



Changeling Press

Temple of Luna I
savage possession

Moira Rogers

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As a novice in the Temple of Luna, Avani is training for the day she'll become a revered priestess, with the skills and magic needed to soothe the feral warriors fighting a brutal war against the world's remaining human colonies. Though forbidden contact with the warriors who have come to the temple for relief, Avani can't keep her distance from Rais, her uncle's protégé and one of the most dangerous fighters the wolves have ever known.

As the royal heir, Rais is destined to take a mate and ascend to the throne, but first he must complete his service as a warrior. The Savage Temple's priestesses offer him relief in the meantime, though there's one he's vowed never to touch. He remembers Avani as the innocent girl she was when they met, but the intervening years have made her a woman. A woman the wolf burns to claim...

Chapter One

"You're overdue, Rais."

How his cousin managed to pack so much admonition into three words, he'd never know. "Not so terribly, Zahra."

"Three moons." Her white robes swished softly as she walked, a familiar sound in the Temple. "Almost four. Dangerous."

"I know danger, cousin." The far door of the hall opened, admitting the noises and scents of the bathing pools and lush flora in the courtyard. Rais kept his eyes closed and relished the gentle sounds. On the battlefield, nothing blocked out the violence and destruction, the bodies of dead men and wolves alike. Closing one's eyes might eclipse the blood and rent, burned flesh for a few moments, but it left behind either pained screams or dead silence to assault the senses.

Here, at least, peace reigned in the quiet.

Zahra's cuffs jingled as she laid a hand on his arm. "This could well be your last visit. Has your father spoken with you?"

"Yes." Rais gritted his teeth. "He feels my birthday feast would be even more festive if we were to celebrate my coronation as well."

"And is he wrong?" Zahra's bright green eyes glimmered with amusement. "You *are* nearing the end age, after all."

"End age, my ass." Not yet forty years old, and put out to graze like an elderly cow. "I have plenty of fighting years left in me."

"But your responsibilities are different now. Choose a mate, settle down, start a family..." The humor in her gaze faded. "And rule, Rais. That is who you are."

"Perhaps." Even if it felt like abandoning the soldiers under his command. Rais changed the subject. "So who am I to see? Lilavati was pleasant."

"Mmm, and she spent a month after your last visit telling the other priestesses you were sure to mate her when the time came to choose your queen."

"Damn." She hadn't been *that* pleasant. "Not her, then."

"Siobhan?"

Rais called to mind the short, curvy redhead and decided she would do nicely. Before he could answer, the door opened behind them and soft footsteps crossed the floor. It had to be a priestess -- he could hear her robes, for one thing, but more telling was the call of her magic. Unlike his own clan's; unlike it enough to awaken the sleeping beast with a flare of lust.

His cock stirred, and he scrubbed his hands over his face with a groan. "Just get me anyone. And hurry."

The woman behind them cleared her throat. "Zahra, they need you in the infirmary. There was an accident with one of the generators. No one's dead, but at least three workers were injured."

He had a voice now to go with the magic. "Avani." He turned and almost stumbled. She'd been a child the last time he'd visited her uncle's home, no more than sixteen. Now, she was beautiful, fully grown into her lithe limbs and strong features.

And she was nervous. Her gaze touched on his and jerked away, and Rais crossed his arms over his chest. "Do they need me?"

"Arrogant ass." Zahra waved a hand at him as she hurried toward the door. "Avani can help you."

Avani smiled, slow and shy but with a bit of the teasing edge he remembered. "Rais. If you'd like, I could find a room for you to wait in. I'm afraid you're going to find yourself stalked by most of my fellow novices if you don't get out of sight. They've been gossiping all morning."

The edge in her smile coupled with her magic made him even harder, and he tried not to look grumpy. "Let me guess. They all aspire to be my mate."

Her full lips pursed, as if she was trying to hold back a smile. "Of course. Who wouldn't want to sit at your feet and bask in your glory?"

Rais didn't bother to hide his own grin. "Only you, Avani." He offered her his arm and ignored the rush of heat that overtook him. Having her wasn't an option. Even if she'd finished with her training, she was off limits. "Walk with me. How is your uncle?"

"He's well. Enjoying some time with his grandchildren now. My cousins have been quite prolific." Magic brushed over him as she settled her hand around his arm, a softly submissive power that was gentle and eager all at the same time.

Every dominant instinct in him suddenly took far more notice of her. "And what of you? Waiting for a soldier of your own to return from war?"

She lifted her free arm with a put-upon sigh. "You didn't notice? I'm a novice. Still."

He studied the gold bands on her sleeves with a raised eyebrow. "You must be nearly twenty-one by now, Avani. What's holding you back?"

Her cheeks flushed as she studied the floor. "I'm twenty-three. But twenty-two is the average age. Some women just need time to grow into their power."

Or they didn't belong in the Temple, wearing Luna's robes. "You've not had your first warrior, then." He shouldn't have been so pleased by the realization.

"I've had my training," she retorted, a hint of challenge in that soft voice. "I know how to gentle a warrior."

"Not one like me." Rais was shocked to hear the challenge returned in his own words.

She stopped in front of a door and turned, tilting her head back until her gaze met his. "Even a prince is just a man in the dark. Or do royalty have exotic tastes?"

He backed her against the door in a surge of sudden, instinctive movement. "A lesson unlearned, novice. Warriors aren't *men*, especially not in the dark."

As if the scent of her body wasn't intoxicating enough, he caught the first hints of arousal as she sucked in a sharp breath. "You -- you know what I meant."

"Do I?" He moved even closer, his hips pressing against hers. "What do they tell you about pleasing a warrior?"

Her body melted into soft curves and submission, but her eyes sparked with the stubbornness that ran in her family. "They don't tell us anything, Rais. Do you think they sit us down to study books and vids and then send us as a virgin sacrifice to whatever warrior is to be our first?"

Honestly, he'd never given much thought to the training. "Then what do they do, Avani?"

She moved, rocking her hips against his as her hand came up to rest against his chest. "They sit us down to study books and vids." Slim fingers stroked down his chest and he felt the power inside her swell, hungry for his dominance. "And when we're done studying, we go to bed with a trainer, who shows us what pleasure is and how to give it."

The rage that welled in him was stupid -- and unacceptable. "Who's touched you?" The words escaped in a growl.

Avani stared up at him with too-wide brown eyes filled with a dangerous longing. "You're touching me."

"No, besides --" Rais bit off the words with a groan. "You're impossible." The only thing to do was kiss her, so he did, claiming her with a hard, hot fusing of mouths.

She wasn't untouched, that was clear. She kissed him back, open-mouthed and hungry, but it soon became painfully obvious why she still wore the robes of a novice. Everything about her was open and too trusting, especially the magic that curled around him, urging him to take, to have in any way he wanted.

In *any* way he wanted.

The warriors would eat her alive.

Rais broke away, panting. "Shit. I have to --" He was horrified with himself and his reaction to her. But more disturbing than that was the thought that, as soon as she'd earned her white bands, someone could take advantage of that trust. "I have to go."

She blinked at him, her eyes dazed. "I... You're going?"

"Yes." He needed to talk to the high priestess. "Have a good night, Avani."

“Rais.” It was barely a whisper, and her voice trembled on his name. “Don’t -- don’t tell. I’ll be in so much trouble. I should have found a senior priestess and left you alone.”

She’d gladly welcome him into her cunt where they stood. He could see it in her eyes. “No, no trouble, sweetheart. I promise.”

Her head bobbed in a jerky nod that sent her wavy blonde hair tumbling over her face. The hand she lifted to push it back trembled, but she smiled at him. “Good night, Rais.”

He gave her a curt nod, then turned on his heel and stalked back toward the heart of the Temple.

* * *

Celine was the kind of woman warriors challenged just to see if they could win. Many men had tried to claim her during the years before her ascension to the coveted position of high priestess of the Temple of Luna. Rumor had it only one man had succeeded in winning the devotion of Luna’s most dangerous servant.

The high priestess of the Temple of Luna gave her obedience to her Goddess and King alone. Anyone else was as likely to get the sharp side of her tongue and a firm set-down if they stepped out of line.

Even the King’s heir.

Rais found her in her usual chair, deep within the Temple. Sharp brown eyes tracked his approach. By the time he’d reached her, she’d set aside her computer tablet in favor of leaning back and crossing her legs. “That look in your eyes makes me nervous.”

He didn’t waste time. “Dhaval’s niece, Avani. She’s still in gold bands, but I want her.”

Celine actually blinked. “Are you out of your mind?”

“Do I look crazy to you? Wait, don’t answer that.” Rais drew his hands through his hair and straightened his loose linen shirt. “I hope we can speak frankly about this. Does Avani have any hope of advancing here?”

"Why do you...?" The woman's nostrils flared and she narrowed her eyes. "You have her scent on you. How far did it go?"

"I kissed her, that's all. It was stupid, and entirely my fault."

Celine closed her eyes and sighed. "No. She has no real hope of advancing. I thought... She's a strong woman. She's got the fiery temper of the formidable warriors in her father's family, but she's too gentle, too trusting. If I can't find a way to fix it without breaking her then she's done on her twenty-fourth birthday. Five months from now."

Some women just need time to grow into their power. Avani's words came back to him. She'd be devastated to be turned out of the Temple. "I won't let that happen."

"You can't stop it, puppy. Not unless you want to come back here in six months or a year and find she's been traumatized by a warrior who took what she offers too readily."

Rais had to unclench his jaw to speak. "No one's pride is worth what could happen. I understand that, which is why I need tonight. Give her to me."

