

Chapter 88

"Rafe has caused my pack, my family a great deal of pain. I don't intend to perpetuate it. According to Aislinn I intended for our family to mean as much to us as your loyalty to the pack and if I punish all of you for your behavior then I have to consider my own actions when I was trying to save her. The woman is far too logical for my tastes sometimes." The last comment had a number of the women smiling. "Not that I don't intend to let you all off. I still believe that the better course of action would have been for you to tell me what had happened. In as much I intend to demote the lot of you." There was a murmur of uncertainty that ran through the room. Demotion was only a step above death. "For the next year every man who betrayed this pack will be given the rank of omega with no opportunity to earn your rank back until the completion of the year. At that point you may attempt to regain your position. And expect to be watched as well. You all know what's expected of omegas. If you don't embrace your new duties I'll find another sentence for you."

The relief was accompanied by understood upset. It would be hardest on Ranaild. A beta being forced to live as an omega would be miserable. But Cullen thought it fitting. More was expected of a beta so his punishment should rightly be more severe.

Cullen looked around. "Peter," he said. A pale looking young man stood from where he had been sitting against the wall. He didn't care what happened. Peter would have preferred death as a sentence and that was evident in his eyes as he approached Cullen. "I am sorry for your loss, my friend. I have no reward for your loyalty that could possibly compensate for that. You are not being counted with the others." The room murmured agreement. "Return to your life as best you can. When you are ready for further duties then see me."

Peter nodded. Then he looked to Cullen with an empty blank stare. "There are old stories that druids can talk to the dead," he said hopefully.

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Cullen could see where that was going. He shook his head sadly. "That I know of Aislinn has no such talent. She sees dreams. That's all. She was never trained as a druid." In his mind Cullen was thinking that this was an excellent opportunity to get rid of some of the bad rumors about her and seem open to talking in front of others. "But you're welcome to ask her about it. I would caution to give her some time. Her grandmother died in the fight at the reservation and she isn't dealing with it well."

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Peter nodded. "Maybe after the funeral then," he said flatly.

"That would probably be best," Cullen answered. Then he looked around the room. They had all been listening intently, as had Liam. Good, that's a start, he thought. "As for the rest of you. After the funeral make arrangements to speak to Sarah about your new assignments." Cullen looked over at Liam. "Is there any further business here?"

"No, not that I know of. Thank you, General. I'm sure that your understanding and lenience has been appreciated." There were a number of women who made to approach Cullen out of gratitude, but a look from Cullen had them backing down.

Cullen headed out of the room. He could hear the relief being expressed as he left the security area. He felt good about his decision. It was a tough punishment. But it would be viewed well across the board. He didn't let any of them off easy but he didn't shed any more blood, either.

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There was no way that Aislinn was going to stay in their room all day. But at the same time she was nervous about dealing with all the people who were so intimidated by her now. Staying in your room and hiding will do nothing help resolve that situation, she told herself. So she got dressed and headed down to the great room.wwW.N(ö)vE?Wôrm.cOm

When the elevator doors opened she headed into the main TV room to look for Rissa. Usually if the Taigh-Oèsda was closed Rissa could be found in the great room. Since the restaurant wouldn't be open for some time yet Aislinn figured that there was a good chance that Rissa might be around. There was also the possibility of finding Sarah and getting that assignment Cullen had been talking about.

Unfortunately Meredith was the first person she ran into that she recognized by name. The woman narrowed her gaze on Aislinn and smiled beautifully. The effect was disturbing. Aislinn rolled her eyes and moved to find a different group of people. But Meredith was having none of that. "Are you afraid to stop in and say hi, Mistress?" came the sarcastic call.

Aislinn stood still for a moment. She couldn't decide if she wanted to deal with Meredith or not.

There was a good deal of laughter in the room. Aislinn hadn't caught the comment that initiated the laughter but here was something about it that wouldn't let her just walk away. "Okay Meredith. You have my attention. What? Are you looking for another thrashing?" At that Meredith looked concerned. This wasn't the same uninformed and uncertain woman as before. "Or should I formally challenge you this time and shut you up permanently?"

"Why would you want to do that now? If you've avoided it for so long. I have my doubts that you're actually capable." But the look in Meredith's eyes told Aislinn that she didn't really believe what was coming out of her own mouth. Her arm was still in a cast and the group that was surrounding her at the moment were all pregnant women who had been kept out of the fight.

Aislinn smiled knowingly. "Say what you like to impress the others. You know what happened in that fight. You also know that Cullen is done with you and the others. Get over it and move on."

Meredith growled. The other women were staring on to see who would win the verbal skirmish and Meredith wasn't doing well. "How I wonder did you talk him into that?"

Aislinn flinched and Meredith smiled. "I can't do what you're implying. Druids have varying abilities. And although I could give you the worst nightmare of your life, that would be the extent of it. I'm sorry to inform you Meredith, but Cullen chose me over you of his own volition. I have to tell you that I don't think it was a tough choice for him." Aislinn smiled, confident in the fact that her response seemed to have gotten to Meredith quite badly.

Meredith was furious. The women were chuckling amongst themselves.

"In any case," Aislinn said off hand. "I don't have time to banter with you. Cullen told me to report to Sarah for some kind of assignment so I was wondering if anyone had seen her." Aislinn looked around at all of them in turn.

The women looked uncertain about that. Talking to Aislinn was totally different from hearing or talking about Aislinn. She was confident and attractive and she didn't appear to be doing anything underhanded. One of the women who was more heavily pregnant spoke up. "Sarah is probably in her office. It's just down from Lord Arnauk's office and the library. You know where the library is," she added with a knowing smile.

Aislinn smiled right back. "Yes, I'm very familiar with the library. Thanks." Then she headed out of the room and down the hall, satisfied that she had made the right decision in dealing with Meredith.

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