

Chapter 53

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After a silent pause that seemed to last an eternity Cullen shifted in his chair. Cullen's voice had softened significantly but his face went more stony, if that was even possible. There was no emotion to be seen in his eyes. The stranger Aislinn was looking at made her go numb. "All right. Brinah, you show us what we need to do to make something to stop Rafe's mind altering abilities. When we deal with him and it is safe, you and Aislinn can go home."

The look on Aislinn's face when he said that ripped into him, even if no one could see it. How could he do that? Was he just going to shove her out the door? "Isn't that my decision to make," Aislinn said in a cracking voice.

Cullen's stomach turned. "I'm not going to ask you to leave your family for this," he responded.

"So you're done with me. Just like the others." Aislinn couldn't stop the tear that dropped from her eye. She stood up and walked away from his desk. She had been figuring it would happen. Just not this soon. And after the afternoon they'd had.

"This is nothing like the others," he said.

"Right," she answered. Then walked out of the office, slamming the door behind her as she left. The shock wave that rolled through the room made Cullen flinch. He almost went after her. But decided that she needed to cool off and if he was going to go through with this then chasing her would give her the wrong impression. He figured that he would talk to her after he was done here.

Aislinn headed for the elevator, walked inside, and hit the lobby button. She needed to get out of here and get some air. She knew there wasn't anywhere inside this building that she could hide and she just didn't want to deal with her thoughts right now.

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Ranaïld only barely made it into the elevator before the door closed. She sent him a teary eyed glare when he joined her. It nearly broke his heart. Whatever had happened in that office wasn't going to make his intentions any easier.

Neither of them spoke. He didn't really want to talk to her. If he started feeling too bad for her he might change his mind. Ranaïld wasn't sure how she had managed to get out of Cullen's sight, but there was no way he could pass this up. When the doors opened on the lobby he wondered why the fates seemed so damned determined to give Rafe what he wanted. Aislinn slipped through the lobby and headed for the front doors. Ranaïld followed her. He couldn't believe how easy she was making this.

She took off out the front doors of the Madadh-Allaidh Saobhaidh and then down the sidewalk. She wrapped her arms around herself. The cool air was helping. She was trying desperately not to cry. I knew it,she thought. Nothing in my life ever stays good. I don't know why I let myself get so attached so quickly. I knew that something would ruin it.Her brain was swimming and she just wanted it to stop. She didn't even notice Ranaïld following her down the sidewalk.

Ranaïld decided to let her get as far from the den as possible before he took her. She was moving at a good clip and as far as he could tell there wasn't anyone else following her. He kept looking behind them and watching. He sniffed at the air. But he seemed to be in the clear.

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Finally Aislinn stopped on a corner. There was a taxi sitting and waiting for a fair. Ranaïld stepped up behind her and took her by the arm. She looked up at him with a shocked, angry glare. He returned an apologetic look as he pulled the dagger from behind him and brought it covertly around to jab into her side. Her anger turned to fear as she realized what was happening.

Ranaïld guided her toward the taxi. "Open the door," he said in a frightening deadpan and pressed the dagger further into her side. Aislinn silently did as she was told. They both got into the taxi and Ranaïld gave the driver directions to where he wanted to go.

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Aislinn looked down at the dagger, covered in dried blood, which was pressing into her side. Then she looked back up at Ranaïld. She knew him. She often saw him talking to Cullen. She knew that Cullen had trusted him.

Celia watched as Ranaïld sat brooding in a chair angled so that he could watch down the hallway. He was acting strangely. Everyone who had been in the elder meeting knew the possibility of one of their own being on the wrong side of all the mess that was going on. The rumors had everyone in the pack on edge. Regardless of Celia's issues with Aislinn there had been a reason that Cullen had taken her as one of the women he spent time with. Ultimately she was one of the best in the pack. She had earned her position the hard way. She was intelligent, observant, and devious enough to see it in other people when sometimes it was overlooked. Ranaïld was acting just strangely enough to get her attention.

When Aislinn came out of Cullen's office in tears and Ranaïld headed after her Celia watched with an uneasy realization that he might be one of the traitors. She couldn't believe it. Ranaïld? Celia went over to the elevator panel and watched to see what floor the elevator stopped at. Then she hit the stairs. She flew down the flights of stairs as fast as she could. She knew she wouldn't catch up if she waited for the elevator. But she might be able to track them if she got to the lobby before the scent was lost.

Mack watched Celia dart for the stairwell and immediately trailed after her. He didn't really know what she was up to but it was a rare occasion that she ran anywhere and he was going to find out where she was going.

Celia almost raised the alarm. But she couldn't bring herself to it without proof of what she thought she was seeing. She had been friends with Ranaïld and Elise, his mate, for too long to do that to him and his family if it wasn't true. At the same time, if it was true she'd rip his throat out herself. Elise? When was the last time she'd spoken with Elise? The thought was fleeting and gone the minute she came slamming out the lobby doors.

Celia headed for the elevator and immediately picked up Aislinn's scent. She'd know that galla anywhere. When she saw Mack come through the stairs' doors and into the lobby she swore to herself.Doesn't he have anything better to do?

"Whatcha up to Cel?" Mack said nonchalantly as he approached her.

"Mind your own-," Celia started then thought better of it. If what she was thinking about Ranaïld was true then it might not be bright to chase after him alone. "Coach," she swore. "Just come on. Follow me and try and keep out of sight."