Celine spoke with her usual bluntness. "To do what? Even if you *can* control yourself enough to keep from hurting her, what do you hope to accomplish?"

The words were ridiculous. Insane. "I want to be sure and claim her before I go out on my last deployment."

"Claim her." Flat words, spoken without a hint of emotion. "That must have been quite a kiss."

He met her stare with a stony one of his own. "I'll need a mate before the year's out. Avani's lineage is impeccable."

"Which is why she doesn't need to be rescued. She could leave here tomorrow on the arm of any of a dozen men, were she not stubbornly determined to serve Luna. You won't be doing her any favors by snatching her up in a moment of foolish chivalry only to tire of her."

It was an insult, not only to his pride but to his honor. "I don't easily give my word, Celine, and when I do I keep it."

"That's what worries me." Celine sat back in her chair and watched him with those hard brown eyes. "I suppose the future is your choice and hers. But the present is my responsibility. Can you control yourself with her? You're overdue a visit."

He owed her the truth. "I may frighten her," he allowed reluctantly, "but I have my control. I won't harm her."

"Fear can be worse than pain, Rais. If you terrorize her, her uncle will thrash you and your father may let him. And if she isn't willing, if she isn't eager, this *will* terrorize her." One slim eyebrow went up. "If I send for her, will I find her willing and eager?"

Rais couldn't check the laugh that burst free of him. "You think I'd trouble you to send a novice to my bed if she didn't even want to be there? That's preposterous." He recalled the way she'd trembled and melted against him, on fire and sweetly aroused. "Of course she wants me."

Celine rolled her eyes toward the heavens and reached for her computer tablet. Her fingers flew over the screen in silence, and she glanced up at him. "You match your father for sheer ego, my boy. You'll find an acolyte waiting outside my door. She'll take you to a room fit for wooing a nervous novice. If Avani is willing, she'll come to you. If not, I'll send someone sturdy enough to quench your frustration."

Rais hesitated, torn. He wanted her promise that she'd send Avani, and he wasn't even sure why. He'd done everything in his power to secure her; the final decision was hers, as well it should be. "You have my thanks, Celine. I shall look forward to seeing Avani."

And Goddess help me if you send anyone in her stead.

* * *

Avani's fingers trembled as she tried to push the tiny pearl button through its hole. Donning the ceremonial costume of a priestess preparing to gentle her first warrior was supposed to be a solemn event, one a woman had plenty of time to prepare for.

She'd had ten minutes, and her hands hadn't stopped shaking once the whole time. She cursed softly and lifted her gaze to her best friend. "Whose idea *were* these tiny little buttons? What warrior will want to wait for me to get them undone again?"

Branwen chuckled. "I believe that's quite the point. They're to be ripped off, not unbuttoned."

A fact Avani would have remembered if her thoughts hadn't scattered the moment Celine had handed over the dress and the location of the room where Rais waited.

For me. Rais is waiting to rip this dress off my body. Rais is waiting to... Her cheeks flushed, and she lifted her hands to cover her face as a shiver claimed her. The worst part was not knowing if it was nerves or anticipation. "I've lost my mind, haven't I?"

Branwen shrugged one shoulder and smiled slowly. "I don't know. He's a strong warrior. Not a usual first, but..."

Nothing about this was usual. She hadn't been called before the high priestess and granted her white bands, or acknowledged at dinner with an invitation to the priestess's table. She was still the novice she'd been an hour before when Rais had pressed her against a door with the hard wall of his body and taught her in one instant that she was nowhere near ready.

And now he wanted her. He was the King's son, the heir to the throne of their people. Being called to his bed was the highest honor for any priestess, especially when everyone knew he still looked for a mate.

But when she looked at Rais she didn't see the all-important heir. She saw the handsome soldier her uncle had brought home for the first time just after her twelfth birthday. In her uncle's home Rais hadn't been royalty. He'd been one of her uncle's men, the latest in a line of rugged soldiers who owed her uncle their obedience.

He'd received no special treatment in her uncle's home, and she'd been fifteen before she realized the man who took her constant teasing with such unruffled good nature was the King's only son. The last time he'd visited, she'd been sixteen and

starting to notice boys who were starting to notice her back. But Rais had been exactly the same, ruffling her hair before asking her about her studies and her class work.

The memory of her teenage indignation at being seen as a child was almost amusing now. She *had* been a child then, an innocent with only the vaguest idea of what went on when a warrior took someone to his bed.

Avani dropped her hands and stared at herself in the mirror. Not a child anymore, and certainly not an innocent. The slender, jeweled leather cuffs buckled around her wrists and ankles had been fitted to her before her first night in the bed of a trainer, and her gown was designed to taunt a man with what he couldn't quite see.

If it hadn't been for the nervousness in her eyes, she would have looked like a woman ready to enjoy a lusty night in bed. She turned to Branwen and twisted her hands together to hide their shaking. "What if he changes his mind? What if I can't please him?"

Branwen drew the ivory-backed brush through Avani's hair again. "Remember your training. Remember what he needs, and how to help him. Don't panic, and don't try to force anything. Just enjoy it."

Enjoying it wouldn't be the problem. Enjoying it too much was the real danger. Letting Rais crawl under her skin until a young woman's affection changed to a grown woman's need.

Nothing to be done about it now. She caught Branwen's hand and slipped the brush from her friend's fingers. "Thank you for helping me prepare, but I need to go. He was already tense. The longer I wait, the worse off he'll be."

The pale brunette hesitated. "Be careful, Avani. Be safe." She turned and hurried out.

Alone in her room, Avani reached for her robe and paused to brush a finger over the gold bands that encircled the sleeves. The heavy robe of a novice instead of the lighter, softer robe of a full priestess. It felt strange to pull it over the costume of silk and lace that barely covered her body, but she had nothing else to wear.

Her footsteps seemed to echo in the empty hallways of the Temple. She'd never been so aware of what was happening behind the soundproof doors she passed, of the tangle of naked flesh and the carnal fucking that left a warrior gentled and a priestess sated.

They'd given Rais one of the opulent rooms tucked in the far corner of the Temple, rooms reserved for the strongest and neediest warriors. Avani's hand trembled as she lifted it to the small scanner by the door. It would already be programmed to recognize her, and once she touched it and crossed the barrier, the room would become inaccessible to any but the Temple guards and the high priestess herself. A safeguard for the priestesses who handled possessive men who could turn violent if someone seemed determined to interrupt them, but a terrifying act of finality for a nervous woman.

In the end it was Rais who decided for her. Rough and dangerous as he obviously could be, every instinct she had screamed for him. He would never hurt her, never cause her pain or distress. The worst thing he could do to her was reject her.

Avani blew out a breath and settled her hand against the panel. A heartbeat later the door whispered open, and her body tightened as she felt his power. Male. Warrior. Yes.

"Come in, Avani."

Her feet moved without her permission, carrying her across the threshold. The door slid shut behind her and she caught her breath as her eyes adjusted to the dim room. Rais stood by the window, looking out into the sunset.

He'd discarded his shirt, and slanting light gilded the hard planes of his chest and shoulders. When he looked at her, his eyes were shadowed. "I want to speak with you. Before you come any closer."

It wasn't what she'd expected to hear, and her fingers stilled on the ties of her outer robe. "Yes?"

He only stood there, arms crossed over his chest, but his gaze was fixed to her unmoving hands. "I have enough control for now, but I don't know how long it will last. If you aren't absolutely sure you want to be here, you should go now."

She knew the clearest way to show her willingness. It was so much a ritual it had become a symbol. A priestess in full robes was a woman to be approached with respect and deference. A priestess without them...

It was supposed to be smooth. In her imagination she envisioned her robe sliding down her body, pooling at her feet as she stood in silent offering. But nerves made her hands tremble, and the knot in her belt seemed tied too tightly. Not even an inelegant tug freed it, and furious heat rose in her cheeks as she looked down at her hands.

Rais stalked silently across the polished floor and plush rugs. "You're to shed your outer robe, priestess." He came out of the deepening shadows, and she saw his eyes blazing with unfed hunger. "Open it, or I will."

Avani swallowed and spread her arms wide, giving him her trust as well as permission to claim her body. "I'm at your mercy, warrior."

His eyes flashed again. He ripped the belt with one tug and left it dangling, frayed and ruined, from her robe. "Better?"

"Much." She lifted her hands and caught the edges of her robe, unable to tear her gaze from his face as she pulled the fabric open and let it slide from her shoulders.

Rais had to have seen the ceremonial clothing a new priestess wore under her robe before, but his jaw clenched as he looked at her, and his voice was hoarse. "On the bed."

Turning her back on him took a supreme act of trust. The sheer fabric of her gown fluttered as she walked, teasing against skin that felt too sensitive. The bed dominated one side of the room, a vast expanse of luxurious black satin bracketed by a sturdy, wrought iron headboard and footboard.

She slid onto it and turned, fighting to ignore the rush of heat that tightened her nipples and made her cunt wet when her gaze fell on the chains already attached to the

footboard. She knelt in the center of the bed and forced herself to meet Rais's dark eyes again.

He watched her as he circled the bed. "Some warriors would be on you by now, hands and cock under that scrap of nothing masquerading as a robe. I have more control than that." His thin linen pants were tented in the front, strained by what looked to be a sizeable erection. "I'm going to make you scream first."

"You can do whatever you wish with me," she whispered, shifting her weight just enough for her gown to part and reveal how very naked she was underneath. "I've been wet for you since the door closed."

