

## Chapter 5

Aislinn stood in silence for a minute staring at nothing on the ground. "You're right. I'm gonna have to quit. I can't stay there now. It would have been one thing if I'd just beat him off like last time. But you really screwed this up."

Cullen growled at her. "Would you have rather--"

"Let me finish." Aislinn interrupted him. Cullen was shocked into silence. No one interrupted him.

"No I wouldn't rather the alternative. But you didn't have to put him in the hospital." *W@w.fiaVélwoRm.cO@*

"He's not in the hospital. At least I don't see you running to call an ambulance." Cullen shook his head. "You know what? Just forget it. I'm sorry I interfered." He turned and started to head for the SUV.

Aislinn watched him leaving for a moment. "Shit, wait!" She was standing there nervously. "God, why does the smart thing have to feel so crappy? Look, I just don't like owing people anything. And I seem to be accumulating quite the bill with you. First you come out of no where and," she shifted her weight from foot to foot, "well you know what you did. Now you want to give me a real job. How the hell am I supposed to pay you back for this stuff?"

Cullen could understand how she was feeling. He didn't like owing people either. "You can call us even for the first thing, considering you spent half your shift keeping an eye on me and then making sure I got home all right." She looked like she was about to argue but an authoritative look from Cullen kept her silent. Even if the glare she threw at him was screaming that she didn't think it was an even trade off. "And as far as the job goes, I'm just offering you a job. Intelligent reliable people are hard to come by. It's not as big a favor as you might think."

"I'm really not in a position to turn you down." Aislinn was feeling trapped. But she knew better than to think that it would be at all feasible to go back to her job at the Blood Pit.

Cullen nodded. He started searching his pockets. Then looked up at her. "Got a piece of paper and a pen?"

Aislinn opened her purse and started rooting around inside. "Now you're asking a lot." After a moment she shook her head. "Not with me. But I know I have one inside." She pulled her keys out and without another thought about letting a complete stranger into her apartment she headed up the stairs and opened the main door. Cullen followed along behind.

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Keith watched out the window as Cullen headed up the stairs with the girl he had just rescued. None of it made any sense. He was torn between getting out and following them and just asking Cullen what the hell he was doing. It was late and he wanted to go back to his bed.

Cullen was still just drunk enough to completely forget that Keith was waiting outside. The elevator was out of order so they headed up three flights of stairs. The place was entirely unpleasant. He couldn't help the look on his face when Aislinn opened the door to her apartment and then looked at him to come in.

"I know the place is pretty awful. But the rent is cheap." She was more than a little embarrassed by letting him see the place. She lived in an efficiency in the bad part of town. There's only one look for places like that. Dark, dingy, dirty, rundown, and crappy. The only thing worse would be being homeless. The one room she was in had wallpaper that was tattered and old in the 70's. She had a mattress on the floor in one corner and the kitchen was only functional because of the microwave she got at the local Goodwill. She tossed her purse down on the table. She was kicking herself for letting him in here. She could just imagine where he probably lived if he was able to say that he had influence over a number of businesses in town. She rummaged through some things on a small table in the kitchen/dining/living area of the room and managed to produce a pen and paper.

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Cullen could see the embarrassment on her face when she handed him the stuff without looking him in the eyes for the first time that night. He put the paper on the table and wrote a name, number, and address on the paper. Then he wrote something else underneath that. "Here," Cullen handed her the paper and she looked over the information. "Go to the address there. The guy you want to talk to is Liam Arnauk. Tell him that Cullen sent you. I wrote him a note there. He'll give you a job."

Aislinn looked over the paper. The note he had written on the bottom of it wasn't written in English, but she could read it. "The girl's name is Aislinn. I'd appreciate if you found her a job. I'll call us even if you manage something good. Cullen."

Cullen was stunned. It took a lot to surprise him. But this girl had managed one thing after another tonight. "You read Gaelic?"

Aislinn was pleased by the shocked look on his face. She smiled at him smugly. "Actually I read and speak several languages. Gaelic is one of them."

"How? No one in the US bothers with Gaelic." He couldn't help the curiosity. Who was she?

"I wasn't always living in crapholes like this and waiting tables in bars to make ends barely meet. Before I came here I was a college student. I was studying folklore and dead languages. Gaelic may not be completely dead, but it's pretty close. I find it interesting. Actually I was wondering why you were using it. Studying something like that in college is one thing. But it looks like you're using it on a casual basis. And 'no one in the US bothers with Gaelic.'" Aislinn mocked good-naturedly. She could tell by the incredulous look on his face that she had managed to get a little passed his guard and that didn't happen often.

"My entire family speaks Gaelic. We just always have." He was giving her that appraising look again. Cullen couldn't hold back his curiosity any longer. He stepped in close to her and moving very slowly so as not to scare her he leaned down and smelled her hair.

Aislinn felt an almost electric surge shoot through her as he stood so close to her. Her heart began pounding. At this proximity she could still smell the awful odor of whatever the blood on his clothes belonged to, but she also got a much stronger scent of him.

They both just stood there breathing. Neither of them wanting to move. Cullen had never felt this compelled to touch a woman before in his life. Aislinn didn't know if she wanted him to go or stay. When they finally moved they just stood staring into each other's eyes as if they were trying to understand what was happening. But neither of them could wrap their brains around the situation.

Finally Cullen gently reached out and cupped his hand along the side of her face. Warmth spread from the touch through Aislinn's body. Cullen ran his thumb slowly over her parted lips. She took in a sharp breath as shock waves seemed to travel through her from the place where he touched. All the sensations were amazingly strong and resulted in a heat forming between her legs.

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The minute the scent of her arousal hit him Cullen felt his wolf surge like nothing he'd ever experienced. No battle or woman before now had ever summoned his spirit like this. He wanted her and there was nothing else in the world right at that moment. Just this enigmatic female standing proudly in front of him, challenging him, and drawing him in. He still couldn't place her scent. It wasn't lycan, was it? But it wasn't completely human either. Could he even be drawn like this to something that was neither human or lycan? Was she fey? Maybe a druid? But he thought he knew those scents as well. Maybe the alcohol and all the competing smells from the evening were messing with his senses. He wanted to know.