

CHAPTER 1

“Emma, your new place is wonderful!” Nana Lissa exclaimed. I’d just finished giving her a tour of the interior of Aroma Wellness Spa as well as the café and the gift shop. Slowly, she spun in a circle and drank in the exterior courtyard, with its stone wishing well, bubbling fountain, and gardenias. “You’ve done a remarkable job.”

“Thank you, Nana,” I murmured. “I couldn’t have completed it without you.” To her patrons at the Harrison Library, my grandmother was Lissa or Ms. Reade, the head librarian with a staff devoted to helping people find the right books. To me, she’d always been Nana Lissa or Nana, the woman who believed in spirits and fairies and taught me to dream big. I sure hoped, this time, I wasn’t dreaming too big.

“I love the slogans you posted around the spa,” she went on.

I grinned. I happened to be a positive-sayings freak. I’d written many on notecards as well as at the spa and at home. That way I could draw inspiration from them when I needed to keep myself on track. Nana was referring to the few I’d printed and framed.

“I love *Immerse in Wellness* and *Indulge in You*,” she said, “but my favorite is *Experience Wellness and Wonder*.” She placed a hand on her chest. “I’m breathing easier already.”

I’d done a deep dive on the internet to find exactly the right catchphrases.

“I’ve told everyone in Carmel about the grand opening tomorrow,” she said. Carmel-by-the-Sea, a gorgeous town on the coast of California, was the perfect location for a spa. It was an intensely spiritual place that radiated good vibes. “And I’ve reposted all your memes on Instagram.”

For weeks, I’d been creating digital art to boost our presence.

“You could do well with a TikTok campaign,” she said. “If you haven’t put one together, I can help.” My grandmother could navigate social media like a pro. She said her patrons at the library were educating her. “Having the opening on a Wednesday is perfect. Everyone looks forward to a midweek break.”

That’s what I’d thought, too. In the morning, we would serve goodies to entice people to drop in. The therapists would explain their techniques and styles, and I would talk up the meditation sessions. In the afternoon, the first round of treatments would begin.

“Now, give your old grandmother a hug for good luck.” Nana extended her arms.

“Old, ha!”

Nana didn’t look like a stereotypical grandmother. She was spry and lean and was stylishly dressed. Her short-cropped silver hair was always neat, unlike my tawny shoulder-length hair, which I swept into a clip or ponytail because it was baby fine, and it snarled if the weather was cool, like now in June, when the marine layer blanketed the coastline until midafternoon.

“The travertine tile turned out nicely,” she said, “and the wrought-iron tables on the patio are chic but casual. Very in keeping with your go-with-the-flow vibe. Did I tell you that I love the plate-glass windows? A direct view into the reception area is very inviting.”

I smiled. Her enthusiasm was infusing me with confidence.

“Are all the bugaboos taken care of?” she asked. “We don’t want any snafus.”

“All handled.” Of course there were a number of little nits that needed addressing. Any new business ran into roadblocks. Like massage oils that hadn’t arrived or singing bowls that had been delayed in customs but were due to arrive today. No matter the hiccup, I couldn’t let a few of them get me down. I was an upbeat person who saw possibility in a challenge.

