

Seduced by Moonlight

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Chapter 1

A lot of people lounge by pools in L.A., but few of them are truly immortal, no matter how hard they pretend with plastic surgery and exercise. Doyle was truly immortal and had been for over a thousand years. A thousand years of wars, assassinations, and political intrigue, and he'd been reduced to being eye candy in a thong bathing suit by the pool of the rich and famous. He lay at the edge of the pool, wearing almost nothing. Sunlight glittered across the blue, blue water of the pool. The light broke in a jagged dance across his body, as if some invisible hand stirred the light, turning it into a dozen tiny spotlights that coaxed Doyle's dark body into colors I'd never known his skin could hold.

He wasn't black the way a human being is black, but more the way a dog is black. Watching the play of light on his skin, I realized I'd been wrong. His skin gleamed with blue highlights, a shine of midnight blue along the long muscular sweep of his calf, a flare of royal blue like a stroke of deep sky touched his back and shoulder. Purple to shame the darkest amethyst caressed his hip. How could I ever have thought his skin monochrome? He was a miracle of colours and light, strapped across a body that rippled and moved with muscles honed in wars fought centuries before I was born.

The braid of his black hair trailed across the edge of the lounge chair, fell over the side, and curled beside him on the concrete like some patient serpent. His hair was the only thing that seemed black on black. There was no play of colors, only a gleam like a black jewel. It seemed as if it should have been the other way around, that his hair should have held the highlights and his body been all one color, but it wasn't.

He lay on his stomach, head turned away from me. He was pretending to be asleep, but I knew he wasn't. He was waiting. Waiting for the helicopter to fly over. The helicopter that would contain the press, people with cameras. We'd made a deal with the devil. If the press would just stay away enough for us to have some privacy, we'd make sure that at prearranged times they had something newsworthy to take pictures of. I was Princess Meredith NicEssus, heir to the throne of the Unseelie Court, and the fact that I'd surfaced in Los Angeles, California, after a three-year absence was big news. People thought I'd died. Now I was alive and well, and living in the middle of one of the biggest media empires on the planet. Then I'd gone and done something that was even better tabloid fodder.

I was looking for a husband. The only faerie princess born on American soil was looking to wed. Being fey, especially a member of the sidhe, the highest of the high royals, I wasn't allowed to marry unless I was pregnant. The fey don't breed much,

and the sidhe royals breed even less. My aunt, the Queen of Air and Darkness, would not tolerate anything less than a fertile match. Since we seemed to be dying out, I guess I couldn't blame her. But somehow the tabloids had gotten wind that I wasn't just dating my bodyguards, I was fucking them. Whoever got me with child, got a wedding. Got to be king to my queen.

The tabloids even knew that the queen had made it a contest between me and her son, my cousin, Prince Cel. Whoever got a baby first, won the throne. The media had fallen on us like a cannibalistic orgy. Not pretty, not pretty at all.

What the tabloids didn't know was that Cel had tried to have me assassinated more than once. They also didn't know that he'd been imprisoned by the queen for six months as punishment. Imprisoned and tortured, for six months. Immortality and an ability to heal almost anything does have some downsides. Torture can last a very, very long time.

When Cel got out, he'd be allowed to continue the contest, unless I got pregnant first. So far, no luck, and it wasn't for lack of trying.

Doyle was one of five bodyguards, the queen's own bodyguards, who had volunteered, or been volunteered, to be my lover. Queen Andais had had a rule that her bodyguards gave their seed to her body, or nobody. Doyle had been celibate for centuries. Again, immortality, if it goes wrong, can have some downsides.

We'd chosen one of the most persistent of the tabloids and made our arrangements. Doyle thought it was rewarding bad behavior; the queen wanted us to show positive images to the media. The Unseelie Court of the sidhe has a reputation for being the bad guys. We can be, but I'd spent my fair share of time at the Seelie Court, the bright and shining court that the media think is so perfect, so joyous. Their King Taranis, the King of Light and Illusion, is my uncle. But I'm not in line to that throne. I had the bad taste to have a father who was full-blooded Unseelie sidhe, and that is a crime for which the glittering throng has no forgiveness. There was no prison that I could go to, no torture I could endure, that would cleanse me of this sin.

They can say that the Seelie Court is a beautiful place, but I learned that my blood is just as red on white marble as it is on black. The beautiful people made it very plain at a young age that I would never be one of them. I'm too short, too human looking, and, worse yet, too Unseelie looking.

My skin is as white as Doyle's is black. Moonlight skin is what I have, a mark of beauty at either court, but I am barely five feet tall. No sidhe is that short. I have curves and am a little too voluptuous for the sidhe - that pesky human blood, I guess. My eyes are tricolored, two shades of green and a circle of gold. The eyes would be welcome in the Seelie Court, but not the hair. It's blood auburn, sidhe scarlet, if you go to a good salon and get the dye job. It's not auburn, and it's not human red. It's as if you took good red garnets and spun the jewels out into hair. It has one other nickname among the glittering throng - Unseelie red. The Seelie have red hair, but it's closer to human red, orangey, golden, true auburn, or true red, but nothing as dark as mine.

