

Candy Pop Princess

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Chapter 1

The sound of birds singing pierced a sweet dream, breaking through to make the young woman's hazel eyes flutter open. A slow confusion parted like a curtain for her in her bed as the blanket of sleep was pulled away. Sun streamed in through the window, radiating gold on her long, light brown locks as they fell in front of her face. A delicate hand reached up and tucked a rebellious lock away behind her ear.

"*Mrooowr...*" came a high-pitched sound from below her. Her eyes flicked to the floor and her pink mouth curled up in a sweet smile. There sat a little black cat, with a white spot on her chest and large, luminous green eyes watching the sleepy human in the bed.

"Hey there sweetheart," the young woman spoke in a melodious tone, reaching out to scratch behind the cat's ears.

"*Mrooowr.*" The cat blinked slowly, affection in her gaze. The young woman sat up and swung her legs over the edge of the bed. She grinned and patted her knees, her cat taking the sign and hopping up onto her lap quickly.

"Are you hungry, Sidhe?" she asked sweetly, to which the cat perked up with another trill of approval.

"Evee..!" came a call from the other room, and the young woman turned, smiling at the sound.

"Coming mama!" she called back, and returned her attention to the sweet animal purring in her lap. "Come on, sweetie, let's get going, huh?" She grinned, making little scratches on the cat's fuzzy little chin, making her purr harder. Evee giggled and began to stand, her kitty leaping down to the ground and pacing around her feet for attention. The young woman padded to the bathroom to wash her face and brush out her long caramel locks into their naturally forming waves and curls, tumbling down her shoulders and midway to her back. She hummed to herself, a sweet tune she had awoken with, turning in a dance as she moved back to her room to dress.

A cute pink dress was in order, and fitted her perfectly, cinching in at the waist, subtle flowers she had sewn on to the hem adding a touch of contrast. She was proud of this one, having made it herself some months ago. She heard another call from downstairs and slipped her white flats on before hurrying down, skirts billowing around her legs, with Sidhe just behind.

"Good morning, mama." The young woman grinned, stepping over to the kitchen table and a plate ready with some eggs and toast.

"Eveline Kay, don't you look so beautiful?" Her mother smiled, embracing her daughter in a warm hug. Eveline just giggled. The moment was interrupted by an impatient meow, causing the two women to laugh, Eveline looking down at her companion.

“Don’t you worry, I didn’t forget about you!” She moved into the kitchen to fetch a can of tuna from the top cupboard.

Next to the table was Sidhe’s bowl, on its own little setting, the cat waiting not so patiently beside it. Her little black paws padded up and down, like they were kneading the step, awaiting her fishy treat. Eveline couldn’t help but smile at her fluffy companion, scooping out the tuna and placing it delicately in the bowl for her kitty. Sidhe offered a small and polite meow of thanks, and dipped her head, beginning to eat.

Eveline smiled at the sight, before washing up and returning to her own breakfast. The eggs were delicious, her mother was a brilliant cook! As she ate, her mind drifted to the day ahead. She looked forward to getting into town and practicing for the latest production she was in with her best friend, Sylvia. In fact, Sylvia was due to pop by at any minute to collect her and make their way into town.

After breakfast, and helping her mother with the dishes, she heard the telltale knocking on the door.

“Helloooooo!” called Sylvia’s loud voice from the front door. Eveline grinned. Sylvia was always so fun, and sassy. The tall young woman entered with a flourish, her dark blonde hair cut short and pixie-like around her oval face, a slender figure and big blue eyes under her choppy bangs, bright and sparking with mischief as she awaited another day with her friend. She wore a loose tunic and leggings in blues and greens, a belt at her waist and soft leather boots.

“Sylvieeeeeee~!” Eveline replied with a giggly cry, hopping up and almost leaping over to her friend to embrace her.

“Ready to go?” Sylvia asked with an equally happy grin, to which Eveline nodded enthusiastically. She turned her head, looking over her shoulder and calling back to her mother, “Sylvia is here, I’ll be back for dinner Mama, I love you!”

“Alright darling, have fun!” her mother called back from the other room. With that, the two girls bounded out the door, Sidhe trotting along proudly behind them as they began their journey down the laneway leading to the little lakeside town. The scenery was lush and green, many a tree leaning over the dirt lane creating dappled shadows and sun creating a soft pattern ahead of them, the girls bouncing from sun spot to sun spot in their own little made-up game, chatting about their excitements, thoughts and dreams as they went.

Soon they could see the little streams of smoke from the various cottages and businesses that dotted the main road leading toward the dock. The production hall was further along, nearing the far side of town, though they had left themselves plenty of time to reach their destination, with a few stops along the way.

The town was old, having been there many, many long years, so the buildings had started to become part of the scenery, moss and vines growing up the first building they came to, the bakery. They could smell the fresh baked goods from the road, and instinctively drew closer, lured by the sweet smell of cakes and sugar rolls.

“Ohh... I hope he made the orange loaf today...” Sylvia groaned excitedly, bouncing on the balls of her feet as she approached.

“It’s his most popular, he may have already sold out!” Eveline warned as the two of them drew closer. They were lured to the open serving window, seeing the baskets of bread and cakes lying there, waiting for someone to come by and buy them.

“Hello Mr Thomboleron!” The girls spoke in sing-song unison. From within the bakery, a figure shuffled forward, his gait short and a little wobbly, but the man made his way to the window. Though 'man' was not the right word, as he was a tall fellow, and in the light, fur could be seen sticking out from under his shirt, and covering his goat head, leaning forward to peer at the two young women through his spectacles.

