

Chapter 57

Every time Aislinn started to speak during the taxi ride Ranaïld would jab her with the dagger. It didn't take long for her to realize that she needed to just keep her mouth shut. The taxi driver kept looking in the rearview mirror. But one look from Ranaïld and the man would go back to minding his own business. *Ww.noVelwórm.c@*

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By the time the taxi pulled up in front of the Tairneach manor it was nearing dawn. Ranaïld had the man stop at the end of the drive just outside the gate. Ranaïld got out first. He was tired and his guard was down. He figured that he was home free at this point. He just couldn't make himself feel good about it. When Aislinn noticed that Ranaïld wasn't paying attention she turned and ran after the taxi that was pulling away from the gate.

Without even thinking Ranaïld let his hand fly. The dagger he had been holding all evening hit Aislinn in the back of the thigh. The dagger lodged deep in the muscle and sent searing waves of pain running all the way up her body. She cried out in pain as she fell to the ground and tears of anger began to pour down her face as the taxi got away. She slammed her hands on the ground in frustraton That was it. She didn't have anything left. Her cries died out and she went limp, resigning herself to her fate. Maybe Rafe was right. Maybe she was destined to be his.

With an emotionless demeanor Ranaïld came over to her. "For what it's worth, I'm sorry," he said as he picked her up and threw her over his shoulder. He reached up and pulled the dagger out of her leg. Blood poured from the wound. There was a trace scent of Elise from the blood that had dried on the dagger that mingled with the coppery fresh smell of Aislinn's blood. The scent reached into Ranaïld and reminded him of why he was betraying his pack, his alpha, his friend, and himself. He put the dagger back in the waist of his pants, not bothering to wipe it off. He figured that with the blood on his hands now, it didn't matter that it was on his clothes as well. Then he headed toward the manor. The gate at the end of the drive swung wide without Ranaïld having to ask. He was expected.

Aislinn didn't bother to fight back. The last ounce of fight left in her was lost in the dash for the taxi. After what had happened with Cullen and now this, Aislinn felt drained. She lay over Ranaïld's shoulder like a rag doll and watched the ground pass beneath his feet as he headed through the gate.

Rafe sat up in bed and picked up the ringing phone on the night stand. "This better be good." As the voice answered back a disgusting smile crept across his lips. "By all means let them in. I'll be down momentarily." Rafe jumped out of bed and threw on a black robe and slippers. He hadn't bothered to rise this early in a long time. But what kind of host would he be if he didn't greet his guest personally.

Ranaïld stood in the front room of the manor. Blood dribbled down Aislinn's leg and was leaving drops on the white and gray marble floor. He stared at the blood and weighed the odds that Elise might already be dead, that Rafe might not release her even now, or that he would get Elise back and be allowed to leave unharmed. But at what price. He felt cold and empty.

Rafe walked into the room. When he saw the blood on Aislinn he was angered at first. But his features smoothed over as he reminded himself that a leg wound would heal. At least he had her now. "Put her down."

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Ranaïld did as he was told too well. Aislinn felt her ass hit the cold marble and winced as the pain in her leg shot up her body again. She was starting to feel strange. She figured that the loss of blood must be making her nauseous and dizzy. She just didn't think she had lost that much blood. And that didn't explain the pain in her arms. All her muscles felt tight and her ears were ringing.

"Where's Elise?" Ranaïld said coolly. He had made the decision that if Rafe did anything other than what he had agreed to Ranaïld was going to kill him where he stood one way or another.

Rafe smiled at the man. He knew exactly what the lycan was thinking. "Why wouldn't I hold up my end of the bargain my friend?" he said with that terrible smile playing along his lips. "After all I wouldn't want to deprive you of the lifetime of self loathing for what you've done." He was amused. Lycans were so easily manipulated. He leaned over to a large tiger that had a lion's mane and said something softly to the animal. Then it trotted off down a hall.

"Now if you don't mind," Rafe said, "you can wait in the entry way." At that another large cat appeared and ushered Ranaïld back toward the front door. Ranaïld vaguely noted the number of annoyed looking lycans around the room who were allowing the cats to run their manor. Rafe walked over and knelt down next to Aislinn. Her blue eyes flashed at him and silver swirled in their depths. "You certainly are beautiful when you're angry," he said staring into her eyes.

Aislinn couldn't help but be frightened. She did her best to channel that fear into her anger so that Rafe wouldn't have the pleasure of knowing how much he scared her. But between the pain, the sick feeling, and his eyes boring into her, Aislinn didn't have the same kind of control over herself as usual. She decided that the best thing she could possibly do is channel all of her remaining energy into blocking Rafe out of her mind. If nothing else she didn't want him able to use what had happened that night to torment her. She'd rather be raped than that.

Rafe tried to get into her head. He had been frustrated enough when he stopped being able to find her dreams. But having her right in front of him and not being able to get in was pissing him off. He stood up and without thinking he pulled his hand back and slapped her across the face sending her sprawling on the floor.

Aislinn was shocked. He was much worse than the last time she had been face to face with him. Something about him was more twisted than before. This was not the man she had originally met. This one wouldn't have been able to play at nice the way Rafe had been in the beginning. This one was leaning toward insane. She hadn't even seen the slap coming when he hit her. She lay on the floor. She could feel him trying to get into her head again. She refused to let him.

"You've gotten better at this since meeting the lycans. I wouldn't have thought you could learn so much so quickly and on your own," his voice shifted strangely from sincere to menacing and angry then back again as he talked. "I'm torn between being annoyed and being impressed. I don't think you want me to put you through what I'm going to do to you if you continue to hide your mind from me Aislinn." *w(w)w.NoVelwórm.c@*