

## The Morning After

I woke the next morning to Josh kissing my neck. The night had been exhausting and fun. He really was good at what he did.

"Mmm." I groaned. "Again?"

"If you insist." Josh chuckled and climbed on top of me.

He knew that wasn't what I meant, but I didn't mind. It had been hard to find willing partners in my home town once the rumors started. I was more than happy to have someone to quench my desires with.

We rolled around in the bed. Not struggling for dominance this time, but exploring each other. He was amazing to be with.

When we nished, Josh laid back on the bed with a contented sigh. I giggled at the look on his face. This whole situation had worked out better than I could have hoped for.

"I need a shower." I told him.

"Me too. Mind if I join you?" He asked.

"I guess." I laughed. "Only cleaning, though. I want to get the apartment sorted today."

"That sounds like something that involves moving furniture. I'll be leaving after the shower." Josh said with a nod.

"Wow. Of course you want to run away right when I need a big strong man around the house." I snickered. "I don't need you. I'm stronger than I look."

I led him into the bathroom and started the shower. This wasn't one of those nice new showers with multiple heads or even a lot of room. I was pretty sure it was original to the building. The tub was an old claw foot tub and the shower head stood at the top of a narrow copper pipe.

Pulling the curtain, I dug out soap and a cloth. We squeezed into the tub laughing. There was barely enough room to move.

Josh helped wash me and I washed him. It was incredibly intimate in such a small space. If I were looking for a boyfriend, I was pretty sure Josh would be a strong candidate.

We'd already established that we had similar interests. He was just similar enough that I was comfortable and just different enough that we would have fun learning about each other. It was as close to a good match as I could come without casting a soulmate search.

That could be a possibility for me in the future. Once I was settled and the store was back on track, I would look into it. There was a perfect man out there somewhere and I'd find him, when I was ready.

"Looks like some heavy thinking." Josh murmured.

"Just planning how I'm going to rearrange the living room. You sure you're not up for it?" I asked.

"I might have been willing, but I have dinner with my family tonight. My little brother just finished college and he's bringing his ancée with him." He replied. "I need to go help my mom. She's going to go overboard. All she wants is grandchildren and Greg is the closest to fulfilling her wishes."

"Oof. Sounds like Greg's the golden child now." I chuckled.

"He's the baby. Mom has always doted on him and he tries to make her happy to keep his status as the favorite. I'm not bothered. My parents have always tried to treat us fairly, even if they have their favorites." Josh shrugged.

"Are you your dad's favorite, then?" I asked.

"Of course. We both picked the same major as our dad, but I was more talented. I graduated at the top of my class and I've grown the company since I started there. Turn around so I can get your back." He ordered.

I turned, rubbing against him. Josh groaned a little before he started scrubbing my back. It felt good. I hadn't showered with someone for a few years. It was actually pretty nice.

"What about you?" Josh asked. "Are you the favorite?"

I snorted. "No. I'd have to say I'm probably the least favorite right now. I didn't do what I was supposed to and ran off to run a magic shop in another state. My brothers are doing exactly what they're supposed to. It's new. I wanted it this way. My mom and dad still love me, they just wish I was more like my brothers."

"Here I thought you were probably some daddy's girl who always got exactly what she wanted." He chuckled as he struggled to get low and wash the backs of my legs.

"I was. Once upon a time. I was supposed to be the most powerful witch in my coven, you know. But, I ended up a disappointment." I replied.

Josh stood up and spun me around, nearly making me fall through the shower curtain. He pulled me to him and held me tight. I froze for a moment. I wasn't used to being hugged.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"You needed a hug. You're not a disappointment to anyone who understands that you're only human. If they're disappointed, it's because they set their standards too high. I bet you're an amazing witch." Josh murmured.

"Of course I am. I'm a triple anity witch. I'm not a disappointment because of my powers, Josh. I'm a disappointment because I didn't follow their life plan for me. Now, let me go and turn around. I want to send you home so I can get my work done." I replied.

Josh let me go and took a step back before turning. I scrubbed his back and butt before struggling myself to move lower. This shower wasn't made for two tall people.

When we got out, Josh helped me so I didn't slip. We dried off and he dressed in his clothes from last night while I put on a t-shirt and jeans. I made him some eggs and pancakes before he left.

Once he was gone, I set about cleaning and rearranging. I was really grateful that he had something to do. I didn't want to have to entertain someone all day.