“Oh hello girls...!” he replied cheerily, a smile across his strange, bestial snout. The girls however didn't bat an eye, as they had known him for years. “What brings you into town today?” he asked, looking them over curiously, his voice gravelly and hoarse as he spoke.

“We're headed to the theatre!” Eveline spoke up happily, always cheery and excited when she ever had the chance to head down there.

“Oh very good, I look forward to seeing your next production, Miss Eveline, you always bring joy to the town when you perform!” Eveline grinned, proud to hear such praise from him.

“Thank you Mr Thomboleron!” She grinned, and opened her mouth to say something else, when Sylvia interrupted.

“Do you have any orange cake left?” she asked suddenly, unable to contain it anymore. Thomboleron just laughed, the goaty sound echoing through the shop.

“Yes, yes, I always save you a slice, Miss Sylvia.” He chuckled, reaching under the counter to retrieve two little paper bags, handing one to each of the girls. They paid with a few coins from their purses, tucking the cake away for later and moved on from the bakery, heading further down the street.

“I just feel...really happy this morning.” Eveline declared as they strode forward, the sun shining down on them, warming their faces gently.

“Good!” Sylvia beamed, swinging her arms comically, filled with extra energy as she walked beside her friend. Eveline felt a bubbling in her chest, and let out a happy sigh. She could feel words filling her mind, and a tune in her heart as they approached the fountain in the town centre. She looked at her friend, filled with a sudden pride.

“You know, Sylvia, you have always been with me, ever since I was little.” Eveline confessed, “It was because of you that I tried for my first production.” It was then the tune that bubbled up couldn't be contained anymore. Eveline opened her mouth, and began to sing.

“Tell you now, tell you how,

I need your love,

Cards are dealt, dice is rolled,

Love is fun and games...!” A sweet and catchy tune sprung from her lips as she leapt up onto the ledge of the fountain, looking at Sylvia, who only laughed happily. A few of the other townspeople poked their heads out of their shops, some regular humans, others more magical in origin.

“You fill my day full of happiness,

Lighting the world with surrounding love,

Who would know this would happen to me,

So glad now I am free!” She spun in a circle, her skirt swirling around her legs as she did. Sidhe also followed along, perking up as Eveline sang.

“Through it all, through it all, through it all,

I know you will always be there,

*Through it all, through it all, through it all,
Your magic has turned to gold,
You really are the only one for me,*

Where would I be without your love?” Sylvia and Sidhe danced beside her, the taller girl taking her best friend’s hand as she jumped down from the fountain, taking turns dipping and twirling each other, making their way closer and closer to the theatre. They could almost hear the music in the air, the upbeat tempo and bright energetic sound of the song.

*“Fall up, get down,
Just realized love’s a game,
King, jack, ace, spades,
I know how to play this game,
You fill my day full of happiness,
Lighting the world with surrounding love,
Who would know this would happen to me,*

So glad now I am free!” Eveline sang as they reached the lake, kicking up a splash of crystal clear water, making Sylvia gasp and cry out, while Sidhe ran ahead, avoiding the water with distaste.

*“Through it all, through it all, through it all,
I know you will always be there,
Through it all, through it all, through it all,
Your magic has turned to gold,
You really are the only one for me,*

Where would I be without your love?” Eveline gestured with her hands towards Sylvia who struck a pose, throwing one arm up and the other on her hip.

“Oh yeah!” she cried, laughing as they began to dance their way up the little hill to the theatre.

*“I saw your tell, I gave you mine,
You’re beautiful, a dime,
I need you, need me too,
Were happily, really I doubt it,
Through it all, through it all, through it all,
I know you will always be there,
Through it all, through it all, through it all,
Your magic has turned to gold,
You really are the only one for me,*

Where would I be without your love?” Eveline made another grand gesture while Sylvia posed against the theatre door, the crescendo of the song lingering in the air a moment, before both girls burst into giggling laughter.

“I see you are as creative as ever, Miss Kay,” came a voice from within the building. Both girls paused, turning to see their director, Ms Faralla Spiff, smiling at them, greying hair in a tight bun and tiny glasses resting on her elegant snout, her large fluffy fox tail peeking out from her many skirts at the back. “Are you ready to practise your lines and get fitted for costumes?”

she asked patiently, her hands together in front of her. Eveline nodded excitedly as she headed in after her mentor, her two best friends, Sidhe and Sylvia, following suit.

There were a few people in the theatre that day, all practising their lines, getting fitted for costumes and testing makeup looks for the upcoming production. Eveline often practised her lines with Sylvia, and the taller girl held the script as she recited the lines, barely missing a single word of dialogue. Ms Spiff was very pleased, commenting on her hard work and dedication to learning her role. The time seemed to speed by, there were so many things to do and have done, people bustling around to ensure everything was prepared for the upcoming production.

By the time everyone was done it was getting late, the sun beginning to dip low on the horizon, the sky turning a pinkish gold. The two girls and the feline headed home, chatting about the upcoming production, how well they thought it would do, and the opportunity Eveline would have to play a princess in this new story. She was excited, so looking forward to opening day. However, when Eveline and Sylvia headed back, returning to Eveline's house first as it was closest, Sylvia was about to say her goodbyes when she spotted several figures in Eveline's front garden.

