

Chapter 82

Marta settled on an overall head bow. She was just an omega after all. It was the betas who were really grouching about the situation. It was their ranks that seemed to be getting infiltrated. Current rumor had it that Meredith hadn't actually lost that fight. Aislinn had used some kind of mass hypnosis to beat her and that was why none of the normal protocol had been followed.

Cullen ordered his usual without thinking about it. Aislinn ordered a smaller version of what Cullen had asked for and Sarah opted for the steak as well. Pretty standard fair at the Taigh-Oèsda. It was a steak house after all. Marta bowed again and headed off for drinks and to place the order. The relief on her face to be leaving the table was obvious.

Aislinn shifted uncomfortably in the booth. "Rafe's influence seems to have gotten to everyone," she said sadly.

Cullen had been hoping that she wouldn't catch everyone's looks or at least not interpret it all so well.

Aislinn glared at him. "I'm not blind," she said to his train of thought.

"Okay," he said gently. "You need to start being a little less obvious about answering me when you catch things like that. And we're going to have a little talk about exactly how much you're really picking up on."

Sarah looked around to see how confidential a conversation was possible. There were only a few full tables this late. The restaurant was just after closing time for a week day. Not that it mattered when the alpha wanted a table and dinner. He didn't usually take advantage but he was hungry and left overs up stairs wasn't going to hack it.*Ww.nôve①②o①m.com*

Sarah made sure to watch for the approach of Marta or anyone else for that matter. Then she shot Cullen the disapproving stare she had been hanging onto all night. "What were you thinking?"

"I wasn't. It's done. Let it go and help me figure a way to deal with it now." His tone left it in no uncertain terms that he wasn't going to be berated. "Besides, mom, dad already gave me that lecture. You and Keith seem to have forgotten that I'm in charge." He felt like he was reminding people of that an awful lot lately.

"Oh I am sorry, Lord Arnauk," Sarah said dripping with sarcasm. "I will try and remember more clearly who's in charge in the future."

Sarah cut the conversation as Marta appeared with water and the drinks they had ordered. Beer for Cullen and red wine for the ladies. She placed the drinks uncomfortably. She had felt the conversation stop as she approached. That would go over well in the kitchen. Aislinn watched her retreat. Marta glanced over her shoulder at the table, saw Aislinn watching her, and seemed to finch and hurry her steps.

"They're all afraid of me," Aislinn said softly. Cullen felt the hurt. Aislinn's head was throbbing. She wasn't sure if it was from trying to force the premonition to come back or from the fact that she was getting so upset about the way everyone was looking at her.

"They'll get over it if you both stop spending so much time alone." Then Sarah's sarcasm returned. "Oh but you can't do that because you went and mated without elder approval or ceremony and now you'll be wanting more time alone. I almost forgot. All we need now is for Aislinn to go into heat."

Cullen growled at Sarah. "Enough. I've got plenty to worry about. You're supposed to be support. If you can't handle the job-

"I'll be replaced?" Sarah offered cutting him off. She sat back in her seat and stared into Cullen's eyes, trying to read him.

Realization overcame him. It had never even occurred to him that Aislinn might replace Sarah as alpha female. Not that Sarah really had anything to worry about. Cullen could feel the lack of ambition in Aislinn. But it wasn't as if he could convey that to Sarah. She was already concerned about the situation and probably had reason. No one know how strong Aislinn had been before the change was finished. But from the looks of what Rafe mixed together, Cullen was guessing tiger and leopard of some kind, Aislinn was probably more formidable than she had been before. If he took into account that she had thrashed Meredith, a beta, and wasn't concerned in the least about dealing with Celia, then it wasn't a far guess that she might be comparable to Sarah. Cullen made a mental note to take Aislinn down to the gym and find out exactly what she was capable of. But for now he just needed to come up with something to say to Sarah.

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Aislinn was the one who interrupted the glaring contest. "I don't want your job Sarah. I've never been the type of person who could run things. I don't even know what you do. I'd be happy to help out and make myself more visible if that would help things. But I don't want to have to be in charge of anything. Besides, I think that would make things worse."

Sarah looked at Aislinn as she spoke. She could hear the sincerity in her voice. Sarah sighed. She still was wavering between moments of annoyance at being replaced after all this time and moments of acceptance and thinking she should have been replaced by Cullen's mate long ago. It wasn't his fault that he had taken so long finding one. Her voice softened. "Aislinn, you may not want it. But the best leaders never do. Whether you give yourself credit for it or not, I can see you stepping up to handle my job fairly well. There's not as much to it as you may think. And by keeping Cull on a short leash you're already doing part of it." Sarah took a sip of the wine in front of her. "It's really only a matter of time and Cullen knows it. He never would have mated with a woman who couldn't match him. He's too smart for that, or at least his wolf is."

Cullen smiled and picked up his beer. He was glad that Sarah was handling this so well. But her supposed to be reassuring lecture wasn't sitting well with Aislinn.

Aislinn looked over at him. She could feel his agreement with Sarah. "No. I don't want to," she said looking concerned. "If they all hate me now, what do you think would happen then. They can't stand the idea that I beat up Meredith. Hell they probably think that I did something to her brain to make it possible. How do you think-

Cullen cut her off. "Calm down. You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. I'm sure Sarah would be more than happy to just have help for a while. It's not necessary for you to be alpha. I could have mated with an omega if I'd wanted."

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Aislinn's eyes narrowed. "And then just have a toy in your bedroom all the time. Totally useless except when you get horny."

"If that's the job you want," he teased.

"I don't think so. I want to do something, but that's not something I want people seeing as my job. I can already hear everyone calling me your pussy cat," she grouched. Sarah started laughing at that and Cullen just grinned. Aislinn shot both of the deadly glares.

"Alright," Sarah said. "Now that I've established that I'm still in charge for the time being. What are my current orders?" The relief in her voice and her obviously relaxed demeanor brought a new calm to Cullen as well.*WwW.(n)oveℓWorm.com*