

Chapter 84

"But I don't want you to start feeling like I'm invading." She looked around. "Technically I seem to be able to get into anyone's head if I try to. I've done it while people were sleeping." Her eyes started to tear. It frightened her. "Before we mated I thought about trying to read your thoughts about me. I never did," she said quickly. "I don't want to be like Rafe. I don't know how to make it stop. And the more things I try the more things I seem to be able to do. What's worse is that there isn't anyone for me to ask about it. Not now." Aislinn's mind was overwhelmed by a feeling of her grandmother watching her. It only made her more upset.

Cullen felt her hands trembling in his. "If it makes you more comfortable to be inside my head, piseagan, then it's okay. Don't worry so much about what you can do. You'll never be like Rafe. It's not your capabilities; it's what you do with them that make a person. Just be more selective about what you choose to answer when you catch what's going on in my head. Especially if there are other people around." He smiled at her. Then he started thinking about what he'd like to do with her after dinner. "Although there are times that a man could grow to love having a mind reader around." His eyes sparkled and he could feel her upset fading away.

Aislinn smiled. The image she was getting was pretty graphic. "I love you," she said softly.

Just then Marta appeared with their dinner, Sarah came back from the restroom, and Liam came walking in with a storm cloud over his head promising to rain on their plates. It was as if they all decided to descend upon them at once. Aislinn felt a resigned annoyance take over Cullen. She sat back as he reluctantly released her hands. Cullen ignored Liam's approach and ravenously dug into the rare meat on his plate.

Liam grabbed a chair from a nearby table, spun it around and seated himself at the end of their booth, glaring at Cullen. Marta was nearly shoved out of the way and she had to reach over him to distribute the rest of the plates. Liam watched Cullen chew and glared some more. Though the glare was accompanied by a reluctant head bow. "I must ask why exactly dinner has taken precedence over a room full of battered, abused, tired, cold, frightened people."

Cullen slammed a fist holding a knife down on the table. His eyes blazed with anger at Liam and the man immediately backed down. Liam re-bowed his head. This time with submissive intent as an apology.

"Because," Cullen strained. "I'm more likely to do something drastic and unfortunate to the tired, cold, frightened traitors, if I don't get a grip on my wolf first."

Liam cleared his throat. "I guess that after the stories I've heard I've become a bit more sympathetic to their situation. I'm sorry Cullen. I didn't mean disrespect."

Cullen sat back and poked at his steak, mulling over what Liam had said. "Okay, so tell me."

With that Cullen sat forward and ate as Liam gave him the full report on what Rafe had done to the women, how he had gotten a hold of them, and the different threats that had been made. "Acutally the worst of it was Peter. Apparently he had been one of the first. When he decided that Zoe would rather die than help betray the pack he tried to go to you. Rafe threatened the others that if Peter managed to let you know what was going on then he'd kill three women for every one thing you found out. So it was our own men who stopped Peter from confessing. Then Rafe tortured and killed Zoe anyway. She's the only one who didn't come back. But Peter knew she was dead days ago. He's been sitting in a corner of the room ever since."

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Aislinn lost her appetite and a tear streaked down her face in sympathy. Liam looked at her curiously. "You didn't even know Zoe," he said.

"Does it matter?" Aislinn looked at him with a glassy expression. "I'd have to be pretty cold hearted to not feel how much this has affected everyone here."

Liam nodded. He watched her contemplatively for a moment. When Cullen growled a warning at him it got his attention. He looked over at Cullen questioningly. Cullen rubbed his face. His wolf was in high gear. Nothing was sating the beast this evening. He was far too worked up. Right then he only wanted to forget what was happening and that would involve Aislinn naked and on all fours. The image brought some small calm to his demeanor.

Liam looked at Cullen with uncertainty. "I don't want to add to your upset Cullen. But I would point out that I have a mate and you know that I have no intentions toward Aislinn. You've been acting so strangely with her. It's one of the things causing so much talk."

Cullen stabbed at another piece of meat on his plate. "I've heard all about the talk. I think what's pissing me off is that everyone seems to assume that I'm supposed to have this magical ability to turn my wolf off whenever I want and to not be possessive of a woman when I finally decide that I want to mate with someone."

Liam raised his eyebrows. "So you're making it official then?"

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Cullen looked over at Aislinn. "She's agreed to it. I don't see a reason to hide my intentions. I don't intend to make anything formal until after the funeral. So don't go advertising."

Liam nodded. "You know I wouldn't. Congratulations," he said tentatively.

"Don't sound so happy about it Liam," Cullen growled.

"I'm sorry. But I've always been honest with you. I agree. When I first met Lizbeth, okay, I acted similarly to what you've been doing lately. But you have to admit that with Rafe and the mind control crap and it being so unlike you. It's not so strange that some of us would question the situation."www.NoVë(1)worm.©ôM

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Cullen glared at him. "You know it's rather insulting to think that the whole of my pack thinks my mind could be so easily manipulated."

"Cullen, I didn't mean-"

"I know what you meant. You and the rest of the elders can just suck it up," he said violently.

Liam stiffened. "Things have just been so strange lately. I'm concerned."

"The implication in that statement seems farther reaching than my mating choice," Cullen said staring at the man.

"Just watch your back, my friend. You know that you have my loyalty. Regardless of your choices."

Sarah sat forward at that. "Liam, why exactly would Cullen need to watch his back?"

"I'm just saying that some of the rumors are going pretty far. I've heard about a pack split. There are people claiming that she's neutering him. I don't know what the general private thought process is. But the public talk is disturbing."

Cullen started growling again.