"Who are they?" she asked, pausing at the gate. Eveline frowned, feeling apprehensive.

"I'm... not sure..." she replied cautiously, then Sylvia spoke again.

"Wait, are those guard uniforms?" As they drew closer, they realised she was right, the two men standing there, with their weapons at their sides, indeed bore on their breast plates the deep red and insignia of the King. "What are they doing here...?" Sylvia murmured, but Eveline had another concern. She dashed forward, worriedly.

"Mama?!" she cried, hurrying through the gate, Sylvia and Sidhe only a few steps behind. The guards' hands moved to their weapons as they saw the girls rush toward them, but were halted as Eveline's mother cried out from inside, pushing past them a few moments later to meet her daughter, crying out her name in both worry and relief that she had made it home safely. "What's going on?" Eveline asked, confused, looking around frantically.

"Come inside, both of you." The older woman sighed, seeming suddenly to have aged years in the space of a few hours. "I... I need to explain something." Behind her, in the doorway, stood a very tall man with tanned skin, high cheekbones, black hair and cold blue eyes, watching them expectantly.

"So...this is the girl," he stated, with little emotion on his face. "I am Ser Vannen, I have been looking for you, my lady." He spoke only to Eveline this time. Eveline's mother glared at him in anger, and what looked to be hatred, before ushering the girls inside. Once they were all seated around the little dining table, Eveline's mother let out a shaky sigh.

"I had hoped this day wouldn't come..." She muttered.

"You were a fool to think it wouldn't, Niamh," the man snapped.

"I am aware, Vannen," Niamh snapped back, then her expression softened as she looked at her daughter. "As you know, I left your father before you were born. I have never spoken much about him as...it is not something I am keen to relive. I counted my blessings with you and I didn't need anyone else." She chewed her lower lip, her hands shaking slightly. Eveline just sat in silence, eager to finally hear about her father, and yet concerned that her mother looked so worried. "I knew you needed to grow up away from him, and that place, else the kindness in you would have been stamped out..."

“Watch your tongue!” Vannen growled, “You are in exile and no longer hold the power you once did.” Niamh just glared at him again, but there was a flash of fear in her eyes. She seemed to know very well what he was capable of.

“I came here, not to my girlhood home, else your father would have found me...” She seemed reluctant to say more, but her pause triggered the Guard Captain’s impatience.

“Your father has called for us to take you home, girl,” he stated bluntly. “To Rothroagh, the capital.”

“Rothroagh..? My father...is he one of the nobles or something?” Eveline asked in awe. Vannen just laughed coldly, as though she had said something very foolish.

“No, Eevee,” Niamh told her, taking her daughter’s hand. “He is the King. You are the Princess of Rothroagh.”

Chapter 2

Eveline sat stone-faced in the carriage. She couldn’t believe it. Just the night before she had learned the truth about who she was, who her father was, realising her entire life was a lie and everything she had ever known was just...not real?

Now she sat in the carriage watching her home grow smaller and smaller behind them, not even a chance to say goodbye, to tell anyone at the theatre or in the village that she was

leaving, apparently never to return. She was furious her mother had lied to her, though, watching her mother, standing beside Sylvia's parents, tears staining her cheeks, she could not help but feel her heart ache. Would she ever see her mother again? Surely she would, she was a princess now, a real one, not just pretend, so she would be able to do what she liked...right?

*"Close your eyes as I say my last goodbyes,
Drift off to sleep, don't you worry about me,
As you lie restless without sleep,*

Just let my words be something you keep," Eveline sang, the words coming from deep within, unbidden and emotionally raw.

*"The sun will rise and the moon it will follow,
The rain feeds those green, green trees,
The ocean holds the rivers while they bleed,*

But please don't cry for me as I leave." Her voice travelled on the breeze, and she hoped that Niamh was able to hear it, that it might bring her some comfort.

*"I have fallen, but picked up from the breeze,
Softly and sweetly, only with ease,
See that twinkle, it's not just a star,
I'll always be there but not as a scar,
The sun will rise and the moon it will follow,
The rain feeds those green, green trees,
The ocean holds the rivers while they bleed,*

*But please don't cry for me as I leave.
The sun will rise and the moon it will follow,
The rain feeds those green, green trees,
The ocean holds the rivers while they bleed,*

But please don't cry for me as I leave." The last word lingered in the air as her mother was finally out of sight. She turned back to Sylvia, tears in her own eyes, so conflicted about this journey. Sylvia had managed to convince Ser Vannen and her parents to let her accompany Eveline on the journey, to help her make the change to a new home. Eveline was forever grateful to her, even more so as the taller girl held her close, stroking her hair in an effort to comfort her.

Eveline felt her body growing heavy as she leant against her friend, not really noticing the scenery as they left the little lake town behind. Time trailed on until Eveline had no more tears, her face blotchy, her eyes red and swollen. Sidhe, who was determined to join her no matter what anyone said, sat on the padded seat beside Eveline, one little paw resting on her leg, a small gesture of support as they travelled through the unfamiliar countryside.

The journey was far longer than either of them realised, taking a good two days of almost non-stop travel. Ser Vannen was strict regarding the stops, not letting them linger for long, scolding either of them for being too loud or anything of the like. The green forests of their home became hills, then valleys, mountains leading eventually to plains, fields of wheat and barley, before the shining white walls of the capital came into view along the horizon. A white pillar marked the final end of their journey, standing proud in the sun. Both girls looked up in awe.

