

Chapter 34

The elevator doors opened onto the 13th floor and Lord General Cullen Arnauk stepped out into a room full of people. As he looked around he figured that the whole of the pack, including those who weren't residing in the Madadh-Allaidh Saobhaidh were gathered. Most everyone was staring at him expectantly. Those who weren't staring at him were staring directly behind him at Aislinn.

Aislinn had watched Cullen's face turn from passionate heat to emotionless stone as the elevator descended from the penthouse. He had been completely silent from the moment they stepped into the elevator and now as they walked into the room she could see the reason why. I've never heard of a pack of wolves this large, she thought as she looked around at the room full of people.

Cullen didn't say a word to her. He simply passed through the crowd and she followed along behind. She hoped that he would give her some direction when it was needed. The people in his way stepped aside to let him pass. Aislinn noted that every person Cullen looked directly at lowered his eyes and slightly bowed his head. Some more obviously than others. The differences were subtle but it didn't take much to notice that the larger the person the smaller the head nod. Aislinn quickly started making mental notes of who seemed to be higher in rank than others. And who seemed to dislike the show of submission and who appeared to do it with due respect. She felt like she had just joined an intricate chess game in the middle and no one had told her who was playing which pieces.

Everyone in the room with few exceptions had a similar look to them. A person who had never met them before may have thought that any two of them were related. They all had the same dark hair and eyes that Cullen did. There were a few women and men who were lighter in shade or darker. But for the most part they all matched. Aislinn felt as though she stood out like a sore thumb. And not just because she was following along behind Cullen like a stray pup.

As Cullen walked into the great room there were slightly fewer people in there and they were all arguing. One graying man was talking exceptionally loud. "How the hell could the woman vanish in full view of the entire pack and no one would say a word about it? No search party? No-" The man cut himself off in mid sentence when Cullen entered the room. At that point everyone turned and looked at him, Keith with a grateful, relieved look. The man who had been yelling gave the smallest nod of everyone that Aislinn had seen so far. He was as tall as Cullen but slighter built and his eyes were an angry, resentful brown. He looked considerably older than Cullen but he was certainly still in good enough shape to be trouble. "So our Lord finally makes his appearance," the man said in a voice dripping with sarcasm. "And this little one behind him must be the curious cause of his late arrival."

Aislinn met the man's stare straight on, without blinking or flinching as he stared at her measuringly. He grinned back at her with a seemingly impressed and amused gaze when she didn't lower her eyes or cow to his stare. Cullen didn't falter a single step. "Terrick, this is Aislinn," he replied. And that was all he said about it. "Now do you mind if we move this conversation into private quarters?" At that Cullen called out a list of names and each of those people moved out of the room and down a hall. Then he turned to Aislinn and looked at her with concern. "The mood in here is harder than I thought it might be." He pulled his keys out of his pocket and fished the key to the elevator off the ring. "Don't lose this," he said as if he was talking to a child and that earned him a glare from Aislinn that more than one person watching started whispering about. "If you need out of here go up to my room. I don't have any idea how long this is going to take. But don't leave the building."

Aislinn nodded to him. "Don't worry. I'll be fine," she smiled at him. "I'm not so sure about you though from the looks on the faces of those people you sent wherever."

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He let a smile toy with the corner of his mouth in return to her quiet comment. "I've seen worse." Then the fleeting bit of emotion was gone and he headed down the hall that the others had gone down, leaving Aislinn to figure out what to do with herself in the mean time.

She let out a heavy breath. This was going to be interesting. Everyone was here for an explanation and they were all going to wait around until they got one. That much was certain. And right now Aislinn was a tempting target. They didn't know how much she knew or didn't know about the mating ceremony. But in and of herself she was certainly a curiosity that they wanted to know about. It was just a matter of time before the questions started. She briefly considered going up to the penthouse to hide, but decided that if she was going to figure out what she was in for the only way to do it would be to stick around and see what happened.

Aislinn looked around the room at all the people staring at her. It wasn't tough to pick out the ones who were merely curious about her and the ones who were pissed off. She counted three women who looked angry and six who looked amused. Those were probably the friends of the angry ones, who had to be some of the women that Cullen had mentioned. Aislinn was in the process of trying to come up with something to say to anyone when Rissa seemed to appear out of nowhere. Her eyes were sparkling with interest and she was being followed by several other women who had the same amused inquisitive look as well.

Aislinn knew that she was about to be bombarded with questions, but she figured that anything Rissa wanted to ask had to be better than standing in the middle of the room like some kind of freak show act at the circus. "Come on," Rissa said, "Let's go sit down. They'll probably be forever back there. When Lord Arnauk gets that tone we all know we're in for it." Then her smile got impossibly wide as she added, "Although he certainly seemed to change his demeanor when he was talking to you." The lilt in her voice said with no uncertainty that she was fishing for some kind of confirmation to the statement. But much to her disappointment Aislinn merely smiled back at the woman. Aislinn was just relieved that she had found someone she knew and was relatively certain was friendly.