"Liar." A sudden, breathtaking grin accompanied the word. Rais lay across the bed in front of her and slid his hand up her inner thigh, his fingers slicking through the evidence of her arousal. "You've been wet for me since I kissed you in the main hall."

Her breath escaped on a moan. She knew she should stay still, *knew* she should submit quietly to his will, but it was Rais with his broad, strong fingers teasing over her skin, and she wanted him. Wanted him enough to grind down against his hand and whimper when one of his fingers brushed her clit and sparked heat through her.

He came back to her clit, rubbing it in a slow circle with the pad of his thumb. Pleasure made her limbs heavy as he spoke in a low voice. "You need my tongue here, don't you?"

She admitted the truth without thinking. "I don't know. I've only had a man lick me there once before."

His dark eyes went even darker. "You didn't enjoy it?"

"It was my first time. My first..." She swallowed and closed her eyes, rocking down against his hand. "I was a nervous virgin. I don't remember it all very clearly."

"You should remember something like that." She felt him move and opened her eyes. He'd rolled to his back, and he cupped one hand around the back of her knee. "Climb over me, Avani, and I'll show you."

Few of the positions she'd been taught involved being on top of a man. Her legs felt wobbly as she braced one hand against the hard muscles of his shoulder and

straddled his chest. "You want me to...?" It seemed shockingly illicit, even when she'd been fully prepared to be bound to the bed and fucked to the edge of sanity.

"Come." His easy humor had faded, and he growled a little as he grasped her hips and moved her up until her cunt was close to his face. "Yes, I want you to come."

She shuddered and inched forward, her hands closing on the solid muscles of his forearms to keep her balance. "Show me. Make sure I never forget."

Rais used his thumbs to stroke her cunt, opening it gently. "You're a beautiful woman," he rasped, then dipped his tongue inside her.

Watching it was almost as erotic as feeling it. His tongue slicked against her and she fought to keep her eyes open, transfixed by the way he watched her. "Does it please you?" *Do I please you?*

He didn't pause to answer. Instead, he took one of her hands in his and pulled it down his body. She had to arch her back to reach, and he finally wrapped her fingers around his cock. He stared up at her and groaned against her cunt when she tightened her fingers and squeezed, frustrated by the linen pants that kept her from clasping him skin to skin.

"I want --" His tongue flicked teasingly over her clit, and she forgot her words in the rush of liquid need. She dug her fingernails into his arm as she fumbled with her other hand, trying to slip it under the waistband of his pants.

He caught her wrist and jerked her hand away with a warning growl. "Behave, Avani, or I'll stop and chain you to the bed."

She forgot that she was supposed to obey, to submit quietly. His voice shook with need and his threat made her dizzy with anticipation. She tugged at his grip and moaned when his fingers tightened. "I want to touch you."

Rais sat up suddenly, and she slid down his chest. He caught her ass before she hit his lap. "That's it. Lie on your back, arms and legs out. I'm chaining you."

Avani chanced his ire enough to kiss his chin and the line of his jaw. "You have to put me down first."

One large hand landed on the curve of her ass in an openhanded slap. It straddled the line between pleasure and pain in the way she'd already come to love, the way that made her ache to be taken. She squirmed in his grasp, panting against his jaw as she wondered if she might come from that one touch.

His other hand twisted in her hair. "Still testing me?"

"Maybe a little." But she didn't want to push him *too* far, not until she'd sated his need. She moved slowly, sliding from his lap and waiting patiently until he released her hair. Nervous anticipation fluttered in her stomach as she stretched out and lifted her hands above her head. "But not too much."

He rolled to his knees and reached for her ankles first. "Playing with fire, Avani."

The chain he clipped to the cuff around her ankle looked too delicate to hold anyone, but Avani knew from experience that the magic in the metal made it strong enough to restrain a warrior. He'd played out just enough chain to give her freedom to squirm, but not enough to allow her to move more than a few inches. *Trapped.*

She shivered as his large hand closed around her other ankle and spread her legs wide enough to fasten the other chain. The flimsy fabric of her gown did little to hide her arousal from him, though the teasing brush of it over her cunt made her body ache.

Rais didn't take off the gown before securing her wrists. Instead, he shackled her and then ran his fingertips over the buttons between her breasts. "What do you want? A gentle seduction until the beast takes over? Or are you really ready for me?" Challenge glinted in his eyes again, and his hard chest rose and fell with rough breaths.

She wanted to meet that challenge. Had it been anyone else, pride might have compelled her. But she knew Rais. Maybe not well, maybe barely at all, but some instinct whispered that he would punish himself later if he hurt her now.

So she licked her lips nervously and gave him the truth. "I don't know if I'm ready. But I want to be."

The challenge faded from his dark gaze, replaced by a warm certainty. "I'll take care of you. Do you believe that?"

He was so beautiful. She wanted to touch him, but the chains clinking against the headboard reminded her just how much power he had over her. She'd expected to be more nervous, but her answer came easily. "Yes."

It seemed to satisfy him. Possessive magic flowed over her as Rais tugged at the gown with painstaking gentleness, popping off the buttons one by one, underscoring his deliberate words. "I'm going to put my mouth on your cunt again. This time I'm not stopping until you come."

It wasn't what she'd been taught to expect. No one had made any secret that the warriors glutted the beast inside them on a woman's pleasure, but her training had made it clear that the slow teasing came *after* a man had slaked his need with carnal fucking. His cock should have been inside her by now, hard and unyielding as he sought relief.

She watched his face as he peeled the transparent lace from her breasts. "Will it hurt you to go so slowly?"

He tweaked her nipple with a sudden, hard pinch. Her back arched and she whimpered, almost drowning out his reply. "Who said anything about slow?"

"Rais." She wanted to rub her thighs together to ease the need inside her. She twisted and pressed her breast up against his hand. "I'm hungry for you."

"I know you are." His hand trailed down the center of her body until he reached the wet, exposed folds of her sex. He teased her with a few light, grazing strokes, and bared his teeth in a cocky grin when she writhed under his hand. "I'm glad, because I plan on giving you no mercy, Avani. Just pleasure."

"More. Please... *please*." She had to dig her teeth into her lower lip to stop the words from tumbling out, because they meant she'd already forgotten that *his* needs were the focus of the evening.

Rais only touched her again, more firmly this time, and bent his head to trace his tongue over her. His hands slid under her hips, lifting her to his ardent mouth.

She couldn't stop herself. She screamed at the first touch of his tongue, helpless under the rush of pleasure when she couldn't do anything more than writhe. The chains

clanked loudly against the bed frame, a stark reminder of her helplessness. "I -- I can't take much more before I come..."

He lifted his head, but only to slide first one finger and then another into her. "Yes? What if I do this?" They curled slightly, massaging her inner walls, and he bent to flick his tongue over her again.

The twisting pleasure fractured without warning. Her cunt clenched around his fingers and she whimpered and tried to get closer to him. He made a soothing noise and looked up, his fingers still thrusting in and out of her.

Avani moaned and met his eyes even as her body trembled. "I'm ready for you," she whispered. "Rais, I'm so ready for you... Have me. Take me."

He stilled, then moved slowly to his knees to loosen his pants. He did nothing more than push them down far enough to free his cock before lifting her again, this time up to rest on his thighs. "Take you?"

The words were tradition, but she spoke them because she meant them, even more now than when she'd uttered them at the door. "I'm at your mercy."

"At my mercy." His voice trembled around the words, and he rubbed his shaft over the slickness of her cunt with a rough groan. "Avani."

He drove into her.

She closed her eyes and let herself feel every inch of his cock as her body struggled to adjust to his size. With her hips lifted from the bed the chains had drawn tight, leaving her incapable of so much as squirming. She was at his mercy.

She loved it.

He eased back and thrust into her again with a low, guttural growl. "Made for me." One hand smoothed up over her stomach and chest. "Open your eyes."

"Rais." She forced her eyes open and moaned when she found his dark gaze fixed on her face, his eyes wild. His clenched jaw seemed to be proof that he was still fighting to hold back, and the realization frustrated her. "I trust you. Let go."

He shook his head. "You don't know what that means."

She responded by clenching her inner muscles around him, and Rais groaned and jerked her harder against him. He bowed his head for several panting breaths, then growled again. "You win, little one." He slammed into her -- hard, unyielding.

Then he did it again. And again.

She lost track of his thrusts after that, aware of nothing but the fire that sparked through her with every rough, claiming movement. It was fucking, dirty and raw and everything she'd been prepared so carefully to enjoy.

Nothing had prepared her for how *much* she'd enjoy it. The pleasure of her body was strong enough, curling tighter with every passing second, promising a bliss that would eclipse her first climax. And even that was nothing compared to the instinctive satisfaction and the way something inside her unfurled to welcome his savage dominance.

Words were impossible, but sound wasn't. So she whimpered and moaned and did both as much as she could to make up for the fact that she couldn't touch him. *Yet.*

He slowed a little, his gaze still fixed on her face. "Tell me why."

She moaned her frustration as the release that had been hanging just out of reach slipped away, ratcheting up the tension and need inside her to feverish levels. "Why what?"

Now he gave her only quick, very shallow thrusts. "Why you came to me. Why you said yes."

"I trust... I trust you." She found his gaze and held it as her breath came in short, desperate pants. "And want you."

"You weren't frightened?" He stopped, his cock buried to the hilt inside her, and found her clit with his thumb. The tiny caress sent sparks to every nerve, and her body began to tremble.

It took two tries to answer his question. "Not of you. Never... never of -- by the Goddess, Rais, please!"

He trembled as badly as she, but he didn't move, just kept stroking her. "Come."

