**Looking For a Place to Happen**

Helena Qi

My mother always told me to follow my dreams and to see the best in people, but I found it hard to do that as I sat behind the filthy tavern bar of the Blue Moon Inn. I looked down at the glass I was cleaning and sighed. I did my best to keep the tavern clean and serve the inn’s patrons with a smile. But Darrow, the owner, still tried to scam every customer who came in here, and only washed the sheets when the lice couldn't be ignored. What would my mother say if she saw what my life had become?

My mother died when I was ten. Enemy troops had marched into our village and sacked it, killing everyone they could find. My mother hid me in the forest and tried to buy me time, but she could do nothing against dozens of soldiers. After the horrors of that day, I lived with my mother’s cousin on a farm for years, helping their family struggle to get back on their feet in the wake of war. But I’d wanted to be a healer, like my mother and grandmother. While my years on the farm were safe and peaceful, it hadn’t been enough to make me forget years of training. And despite my cousins’ charity, I had never been close to them. So no one tried to stop me when I took my meager savings and left the farm shortly after my seventeenth birthday.

I had set out for Belport, a city of peace and learning in the north, where there was a great academy for healers. I made it to Wigston before I ran out of money, which was why I took the job at the Blue Moon. It was supposed to be temporary, a way to earn enough for the passage to Belport. But I’d worried that I wouldn’t have any money to pay for my training when I arrived, so I stayed at the inn, and weeks became months. Then Darrow started lowering my my salary and increasing the rent on my room, and my dream of saving up for Belport had slowly slipped away.

Once I was a healer with a dream, who made a stop along the way to her goal. Now I'm just a barmaid in a backwater town, with a broken future and shattered dreams.