

Chapter 60

Brinah was torn between telling her that it was ignorant to go charging off to attack a place over the possibility that they may have taken one person captive and asking why they hadn't left yet. She opted for not causing any additional trouble. "So do you have the things I asked for? I'll need a kitchen. And there are a few other things that occur to me might be helpful. I'll get you a list of ingredients for those as well." She was wringing her hands and shifting her weight from foot to foot.

Sarah rolled her eyes and took off out the door to handle other duties and left Keith to finish with Brinah.

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The Arnauk were drastically out of practice. It had been a couple decades since they had been on war footing. When Cullen had spoken to the elders after the failed mating everyone had left the meeting believing that Cullen would get it all under control. He always did. When the call for fighters to mobilize went out it took everyone off guard. Cullen was pissed and impatient. At one point in time a call to mobilize would have had the entire pack assembled at the den within hours.

As the day wore on Cullen grew more and more agitated. Brinah wasn't finished with whatever she was making and a large number of his pack were still missing. He didn't know whether it was because they had joined Rafe or because they hadn't gotten the call or because they were on their way. He promised himself that he wouldn't let the pack get this out of shape ever again. But for now there was nothing he could do about it. He paced and swore and scared people away from himself. He decided that regardless of who he had, how many he had, or whether Brinah was ready by nightfall they would be leaving for the Tairneach manor.

Ranaild and Elise had managed to get to town. Elise had been chained and beaten so often that she had only barely managed to walk to town and she wouldn't have made it if Ranaild hadn't carried her most of the way. He was debating taking her to a human hospital. But the need to be as far from the Tairneach as possible made him opt for the first public bathroom they came too.

Ranaild carried Elise into the nasty gas station bathroom and sat her on the dirty graffiti covered sink counter. They hadn't talked since they left the manor. Elise could see and feel the self loathing in him even though he refused to look directly at her. Ranaild wet a bunch of paper towels and made Elise let him look at her wounds. He was wiping dried blood away from a particularly nasty looking one on her side.

Elise's voice trembled a bit when she asked him, "What did you do to get me out of there Ranaild?"

He stopped cleaning the gash in her flesh and finally met her gaze. He stared into her eyes for a very long time. Tears formed in his own and she reached for him, but he wouldn't accept the comfort she was offering. "Whatever I had to do," he finally said.

Elise didn't ask him any more. She submitted to his poking and prodding. When he was satisfied that she was able to keep going he helped her down and they headed out the door. He couldn't stop thinking about how much he hated himself right then. He wasn't strong enough to have protected her the way he should have. He wanted to kill Rafe for what he had done to Elise and for what Rafe had made him do. He wanted to kill himself for betraying his pack.

Elise was the one who saw the Tairneach convoy. Her hands dug into Ranaild's arm and she pulled him back around the corner of the gas station to hide as they drove past. Her heart was racing. They were headed for Arnauk territory. "They must be on their way to the reservation," she said as tears filled her eyes. "They're going to attack again. It's all they've been talking about for days. When they were going to take the stones."

Ranaild looked at Elise. "You know I love you," he said.

"I don't like the way you said that Ranaild. What are you going to do?"

"If I call Cullen and warn them they may be able to do something about it. But after what I've done..." He couldn't finish it.

"So we weren't going home, were we?"

"I'll take you back to the pack Elise. You'll be safe there. But if I were Cullen, I wouldn't let me live."*www.NovelWorm.com*

"Then we won't go back. Ranaild, I don't want to know what you did. I don't care. I just need to be with you. We don't need the pack. We can go somewhere else." The panic in Elise's voice almost made him think that it could work.

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He shook his head. "I'd never be able to live with myself knowing... And there's the boys Elise. I've got to tell Cullen. I can tell him other things too. I can't just disappear. I wish I could."

Elise wanted to stop him. But she knew that if he didn't follow his heart then he wouldn't be the man she mated with. She nodded agreement with tears in her eyes.

Ranaild fished his cell phone out of his pocket. The 1 message caption was running across the face of the phone. He knew that it was from Cullen. He wondered if the alpha had figured it out or if it was just a call. It didn't matter. He dialed Cullen's number and listened to the phone ring with the morbid feeling of a man going to his own funeral. *www.novelworm.com*

Cullen was sitting in his office going over the report he had neglected earlier. He was trying to decide if Ranaild was the only traitor or if he needed to jail all of the people on the list. His phone rang and he picked it up to see who was calling him. When he saw the caller ID his wolf went into overdrive. He flipped open the phone and growled into the receiver, "Tell me why I shouldn't rip your throat out."

"I can't. I'll lay down at your feet and offer you my throat when this is over. But for now you need to know some things. Rafe has loaded the Tairneach up and they're all headed for the reservation. I just watched the convoy pass us. I give them two hours to get there."

Cullen was confused. "Why should I listen to you?"

"I've done enough damage. I'm on my way back to the den. You can deal with me when you return. I'll accept the repercussions of my actions. I'm sorry."

Cullen's wolf retreated in confusion. Cullen could felt as though his beast was pacing in him mind. He wasn't sure how to deal with Ranaild now and that made him angrier. It would have been much easier breaking Ranaild's neck before this phone call. Ranaild proceeded to give him the names of the other men he knew were being manipulated by Rafe. But left the detailed explanations for a later date, when there was more time.

Cullen stormed out of the office with a new list. He had to further cut his numbers. He pulled several of his best men who weren't on the list to round up the men that Ranaild had named. The last thing he needed was inner pack conflict when they went into battle, even if he was neutering his numbers.

Finally he decided that he couldn't wait any longer. The Tairneach had a two hour lead by the time he straightened everything out. If Ranaild was correct that would place them on the reservation by now. Brinah had only just finished the alchemical formula she said would counteract the compound Rafe was using. It was a foul smelling liquid that she told people to spray themselves down with. Keith was complaining that it didn't mesh well with his aftershave. Brinah insisted on going with them. Cullen hadn't thought it was a good idea but he had enough other things going on that he just didn't have the energy left to try and stop her. Overall it was a hectic mess.