

Chapter 67

Cullen's jaws closed on Rafe's throat. He heard a sickening crunch and he yanked his head back tearing Rafe's throat from his neck. Cullen fell back from Rafe's body, spitting the bloody mass of flesh out. Cullen sat there breathing heavily for a moment before he came to his senses and looked around for Aislinn. He let his wolf slip back and took on his human form, feeling some of the tension ebb.

All around them the sounds of battle were coming to an end. Slowly the Arnauk and Tairneach left were gathering around the stone circle for orders. They stood uneasily together. Bodies riddled the ground. The smell of blood was so thick that the lycans couldn't scent the difference between each other. Mates sensing loss searched through the crowd for each other in fear crying out mentally for their missing half. There was a growing group of were-cats being herded together to be dealt with when Jenna and Cullen were able to give their joint attentions to the problem.

Jenna appeared and stood over Rafe's mangled form. Her body apparently untouched amidst the battle. She kicked at the dead were-bear-lion with one foot as if to make sure he wasn't coming back. Then she looked over at Cullen with a relief that made Cullen start to wonder if he had misjudged her. But that moment was fleeting. She smiled at him with a weak evil, as if it was taking too much effort for her right then and she fiddled with a ring on a chain around her neck. Cullen recognized the large ruby signet that had been on Brennus Tairneach's hand for the whole of the time that Cullen had known him. The two alphas exchanged looks and without talking agreed that their fight would continue at a later date.

www.foVellw(r)m.co)m

Jenna turned to the two large lycans that were trailing behind her protectively. "Have the others gather the bodies of our dead and make ready to leave."

The large man bowed his head in compliance. "What about the cats," he sneered, looking over at the group of creatures that were being gathered together. It was taking quite a few lycans to keep them all in line. There were a few excessively large mixed were-beasts that the lycan guards were having trouble with.

Jenna looked over her shoulder at Cullen, who was still sitting on his knees trying to gather his strength. "I think that Rafe and his followers have been a Tairneach problem for long enough. Let the Arnauk clean up the mess." She grinned at Cullen. "I wouldn't want you to get the wrong idea about me," she said sweetly. Then headed away from the gory scene in the circle of standing stones. (w)Ww.NoVell@ôrm.co)m

"Jenna," Cullen called after her. She stopped momentarily and turned to him. "Brennus would have been proud," he said loud enough that most of the Tairneach present wouldn't miss it.

Jenna's eyes fell away from his with a teary thoughtful glaze across them, as if she didn't really believe it. Then she looked at Cullen again with a sad grateful stare, before turning and disappearing back toward the cabin and their vans.

Cullen shook his head and started to stand. He felt his body crunch. He had a lot of healing to do. Rafe may not have been very skilled at fighting. Thank the Fates for that! But his strength had been monstrous and every time he managed to make contact with Cullen he broke a bone or ripped a gash in his flesh that would scar horribly before he had a chance to heal. But he would survive. Barely, he thought.

ww(w).©•el@ôRM.(c)©©

Cullen's eyes fell on Aislinn. She was so amazingly beautiful. His heart was near exploding with how much he needed to hold her. She hadn't managed to change out of her hybrid form yet. But she appeared relatively unharmed. There were a number of claw slashes along her waist and arms but they appeared to be healing quickly. Unbelievably quickly, Cullen noted as he watched the scratches on her breasts fade away. Suddenly he realized he was staring at her breasts. His breath caught in his chest as his eyes traveled to the small scattered spots and white fur that began just under and along the sides of her breasts. The spots darkened to mottled black in color as the white fur blended into the same brown color as her hair, and increased in number traveling around her sides. The spots seemed to dip and gather in just the right places to accentuate each curve of her body. The leopard like markings kissed the tops of her shoulders and faded along her collar bone. He was dying to press his lips to her skin and taste each gorgeous spot. They ran up the sides of her neck and along her hair line. Her face was more human than it should have been, even in hybrid form.

(w)ww.No(v)Elwôrm.coMl

Cullen wondered how many women Rafe had experimented with changing before he came up with this. Her features were most definitely cat-like. Her upper lip curved up just enough to appear like a muzzle but without losing the thick human lower lip. Her nose was more flat against her muzzle, but was oddly wider than a cat's should have been. His tongue wet his own lips unconsciously. He felt his arousal growing even through the pain of his injuries. Her eyes were what captured him the most. There was no cat there. They were too round. The pupils took up too much area. He smiled. Somehow those eyes were lycan. Amber had replaced the silver that they had been before and swirled around the black dilated pupils. Flecks of iridescent blue mingled in their depths causing them to shift from gold to green and back again. It was hypnotic to watch.

She had gone to Brinah's collapsed body and was kneeling next to her grandmother. She pulled Brinah up onto her lap. Aislinn was stroking her grandmother's hair and tears were streaming down her face. Her gaze shifted alternately from the strange spots that covered the back of her arms to her grandmother's face. She didn't think she could take one more thing. She just didn't have the strength left. She believed that Cullen didn't want her, Rafe raped her and changed her into this thing, and now her grandmother was lying dead in her arms. She trembled with the excess of misery that flowed through her. I knew I never should have let you come here, she thought as she stroked her grandmother's hair gently. Aislinn wouldn't let herself think it in words but she felt as though this was her fault.

Cullen forced himself to stand and walk to Aislinn. She was concentrating so hard on her own thoughts that she didn't notice him coming. As he walked around behind her he watched the spots blend into stripes. The change was so subtle it was difficult to tell where the stripes ended and the spots began. He studied the elegant slant of the stripes across her back, trailing the line of her waist and leading his eyes to follow the curve of her hip. He winced and let out a sharp escape of air as he knelt behind her. Cullen's presence behind her shocked her and she flinched away as if he was going to hurt her. She refused to look at him. "Aislinn-"he started and tried to reach for her. Cullen felt more pain from her reaction to him than he did from his broken body.

She shied away from him. "Stop," she interrupted. Her voice was trembling and she held herself protectively away from him. "Just stop. Whatever it is I can't do it right now. Just leave me alone."

Cullen felt tears well up. He held them down. But he moved back, falling to sit a few feet away, watching her back. He was tired of not knowing what to do. It seemed to have been a perpetual state of mind for him since she had appeared in his life. But, the last thing he wanted was for her to start associating him with the types of things that Rafe had done to her. So forcing her to let him hold her was out of the question. He sat on the ground, those few feet from her seeming like miles, and feeling broken in so many ways.