

## Chapter 3

Aislinn could see the thoughts spinning through his head. He was amusing himself with whatever it was he was thinking. She couldn't help wondering what it was. He certainly had a pleasant smile. As he was standing there she finally saw what was making him smell so foul. He was wearing a t-shirt and jeans under his duster. Everything he was wearing was black, so in the gloomy bar with all the smoke and him sitting behind the bar she hadn't noticed. But now that he was standing, with the coat open in the light from the main entrance she could see what appeared to be blood all over the front of him. She wasn't an expert but she was pretty positive from the smell that it wasn't human blood. That had a more coppery smell to it. She had caught that smell coming from people a number of times. People were always getting hurt. The smell of human blood wasn't pleasant but it wasn't this foul either. ©(w)w.nov(e)lworm.cõmm

Cullen saw the look on her face and followed her gaze to the front of his clothes. When he realized what she was staring at he pulled the duster closed and looked up at her again. That had sobered him up a bit. He had nearly forgotten the fight with the vamp he'd gotten himself into on his way home. Then he didn't manage to make it home. This time when their eyes met they seemed to be staring into each other, trying to read the other's mind. That was when another large black SUV pulled into the lot.

Aislinn turned to look at who was pulling in. "This your friend?"

"Yhea, I think so," he said, still looking at her. He didn't want to be done with this yet. She had obviously seen the blood. Didn't she even care?

Aislinn looked back over his shoulder, and then sidled past him. "Excuse me." She half jogged, half walked toward the bar and jumped over it in one motion. Cullen noted the athletic ability that her non-athletic build masked. She grabbed some stuff from behind the bar and then came around the side, all the while watching the office door. As she came back toward the main entrance she called back to the office, "Derrick, that guy's ride's here. I'm leaving."

Before Derrick could get out of the office to stop her she had moved passed Cullen again and out into the parking lot. "Have a good night," she waved and walked hurriedly toward the street.

The guy from the office came trotting across the floor and stared out the door after her but she had managed to get out to the road and was on her way toward town. "Shit," he said and glared at Cullen.

Cullen could see the look in the man's eyes and knew that whether it was tonight or some other night Aislinn was in danger. Something in Cullen was outraged at the thought. But the alcohol was making it difficult for him to think beyond doing something unfortunate to the man right then and there. ©(w)w.(n)©(e)llwõrm.cõ©

Keith walked up to Cullen as Derrick ushered him the rest of the way out the entrance and closed the door and locked it without a word. Derrick would never know how close he came to being ripped to shreds that night.

Keith followed Cullen's gaze as he watched Aislinn walking quickly down the road. "Hey, you alright?"

"Yhea," Cullen answered and looked over at his friend as he was led toward the SUV. "Congratulate me. I'm engaged to be mated."

Keith understood. He shook his head. He couldn't believe that Cullen was going along with this. It wasn't the way the Arnauk operated. As they neared the SUV Liam stepped out. Cullen threw Liam the keys to the truck that he'd driven here and Liam headed for the other vehicle. Keith headed for his side of the car. As they were getting in Cullen saw Derrick appear out the side of the bar and head for the beat up car at the other side of the lot.

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"Do me a favor," Cullen said. "Consider it a condemned man's last request. Follow that guy."

Keith stared at Cullen a minute and then shrugged. Putting the truck in gear he headed after the guy. It didn't make any sense but who was he to argue with Lord General Cullen Arnauk. "You gonna tell me why we're following him?" www.noveworm.com

Cullen smiled sardonically. "Cuz he's an ass and I want a reason to rip his throat out."

"Alright." Keith wasn't used to Cullen being like this. Firstly, he didn't get drunk. Secondly, he didn't disappear and then need rides summoned by strange girls in the middle of the night. Thirdly, he didn't show interest in human females. And if that wasn't enough, he didn't chase human males around regardless of his intentions on them. Keith looked over at Cullen appraisingly. He knew that being forced into mating with Jenna Tairneach was the last thing in existence that he wanted.

"Faigh muin," Cullen swore vehemently and brought Keith's attention back to the situation. Keith slammed on the brakes and Cullen dove out of the car before Keith could see what the problem was.

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Aislinn had been walking as fast as she could. She was just praying that she could reach her crappy apartment before Derrick could get his act together. It was only a ten minute walk from the bar but if he got in his car relatively quickly he'd be able to catch up.

When Derrick pulled in front of her, cutting her off, she knew that she was in trouble. Aislinn headed for the other side of the road as Derrick got out and followed her. "Hey Ais, are you sure you don't want a ride?" he slurred.

God, I wonder how much he drank tonight? Aislinn's mind raced. He was between her and her apartment. Just one more block. Momentarily she thought she might be able to get around him. She was rather quick. Then there was the other option. He had tried this once before. She had cold cocked him and he had left her alone for a week. "Do you want me to hit you again?"

"You bitch," he said with a wicked glare. "You really do think you're too good for me. I'll teach you this time."

Aislinn set herself up in a defensive stance. As Derrick got closer she balled her hands into fists and punched him square in the face. Derrick grunted, but managed to catch himself just before he fell over. "Damn bitch!" he said, spitting out blood. "You on steroids or something?"