She didn't have a choice. The tense heat in her abdomen snapped, flooding her with earth-shattering pleasure. It felt so good she didn't care that the cuffs dug painfully into her wrists and her arms, and her shoulders would surely ache later from the strain of writhing against her bindings.

Rais threw his head back with a howl. He gripped her thighs with bruising force and jerked her toward him to meet his frantic thrusts. She came again, harder this time, her entire body taut and her voice rasping in her throat as she let the magic inside her embrace him. Even through the pleasure, she could *feel* the way they fit together, the way the beast inside him fed on her pleasure and submission.

A rush of power washed over her when he came. She felt him in every cell of her being, the dwindling rage and pain that swept through her without touching her, and the satisfaction he found in the depths of her body and the readiness of her acceptance. Nothing inside him frightened her, even the things that perhaps should have. He was Rais, he was beautiful... and he was hers.

He knelt between her thighs, still deep inside her, his head bowed and eyes closed as he panted. "Avani."

She shivered and wondered if the aftershocks of pleasure would continue as long as he was inside her. She knew there were words she was supposed to say, things that would ease his mind and assure him she was unharmed. But her breath still came in helpless pants and her training was a distant memory. So she made a soft noise of pleasure and hoped he'd understand.

Rais started as if surprised and watched her face as he pulled away. "Not hurt?"

It was foolish to feel the loss of him so sharply, especially knowing he'd need to take her at least once more. But she hungered for the feel of his skin, for the chance to touch him, and it undercut her reply with a yearning she couldn't mask. "Not hurt. Just tired."

His movements were efficient but slow, almost exhausted. He freed her ankles first and then her wrists, leaving the lengths of delicate chain hanging from the bed as he collapsed beside her, half on his side and half on his stomach.

Avani hid a wince as she shifted to her knees, her arms protesting how strongly she'd tugged against her shackles. The discomfort was minimal though, as inconsequential as the soft ache between her legs. She'd been well fucked, had prodded Rais to take her with force, though he'd been clearly reluctant to do so.

The thought made her smile as she reached for his linen pants, still partly tangled around his body. "Lift your hips," she whispered, stroking a hand over the strong line of his back. "You'll be more comfortable without these."

Rais murmured a protest and reached for her. "Too much trouble. Come here."

She ignored him and tugged at the pants with both hands until he lifted just enough for her to ease them down his legs. They hit the floor a moment later, and Avani found just enough energy to ease her open gown from her arms. She let it slip from the bed before crawling back up to settle in his arms. "In case you didn't notice, the years have not made me less stubborn."

The corner of his mouth ticked up. "You don't say."

"Mm-hmm." She pressed her fingers to his chest, exploring the skin stretched taut over solid muscle with a sleepy curiosity. "Promise me that you'll let me touch you before you leave. The chains are very arousing, but you're so beautiful."

"Touching me now," he murmured, then rolled to bring her on top of him. He snagged the top edge of the turned-back sheet and pulled it over them.

"Yes, but I want you awake to enjoy it." Avani turned to rest her cheek against his chest and listened to his heartbeat slow. With the first desperate need sated he'd sleep, probably the first deep sleep he'd had in months.

And when he woke up... One of her teachers had claimed that a warrior's need sprung from the balance of nature. That the pain and death he'd caused would haunt him until he'd given pleasure and celebrated life with equal vigor. A priestess was trained to manage the initial rough encounter and taught to revel in what followed, the bliss of a focused man bent on wrenching every bit of ecstasy imaginable from her body.

Rais hadn't replied, so she lifted her head just long enough to ascertain that he'd fallen asleep. He looked just as severe in rest, the strong features too rugged to relax into anything less intimidating. Avani stroked her finger lightly over his cheek and smiled as affection welled up in her. He might not know the woman she'd become, but she knew him. She wanted him.

And you have him. Avani settled against his chest and closed her eyes, luxuriating in the masculine, strong scent of a warrior and the feel of his magic curling deeper around her. For the next day or two, Rais was hers. And maybe he'd like the woman as much as she liked the warrior.

Chapter Two

His body ached like he'd undertaken a ten-mile march in full gear. But he wasn't on the field. He was in the Temple, swathed in sensuous satin, and Avani lay draped over him.

No wonder he was smiling.

Rais stretched a little, trying to relieve an impending cramp in his shoulder. "Wake up, little one."

"Mmm." She turned her head and nuzzled his chest sleepily, sending a cascade of tousled blonde hair spilling over his neck. "Warm."

"Indeed." His cock stiffened, and he nudged its length against her hip. "You need something? Wine? Water?"

She slid both hands to his chest and pushed herself upright, ending up with one knee on either side of one of his thighs. That wildly disheveled hair fell around her face as she smiled at him. "I may not be an experienced priestess, but I'm fairly sure fetching food and drink is my job. Would you like anything?"

He shook his head, entranced by her breasts. He lifted his hands to cup their weight, heavy and firm, and flicked his thumbs over her nipples. "Maybe in a little while."

Her eyes fluttered shut and she made a quiet noise of pleasure, arching into his touch. The movement rubbed her cunt against his leg, and he could feel her slowly awakening arousal as she rocked down against him.

She'd come hard before; he'd kept enough of his wits about him to make sure of it. But now was his chance to tease her, to take her slowly and watch her pleasure build to a fever pitch. "Can I have you again?"

"Yes." Her hand dropped and she curled her fingers around his cock as she opened her eyes, her smile turning teasing. "Are you going to spank me if I misbehave again? Because it's very tempting."

"You like it too much," he teased back. "Vixen."

She stroked her hand up the length of his cock, her grip still feather-light, but her expression turned serious. "That's why I'm still in gold bands, isn't it?"

He could guess, but he merely shrugged one shoulder. "Have you asked Celine why?"

"She says my job is to give a warrior what he needs, not give him license to take whatever he wants."

He felt his eyebrows go up. "And if either is at odds with what you need or want?"

"You mean if he hurts me?" She dropped her hand to his thigh. "There are protocols in place. Spells that would trigger before he could do permanent physical damage. I might get a little bruised, but I'd heal. There's always some risk in what we do, Rais, but nothing as dangerous as fighting on the front lines."

That all depended on the submission those warriors demanded, and the toll it might take on Avani's mind and heart before it hurt her body. "Nothing as dangerous as that," he agreed, "but more insidious."

She studied him with a tiny frown. "You think I should leave."

He tucked one arm behind his head and sighed. He couldn't tell her Celine planned to have her leave after her next birthday, not before he'd given her his own proposal. Doing so would be tantamount to emotional blackmail. "What I think is that you should consider me."

"Consider you for..." Her voice faded and he felt the prick of her fingernails as her hand tightened on his leg. "Do you want me? Or do you pity me?"

"Why do you ask when only an idiot would answer that in any way but one?"

"Because only an idiot would lie to a woman with her knee this close to his cock."

Rais easily flipped her over on her back and sat up beside her. "Are you going to rant and scream and throw things at me if I say it's a little of both?"

Her cheeks flushed, probably at the reminder that Rais had been witness to one or two of her more spectacular bouts of temper. "No. But I'm not going to run off with you, either."

"That's the last thing I'd ask, especially considering my remaining months of service."

"So what do you want?" She reached out and stroked her fingers up his side, the touch feather-light. "You want no one else to touch me?"

He caught her hand. "Will you wait for me?" The words seemed so innocuous, but it was a question that couldn't be asked -- or answered -- lightly. "It's not long now, Avani."

She didn't reply at once. Her hand felt delicate until she curled her fingers around his in a surprisingly firm grasp. "I could be convinced to consider it."

No, she wasn't the kind of woman who'd thank the Goddess and her lucky stars that he'd chosen to focus his attentions on her. "Convinced how?"

"Call me when you can. Learn to know me as a woman. Fall in love with me. Make me fall in love with you."

A courtship. Rais had never thought of it, had never had to. Kings didn't court women; they simply chose whom they pleased when they pleased. "I don't have the luxury of courting you, Avani. I'll be on the front, in the midst of heavy fighting, and I don't know how much reliable communications contact I'll have."

Avani closed her eyes as a hint of color deepened in her cheeks again. "The wishful thinking of a girl who's always had a little bit of a crush on you, I suppose. I've been spoiled. Many men would do whatever it takes to marry into my uncle's family."

"Of course they would." He touched the curling end of one blonde lock of hair and hesitated. "You weren't raised to settle for anything less. I understand."

"Do you, though?" She curled onto her side and nuzzled his fingers before brushing a kiss to his palm. "Do you have any idea how easily you could break me?"

His chest ached, and he sank his fingers into her hair and held her so her gaze met his. "That's the last thing I want, Avani. You deserve better than that, from me and everyone else."

She wet her lips with a quick dart of her tongue, her gaze never leaving his face. "I trust you. I trust you to do everything you can to keep from hurting me. So tell me what you want, and it's yours."

The readiness and sincerity of the vow startled him. "Put it out of your mind." He kissed her chin and traced her lips with his tongue. "Don't worry about it."

Her lips parted. He felt the teasing brush of her tongue as she made a soft noise of pleasure, her earlier eagerness returning redoubled.

Rais lay down and pulled her on top of him again. "Not tying you down this time," he murmured against her mouth.

She just laughed and bit his lower lip before squirming down his body. Her teeth scored his collarbone before her tongue darted out to trace over his chest. "You shouldn't promise that before you see how badly I intend to misbehave."

"I have better ways to keep you in line."

"Do you?" She inched lower, not lifting her mouth from his skin until his cock rested in the valley between her breasts. "I find myself intrigued."

