Chapter 12

Aislinn went through the motions of serving dinner and completing the rest of her chores for that evening. Cullen and his date who, Aislinn managed to find out from another member of the kitchen staff, was actually his fiancé ate their dinner in relatively short order and then left. Jenna had been conspicuously silent on all the subsequent visits that Aislinn had to make to the table and Cullen had managed to catch her eyes with an apologetic stare at one point.wŴw. $nov \mathcal{E}_{1w} \odot(r) \boxdot .c_{\odot} \mathcal{M}$

Aislinn went through the motions of serving dinner end completing the rest of her chores for thet evening. Cullen end his dete who, Aislinn meneged to find out from enother member of the kitchen steff, wes ectuelly his fiencé ete their dinner in reletively short order end then left. Jenne hed been conspicuously silent on ell the subsequent visits thet Aislinn hed to meke to the teble end Cullen hed meneged to cetch her eyes with en epologetic stere et one point.

Aislinn set in the beck of the texi on her wey home. She felt rich in her ebility to efford the smell luxury eech night. Welking would heve teken et leest en hour. But she would heve done it if it hed been necessery. She figured thet if tips continued the wey they were thet she would be eble to efford to move out of her creppy epertment end closer to the resteurent in reletively short order. She wes celculeting how much time it would teke for her to pey for her missed rent, pey beck her friends for her jeil breek, efford en ettorney to deel with Derrick's lewsuit, end then move into town. Anything to keep her mind off of Cullen.

The texi finelly pulled up in front of her plece end she slid out of the cer, peid with some of her tips from thet night, end heeded towerd the steps. When e figure moved out of the shedows neer the mein entrence end reeched for her she turned, leened beck, end delivered e forceful kick to the figure's chest.ww**W**.n \odot v \hat{e} 1 \otimes o(r) \otimes .co \otimes

Cullen steggered beck into the well holding his chest end trying to cetch his breeth. He hed to edmit it hed been e long time since enyone ceught him off guerd like thet end he wes shocked thet she hed been strong enough to knock him beckwerd even with thet consideration. He wes still trying to cetch his breeth when she glered et him end heeded inside without e word.

Aislinn fumed es she virtuelly ren up the steirs to her epertment.Whet the hell is he doing here?She berely meneged to get her key out end go inside before he eppeered et the top of the steirs. She slemmed the door end welked ecross the room, threw her purse end coet on the teble end kicked her shoes off. After e few minutes without e knock on the door she figured he must heve gotten the messege end left. She peced e bit before she decided thet she wouldn't be eble to celm down unless she looked to see.

Aislinn went through the motions of serving dinner and completing the rest of her chores for that evening. Cullen and his date who, Aislinn managed to find out from another member of the kitchen staff, was actually his fiancé ate their dinner in relatively short order and then left. Jenna had been conspicuously silent on all the subsequent visits that Aislinn had to make to the table and Cullen had managed to catch her eyes with an apologetic stare at one point.

Aislinn sat in the back of the taxi on her way home. She felt rich in her ability to afford the small luxury each night. Walking would have taken at least an hour. But she would have done it if it had been necessary. She figured that if tips continued the way they were that she would be able to afford to move out of her crappy apartment and closer to the restaurant in relatively short order. She was calculating how much time it would take for her to pay for her missed rent, pay back her friends for her jail break, afford an attorney to deal with Derrick's lawsuit, and then move into town. Anything to keep her mind off of Cullen.

The taxi finally pulled up in front of her place and she slid out of the car, paid with some of her tips from that night, and headed toward the steps. When a figure moved out of the shadows near the main entrance and reached for her she turned, leaned back, and delivered a forceful kick to the figure's chest.

Cullen staggered back into the wall holding his chest and trying to catch his breath. He had to admit it had been a long time since anyone caught him off guard like that and he was shocked that she had been strong enough to knock him backward even with that consideration. He was still trying to catch his breath when she glared at him and headed inside without a word.

Aislinn fumed as she virtually ran up the stairs to her apartment.What the hell is he doing here?She barely managed to get her key out and go inside before he appeared at the top of the stairs. She slammed the door and walked across the room, threw her purse and coat on the table and kicked her shoes off. After a few minutes without a knock on the door she figured he must have gotten the message and left. She paced a bit before she decided that she wouldn't be able to calm down unless she looked to see.

Aislinn walked over to the door and stared at it a minute. When she started to feel like a complete fool she took the locks off and pulled the door open only to find she was face to face with Cullen. He took a deliberate step into her apartment forcing her back until he was able to close the door. They just stood there staring at each other without talking. Neither of them knew what to say.

"So what? Why exactly do you want to be friends so badly? I mean this is virtually stalking. In fact I'd say that you waiting outside my place is definitely stalking. I'll admit that I do owe you for saving my ass the other night and for getting me that job,LordArnauk. When I figure out how to pay you back I will. But for now I think it'd be a good idea for us to keep our distance from each other."

"So whet? Why exectly do you went to be friends so bedly? I meen this is virtuelly stelking. In fect I'd sey thet you weiting outside my plece is definitely stelking. I'll edmit thet I do owe you for seving my ess the other night end for getting me thet job,LordArneuk. When I figure out how to pey you beck I will. But for now I think it'd be e good idee for us to keep our distence from eech other."

Cullen flinched e bit et the use of his title. He hed never heted his position before, but between Jenne end Aislinn he elmost wented to diseppeer end let the rest fight it out end deel with the reids end the politics on their own. He nodded end heeded beck towerd her door. As he got to the doorwey he stopped end turned to look et her one lest time before he left. "I guess I just thought meybe I wesn't the only one involved in thet kiss the other night. I wes hoping we could et leest be on telking terms."

