

## Chapter 123

"This is ridiculous. I don't wear makeup like this," she grouched. "He's just going to mess it up anyway."

"You said you were going to cooperate," Sarah warned.

Aislinn growled in response and the two women laughed. After some time they were satisfied with her face and her hair. She had managed to convince them to leave it down. "It's either a pony tail or long. I don't do twists or whatever else you want to do to it." So they let her win that one. They used a curling iron but ultimately it lay in long brown waves down her back. When they stepped back and gave her a satisfied look, Aislinn got up and went after the dress again.

"Don't put it on yet," Sarah said. That was when Sarah held up the box that Cullen had given her. "Cullen picked these out for you," she smiled. "Let's see if he has any taste," she added as she handed the box to Aislinn.**wWw.novêlworM.com**

Aislinn's stomach fluttered a bit. He'd never given her a present before. She wished he had given it to her himself instead of leaving it with Sarah. She opened the lid on the black box to see a great deal of white gold and diamonds. The three of them gasped in delight.

"They're beautiful," Aislinn said, breathing again.

Sarah made her put the box down so that she could help her put the jewelry on. There were quite a few pieces of jewelry. They were all made of heavy, loose fitting white gold rope chains that had diamonds dangling from different lengths of smaller delicate chains so that it looked like it was raining diamonds from the heavy chain. There was one for her ankle, one to wear around her waist, and one for around her neck. There were barrettes for her hair as well. That resulted in a great deal more fussing. They were all fitted loosely enough that they wouldn't be broken when Aislinn shifted into her hybrid form.

"It's considered bad luck," Sarah explained. "Not to mention it would really suck to mess this set up." She held up her skirt so that Aislinn could see the golden chain around her ankle. It was simple and very pretty. "Drake bought this one for me when we were mated. He didn't quite have the resources that Cullen does though."

Aislinn looked at herself in the mirror. She had to admit that the affect was beautiful. The light in the room danced off the diamonds. Her heart was beating a mile a minute. Both Sarah and Makeda could see her nerves failing her again. The jewelry scared her. I'm not really in his league, she thought. I can be dressed up. But this isn't me. Aislinn felt a strange calm from the back of her mind reassuring her.

Cullen, she asked him. Are you sure you want me? I mean. This is so much.

Cullen was talking to a small group of men he had just been introduced to. He took a sip from his drink and tried to send Aislinn as much reassurance as he could. Calm down. It's a little late for you to change your mind. That conversation should have taken place before the last time we were here.

Aislinn could feel how amused he was that she was this nervous. Cullen, she started but didn't even know what she was thinking.

He answered something that someone asked him but it wasn't quite the right answer. He cleared his throat and took another drink out of his cup and looked around the room so he wouldn't have to participate in the conversation he had been having before Aislinn called out to him. My love, I want you more than I could every say. And I hope you want me. You don't have to come down here. I know I'm asking a lot of you in this and I didn't even really discuss the situation with you. It's up to you. Cullen's worry shifted at that point from the possibility of Jenna's attack to the reality that Aislinn was just nervous enough to bolt.

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Aislinn could feel his entire train of thought shift from Jena and how she had dominated his mind for days now to being scared to death that she was going to leave him, that he had pushed too much on her in too little time, and that she didn't want him enough to be capable of putting up with his life. I'm not going anywhere. I love you too much for that, she told him. But that didn't help his new upset. He wasn't sure he believed her. Aislinn decided that she needed to hurry.

Makeda and Sarah could see the vague look in her eyes and knew she was having a private conversation. From the look on her face it was serious enough to leave her be until it was over.

Suddenly Aislinn's vision seemed to clear and a new resolve over took her features. "Are we almost done?"

"Yeah," Sarah said. "Are you okay?"

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Aislinn took a deep breath. "No. But I will be. I want to go down and see Cullen. You guys don't do that bride before wedding bullshit do you?"

"No," Sarah said in concern at her tone.

"So then I can put the dress on now?"

"Yeah."**Wwv.n©(v)eLwørn.CoM**

Sarah and Makeda exchanged looks, but helped her put the dress on over her hair and jewelry so that it wouldn't be caught. The black silk clung to her hips and breasts and any other body part that curved. Aislinn looked herself over in the mirror. The halter dipped low between her breasts in front and just grazed the sides. The skirt clung to her hips and legs and flared past her knees to pool on the floor about her feet. She walked away from the mirror a bit and then looked at her back in the mirror. There were a few folds of the dress that sat just above her butt and left her entire back and lower back bare, except for the white gold and diamonds. She had to admit it was impressive.

"It's too bad I'm not better at controlling my shifting," she said softly.

Makeda was confused by that. "What?"

"I've only been able to do it a short time. I'm not very good at it. But Cullen likes the stripes and spots. I've seen him just change parts. So I guess I was thinking it's a shame that I couldn't just have the markings, bare back and all. Thing is I don't really want to do the cat thing yet and it's pretty much an all or nothing process with me."

Makeda grinned. "I didn't know you had stripes. I've only seen parts of you in lighted rooms," she chuckled.

Aislinn couldn't help but smile at that. And the women got another amused look from Sarah.

"I agree. That would definitely add to the affect," Sarah said. "But unfortunately it really is a learning process. I don't think I'm able to just tell you how." She held out one hand and shifted it to a clawed paw then back again. "It's not easy to describe," she said contemplatively.

Aislinn walked over to Sarah and hugged her. Sarah didn't know exactly how to react. When Aislinn let her go she looked at the surprised woman. "I just wanted to say thanks."

Sarah smiled back. "Well, I think we're ready then. Would you like to make an entrance or just appear in the crowd?"

"I'm not the entrance making type."

Makeda shook her head. "Oh but you could be." Makeda was eyeing Aislinn wantonly. "But you're not for me tonight." She grinned wickedly and then walked to the door. "We'll go with you. Are you ready?"

Aislinn nodded and reached down to pick up the front of her skirt. The three women walked across the balcony and down the large staircase that descended from the balcony to the main room. Sarah and Makeda walked just behind and beside Aislinn. There were enough people coming and going on the staircase at that moment that no one in the main room noticed the group as being any different from the rest of the crowd. There were quite a few beautiful women in the cabin that night.

Aislinn looked over the crowd. There were very few people who weren't dressed in black. Even the druids were in suits or gowns. The women who weren't in black were obviously trying to draw attention. There was a red-head in a fire red dress, surrounded by numerous men.

Makeda laughed and pointed to the woman over the rail of the staircase. "I'll not tell you her name, so that when you do meet her you'll be able to say honestly you've not heard of her. That will drive her crazy. But be sure to mention knowing me during the conversation." Makeda's eyes sparkled mischievously. It was strange but that little joke was enough to make Aislinn feel much better.

Perhaps it wasn't as scary out here as she thought it would be.