They had never seen anything like it before. All the buildings at home were small, old and repaired by homeowners and not any super skilled men of the state.

As they drew closer to this city, they could see the tall walls gleaming, clean and pristine, like they were regularly washed and barely touched. All the buildings were so tall and so beautiful, and there were so many people out there.

Huge crowds flocked like birds, some of them as richly dressed as characters Eveline had only ever seen on the stage. Everything was busy and noisy, and nobody stopped to greet each other like they would in her small town, because nobody seemed to know each other. They were all intent on their own business, and there was a lot of it to do, with dazzling displays of every kind of thing for sale. Endless carriages and horses whisked people to and fro on the wide avenues lined with large, stately houses, and guards in fine uniforms were dotted along the streets at attention, offering a salute to Eveline's carriage as it passed.

Finally, they reached the palace itself, a mass of shining white towers with tall turrets piercing the sky. Hundreds of windows glittered in the sunlight, and banners draped from the battlements, emblazoned with the royal insignia, were bold splashes of red bright enough that none for miles around could forget who was their king. Eveline stared in wonder - it must've taken half a mountain of stone to build it! She was sure it could have fit her cosy little cottage inside it a hundred times, big enough to house her entire town easily. Such a big house for one man. Though...it was her house now too. She couldn't wait to see all the rooms, the gardens and everything within!

The carriage came to a halt at the giant, heavily decorated doors, dark wood covered in gold filigree embellishing the insignia of the King, like a loud statement of power and luxury, so all would feel reverence and awe just from laying eyes on it. Eveline stepped down, looking around in amazement, at the fountain, at the pale stones leading up magnificent wide steps to the doors.

She felt her heart beat faster. She was finally here, finally able to see her father. Finally able to meet him. The two girls were ushered up the stairs, directed by Vannen to follow quickly, barely getting time to look everything over. Each with a case in her hands, the girls trotted up behind the broodingly quiet man, his gaze ahead, on a large woman who stood at the top of the stairs, tapping a small fan impatiently on her opposite hand as she awaited for the Princess to arrive. Her frown deepened as she noticed the taller and more lanky girl trailing behind Eveline, and even more when she noticed the animal at her side.

"I wasn't expecting tag-alongs," she announced in a brisk tone to Ser Vannen, not really looking at the girls for the moment.

"Apparently she would not attend without the common girl or the beast," he responded, a dull tone to his voice, very unimpressed with them. Eveline frowned. He sure was grumpy.

"Sylvia is my best friend, and Sidhe is always with me," she stated proudly, jerking her chin up slightly as she did so, a smile on her lips. She was a princess now, so she wouldn't let her friends be looked down upon. The large woman in the purple dress looked at her sharply, as though Eveline had said something horribly shocking, though after a moment she offered a smile.

“Uh, of course, your highness. I suppose the girl can be trained as your handmaid, once you’ve all been...washed. Poor thing, having to hide in the filthy outskirts all this time!” she offered in a sweet voice.

“Princess Eveline,” Ser Vannen spoke sharply. “This is Lady Castiss, she shall be your mentor and teacher, showing you how to be a proper lady of the court. You will follow her instruction.” After a moment, he assumed she understood and offered a curt nod to her. “I take my leave.” With that, he marched off into the castle.

Eveline was confused. Training? To be a proper lady? What did she have to learn? She frowned slightly, but shook the idea away for now. “So, when can I meet my father?” she asked curiously, looking up at Lady Castiss, who blinked in confusion, then annoyance.

“Ser Vannen didn’t tell you anything, did he?” she asked, sounding a little irritated, and let out a short sigh. “Of course not. He doesn’t talk much. Well, no matter. Follow me to your room, Princess.” She turned to head inside, snapping her fingers, and two servants stepped over, taking the cases from the girls and heading in ahead of them before they could protest.

Eveline hurried after Lady Castiss, having to stumble on along to keep up. The lady began to explain that she would need to learn special etiquette and customs, the ranks of the nobility and their names, all the relations between the courtiers and herself, the histories of her ancestors, conquests of the king, wars he had won, battles fought and everything else.

“How are you supposed to remember all that...?!” Sylvia whispered in shock.

“I don’t understand...what does this have to do with seeing my father?” she asked, getting frustrated. Lady Castiss abruptly stopped, turning to face her on one of the ornately carved staircases.

“You will need to learn all this before your first meeting. He will test you,” she replied, as though it were obvious.

“What?” Eveline blinked. “Why? Why can’t I just go to see him now?” Lady Castiss spluttered in shock,

“Of course you can’t! The king is so busy, and you are not nearly close to being ready! You are hardly a real princess yet!” the Lady explained as she turned ahead to continue. “No, no, no, you must prove to him you are worthy to be his daughter, and then he will announce your arrival to the City!” Her tone perked up again, bright as her orange hair.

Eveline was unsure what she was hearing. She had to 'prove' herself? She had missed out on a lot of training over the years, maybe he wanted to see that she was a hard worker, and not spoiled? Why didn't he want to see her?

The question stayed like a pit in her stomach, but as she reached her bedroom, or more accurately, rooms, she had to marvel at the size. They were as big as her old house! A balcony, a sitting room, a washroom and even an entire dressing room bigger than her mother’s dining room. So many dresses of all colours, patterns and fabrics filled a vast wardrobe, and shoes! So many of them on racks, so many hair pieces and wigs on shelves. Eveline’s sadness was washed away as she looked at all the wonder around her. It was incredible!