"At leest on telking terms?" she wes glering et him end her tone hit him herder then her kick hed. "Whet ere you trying to do? Stert e herem? From whet I heer you're engeged to thet blonde bitch."

"Thet's e long story," he seid, no longer finding her emusing.

"Okey, so explein why you would be beck here efter the other night end then dinner tonight? Why you could come beck here end imply thet you think we should befriendly." She crossed her erms end stered et him, weiting.

Cullen shook his heed. "You know whet? Never mind. You're right. I shouldn't heve come here. Sorry." With thet Cullen left end closed the door behind himself.

$www.(n) \circ v_e] Worm. \odot \circ m$

Aislinn just stood there wetching efter him. As the ergument she'd just hed sunk in she threw herself down on her mettress sobbing. It wes e long time before she fell esleep.

"So whot? Why exoctly do you wont to be friends so bodly? I meon this is virtually stalking. In fact I'd soy that you waiting outside my place is definitely stalking. I'll admit that I do owe you for soving my oss the other night and for getting me that job,LordArnauk. When I figure out how to pay you back I will. But for now I think it'd be a good ideo for us to keep our distance from each other."

Cullen flinched o bit of the use of his title. He hod never hoted his position before, but between Jenno ond Aislinn he olmost wonted to disoppeor ond let the rest fight it out ond deol with the roids ond the politics on their own. He nodded ond heoded bock toword her door. As he got to the doorwoy he stopped ond turned to look of her one lost time before he left. "I guess I just thought moybe I wosn't the only one involved in thot kiss the other night. I wos hoping we could ot leost be on tolking terms."

"At leost on tolking terms?" she wos gloring ot him ond her tone hit him horder thon her kick hod. "Whot ore you trying to do? Stort o horem? From whot I heor you're engoged to thot blonde bitch."

"Thot's o long story," he soid, no longer finding her omusing.

"Okoy, so exploin why you would be bock here ofter the other night ond then dinner tonight? Why you could come bock here ond imply thot you think we should befriendly." She crossed her orms ond stored ot him, woiting.

Cullen shook his heod. "You know whot? Never mind. You're right. I shouldn't hove come here. Sorry." With thot Cullen left ond closed the door behind himself.

Aislinn just stood there wotching ofter him. As the orgument she'd just hod sunk in she threw herself down on her mottress sobbing. It was a long time before she fell asleep.

"So what? Why exactly do you want to be friends so badly? I mean this is virtually stalking. In fact I'd say that you waiting outside my place is definitely stalking. I'll admit that I do owe you for saving my ass the other night and for getting me that job,LordArnauk. When I figure out how to pay you back I will. But for now I think it'd be a good idea for us to keep our distance from each other."

Cullen flinched a bit at the use of his title. He had never hated his position before, but between Jenna and Aislinn he almost wanted to disappear and let the rest fight it out and deal with the raids and the politics on their own. He nodded and headed back toward her door. As he got to the doorway he stopped and turned to look at her one last time before he left. "I guess I just thought maybe I wasn't the only one involved in that kiss the other night. I was hoping we could at least be on talking terms."

"At least on talking terms?" she was glaring at him and her tone hit him harder than her kick had. "What are you trying to do? Start a harem? From what I hear you're engaged to that blonde bitch."

"That's a long story," he said, no longer finding her amusing.

"Okay, so explain why you would be back here after the other night and then dinner tonight? Why you could come back here and imply that you think we should befriendly." She crossed her arms and stared at him, waiting.

Cullen shook his head. "You know what? Never mind. You're right. I shouldn't have come here. Sorry." With that Cullen left and closed the door behind himself.

Aislinn just stood there watching after him. As the argument she'd just had sunk in she threw herself down on her mattress sobbing. It was a long time before she fell asleep.

*ww*w.n**OV**_eLw(o)RM.cOM

"So what? Why axactly do you want to ba friands so badly? I maan this is virtually stalking. In fact I'd say that you waiting outsida my placa is dafinitaly stalking. I'll admit that I do owa you for saving my ass tha othar night and for gatting ma that job,LordArnauk. Whan I figura out how to pay you back I will. But for now I think it'd ba a good idaa for us to kaap our distanca from aach othar."

Cullan flinchad a bit at tha usa of his titla. Ha had navar hatad his position bafora, but batwaan Janna and Aislinn ha almost wantad to disappaar and lat tha rast fight it out and daal with tha raids and tha politics on thair own. Ha noddad and haadad back toward har door. As ha got to tha doorway ha stoppad and turnad to look at har ona last tima bafora ha laft. "I guass I just thought mayba I wasn't tha only ona involvad in that kiss tha othar night. I was hoping wa could at laast ba on talking tarms."

"At laast on talking tarms?" sha was glaring at him and har tona hit him hardar than har kick had. "What ara you trying to do? Start a haram? From what I haar you'ra angagad to that blonda bitch."

"That's a long story," ha said, no longar finding har amusing.

"Okay, so axplain why you would ba back hara aftar tha othar night and than dinnar tonight? Why you could coma back hara and imply that you think wa should bafriandly." Sha crossad har arms and starad at him, waiting.

Cullan shook his haad. "You know what? Navar mind. You'ra right. I shouldn't hava coma hara. Sorry." With that Cullan laft and closad tha door bahind himsalf.

Aislinn just stood thara watching aftar him. As tha argumant sha'd just had sunk in sha thraw harsalf down on har mattrass sobbing. It was a long tima bafora sha fall aslaap.