Rais arched an eyebrow and cupped her breasts, squeezing them around his shaft. She moaned and rubbed against him, and he had to bite his tongue to hold back a groan. "I can't tell you what they are."

She smiled, that wickedly teasing glint in her eyes so much more dangerous now that she was a woman. "Not unless I earn it?" she asked, her voice warm and amused. She didn't wait for a response, just dropped her mouth and took the head of his cock between her warm lips.

This time, he couldn't stop the groan that ripped free of him. "Can't tell you because you'd *try* to get me to spank you."

The wet heat of her tongue teased over him as she hummed her agreement before lifting her head. "I'd beg you for it," she whispered, her breath skating over him.

"If you'd gotten me in the traditional way you'd know that. My profile indicates a decided preference for games of dominance in bed."

"Your profile?" He drew his fingers slowly through her hair and clenched his fist in the silky locks. "You're right. I've never seen it."

"Too bad." She dragged her tongue up the length of his shaft. "You'll just have to figure it out on your own."

He pulled a little, then harder when she moaned. "You think I haven't figured it out already?"

"Maybe..." Her gaze found his as she licked his head. "You do seem very clever."

He couldn't stop his hips from thrusting a little toward her mouth. "So do you."

She watched his face for one tense, teasing heartbeat, then wrapped her lips around his cock and began sucking him in earnest.

It was sloppy, unpracticed. That soothed his possessiveness, but it didn't explain why it still felt so damn good. Better than anything in recent memory, with the exception of being inside her. "Fuck."

Her moan shook through him as she clutched at his hips and tried to take him deeper. She seemed eager, almost desperate to please him, the feeling coming not just from the wet heat of her mouth, but the needy grasp of her magic.

Rais pulled her head back gently. "Give me more, Avani. Ride me."

She let him guide her up his body, until her hips sat poised over his. She rubbed against him, grinding her cunt down on his cock, and tilted her head back as a moan of pleasure escaped her. "I've never spent this much time on top of a man before."

She'd probably never had a man comfortable giving up any control. "Just a little..." He slid inside her with a groan. "That's it."

Both of her hands landed on his chest. She stared down at him, eyes wide and glazed with pleasure, and took another few inches of his cock into her body with a sharp moan. "You fill me."

"Take it." He arched up, driving against her. "Deeper."

Her throat worked and her nails pricked his chest as her cunt clenched around him. "By the Goddess, Rais..." She dropped her head forward again, her hair tumbling around her face as she slammed down with a cry.

Pleasure rippled up his spine, and he rested his hands lightly on her hips. "Stop."

She stilled obediently, though her body trembled. "You feel so good inside me."

"Don't tell me." He took one of her hands and guided it down to her clit. "Show me."

"Oh..." Her breath hissed out as her fingers moved under his, rubbing in tiny, slow circles that made her spasm around his cock. "I -- I can't do this for long or I'll come."

She was gripping him tightly and growing wetter by the second. He started rocking slowly under her. "What about this?"

Avani cried out, and he felt her grip on control snap when her magic did. Giddy, joyful power rose in the room as she started to rock, jerky, tentative movements that grew fluid as she found the rhythm.

"Slow. Like that." His balls tightened as she drew him deeper with every roll of her hips, and he watched her, fascinated. "Just like that."

"Yes." Her voice had dropped to a throaty, pleasure-filled whisper. When she spoke again it was his name, over and over in a trembling chant between panting breaths. Climax built slowly in her, stealing over her in a visible wave as color rose in her cheeks and her eyes clenched shut.

She'd reached the plateau of pleasure where the slightest touch could set her over, and Rais meant to keep her there. He moved her hand and replaced it with his own, and began to stroke her clit with quick flicks of his thumb.

Her mouth fell open. Her fingernails scraped along his arm as she flung her head back and came. She was so tight, so wet, that he almost followed her into madness. But he gritted his teeth and kept caressing her, his control nearly in shreds. "Don't stop, Avani."

"Oh Goddess, yes..." The rhythm of her hips faltered and she clutched at his arm with a frantic whimper. "I can't -- help me, help me move --"

He flipped her onto her back without withdrawing and stretched his body over hers. "Hard?"

"You." She reached her arms over her head and arched her neck, giving him her submission. "All I want is you."

All he wanted was for the pleasure of being inside her to never end. "Slow, then." He eased back until his cock was barely in and rocked into her again.

Her eyes fluttered open and she stared up at him as she lifted one hand to cup his cheek. "Are you sure this is what you want? You haven't taken me from behind yet."

The question startled him, mostly because it hadn't even occurred to him. "I like looking at your face."

"Oh." Her mouth curved up, her eyes shyly pleased. "I'm glad." She rubbed her thumb over his lower lip, the touch soft, almost tentative. "I like watching you look at me."

He bit the pad of her thumb and kept up his careful thrusts. "What do you see? A man or a king?"

Her smile widened, turned wicked. "Oh, a king of course. All I want is to bask in the glory of your highness's perfectly chiseled jaw and manfully --"

Rais rolled them to one side and slapped her ass. "Behave, damn it."

He felt the sting of her teeth against his shoulder before her head fell back, and all of the teasing had vanished from her eyes. "You, Rais," she whispered. "I always see you."

The man was mollified. The beast, however, reared inside him, stirred by her teasing. Rais pulled away and swatted at her ass again. "Roll over and grab the headboard."

She obeyed without a murmur of protest, coming to her knees before bending down to clutch at the base of the headboard. "Like this?"

He answered with a single hard thrust, one that took him deep into her body, and a tortured groan. And even that wasn't loud enough to drown out her cry of pleasure. "Again, please... please!"

His hands trembled on her hips and he had to bite his lip, but he stopped, still buried inside her. "You teased me. Now I tease you back."

Avani had lost her grip on rational thought. It was the only way to explain how desperately she wanted to prod at Rais, to drive him into claiming her. Reckless, considering she'd already told him she wasn't his to take.

But she wanted to be. She needed to be.

No. She pushed back against him and tried to urge him to move. At least movement would keep her from thinking. From yearning for things that shouldn't be.

Instead, he stayed still and stroked one hand up her back. "Ask."

"Please." It sounded more challenging than pleading, so she tried again. "Rais, please."

He leaned over her and scraped his teeth over the back of her shoulder. "Beg."

"I am." But not the way he wanted. She clenched her eyes shut and rubbed up against him. "I've been begging since you kissed me."

"No, you haven't. You've been pretending to beg."

With words she'd pretended, maybe, but her body had betrayed her time and time again. Maybe she should be grateful he didn't realize yet that he had such power over her. But her body betrayed her again, and this time words followed. "Because you can't beg when you already have everything you want."

"Do you, though?" he rasped. His hips bumped against hers, just a quick rush of sensation. A promise of more to come. Need burned inside her, but so did a sharp thread of satisfaction at being held on the edge.

She twisted her head so her lips brushed his jaw. "You haven't been listening. I'm at your mercy, Rais. Make me come, make me wait, make me scream. I'm at your mercy."

“Yes.” He followed the low growl with a surging thrust, then another. He rode her hard, pulling her back to meet him, rough eddies of power swirling around them as he fucked her. Not soft or pretty, not careful lovemaking.

He fucked her, and every claiming thrust wrapped his magic more tightly around her, until she feared the marks would never truly fade. She’d go through her life craving this man, needing him because nothing would ever be this good again --

Her body was already primed, but she fought the rising pleasure with everything in her. She’d rejected Rais. She’d asked the impossible, as if she had any right to dictate how the future king chose his mate. *I may never feel this pleasure again.*

So she wallowed in it. She savored the heat of his body and the unquestionable dominance in his strength. She shivered at the next brush of his magic, heat and intangible need that expressed itself in a tingling caress.

His next thrust went deeper, stroked along neglected nerves that sent liquid fire racing through her. Her fingers lost their grip on the headboard and she barely felt the impact as her elbows crashed into the bed, too lost in the sudden sensation.

And maybe she could beg after all, because her lips parted and words tumbled out before she could stop them. “Again, please Rais, right there... oh God --”

He growled loudly as the wild power in him swelled and burst through her. His hand clenched in her hair, and he panted her name between harsh groans. The thrusts were wild, desperate, but it didn’t matter. The next one hit just right and pleasure upended the world.

She screamed, maybe his name, maybe just noise. Her fingers clenched around the bedding as if it would anchor her, keep her from losing herself in the shuddering waves of heat that accompanied every fierce spasm.

Rais drove into her one final time and shouted his release. His fingers dug into her hip, holding her close as he ground against her, riding her through both their orgasms.

The hand on her hip was the only thing keeping her on her knees. Avani closed her eyes and let her cheek rest against the rumpled sheets, unable to gather the voice to say more than his name. "Rais."

He heaved a shaky sigh and rolled them both to the bed, still joined. He brushed her hair away from her neck and panted against her skin. "What is it, Avani?"

She'd noticed him for years. He'd noticed her for a day. The girl might have fooled herself into believing their attraction was deep and lasting, but the woman knew better. Kings did as they pleased. Loved as they pleased. A moment of impulse now could bind her to him forever, but Rais would never be similarly bound. Not unless he wanted to be.

His body felt warm behind her. She couldn't make a foolish promise on the hope of a day of sex, but she could enjoy the way he felt and pray the need for him would fade. So she rubbed back against him with a quiet, contented noise. "I feel very, very good."

She had to have imagined the way he tensed. "I'm glad. You should get some sleep." Then he kissed her neck and slipped away.

It was the last thing she expected to hear. She rolled over, and her stomach twisted when she saw him reaching for his pants. "You're leaving?"