“Oh my god, Eevee! This is amazing!” Sylvia cried in shock. She ran around from one room to another, looking at everything, expensive artwork, jewellery, makeup...everything looked incredible! The girls excitedly ran around, squealing in amazement, exasperating Lady Castiss.

“Yes, well, I shall have the servants assist with accommodations for your...friends.” She nodded, beginning to back away from the room. “But remember, your schooling will start early tomorrow!”

The rest of the day was a blur, washing in a huge fancy tub, dressing in a fine dress, the servants setting up a cot and bed for Sidhe and Sylvia, the three exploring her new surroundings, though for the moment she was told by guards at the door that she was to stay in her own rooms, for safety reasons. Odd, she thought, but she supposed it made sense, and returned to exploring everything in her new rooms.

As Lady Castiss warned however, though the first night was magical, Eveline soon learned that there was a series of protocols and more strict rules she needed to adhere to. In the coming days she learned she needed to be up, and have washed and dressed and eaten by a certain time every morning. She needed to take her lessons in a particular order, she needed to take meticulous notes, and most disappointing of all, Sylvia wasn't able to accompany her to any of her lessons. She was stuck on her own while her best friend had to learn how to tidy up, clean and dress Eveline, brush her hair, paint her makeup on and ready her to be seen by others.

Eveline was a little unsure, but she really did want to do her best to make her father proud.

After being at the Palace for nearly a month, she still did not have time to see him, and was concerned about when she might be able to meet him properly. She had often dreamed of meeting with her father, and yet now she was in the same building as him, she could not even go to him and say hello. It was frustrating! Still, she wanted to make a good impression when she did finally have the chance.

Most nights, both girls were so tired they didn't have time to talk or discuss much, just collapsing into bed at the end of a long day. This particular night however, Eveline managed to keep her eyes open for a while, turning her head toward her best friend on the cot across the room.

“I didn't expect all of this when I thought of being a princess,” she confessed, her expression tired, though Sylvia's looked more so.

“Yeah...I didn't think you would be bossed around so much.” Her friend gave a heavy sigh. Eveline felt a little down about the whole thing, wondering if she would ever get to see her father after all. She was about to roll over and try to sleep, when suddenly, she had a great idea. She flashed a knowing grin at the other girl. “Uh oh, I know that look!” Sylvia chuckled. “What just popped in your head?”

“Well...” Eveline grinned, realising her own genius. “I *do* have the day off from studies tomorrow.” She waggled her brows with a giggle. “What say we have an old-fashioned adventure?”

Sylvia looked thrilled, her tired expression vanishing as she matched the Princess's cheeky grin. “Evee Kay, that is the best thing I have heard you say since we got here!” she chirped happily.

“Of course it is! I thought of it myself!” Eveline laughed. “You watch, we will make our own fun!” After discussing it a little, both girls lay back with a smile, their fatigue less taxing,

and both looked forward to waking the next morning and setting off on their exploration adventure.

Chapter 3

The next morning could not come too soon for the girls, both of them thrilled to begin their adventure around the city, though it took some manoeuvring to sneak past the guards. Eveline had to dress down, covering herself with a dark cloak, hood up to hide her hair and face as Sylvia led her out by the servants' passage. They had to keep out of sight of the guards in a

passing patrol, ducking behind a wagon as it rolled by with their hearts racing, a bubbling giggle escaping Eveline once the coast was clear.

The City was bustling, smells of the market and spices in the air, the scent of flowers and the sounds of bartering, chatter, animals, wagons and merchants calling for attention for their wares. Eveline had never seen so many people before! It was incredible, so much more exciting down here than just watching from the window.

The two girls began to explore, heading out to the market, trying to find the buildings that had looked most interesting from the palace. There was the temple, rising high, its steeple reaching to the Gods, like a beacon of hope that they might hear the prayers of the people below.

“Oh look!” Sylvia gasped as they passed one street, gesturing down an alley toward some commotion. There was music...was it a celebration of some kind? There were flashes of colour and sounds of people crying out in amazement. The two hurried along to see a parade of some kind, people in colourful clothes, dancers, jugglers, magicians, other entertainers, and so many people calling out for them to buy...candy! Bowls and jars and boxes, so many stalls all offering a different type of sweet. Caramel, glassy, bright-coloured hard candy, soft chewy ones, taffy, sour chews, refreshing mints with a creamy centre, chocolates of all kinds! The girls stared in awe, it was wonderful!

One stall close to them drew their attention, a woman selling clothing, and masks that many people seemed to be wearing.

“Do you girls want a mask?” asked the woman, her wrinkled face smiling as they approached. The girls both grinned, nodding excitedly. It would help them avoid detection too! Eveline chose a pretty one with a layer of lace and silk covering it in a gentle blue, matching the dress she wore, like it was made just for her. “Just beautiful, my dear.” The woman smiled again, looking proud, her eyes sparkling as she looked at the two girls fondly. They were excited, gazing around in all directions, wanting to see every stall, try every type of candy. They were drawn this way and that through the swarming crowd, and eventually in their excitement and the distracting sights and sounds, Sylvia and Eveline managed to get separated.

Eveline was watching a magician putting on a show and hadn't noticed when Sylvia left her side, though she wasn't too worried, as she couldn't have gotten far. It was then she turned and walked right into someone.