My mother made sure that I knew I was less. Less beautiful, less welcome, just less. She and I don't talk much. My father died when I was younger, and there is rarely a day that I don't miss him. He taught me that I was enough, beautiful enough, tall enough, strong enough, just enough.

Doyle raised his head, showing the black wraparound sunglasses that hid his own black eyes. The light glittered off the silver earrings that graced almost every inch of his ears, from lobe to pointed tip. The ears were the only thing that gave away the fact that Doyle wasn't pure Unseelie sidhe. Contrary to popular literature, and every wanna-be fey with ear implants, real sidhe do not have pointed ears. Doyle could have hidden the ears and passed for pure sidhe, but he almost always wore his hair back so that this one imperfection showed. I think the earrings were so you wouldn't miss them.

'I hear the helicopter. Where is Rhys?'

I didn't hear anything yet, but I'd learned not to question Doyle; if he said he'd heard something, he had. His hearing was better than a human's, and better than most of the rest of the guards. Probably something to do with his mixed heritage.

I sat up and looked back toward the wall of glass that led into the house. Rhys appeared in the sliding glass doors before I could call for him. His skin was the paleness of mine, but there the sameness ended. His waist-length hair was a mass of tight white curls framing a face that was boyishly handsome and would be forever. His one eye was tricolored blue, cornflower, and winter sky. His other eye was gone, lost long ago. Sometimes he wore a patch to cover the scars, but once he realized that I didn't mind, he seldom bothered. The scars trailed down his face but stopped short of his kissable, pouting lips. For sheer shape of the mouth, his was the prettiest. He was five foot six, the shortest full-blooded sidhe I'd ever met. But every inch of him that showed was muscled. He seemed to try to make up for the lack of height by being in better shape than the rest of the guards. They were all muscular, but he was one of the few who really took the weight lifting seriously. He was also the only one with washboard abs. He had the towels he'd gone for, in front of those abs, and lower, and it wasn't until he dropped the towels beside my chair that I realized he'd left his bathing suit in the house.

'Rhys! What are you doing?'

He grinned at me. 'Bathing suits this small are like lies. It's a way for humans to be nude without being naked. I'd rather just be naked.'

'They won't be able to print the pictures if one of us is nude,' Doyle said.

'They'll print my ass, just not my front.'

I looked up at him, suddenly suspicious. 'And just why won't they be able to see the front of your body?'

He laughed, head back, mouth wide, a sound so joyous it seemed to make the day brighter. 'I'll be hiding myself against your gorgeous body.'

'No,' Doyle said.

'And are you going to do anything pictureworthy?' Rhys asked, hands on his hips. He was totally comfortable nude. His body language never changed no matter what he was, or wasn't, wearing. It had taken two days worth of arguing to get Doyle into the thong bikini bottom he had on. He'd never participated in the court's casual nudity.

Doyle stood, and the front of the suit was tiny enough, and close enough in color, that I could see Rhys's point. If you didn't know how magnificent Doyle looked nude, you might think this was it, at a glance. From the back he looked almost as nude as Rhys.

'I am wearing this, and I am in public view.'

'You're cute,' Rhys said, 'but if we want the tabloids to stop trying to snap pictures through the bedroom windows, we need to play fair with them. We need to give them a show.' He spread his arms wide when he said the last, turning his back to me so I got the full view of the back of his body. The view was better without the bathing suit to break up the clean, muscled lines of him. He still had a wonderful ass, unlike some bodybuilders, who've taken the lack of body fat to a point where there is nothing soft on their bodies. You need a little softness to hide the lines of muscles, or it just looks wrong.

I could hear the helicopter now. 'We're running out of time, gentlemen. I do not want to go back to having the photographers camped out in the trees outside the wall.'

Rhys glanced back at me. 'If we don't give the first tabloid a good show, they'll tell the rest that we lied, and we'll have them climbing all over us again.' He sighed, and not as if he was happy. 'I'd rather flash my ass to the entire country than have another photographer break his arm falling off the roof.'

'Agreed,' I said.

Doyle took a deep breath in through his nose and let it out slowly through his mouth. 'Agreed.' How little he liked it showed in the lines of his body, the way he stood. If he couldn't act better than this, Doyle would have to be excused from future photo opportunities.

Rhys came to the foot of my lounge chair and knelt on all fours, with his hands on the chair arms. He was grinning at me, and I knew he'd find a way of enjoying this. It might be duty, and he might prefer to just shoot the helicopter out of the sky, but he'd play fair, and he'd find a way to make it fun, if he could.

