, they all knew I refused, they all knew I tried to kill myself.

Some rumors started up that I was being kicked out by my family because I was talking about going dark. That caused a lot of people to stop talking to me or acknowledging my presence.

I didn't really care that much. It was things like those reactions that made me more eager to leave. If they wanted to believe rumors, they could. I didn't need people in my life who had known me since childhood and would believe such terrible stories.

Steven tried to defend me, but people said he was so in love with me that he couldn't see the truth. Honestly, I hated breaking his heart. He was my best friend and had been by my side for everything ever since we were born. He was actually only a few hours older than me. He'd been born as the sun rose on the solstice.

The reason my parents had entered into the arrangement was because we were two of the strongest re witches in the coven. They gured that any child who didn't have a double or triple anity would, at least, be a powerful re witch. Everyone felt it was a good match.

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When I got upstairs, I turned off the crockpot and dished up my food. Then I put the rest into storage containers, without lids, and set them on the counter to cool before I put them away. It was something I wanted to become used to. Meal prepping would save me work every night.

I sat at the dining table and ate my dinner. I was starting to become fond of the quiet. My life hadn't had a lot of that. With two younger brothers, our house was often loud. The quiet was almost too much, though. It would still take a while to be used to.

After I cleaned the table, I called my mom for a quick check in. She was always so busy, especially without me there to take some of the pressure off from being the family of the coven leader. We were held to a higher standard.

She picked up the phone after three rings.

"Baby! How are you? How was the drive? Aunt Tonya called and let me know she boarded her boat safely and was starting her journey. Is everything okay? You aren't talking much. Are you sick, sweetheart? Do you want me to come up and help?" Mom rattled on, interrupting me when I tried to answer her questions.

When she was nally quiet, I was able to answer her.

"I'm ne, mama. You didn't take a breath that whole time, are you okay?" I laughed.

"I've been worried about you. It's not like I can just go upstairs and see you anymore. I have to drive for hours just to look at your beautiful face." She replied.

"You can come and visit as soon as I have everything up and running. I met a rogue queen today. She's the head of the collective in the area." I told her.

"You met her? Did you faint?" Mom asked.

"Yeah. Her mate carried me to the couch in the shop. It was pretty embarrassing." I admitted.

"She didn't make fun of you, did she? I don't care what she's queen of, I'll set her tail on re if she hurts you." Mom threatened.

"She was really nice about it. So was her mate. They just wanted to meet me since I joined the collective." I said.

"You joined a werewolf collective? You can't even be around them without getting dizzy. How are you going to live with them? What about the shop? What have you gotten yourself into? I'm getting your father. We're coming to bring you home."

"Mom! Stop! Auntie Tonya set me up with the information to join the collective. It's what all supernaturals do here. It'll give me the protection of the werewolves and all I provide is some spells if they need them. Auntie Tonya says it's mostly morning sickness remedies for the queen. I will live above the shop and continue to run it. I am not living with werewolves. I promise. You can't try to take me home at every surprise." I sighed.

"I just worry. I never expected you to move so far away."

"I only moved to Oregon, mom. Not Alaska. Trust that I will be as safe and cautious as possible. Like I said, you can come visit as soon as I have everything settled. I promise. I need to go. I have a lot to do still and I need my rest." I told her.

"Okay, baby. Get some sleep. May the goddess guide you and care for you." She said softly.

"You too, mama. I love you."

"Love you, too, sweetie. I'll let your dad know that everything is alright. Talk to you later." Mom said before hanging up.

I looked at my phone. I didn't realize how much I missed my mom and dad until just then. Mom was always a little high strung, dad was more mellow. It was a nice mix for me because I always knew who to go to with an issue. If I just wanted to rage, I talked to mom, if I wanted a resolution, I talked to dad.

Being the daughter of two strong witches could be dicult. I loved my parents, but they weren't always the easiest to deal with. I assured myself that this was the right move. They encouraged it because they knew it was right for me. If I ran back home, I would be giving in to the people who said I was acting like a child.

So many people had said I would come running home within a week, that my stubborn little heart absolutely refused. No matter how much I was missing home, I wouldn't give in.

I put lids on the containers of soup and got them put into the fridge. Afterward, I busied myself with cleaning up around the apartment. There was a lot of clutter that needed to be arranged and organized. I wanted to have a comfortable place to come home to every night.

It was nearly eleven when I felt nished enough to call it good. I went to the bathroom and ran a hot bath to soak in. I added some herbs for relaxation and rest. I had shopping to do the next day and I needed to clean up the outside of the shop.

As I laid my head back against the cool edge of the tub, I thought about Emmalyn's reading. The beast was coming for me. I wondered if the beast would have come for me if I'd stayed home and married Steven. Had I managed to stumble into my fate?

The 'life or death' situation that the beast will lead me to was concerning. I had to gure out how to make the right decision or I could end up dead. I wanted to live for as long as possible.

I got out of the tub sometime later absolutely resolute. I would nd the beast myself. I would force it to help me survive if I had to. All I needed was something to go on other than the fact that it was a beast and I was a little terried of it. I needed a plan.