"I'd planned on making this a short visit." His face was inscrutable. "Have to get back as soon as possible."

The high priestess had made it clear that Rais was overdue a visit and needier than usual. Avani had been prepared to spend several days secluded with him while he worked out his frustration.

She was supposed to have time.

He pulled on his pants, and some tiny, terrified part of her considered the possibility that she'd failed. She was twenty-three and still a novice, and he could be leaving because her magic hadn't been enough. Because her body hadn't been enough. It took no special skill to lie passively while a man took his pleasure, after all.

Her chest ached as she sat up and gathered the blanket against her body, as if modesty would make her feel less like a failure. "Did I -- Will you be all right? If I wasn't... enough, you should find someone else. So you won't be in danger."

"No, you were..." He looked at her for a long moment, his eyes dark. Then his lips curved into a gentle, sad smile. "You did well, little one."

Nothing had hurt this much in her pampered, sheltered life. And even knowing Rais could break her heart, even knowing it was foolish, she couldn't stop herself. "If you were still interested --"

"Stop." He dragged his hands through his hair. "Don't apologize or compromise your decisions, Avani, least of all for me."

Because she'd offended him beyond repair. Or because a taste of her when the beast wasn't in control had been enough to kill any desire to possess her. He had his pick of women, ones more beautiful, more talented, more innocent, more whatever he could possibly want.

Avani closed her eyes so she wouldn't have to see him leave, and tried to tell herself it was for the best. "I hope you'll be safe, Rais. I'll give your regards to my uncle, and I know my aunt is hoping you'll favor her with a visit again soon."

His silence was deafening. "Thank you for your kindness and concern. Please tell them I'll -- I'll see them when I can."

The stilted, miserable conversation was worse than the pain of losing him. But she'd have no one to blame but herself if she let him go without telling him the one thing that mattered. "I was truly blessed to have you as my first. I'll never forget it." Not even if she wanted to, she wagered.

He said nothing else. The door closed behind him, a quiet, stark statement on how easy it would be to forget her.

She'd made her choice. The smart choice of a mature, fortunate woman who didn't have to settle for a king's wandering attention. Or worse, a mating like that of Rais's father, who was rumored to have a long-term mistress who owned his heart and body while his mate had to settle for the cold sheets of his empty bed.

Avani knew better. Raised by those close to power, she knew that the king had no mistress. If anyone owned his heart, it was without the comfort of flesh. Kings could do as they pleased, but strong rulers did what was honorable. If Rais took a mate of good breeding and found no long-term pleasure in her body, he would do the honorable thing. A cold, proper marriage, with carefully scheduled sex as a means of producing heirs.

For her, a life living on the crumbs of lingering affection when her uncle's status and wealth could guarantee her the luxury of love. *Unless he loved me.*

The worst thing of all was knowing she hadn't been brave enough to take that chance.

And now she'd never know.

Chapter Three

Rais tripped over the rucksack in the middle of his tent. He regained his balance, but not before driving his toes into the metal frame of his cot. Pain shot up his leg, and he growled viciously. "I need bigger quarters, Jarek."

The healer didn't look up from the wide tablet in his hands, but his fingers moved to touch the screen. "You have the biggest tent in the army," he said absently. "But you already know that."

It was true, and it drew another growl from him as he hauled the rucksack into the corner. "That doesn't mean it's sufficient."

Jarek simply arched a thin eyebrow and studied him over the tablet. "You do remember that I'm here to decide if your... irregular schedule of Temple visits is detrimental to your temper, don't you? If I didn't know better, I'd think you wanted to be sent back."

"I don't have a temper," he snapped. "And if I wanted to go back to the Temple, I wouldn't need anyone's permission."

"Interesting." Jarek returned his attention to whatever notes he was taking. "I went to school with your cousin, you know. She has your temper. She's a lot prettier, though."

"Fuck you. And stay away from Zahra." He paced to the other side of the tent, his shoulders tense. "She's too good for you."

"Undoubtedly true." He didn't sound offended. "My file says you saw Dhaval's niece, but stayed with her less than a day. You're playing a dangerous game, and I can't let you rejoin combat if you're not steady."

Avani. His chest ached, and he rubbed his hand over it absently. "The priestess attended my needs very efficiently. I'm not going to crack up, if that's what you're implying."

Jarek sighed. "I don't care if you fucked the high priestess herself. Twelve hours is insufficient time for a man who's been under your level of strain. And it shows."

Again, the quiet healer probably spoke the truth. But, for some reason, the thought of going back to the Temple to see another priestess was unfathomable. *And Avani doesn't want to see you, does she, you sad little bastard?* "I'm fine. Just fine, Jarek."

"You're not fine," Jarek replied, his voice flat. "You can tell me what's going on and we can work through it, or you can lie and I'll mark you unfit for duty. After the last incident we had with a man pushed too far, I'm not taking chances."

Rais ground his teeth. "My ill temper has nothing to do with the stress of battle. It's --" He sucked in a rough breath. "Perhaps you'll be happy to know I'm in a mood because I've been thoroughly rejected. I asked Avani to wait for me, and she refused."

"Avani?" Jarek's fingers whispered over the screen, undoubtedly calling up files. "Dhaval's niece. Previously a novice of the Temple of Luna." The healer glanced up at him. "She left the Temple after seeing you? Was there an... incident?"

"Just her deeming me unworthy." Rais wouldn't ask. He wouldn't. "Where did she go? Back to her uncle's?"

"No, actually. To your mother's court."

Where she'd be constantly surrounded by eligible courtiers. He couldn't hold back his growl. "That'll make her a lovely match, I bet."

"Perhaps. I hesitate to intrude, but..." Jarek cleared his throat. "You were with her for twelve hours, during which you claim she satisfied a priestess's duties. At what point did she deem you unworthy? The two seem mutually exclusive."

He didn't want to talk about it anymore. "I told you. She did her duty, but refused me as a mate."

“Ah. So, if I’m to understand correctly, you’re acting like a man on the edge of violence because a woman you’d spent twelve hours with refused to promise the rest of her life to you.”

The healer’s dismissive tone scraped Rais’s raw nerves. “Make light of it if you please, but you’ll do it elsewhere.” *If you value your face.*

Jarek wasn’t intimidated. He met the glare with cool blue eyes that showed no hint of pity. “With all respect due a prince of the blood? Grow up. If she matters so much, spend more than twelve hours wooing her. And if she doesn’t, stop acting like a sixteen-year-old with a bruised ego.”

He wanted to punch Jarek right in his smug, calm face, but he forced himself to consider the admonition. How hard had he tried? All he could remember now was that he’d asked, and she’d denied him. She’d wounded his pride, and that had been all that had mattered. “Do we have video communications set up yet?”

“Not stable. The humans are doing something new to block our signals. We can break through in spurts to download data, but video communication would be erratic at best.”

If he could manage to get away without endangering his unit, he could settle the matter with Avani once and for all. “Has Ari made it back yet?”

Jarek returned his attention to his tablet. “Two days ago.”

“Then I’m taking a few more days.” He arched an eyebrow. “Make it a medical suggestion, if you’d like.”

“Pretend it’s a suggestion if you like,” Jarek replied, his voice a little sharp. “It’s hard enough on the men when their leaders are calm. Don’t come back on edge like this. You’ll get men killed.”

Rais glared at Jarek as he snatched up his own tablet. “I overlooked it when you called me an immature brat because it’s possibly true, but if you treat me like an idiot, we’ll be taking this outside.”

Oddly, the corner of the healer’s mouth quirked up. “There’s the royal temper. Have a good trip. Be sure to forget to give my regards to your cousin.”

Jarek fled before Rais could say another word, and the prince turned his attention toward preparing a message for his mother. He could be at her summer home in two days. Avani would be there, and he could do the unthinkable.

The future king could woo his bride.

* * *

Karim was handsome. Not a surprise, Avani supposed. Not with the gorgeous Zahra as a sister and Rais as a cousin. The entire royal family was sinfully attractive, a fact she sometimes thought they were all too well aware of.

But Karim was especially pleasing to the eyes, and he had too much grace to be an unpleasant person. She was in no mood to be courted by a stranger, but even she wasn't foolish enough to pretend that wasn't exactly why she'd been summoned to court. Her aunt and the queen had taken an interest in her future now that she no longer served Luna.

An interest in joining their families was more like it. She supposed she should be flattered that the king's own nephew was courting her with the full approval of his family. She watched him weave through the crowded room toward her with two glasses of wine and tried to summon the slightest bit of interest in him.

"Come, Avani." He offered her one goblet and leaned his shoulder against the wall. "If it were as bad as all that, you'd have jumped out the window already."

Her mouth twitched up in spite of herself as she accepted the wine. "You're assuming I could get it open before my aunt descended on me."

"I could distract her with my dazzling wit and charm, but then your uncle would challenge me. A mess from start to finish, you know."

"A pity." She sipped her wine and found a small smile for him. "I'm sorry, Karim. It's been a trying month with many changes. I'm afraid I'm not excellent company."

"Trying is putting it mildly if you had to deal with my cousin." His grin was mischievous. "You wouldn't believe the rumors. I don't believe them, and I believe damn near everything."

Avani felt warmth rise in her cheeks as she stared down at the wine in her goblet. "I can imagine. Women don't often leave the Savage Temple at my age without a mate."

Karim's light eyes were sharp. "No, they do not. So why did you, little one?"

As if she'd had a choice. Oh, Celine had been very solicitous. Eager to make arrangements that would dispel any rumor that Avani was being sent away from the Temple in disgrace.

Even if she was.