I gazed down his body, because I couldn't help it. I couldn't not look at him dangling there, close enough to fondle, close enough for so much. My voice was a little less than steady when I asked, 'Do you have a plan?'

'I thought we'd make out.'

'And what am I supposed to be doing?' Doyle asked. He sounded disgusted with the entire situation. He loved being my lover, loved the possibility of being king; he hated the publicity and everything that went with it.

'You can take one end, I'll take the other.'

The helicopter was close now, perhaps hidden only by the line of tall eucalyptus trees that bordered the estate. Doyle flashed a smile, white and sudden as lightning in the darkness of his face. He moved with that liquid grace and speed that I could never match, and was suddenly kneeling beside my shoulder. 'If I must, then I would have the sweet taste of your mouth.'

Rhys darted a quick lick across my bare stomach that made me writhe and giggle. He raised his face enough to say, 'There are other tastes just as sweet.' The look in his eye, his face, held a heat and knowledge that stole the laughter from my throat and sent my pulse racing.

Doyle brushed his lips across my shoulder. The movement brought my gaze to his, and there was that same dark knowledge. A knowledge born of nights and days of skin and sweat and bodies, of tangled sheets and pleasure.

My voice came a little shaky. 'You've decided to play. What made you change your mind?'

He whispered against my cheek, and just his breath hot against my skin made me shudder. 'This is a necessary evil, and if you must parade yourself for the media, then I will not abandon you.' That flash of a smile came again, like a surprise across his face. It made him look younger, almost like someone else entirely. It had only been in the last month or so that I'd known Doyle had a smile like that inside him. 'Besides, I cannot leave you to Rhys. Goddess knows what he would do out here on his own.'

Rhys ran a finger along the edge of my bikini bottom. 'Such a tiny piece of cloth. They'll never see it if we're careful.'

I frowned at him. 'What do you mean?'

He dropped lower on the lounge chair so that his face was above that tiny piece of cloth, his hands sliding under my slightly raised thighs until those hands came up over my hips and hid the bright red cloth of the bikini bottom. He lowered his face just over my groin, and his hair spread across my thighs like a curtain.

I didn't have time to protest, or even decide if I was going to. The helicopter cleared the trees, and that was how they found us. Rhys with his face buried in my groin, his legs bent at the knees, feet kicking slightly over his bare ass, like a child with a piece of good candy.

I thought Doyle would protest, until he pressed his face into my neck and I realized he was laughing. Silently, shoulders shaking. He eased me back onto the lounge chair so that I was lying down again, still laughing, but hiding it from the cameras.

I started to smile and was glad my sunglasses were back in place. The smile started to turn into a laugh as the helicopter circled overhead, close enough to chop the water of the pool and send Rhys's hair tickling along my skin. My hair flared in the artificial wind like bloody flames.

I was laughing full out now, which made things besides my shoulders shake.

Rhys licked across the front of my groin, and even through the cloth it slowed the laughter, brought a catch to my breath. He rolled his eye up the line of my body, and the look was enough; he didn't want me laughing. He set his teeth into the cloth and grazed me delicately with his teeth. The sensation made me shudder, spine bowing enough to spill my head backward and open my mouth in a throaty gasp.

Doyle squeezed my shoulder, brought me back into my head a little. I was still shaky and had trouble focusing on his face. 'I think we have had enough of a show for one day.' He laid one of the towels across my stomach. He handed the other one to Rhys.

Rhys looked up at him, and I saw the thought to argue cross his face, but in the end he simply began to get up, spreading the towel as he moved so that the cameras didn't get a glimpse of the bikini bottoms. I'd half expected him to flash the camera, show the joke, but he didn't. He very carefully covered me with the towel, while the helicopter swirled overhead and the wind beat our hair around us. On his knees, he was fully exposed, and I wondered if there'd be photos with him politely fuzzed out, or whether they'd sell them to the European papers and not worry about it.

When I was covered completely, from thighs to just under the red bikini top, he scooped me up in his arms.

I had to shout to be heard above the sound of wind and machinery. 'I can walk.'

'I want to carry you.' He seemed so serious when he said it, and it cost me nothing to let him do it.

I nodded.

Rhys carried me toward the house with Doyle walking a little behind and to one side of us. Doyle was being a good bodyguard, bringing up the rear, but he was also walking to one side, instead of directly behind us, so that he didn't ruin the photo opportunity.

He stopped at his chair and scooped up a third towel, then moved smoothly toward the house. I caught a glimpse of the gun wrapped in that towel. The helicopter circling overhead never knew that any of us was armed. They also couldn't see Frost standing just inside the sliding glass doors, hidden by a spill of drapes. He was fully dressed, and very fully armed. I think the reason I didn't mind the media games so much was that if no one tried to kill me, it was a good day. When that's your criterion for a good day, what's a few helicopters and some racy photos? Not much.