“Oh, I'm so sorry--!” She gasped, face to face with...clothing? It took her a second to realise the person she had bumped into was a very well dressed young man, and her eyes were level with his chest. Her hazel gaze travelled upwards and upon meeting his, piercing blue, she froze, her heart suddenly pounding.

Wow.

He was dressed in dark, tailored clothing, looking ever so sharp, dark hair, tanned skin showing at his neck and strong jaw, a matching dark blue mask framing those impossible eyes. It was like all sound disappeared from the world for a moment, and all the power in her body was taken away. The moment lasted for eternity, and yet no time at all.

“My apologies, Miss..?”

“Eveline,” she managed, a little hoarsely. She flashed a little smile and after a moment, he returned a smile of his own, dazzling white.

“Beautiful name.” He offered her his hand. “I am Caelan.” As Eveline give him her own hand, he took it gently and placed a kiss upon the back of it. A heat sparked in her skin and she felt her face flush. “Do you come to the festival every year?”

“Oh, well I am rather new to the City, I didn’t even know about it!” she admitted, feeling unsure when he frowned.

“You didn’t know?” He seemed incredulous, but his expression changed into a grin once more. “Well we had best fix that!” He chuckled, taking her hand again and leading her through the crowd towards a bright stand near the far end of the alley. He began to show her through the festival, to the most interesting, as well as some of the lesser known stalls that had some of the rarer handmade items from exotic places.

“This is amazing!” she gasped, looking around at a smaller alley that she had completely missed before. “You must have been here a lot!” As she spoke some brightly coloured bubbles floated past them, her laughter just as bubbly, her eyes wide. He led her to a scenic little bridge, letting her look over the edge and down the stream that ran through the city, the two of them taking to the railing and leaning on it.

“I come here every year,” Caelan admitted with a wistful sigh. “I come from the north, the Kingdom of Ciarne.”

“Oh, I was living in Gallwick before I came to the city,” Eveline replied, glancing up through her long lashes. Caelan looked interested, curious about her life there, asking her questions, what she liked, what she did there, how she had enjoyed it. He seemed very interested in her singing and acting. But when he asked about why she was here instead of with her mother, she paused. She couldn’t tell him she was the princess, could she? She wasn’t happy about it, surely he could be trusted...? But... All Lady Castiss' words of warning came back to her and she glossed over it, citing a need to come here for a change. He seemed a little confused, and looked like he might be about to question her, when luckily for her, just at that moment the music grew louder and more of the bubbles floated past, filled with brightly coloured smoke. Eveline let out a laugh, and the two of them followed the bubbles to their source, an old man with a small monkey and a strange machine that made tinkling sounds as the bubbles grew out of its large spout, somehow a different colour each time. The music from the festival rose around them, and that feeling came over Eveline again. As Caelan took her hand, leading her to the square to dance, a song bubbled up in her. Her lips parted, and as she danced, the song flowed around them.

*“Sometimes I am sweet, like candy,
Sometimes you need that sugar rush,
I’m so colourful you want to eat me,*

Sometimes I’ll get you through the day.” The song filled the square, the people beginning to sing along, dancing to the music, the bright and energetic sound bringing them joy and making them all move.

*“Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush oh babe be my,
Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush why won't you be my,
Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush come on and by my,
Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush sugar sugar,
Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush MMM taste my candy,*

*Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush oh babe sweet and sassy,
Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush oh babe by my be my,
Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush Sugar sugar,”* Eveline grinned as Caelan twirled her, the music filling the air, colors everywhere and flower petals in her hair, she felt her heart swell as he met her eyes, his strong arms around her.

*“You’re sweet like candy, so colourful,
Is this a rush or love at first bite,
New love can be Mr. Right.”*

She felt a connection between them, the strong fluttering in her chest as she gazed at him, the world moving in slow motion before he could set her down.

*“Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush oh babe be my,
Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush why won't you be my,
Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush come on and by my,
Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush sugar sugar,
Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush MMM taste my candy,
Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush oh babe sweet and sassy,
Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush oh babe by my be my,
Sugar Rush, Sugar Rush Sugar sugar,”*

There was laughter and cheering, the crowd enjoying themselves as they danced. Eveline felt like she was floating, she didn't think it could get any better than this...

But the moment was broken by Sylvia reappearing in a frantic state, grabbing her arm and breaking her from the dance.

“Evee! The guards are out looking for you, we have to get back!” she hissed in a harsh whisper, beginning to drag her off. Eveline looked back at Caelan, a torn expression on her face, pained at having to leave his side, but she couldn't be caught outside the palace like this.

“I'm sorry...!” she managed in a strained voice, feeling her heart break as she looked into his sad eyes and then had to turn away, running with Sylvia all the way back to the servants' entrance, to sneak their way back inside the palace, rushing to hide the candies and other trinkets they had bought in the market in a safe little box hidden away in the wardrobe.

Then the girls collapsed, breathless after their rush. When they had their breath back at last, they began talking quietly and excitedly about their time at the festival, though Eveline found it bitter sweet. Would she ever see him again?

Chapter 4

Princess Eveline's studies seemed to be suffering. She had little focus, her mind always wandering back to the festival...and Caelan. His eyes, his smile, the way he had danced with her...

