

## Chapter 71

"I thought we already had this discussion. I do remember telling you at one point that it wouldn't matter," Cullen said in his most sincere tone. His stomach was turning he was so nervous. But if he didn't take this opportunity he didn't know if he'd get another one. "Besides, I do find you incredibly beautiful. And it's not just because of what you look like or smell like. I like the way you make me think and feel. You're intelligent and capable. I never knew what I wanted until I met you."

Aislinn looked up at him. She wanted to believe him so badly.*w(w)w.ôvŁW@Tm.(c)cn*

Sarah's words echoed in Cullen's mind. She better be right, he thought. Knowing that if Aislinn ripped his heart out they'd be finding a new alpha for the Arnauk. He cleared his throat and Aislinn could see a nervous schoolboy looking at her through his eyes. "Aislinn Brianne Stevens," he said with a lopsided grin using her full name. She finally smiled back and it gave him courage to continue. "Tá grá agam duit."

Aislinn felt her heart start beating again. She didn't even know that it had stopped. He leaned down and nuzzled her face up so that he could kiss her, afraid to wait for a response. Electricity shot through them both as their lips met. Her hands slid up his chest and gripped his shirt in her fists as though he may try to pull away. His arms wrapped around her more tightly. One hand slipping up into her hair. It took some coaxing but she opened her mouth to his inquisitive tongue allowing him to explore the new fangs. She suckled on his tongue gently and bit at it as he tested the sharpness of one fang.

He smiled against her mouth at her little game. He kissed her nose and then nuzzled his against it again, before looking down into her eyes as if to ask for her answer. Her brilliant amber eyes swirled with blue flecks. Cullen hadn't thought they could have been more beautiful than they had been before. But he had to admit he liked the amber better than the silver. She'll need to learn to control that, he thought, pleased that he might actually get the chance to teach her if she'd let him. He refused to let go of her, afraid that her mood might shift against him again. She still hadn't answered him but she seemed happy with what he had said. In the silence his next thought was out of his mouth before he realized what he was saying. "Mate with me."

Aislinn was shocked. She pulled back a little so that she could look into his face and try to read him. She actually considered invading his mind to see what he was thinking. "How do you go from wanting to get rid of me to wanting to mate with me over night?" she asked suspiciously.

Cullen's brow furrowed and upset invaded his eyes. "I never wanted to get rid of you. It killed me to suggest that you go back to your family. But it seemed like that was what you wanted and you were afraid to say it. I know how I would feel if I was told to choose between the pack and..." Cullen stopped as he realized where that one was going.

"And me?" Aislinn asked. "What would you do?" Her voice softened and sounded more curious than angry. "I mean. I'd never ask you to do that. But..."

"I already made that choice," he said definitely. He stared into her eyes hard. "If I can't have you I don't want any of it."

"I don't understand. I mean. I already left my family to protect them. And now," she looked at the spots on her hands, "there really is no going back to them. Not like this. I'll miss them until the day I die. But if it had come down to it and I could have gone back or stayed with you." She shook her head and seemed to look inside herself. "I would have stayed. I just didn't know how to say it to my grandmother." She looked at Cullen again, understanding resolving her features.

Cullen leaned down and kissed her. The passion in that kiss exceeded everything he had ever felt. His hands roamed over her body, trying to pull her closer. Heat rolled low in Aislinn's belly and the scent of her need rose between them as readily as his steel erection pressed against her hip. Cullen growled and pulled back to look down at her. "So is that a yes?" he prompted hopefully.

Aislinn smiled at him as she tried to catch her breath. Relief and need overwhelming her. "Now?"

Cullen grinned excitedly, hoping that the emotional roller coaster ride was ending. "If you want now I could probably arrange it. But it generally takes a bit more than an announcement in the great room. And there a quite a few people who lost mates last night who might not be enthusiastic about attending a mating ceremony alone the morning after." He bent to kiss her again, licking her lips and then sucking and nibbling on her lower one.

Aislinn moaned into his mouth as he kissed her. Encouraged by the sweet sound, Cullen's hands found their way beneath her shirt. He growled with pleasure as his hands found soft fur covering her back. He let his fingers dance along her back wondering where each stripe was and wanting to see her naked again.

"Then when?" she asked.

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He laughed and hugged her tightly, burying his face in her hair and breathing in her scent, dying to possess her. "Mmm," he rumbled. "I'll have to see what the atmosphere of the pack is like before I answer that." He kissed her neck and then started to nibble and suck on her ear. "But I want to hear you say it."

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Aislinn pulled back from him and looked into his swirling amber eyes. His wolf was close to the surface. Cullen stared back at the glassy look of her own amber eyes. "It's not really fair, you know," she teased him, blinking away the happy tears and delaying saying it. "I don't even know your full name she said," remembering that morning not so long ago that he weaseled her full name out of her only to use it against her a few moments ago.*wWw.move(1)@or(m).cO(m)*

He grinned back with a tortured look on his face. "Cullen is ainm dom. That's it," he played along, letting a heavy Scottish accent that had long since dropped from his speech color the statement. "My parents were from a day and age that didn't use names the same way you do. Cullen of the clan Arnauk. Now say it."

She grinned and giggled. "Oh really," she continued to tease. "How old are you anyway?"

Cullen growled his frustration at her game and his eyes narrowed. "Lost count. Say it."

Aislinn's eyes softened and she leaned in for another kiss. He dipped his head down and kissed her gently, balled his hand in her hair, and then pressed his nose into her hair and breathed her in again. "Please say it," he asked against her ear.

Aislinn bit at his neck. As much fun as teasing him was she didn't think she should make her alpha beg. She spoke so softly into his ear that he nearly missed it. "Tá grá agam duit, Cullen. Yes I'll mate with you. And anything else you may want of me."

Cullen's wolf howled with joy. He crushed her to himself just breathing her scent and reveling in the fact that she was his. She said she would be his. He felt himself begin to shift. Cullen growled as his control slipped and his wolf surfaced. He knew that he wasn't going to be able to stop this. He looked around for any witnesses to what he was about to do. His senses were a bit fuzzy with his focus on Aislinn but he didn't see or scent anyone in the woods. He didn't even manage to get out of his clothes before the shift started.

Aislin felt is grip on her grow almost painful as a rumbling growl in his throat warned her what was coming. Aislinn found herself facing Cullen as he shifted into his hybrid form. She saw him like this last night during the fight but she never really got a good look and she'd never seen anything but his eyes shift before. His muzzle began to protrude and his skin color darkened. His ears moved back and up on his head, his hands grew claws, and his entire body grew larger. He groaned as his jeans became uncomfortably tight, especially with the raging hardon in his pants. He hadn't lost control like this since he was a young man.