

Chapter 83

"I think that first order of business is that I'll get a hold of Jenna and thank her for the return of our people. Then I'll call the feds and check up on the weres that were handed over to them. I want you and Keith to get a feel on the atmosphere around here. Arrange something to improve moral. That includes dealing with pack doubt about Aislinn. I'll do my best to try and keep things more public. But if they think she's messing with my head I don't know how much that will help. I'm going to set up a meeting with the elders for after the funeral and I'll deal with the mating ceremony issues. I think the only other thing would be assigning Aislinn to work with some of the others. They'll get more comfortable with her if they meet her. And as much as I hate to bring this up," he looked at Aislinn apologetically. "Make sure everyone knows that Brinah was a druid from the same order as Rafe and that she gave her life to help us. That might help." Cullen took another drink of his beer.

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Aislinn was playing with her cup and staring at it. Cullen looked over at her expectantly. "Whatever it is just ask it," he said.

"Now who's over reading whom," she snapped.

Cullen gave her a hard look. "I could have read that from anyone. Stop playing with your drink and say whatever it is."

There was a long pause. Sarah looked at the two of them and smiled in amusement. "How strong is your bond anyway?"

"That has yet to be completely determined." Cullen responded, wondering what Aislinn was afraid to ask. He shifted his gaze to Sarah. "How strong is yours? It's been a long time since I had that part of my lycan education," he clarified when Sarah chuckled.

"Well," she said thinking about it. "It's been so long since I was without Drake I don't really remember what it's like to feel by myself." She sat contemplative a moment. Both Cullen and Aislinn stared at her attentively. "We seem to have a connection that's good for most of the territory. I can still sense him even at the reservation, but it's weak from here. I know a couple people who have stronger links than that. I don't know really what determines the distance allotment. Uh," she thought some more about what he might be trying to find out. "Sometimes I pick up things that he didn't mean to project at me, but that's usually only when he's projecting at someone else and angry. From the sounds of things," she smiled, "you two go a bit beyond that."

Cullen glared at her. He wasn't finding it funny.

Aislinn growled. "You know, if it bothers you so much I could always try and teach you how I blocked Rafe out. Then you could shut me off whenever you wanted." Sarah suddenly felt like she was about to become the third wheel in a dangerous argument.

Cullen could feel the hurt coming from Aislinn. He hadn't meant to hurt her feelings. "That's not it," he said gently.

"It just seems to me that everyone else around here accepts this part of mating. If you didn't want it you shouldn't have done it. Logically, considering that I'm the outsider here and the one who didn't see it coming I would have thought that I'd be the one having such a hard time adjusting." Aislinn almost started to cry. She wanted out of here. Her head was throbbing.

Cullen breathed out heavily. This was not a conversation that should be happening in front of Sarah. Sarah sensed the need for some privacy. She looked over at Aislinn sympathetically and excused herself to go to the lady's room.

Cullen reached across the table and took Aislinn's hands. She glared at him and tried to pull them back, but he wasn't about to let her have access to running away from him again. He knew she wanted to. He spoke very softly, trying to coax her into looking at him. "Piseagan, it's not that I don't want it. I love you with all I am. You can feel that can't you?"

Aislinn stopped trying to pull away from him, but still wasn't looking into his eyes. He decided a different tactic might be better. "Do you really feel so sure of yourself that you have no problem with me knowing everything that goes through your head?" Aislinn didn't answer. Cullen smiled, knowing that she caught his point and that her answer would have been 'no' if she were speaking to him. "Now add to that the fact that you seem to pick up far more from me than I get from you."

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She looked up at him when he said that. There was confusion on her features. "I know that I'm picking up more from you than normal bonds give the others. I can feel more reasoning behind your emotions than the others get from their mates. I know most of the others only know if their mate is happy or sad or whatever.

I know you're upset now and somehow get why you're upset too. If that were all you were getting from me then I don't think I would be nearly so concerned. But you also seem to pick up on thought process as well. You answer me like I was talking. I've never had to censor my own head before and I don't think any of the others do either. How happy would you be with the situation if our positions were reversed? You only get to know feeling and why, but I could hear you thinking."

"I don't know why it's like that," Aislinn said. "I can try not to listen," she offered. "I mean I could probably block it out the way I did with Rafe. But," Aislinn hesitated, "I kinda like knowing you this well."

"It's certainly adding to your confidence level," he said with raised eyebrows, thinking about how she was carrying herself and the way she was talking to Sarah..

"Is there anything else weird with us that isn't there with the others that might be my druid fault?"

He let out a long breath. "Not your fault." He smiled. "It pleases me to think that we were meant to be together like this. The stronger the bond the more compatible the couple. At least that's what they teach. There's the projecting in human form. That only happens with really strong bonds.

Most lycans can only project thoughts in hybrid or wolven forms. But that is part of lycan lore. So it's not your druid fault. I've even heard of partial bonds that ended up with the couple having the ability to project or sense each other without completely finishing the mating. But that's incredibly rare."
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