"Princess!" Lady Castiss's shrill voice cut across her daydream, starting her out of it, and looking back to the woman instead of out the window, Eveline blinked, a blank expression on her face. Lady Castiss groaned in exasperation. "What is the matter with you?" she asked, frustrated, shaking her head. Eveline didn't have an answer. "I thought you wanted to impress your father when you meet him?" The lady stepped closer, seemingly ready to launch into another infamous lecture.

It had been months and still Eveline had not been permitted to meet her father or even join the court so she might see him from a distance. She still had no idea what he was like, how he governed or what he did day to day. Did he miss her? Did he want to see her too? Lady Castiss seemed to have this in mind herself, or perhaps she just couldn't be bothered lecturing Eveline today, as she merely sighed and lowered her head.

"Well, I suppose you had better hope you have everything memorised, to at least a passable level... His Majesty has summoned you to a royal dinner, to welcome the arrival of your betrothed." Eveline blinked in disbelief.

"My what?" she asked, incredulously.

"Your husband to be," Lady Castiss told her, as though it was the word itself that she hadn't understood. Eveline stared at her in alarm.

"How can I be engaged when I haven't even met him?!" she cried in anger.

"Princesses don't shout!" Lady Castiss chided her. "You are to marry the Prince of the North to secure an alliance between the kingdoms." She smiled. "And you're lucky! The Prince is said to be quite handsome." She said it like it wasn't completely outrageous.

"But I haven't even met him, or had a letter from him or anything! What if I don't like him and don't want to marry him?" the princess asked, confused.

"Oh, that doesn't matter." The Lady Castiss shook her head. "You just have to be seen in public with him and give him a son. Other than that, you don't even need to talk to him!" She laughed, as though Eveline had said something very silly. "Either way, you need to be ready. The dinner is tonight. I will send some maids up to help you prepare for it. You will have to be on your best behaviour tonight." With that, her mentor departed, leaving Eveline feeling numb.

The dinner approached much more quickly than she would have liked, a pit growing in her stomach at the thought of having to be married to a man she had never met before. And she was supposedly already engaged to him? She would have to talk to her father and get this cleared up. Surely he would listen? He had to, he had been searching for her for years! He was her father! Of course he wanted her safe and happy. That's what parents did, wasn't it? Look after their children?

Eveline had managed a small word to Sylvia, who seemed just as outraged, demanding that they talk about it in the evening after dinner.

The dining hall was vast and lavish, with a table set for many people. Thus far, Eveline had eaten in her room or garden, and had never seen this room before. She wondered if her father ate here everyday, or if it was only used for special occasions such as this. She was

escorted by one of the staff to the table, taking her seat, on the left side of the head of the table. She was greeted by a few men already there, whom she recognised from her studies, so she knew their names though she'd never met them before. She greeted them politely, if perhaps a little awkwardly as she made her way to the table. There was some chatter, a few places that still needed people to fill them. She was wondering who, if any of them, would be her betrothed.

Suddenly a trumpet sounded and everyone stood. Eveline hesitated, confused but then stood quickly as she saw how tense the others were. After a moment of silence, the King himself swept into the room. There he was...King Lorcan. Finally, Eveline could lay eyes on her father.

He stood tall, well over 6 feet, his dark hair combed neatly back from his face beneath his golden crown. His beard was full, but neatly trimmed around his jaw, gold on a medallion around his neck, on his belt, his pauldrons, rings on his fingers and in fine threads embroidered into the red vest he wore. Truly he was a figure of regal splendor and authority. He regarded his guests with a nod, moving to the head of the table by the large throne-like chair.

"Welcome friends, to my home. Tonight we celebrate the return of our beloved princess, and her betrothal, which will unite us with our friends of the Northern realm!" He gestured with a flourish toward the far door, which opened on cue. Three men entered the room, all dressed sharply. Two of them, older men, were in dark blue, and the third, a young man with dark hair, had on a cream and white coloured outfit, in a similar fashion to her own dress. Was this him, then? Was this the man she would marry? He moved to stand next to her, and she froze on meeting his gaze. Those eyes. Those blue eyes. She would know them anywhere.

"Prince Caelan," the King greeted him warmly. "It is wonderful to have you with us. My daughter Eveline has been telling me how excited she is for your arrival." He smiled, petting Eveline's shoulder with a large hand. The Princess was left confused. Caelan was a Prince? And...did her father know they had met? She hadn't even spoken to him before? What was going on?

"My Lady, it is an honour to meet you." She felt her hand being taken as she heard that familiar voice in her ear. Her heart swelled to know he was right here, his lips brushing the back of her hand in a gentlemanly gesture. Though his words confused her, surely he knew who she was? He could not have forgotten?

"I..." she managed, a little frown of confusion on her face. "We..."

"Oh, she is speechless!" Lorcan laughed heartily. "She will certainly make you a fine wife, sir!" He chuckled further, taking a seat and waving a hand, urging everyone else to sit as well. The food was brought out and the feast began. The table was piled high with plates of rich food, goblets and chalices filled with expensive wines. Chatter rose up and for the moment, Eveline was quiet, watching on with some confusion. She looked between her father and the man on her left side. She felt like she was in a fever dream that made no sense.

"Father..." She decided to put it aside for the minute. It was time to speak up. "It really is so good to finally meet you," she began, attracting the attention of not just the King but some of the courtiers opposite her.

"You say that like you have only just met!" chuckled the sandy haired lord opposite with a smile.

"I...I have," she replied. "I have been here some weeks and yet this is the first time I have seen my father."

A hush fell over the table, and Eveline felt a tension rising.