Not in the mood to discuss her shortcomings, Avani sidestepped the question completely. "I'm more interested in hearing the rumors. I imagine they're a great deal more amusing than the truth could ever be."

"They're stranger, at any rate." There was something almost too casual in his demeanor. "The most oft-repeated rumor is that you rejected him. That he wanted you for his mate and you refused."

Her chest hurt. Her stomach felt tied in knots. It took all the training she'd been given in the art of control to show no reaction but mild amusement. "What kind of foolish girl would reject the king's own heir?" *What kind, indeed?*

But Karim didn't laugh. He didn't say anything at first, just stared at her as he straightened off the wall. "By the Goddess. It's true, isn't it?"

She refused to let herself react. "Are you saying you find me foolish?"

"Of course not." He studied her face, his brows drawn together in a puzzled frown. "But you loved him when you were younger. Everyone but Rais knew it. What changed?"

She felt another twisting stab of pain, and this time she doubted any amount of practice could keep it from her eyes. She looked away from him and found the queen, a beautiful, regal woman who suffered her own pain with graceful elegance. "Nothing," she whispered. "Everyone but Rais knows."

Karim made a soft noise of sympathy and laid his hand on her shoulder. "Your aunt and mine have conspired to throw us together. It isn't the best of circumstances, but... Well, a man would be lucky, Avani. Me, or anyone else. Just remember that."

His hand was warm and comforting. He was older than Rais, almost twice her own age. Old enough to have served his time in the war and come home to enjoy the pleasures wealth and beauty could bring. Gossip linked Karim to an endless string of women and no small number of scandals.

An experienced man and a dangerous one, but at least he seemed willing to be patient with her. She lifted her gaze to his and wet her lips nervously. "My uncle has many daughters who gained wealth and power with their matings, but he encouraged them to wait for a man who would cherish them. I'll tell you what I told Rais, and you might find it equally naive. But I want a man who loves me."

He smiled faintly and brushed a stray curl from her cheek. "That's unfortunate for me, since my heart is long since dead. These days, it's merely waiting for the rest of me to catch up."

His pain pulled at her, perhaps because she'd been trained to use the magic inside her to ease a man's agony. She touched his arm, and there was no hiding her sympathy. "Perhaps you needed a priestess who was good at her job instead of one who failed in every way."

"And perhaps you are a bit naive." Karim lifted her hand and kissed it with a gallant flourish. "How do you think I wound up dead inside?"

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I didn't --"

"Cousin," Rais's deep voice interrupted. "Do you do anything these days besides charm the ladies?"

She jerked her hand back as if she'd been caught doing something illicit, which was absurd. But heat still flooded her cheeks as she leaned back against the wall and stared at Rais. Tall, powerful, a man with violence lurking close to the surface. Not as handsome as Karim, perhaps, but harder and stronger in ways that still warmed her body.

Karim's laughter was edged with warning. "Charming the ladies is a full-time occupation, I assure you."

Avani found her voice. "You're back from the front so soon. It's good to see you. I hope you're well?" It sounded polite and distant, but at least her voice didn't tremble as much as her hands.

"Depends on who you ask." He stared pointedly at Karim, who finally sighed and scooted half a foot away. "How have you been, Avani?"

"I'm adjusting to life at the court. Your mother was kind to invite me in time for the full moon celebration tonight. I hear it's quite an experience."

"It is." Rais lifted the glass of wine from Karim's hand and finished it without taking his eyes from Avani's face.

"Thieving bastard." But Karim dropped a kiss to Avani's cheek, then leaned in close to Rais. "Make her cry, and I'll show you a few painful old warrior's tricks, pup."

Avani watched Karim's retreat before turning her gaze back to Rais with a frown, unsettled by his rudeness. "Perhaps I'm not going to enjoy court after all."

"Why is that?"

She narrowed her eyes. "Because you're a king here. Not the man I --" She caught the word before it escaped only by digging her teeth into her lip. "Not the man I know."

Uncertainty flashed in his eyes, and he fidgeted uncomfortably. "You say that as if I can't possibly be both."

"Why were you so unpleasant to your cousin?"

"I --" He snapped his mouth shut and stared at her. Slowly, his expression hardened into a cool, impassive mask. "Excuse me. I have duties to attend. I implore you to enjoy the celebration."

He turned on his heel and stalked off through the crowd, leaving Avani alone with a dozen gazes fixed on her.

She wasn't that sheltered. Rais had challenged his cousin. Over her. What she couldn't fathom was why. It could be nothing more meaningful than a long-standing rivalry, or the remnants of possessiveness in a man who had so recently claimed her body.

Or he could want more. A dangerous, giddy thought. And maybe a second chance.

* * *

Rais ran through the forest which grew thick on the royal grounds. All around him, he heard rising howls as his fellow wolves sounded the call of the hunt.

Only they were soon to be his subjects, a fact he reminded himself of sternly. He had responsibilities, a calling that ran through his royal blood and demanded his service. Tonight, he ran for the last time as a servant of the king. The next time his mother held a celebration...

You're a king here. Not the man I know.

Avani's words had cut. He supposed there would never be a time when he didn't feel entitled to most of the things he wanted; he hadn't been raised to embrace the virtue of self-denial, and it was difficult not to feel as if the world was yours when it was true, at least of everything you surveyed.

But he was a good man, and he cared about his people. His recent foul temper was entirely to blame for his confrontation with Karim, not a generally poor disposition. His cousin understood that, but Avani --

Perhaps Avani just didn't care.

You're a king here. Not the man I know.

But if he weren't the king?

His smooth stride faltered, and he skidded to a halt, all four paws digging into the loamy earth of the forest floor. Was that what she wanted, for him to be another warrior, finished with his service and ready to start a family?

Avani bounded past him, a small pale wolf who ran with a joy impossible to hide. But she slowed as the rest of the court thundered past, her paws slipping as she checked her run and turned to watch him.

He sat and watched her. If she stayed, maybe they could talk. Maybe they could figure things out.

She lunged, fast and surprisingly graceful, and nipped at his shoulder. Then she took off running back the way they'd come, angling into the deepest part of the woods.

He followed her, helpless to do anything else. The call of the moon sang in his blood, demanding he answer her challenge. Demanding he cement his claim.

His long strides overtook hers on the bank of a small creek running through the grounds. He nipped at her flank and jumped, twisting to land in front of her. Panting, he waited.

The full moon still shone bright overhead, but they'd run for hours already. Avani collapsed to the forest floor as magic swelled, and began to shift. With power thick in the air already the change flowed over her, leaving her naked and panting softly on the forest floor, her cheek pillowed on her arm as she watched him.

His own change stole over him in a maddening rush of magic and lust. "Stand up, Avani."

He could smell her arousal, knew the rush of the change and the call of the moon would touch her, too. She smiled and came slowly to her knees. "I don't know if my legs will hold me."

Rais dragged her up and held her against him. "Do you hate the man I've become?"

Her eyes widened. "Of course not."

He slid his hand into her hair and urged her head back. "Then why is my mother trying to find you a mate who isn't me?"

She wet her lips, the gesture nervous. "You told me not to compromise my decision for you. I have decided I will never take a mate for love unless it is mutual love. A mating of practicality would be far preferable to loving you while you tolerate me because you made a vow in haste and find me lacking."

"I don't find you lacking," he told her hoarsely, drawing her hips closer to his. "I nearly challenged my own cousin over you."

"You barely know me," she countered even as her body pressed tight to his. "Perhaps it was unfair to ask you to fall in love with me first. We're at war, and there are more important things than my heart at stake."

Her full lips called to him, and he shook his head to clear it. "You don't think I could love you."

"I don't know." She'd submitted to him gleefully in the bedroom, but he'd never in his life seen the brittle vulnerability that filled her eyes as she stared up at him. "Could you?"

Could he? She was a gentle soul, kind and thoughtful, despite her temper. "I could, if you let me in. If I let you in." He touched her face. "If we both stop fighting it."

She closed her eyes. "When you left me, it wasn't because I wasn't... enough?"

"No, Avani." Rais kissed her forehead, her cheeks. Her mouth. "You gave me so much. Almost everything."

"Almost?" It was barely more than a whisper against his lips.

"Almost." He laid his hand over her heart and caught her mouth again, this time urging it open to slip his tongue inside. She tasted like wine, and moaned when his tongue found hers.

She kissed him hard, hard enough that her teeth scraped his lower lip before she pulled back with a gasp. "Tell me what you want."

"I want you for my mate." He lifted her into his arms and laid her out on the cool grass. "I'll give it all up if that's what you want. I'll just be Rais, and you won't have to worry about the court."

Her eyebrows drew together and she reached up to brush her fingers lightly over his cheek. "You want me that much?"

The answer was simple. "I need you."

She swallowed and shifted her touch to his lips, and her wide dark eyes turned wondering. "I didn't imagine it, did I? The magic... It feels like you're in my blood. With the trainers it faded in seconds or minutes, but I felt you days later. I felt sick from needing you. I thought it was just a broken heart."

Instinct had led her close to the truth. "It was, in a way, and I felt it too. My unit's healer didn't want me anywhere near the front lines in my condition."

"Your family has power. Not like ours. Stronger. I've seen Zahra hear people's thoughts."

"The royal bloodline has its gifts along with its advantages," he admitted. "Sometimes I have visions. Does that bother you?"

"No." She lifted her head and kissed him, a soft brush of warm lips over his chin. "Not unless you've had visions of our doomed love you're not telling me about."

"Nothing like that." It had been ages since he'd had an outright vision. His precognitive ability mostly manifested itself in hunches these days. "Is it too late? Will you let me court you like you wanted?"

