

Chapter 43

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While she was talking Cullen was running his hands under her shirt and heading for her breasts, causing her to smile through the annoying topic. She breathed out with an odd soft growling purr that had him more listening to her breath than her talking as he cupped her breasts and pushed his hardon against her. Aislinn tried to continue but was finding it more and more difficult. "Half the people I run into seem curious about me, amused for some reason, and inclined to sniff and move on. The other half, mostly women, are acting as if I insulted their mothers." If Cullen kept up his play then she'd never get to talk to him about what was going on.

"They'll get over it," Cullen said in dismissal and pinched her nipple, causing a delicious moan. He smiled and moved her off of his lap onto the desk. He sat her on the edge of the desk and nuzzled her nose with his angling her face up. He was pleased that she seemed to be taking this all with such acceptance. "As long as you think putting up with them is worth it."

Aislinn put her hands on either side of his face and stared into his eyes. "Tell me that you want me," she responded softly and with a seriousness that nearly drove Cullen back into the wall. Normally a woman speaking and acting like Aislinn would have him assigning her to some job as far from the den as possible. But Aislinn inspired him to want to do any number of things to her, most of which involved his bed and her on her hands and knees.

Cullen stared into her eyes. Emotions crashed over him like a tidal wave. "Aislinn, I-" A knock on the door interrupted him and Keith walked in without waiting for a response. When there was no smart ass comment about walking in on Cullen standing between Aislinn's legs with such obvious intent Cullen knew that something serious was happening.

Keith didn't wait for Cullen to ask what was wrong and only briefly considered suggesting that they send Aislinn out of the room. There were some things he wanted to know about Aislinn that Cullen didn't seem willing to broach with her and he figured that this would be as good a time as any. He had never seen his friend so obsessed with a woman. There wasn't a lycan in the pack that couldn't see where this was go. Hell, half the women who had been chasing him for decades had already given in and moved on to lesser targets. The only problem was that most of the elders were uncomfortable with Aislinn. She was too much of a mystery. And what was worse was that Cullen didn't seem to be in any hurry to figure it out. With all the time they had spent together, if Cullen had been talking to her, then he'd know her family life history by now. Keith stared at her contemplatively and Aislinn stared right back. Another reason to be nervous about her.

Keith didn't bother to wait for an invitation. He just started his latest resport. "Jenna has turned up. Apparently there's a mating about to take place. Brennus and Gregor are both dead and Rafe is to be the alpha of the Tairneach." Keith sat down in the chair across from Cullen's desk. He propped his feet up and waited for a response.

Cullen took a deep breath and stepped away from Aislinn. "When did this happen?"

"This morning I guess. Our contact in the Tairneach says that Rafe showed up with Jenna on his arm and a group of weres of all shapes and sizes backing him up. Odd weres too. A bunch of them were mix-breeds. Made some pretty speech that had everyone growling with approval and then Brennus promptly handed the pack over. Shortly there after Brennus's body was found along with Gregor's. The story is that the two men killed each other fighting over Brennus's decision. No one is contesting it. I wonder why. Who knows what Rafe's doing to their brains as we speak." Keith shifted uncomfortably and looked over at Aislinn. "You can't do that kind of coach can you?"

Aislinn looked confused. "What? Mind control? No. But Rafe seems to think I have the potential. He talked about teaching me. I think that it's part of the reason he won't back off and let me go. He keeps saying that I'm like him." Then she turned to Cullen. "But I'm not."

Cullen heard the tremor in her voice. He had been concerned that this might come up. He pulled her to himself and hugged her. "I know. Don't worry. I think Keith was more interested in the possibility that you might be able to do something to help the situation." He gave Keith a meaningful glare over Aislinn's head so that she wouldn't see it. *w(w)w.nôV(e)lw©Rm.©oM*

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Keith wasn't sure he liked the way Cullen was coddling her. There were times that Aislinn appeared strong and intelligent. But all it took was mention of Rafe and she seemed to crumble. The guy had gotten to her badly and Cullen was dangerously protective of her. He only hoped that the situation would improve once they were mated and Cullen would be more able to keep track of her. "Yeah, that's what I meant," he said unconvincingly. "Look what we know is that we're about to be at war with a pack that was already our equal and has now added lions, tigers, bears, and the Gods know what else to their numbers. To make matters worse the new alpha has no trouble randomly killing anyone who might see reason and can play games with people's heads. I don't know about you but I'm scared shitless. You'll have to forgive me if I start grasping at straws and being suspicious." Keith's joking demeanor was completely gone and Cullen knew that the only thing keeping him from joining Keith in serious terror was Aislinn. It was impossible to think about anything unpleasant when she smiled at him.

Aislinn got down off of Cullen's desk. Keith was right. She knew how he felt or worse. Rafe terrified her. She thought back to the night at the mating ceremony, as much as she didn't like that. With a great deal of effort she pulled herself into the moment and tried to be as helpful as she could. She knew that if she was going to fit in around here then someone other than Cullen needed to trust her or they were all going to start thinking that the only reason Cullen liked her was because she was doing something to him when no one was looking. Well, beyond what she was doing. She smiled to herself. "I don't know what I'm capable of. I seem to be able to manage things when I put my mind to it. I'd never tried getting into other people's minds before that night at your ceremony but I managed a little. I don't know. Maybe if I put some effort into it I could do some of the things Rafe does. But it's more than just some mental ability he has. He uses something else too. He's always got a smell about him. That's part of his ability to mess with people. Maybe you could all wear gas masks or something."