I watered the plants in the planter outside my bedroom window around lunch time and coaxed some grapes to ripen for me. I didn't want anything too heavy, so I grabbed them as a snack. They were perfect.

After rearranging, I vacuumed and took the rug out to the back of the building to hang and beat. I had a great deal of fun imagining it was one of the gossip mongers from back home who had made my last few months there hell. I don't think that rug had been so clean since it was new.

Taking the rug back upstairs and settling it in its new home before arranging the coffee table on it. I liked how it all looked. For being someone else's style I was quite proud of how I had made it mine.

I reheated the soup base in the fridge and added two soft boiled eggs, some sliced sautéed mushrooms, and some noodles. Taking my bowl to the couch, I turned on the TV and settled in with some made for TV rom-com that totally used every trope in the book. I laughed through most of it, because it was just so ridiculous.

My mom always got on me about that. She loved those sappy Hallmark style romances, but I just found them hilarious. Meeting a guy and falling instantly in love with him, or hating him until you fall in love with him. If I hate a guy, I hate him. I'm not the type of person who would let their feelings change that easily.

As the 'hero' and 'heroine' were sharing their first kiss at their impromptu wedding, my phone started ringing. I turned off the TV and shook my head while I checked who the call was from. It was Steven. I hadn't talked to him since he learned that I was moving.

I went back and forth as to whether or not I should answer it. On one hand, Steven had been my best friend for most of my life, on the other, he thought we would be married by now. It was something you don't just get over. I cringed and answered the phone.

"Hello?"

"Clo." He sounded like he was smiling.

"Hey, Steve. What's up?" I asked, pretending like we hadn't gone months without talking.

"I was just thinking. I know you felt like it was sprung on you, Clo, but we're really perfect for each other. We've been best friends for so long. What if I came and stayed in the town where you live? We could start over, dating. I know you said you don't think of me that way, but, if we dated for a while, maybe you could." Steven offered.

"You're forgetting that I told you I couldn't ever think of you that way, Steven. There is nothing that could change it. You're not my type." I insisted.

"I know what your type is, Clo. I know exactly what you like. I can be that. I'll crawl around at the end of your leash. I'll lick your shoes. I'll sleep on the end of your bed. You can step on me, whip me, anything. I listened. I can be the guy you need." He begged. "Please, mistress. I'll be your good little slave."

I cringed again. It sounded terribly embarrassing when Steven said stuff like that. I liked degrading guys from time to time, but it wasn't what I craved. Dominating wasn't about that all the time.

I wanted someone to be fully dedicated to me when we were alone. I wanted someone who was fully independent outside of the bedroom. Steven wasn't that. He'd always depended on me to make decisions for us. I didn't want to live my life like that.

"Look, Steven, I'm not stopping you from doing what you want in life. If you want to pursue me, that's your business. I'm telling you right now, I'm never going to marry you. You'd be better off doing your soulmate search. I'm not the girl for you, Steven." I told him firmly.

"I don't need my soulmate search. I know it's you, Clo. Give me a chance. Just date me for a month. Then I'll give up. I promise. I just want a chance." He pled.

Goddess, this was uncomfortable. I didn't want him to waste his time, but I knew, in the long run, I couldn't stop him from what he was wanting to do. I was sure that a number of people had tried to talk him out of ever contacting me again.

"No, Steven. This is it. If you come down here, I'll just keep rejecting you. I don't like hurting you, but this is how it is. I only love you as my friend." I replied.

"You said you wouldn't stop me from pursuing you. That's what I'll do. I'll make you love me, Clo. I'll make you love me the way I love you. Then, I'll take care of you for the rest of your life." Steven vowed.

"I'm seeing someone. You need to know that I'm not going to end my relationship just because you're here trying to get my attention." I warned.

"Another witch?" He asked in a wispy sort of tone.

"No. A human, but I'm very involved with him."

Steven scoffed. "I'm not worried about a human. You're destined to be with a witch. You're too powerful to have someone as weak as a human for your spouse."

I hung up. I didn't need to hear the anti-human bullshit he was always spouting. There was a lot to love about Steven, but he believed supernaturals to be the superior species on Earth and I disagreed. I thought we were all meant to work together to make the world stronger.

Getting up, I ignored the phone as it rang again. I didn't want to hear more of Steven's ranting. I washed my dishes and picked up a book off the bookshelves. Maybe I could get lost in one of the novels Auntie Tonya kept lying around. It would be better than an evening of trying to convince Steven to leave me alone.