He felt the sharp sting of her teeth against his jaw as her arms twined around his neck. "Will you start right now?"

Need swelled in him again, calmer now that she'd accepted him, and Rais moved until his hips were nestled against hers. "I should have started weeks ago."

Her body was soft and perfect underneath him, and her breath fell hot against his skin and she nipped along his jaw until her lips found his ear. "How wicked that would have been. You all but stole a novice from the Temple, you know. The gossip is already out of control."

He scraped his teeth over her chin as his hand crept up to tease her breast. "The gossips will tire of us when we prove faithful to one another. There's nothing more boring to them."

"Mmm." She arched her neck in offering. "I hope you intend to seduce me now."

He bit her gently, teasing, knowing she wanted more. "Right here?"

"Under the full moon," she agreed, her voice hoarse. Her fingers tangled in his hair, tugging insistently as if she could force him to claim her. "My first time outside the Temple."

Possessive satisfaction rose in him, and he nudged his burgeoning cock against her cunt. "First times should be slow."

Her teeth sank closed on his earlobe without warning, and she growled. "So put your tongue on me again. I liked that."

He moved quickly, drawing her wrists up and pinning them above her head. "You also liked when I took you, however I wanted."

She still did. Her lips parted on a moan and she squirmed beneath him, grinding up against his cock. The magic that simmered between them flared, giving him a delicious taste of her need, her craving for him.

An answering need drove Rais to nudge her again, then slowly push inside her. She reacted with a low cry and a lift of her hips, and he steeled himself against the animal desire that rose and urged him to take her, hard and fast.

"Rais." She was wet but so tight, and her eyes looked dazed as she stared up at him. "You -- you feel --"

"Like I'm yours." He lowered his mouth to hers and stroked her lips with his tongue as he flexed his hips and rocked inside her.

Her breathless laughter was giddy. Joyful. "I was going to say huge, but your ego is big enough, I imagine."

He grinned and bit her lip. "You can't behave, even when I'm fucking you, can you?"

"Not my job to behave. Not anymore." She teased her tongue against his lips. "If you're courting me, you should know what you're getting into."

"I know what I'm getting into." Delighted, he flexed his hips again. "Trust me."

Her legs came up, tangled around his hips so she could grind up to meet his next rock. "With everything."

She was his. He'd claimed her before, but this was different. This was her accepting his claim, accepting him. Taking him in.

He braced his hands on the earth on either side of her head and raised his body so he could look at her. Her disheveled blonde hair was pale in the silvered light of the moon, her brown eyes were wide and needy and her lips swollen from his kisses. "You're beautiful, Avani."

"I'm yours, Rais." Her hands still rested above her head, and she twined her fingers together and tilted her chin up. "I'm at your mercy. Body and heart."

"You were frightened before." It had been something more than his lack of grand words or gestures. "Why?"

"Because you could break my heart so easily." Her eyes fluttered shut as her voice dropped to a whisper. "I loved you as a girl. And I don't think it would take much to love you as a woman. I'm halfway there, and I didn't want to get too far ahead of you."

He bit her chin lightly. "I would have caught up."

Her hips nudged up against his, and the soft noise that escaped her had an impatient edge this time. "You're not moving very fast right now."

"Want me to?" Rais pulled back and thrust into her once, hard and fast.

She jerked under him and cried out. Color rose in her cheeks, and her eyes looked wild. "More. Again."

Even that single thrust had taken him closer to the edge, so he shook his head. "Not yet."

She snarled and bit him, and he drove into her again as his control wavered. Slow suddenly seemed unnecessary, and he lifted his hands to cover hers. "You want more?"

"Oh yes." Her body embraced him as eagerly as her magic, her cunt hot and clenching tight. "I want everything."

"Then say it." He froze with his next thrust, his cock deep inside her. "Say you'll be my mate."

She panted against his cheek. "Yours. Yours, if you'll take me."

He teased his tongue over her lips, relief making him weak. "I already have." Then he let go with a growl and rode her with hard, quick thrusts. By the third surge forward she was wild beneath him, making frantic, needy noises. Her teeth closed on his lower lip, hard and desperate, and she moaned into his mouth.

He growled back and snapped his teeth close to her lips. "Mine now, little one. Always."

She made a choked noise of satisfaction and came. She tightened around him, gripping his cock, and Rais buried himself in her one more time as release overtook him as well, sending him tumbling after her with a shout.

It took forever for her to speak, her voice a hoarse whisper. "Mine."

"Yours." He managed to roll to his back before crushing her, and she nestled against his chest. "Want to tell everyone, or make them wait a while?"

She laughed and nuzzled her nose against his skin. "Make them wait. And hope you get stable video at the front. If you don't, I'll write you old-fashioned letters."

"I'll have the techs work it out." He nibbled at her ear. "I can't go too long without seeing you."

"Better not have the techs in the room when you call me. I have every intention of being scandalously naked." Her voice dropped to a dirty whisper. "I find myself enchanted by the thought of letting you tell me how to touch myself."

The thought was ridiculously hot. He smacked her ass and grinned. "No more sex until we get back to my bedroom."

"Why not?"

He ran his hand down her back, cherishing the softness of her skin. "Because you're too delicate for this, no matter what you say. And this is no way for a king to treat his queen."

She shivered. "Queen. I don't know if I'll be a good one. I never really thought about it, even when I thought about you."

"Shh." He held her tighter. "You were raised to lead, Avani. Even if you hadn't been, you're kind, gentle. Perfect."

"I'm stubborn, irreverent and a little bit spoiled," she countered in a sleepy voice. "And speaking of how I was raised, you might want to reconsider this, you know. You're going to have to speak to my uncle."

Dhaval would have his head if he suspected the sorts of things Rais had been doing to Avani already. "I'll handle your uncle. Trust me."

"I do," she whispered, the words gentle and accepting. The tender moment shattered a second later when she lifted her head and glared down at him. "But if you ever imply I'm too weak for a romp in the woods again I'll plant my knee between your legs and see how delicate you feel."

Rais laughed and tangled his hands in her hair. "Delicate doesn't equal weak."

"I'm from a family of warriors. I wasn't raised to be delicate either."

"Point taken, little one." He shifted her weight and sat up. "Now, were we rejoining the celebration, or running back to my rooms?"

She laughed and rose to her feet, standing naked and unashamed in the moonlight. "Only one way to find out." Two steps back and magic rose around her. With the moon high overhead the change flowed over her until the small pale wolf stood in front of him. She lifted her head and howled, the sound full of joyful challenge.

Then she turned and launched herself into the trees.

The same joy swelled inside him, and he followed her. He always would.

Epilogue

Avani paused in the doorway and watched Rais pace the expensive carpet in front of the receiving room's massive fireplace. Old-fashioned to be sure, but in the past weeks she'd discovered that many in the royal family embraced traditions most of their people had long since abandoned.

Rais looked striking in his formal robes, rich fabric cut to show off the strength in his hard body. Traditional or not, they were still a country at war. Strength and virility were the virtues desired in a leader, and today Rais embodied them both.

He reached the edge of the room and turned sharply, and Avani smiled as his gaze fell on her. "I escaped your mother's maids. You'd better not tell me they're likely to hover over me all the time, because I can bathe and dress on my own."

His gaze softened and grew warm. "You look beautiful, as always." He held out his hand.

She slipped her fingers into his hand and tried not to feel nervous. Three months of courtship might have eased her worries about the dangers to her heart, but she had accepted Rais as a man and a king.

Today he would be king in fact as well as name. And Avani would be his queen.

She clutched at his hand and pretended she couldn't hear the murmur of voices from the other side of the wide doors, where people waited for the official coronation. "I notice you didn't promise me freedom from meddlesome maids."

"You'll never make it into some of your clothes unassisted," he murmured, his eyes sparkling with mischief. "It will cause a scandal, but I'll dismiss them and bathe and dress you myself if you like."

A memory drifted up of the previous night, of joining Rais in his oversized tub and how quickly an innocent bath had turned into an experiment in how many times he

could make her come. Her cheeks felt warm as she laughed. "I do enjoy sharing your bath."

"Then consider it done, my queen." He stopped just shy of the wide, ornate doors and rubbed his thumb over her cheek. "Are you ready?"

He'd wooed her over long months apart, calling her when he could and writing notes when he couldn't. His actions had bemused her uncle and perplexed the rest of the court, who couldn't fathom the king's heir bestirring himself to such effort for a mate.

But he had. And it had worked. Her heart pounded as his soft touch stirred her body and warmed her heart. "I'm ready for anything. I love you."

"And I love you." Rais smiled, an intimate expression meant just for her, then laid his hand on the door. "Let's go meet your people, Avani. *Our* people."

There was no room for nerves when she could feel his love in the bond that grew between them with every passing day. Dressed in his royal finest, she still saw the man instead of the king, and it was the man she smiled for, even as she let the king lead her out to meet their people.

Moira Rogers

How do you make a Moira Rogers? Take a former forensic science and nursing student obsessed with paranormal romance and add a computer programmer with a passion for gritty urban fantasy. Toss in a dash of whimsy and a lot of caffeine, and enjoy with a side of chocolate by the light of the full moon.

By day, Bree and Donna are mild-mannered ladies who reside in the Deep South. At night, when their husbands and children are asleep, they combine forces to unleash the product of their fevered imaginations upon the page. To learn more about this romance writing, crime fighting duo, visit their webpage at www.moirarogers.com. (Disclaimer: crime fighting abilities may appear only in the aforementioned fevered imaginations.)