“Weeks...?” the courtier’s wife asked. “I had thought you only just arrived?” The older woman frowned. Suddenly the King laughed again, waving his hand and shaking his head.

“Ah, forgive her, she jests!” Lorcan grinned, his booming voice carrying to the end of the hall. The rest of the courtiers began to laugh, though it seemed forced. Or was she imagining it? The only one that did not laugh was Caelan. He laid a hand over hers, squeezing gently. A gesture of support.

The rest of the dinner held some tension from that moment on, and when it was winding down, Lorcan offered his thanks and apologies, stepping away from the table. He paused by Eveline’s chair and offered an arm to her.

“Come daughter, talk with an old man a while,” he offered, with a kindly smile. Eveline looked up, her heart warmed, and she nodded, reaching out to take his arm as she stood from the table. She bade the others goodnight, hoping she would be able to talk to Caelan more in the coming days, now she knew he was staying in the palace. She eagerly headed back toward the royal wing of the palace, near where her rooms were, however his majesty paused at a private parlour and stepped inside.

“What was that?” he asked, his voice sounding so harsh Eveline instinctively took a step back. She stared as Lorcan folded his arms, all warmth gone from his face.

“W-what?” Eveline stammered, shocked by the sudden change in his demeanour.

“Do not treat me a fool, stupid girl! You directly spoke against me to those idiots at dinner to make me seem neglectful! Did Castiss not tell you what you must say?!” His voice was rising and his face turned red with anger. “You arrived last night and that is what you will tell them!”

Eveline stared at him confused. “But... I didn’t, I have been here, learning about the court and--”

“You dare to contradict your king?!” he roared. Eveline had not been faced with such rage before and shrunk back further. Why was he so angry?!

“I...I just told the truth...”

“The truth is what I say it is!”

“Why? Why would you keep me here and not see me if you are so ashamed of it?” she asked, looking at him with wide eyes. This time he scoffed.

“Really? Are you so foolish that you do not understand?” He shook his head. “Had you been my son, your mother would not have been permitted to leave. As a woman you have been of no use, until the chance for this alliance with the North. Why do you think I only sent for you now? Had I known you were so obstinate I would have brought you here sooner to better learn your manners!” he hissed.

The pit in Eveline’s stomach opened up, a cold feeling running up her back. *This* was her father? This is what he was truly like? She forgave her mother in an instant, realising exactly why she was here, as a pawn for her father to use. Her heart shattered in a moment, and all her hopes and dreams of him were broken. She could not take the pain in her chest, hot tears spilling from her hazel eyes as she ran from the room in a fit of sadness.

She didn’t stop until she reached her bedroom, slamming the heavy door behind her and flinging herself onto her bed. A feeling of hopelessness fell over her, one even Sidhe could not

assuage, her little warm paw resting on Eveline's hand as she settled near her mistress and friend. Her heart ached, and she thought of Sylvia, her mother, of everything her father had said... and of Caelan.

How had she fallen into such a mess? Sure, Caelan was wonderful...but she didn't know him so well, and... she hadn't a choice! Her father...she had dreamed he would be a warm and kind man, that he would see her at last and open his arms wide, embrace her and lay a kiss of love upon her forehead. The kind fathers ought to give their daughters.

*“Dear diary, I got this question for you,
Please be honest and I'll be truthful to you,
I have hear you can wish upon a fallen star,
For all your hopes and dreams,
And all in-betweens, and that it comes true,
Is it true? Is it true? Is it true?
Starlight, star bright, first I see tonight,
Wish I may, wish I might have this kiss tonight,
Starlight, star bright, first I see tonight,
Wish I may, wish I might have this kiss tonight.”*

This had to be some cruel joke...weren't princesses in fairy tales happy? How could this man she had been longing to meet, her lost parent be so...so unlike anything she wanted or needed? How could this be real?

*“People always passing,
Children always crying, but I'm told to keep on moving,
Find a penny, pick it up, all the years we will have good luck,
We'll throw pennies to find pennies for our luck,
No more tears, only cheers,
Raw, raw, raw,
Is it true? Is it true? Is it true?
Starlight, star bright, first I see tonight,
Wish I may, wish I might have this kiss tonight,
Starlight, star bright, first I see tonight,
Wish I may, wish I might have this kiss tonight,”*

This wasn't right! How could this be? How could it be so that her father was such a cruel man? That he didn't care? God...her mother had been married to him... No wonder she never spoke of him, it must have pained her heart every time Eveline mentioned the man.

*“I have wished for a bandaid to cover all the hurt,
I have wished for love to heal all the sick,
I have wished for happiness to friend the lonely,
And with my wish upon the fallen star,
I hope it comes true,
Starlight, star bright, first I see tonight,
Wish I may, wish I might have this kiss tonight,
Starlight, star bright, first I see tonight,
Wish I may, wish I might have this kiss tonight.”*

But it was not to be... The princess cried until her tears ran dry, and Sylvia returned for the night to comfort her friend and learn what had happened. While she was happy the prince was the boy Eveline had met, King Lorcan's words shocked and angered her, and it was she that spoke the words that set a fire within the princess.

“We have to stop him.”

Chapter 5

The next few days were miserable. Apparently Lady Castiss had been punished for Eveline's 'insolence' and decided to return the favour by lecturing and scolding the princess as though she were a child!

Luckily Eveline was able to escape to the gardens with Sylvia and Sidhe. She found a quiet area hidden by trees, on a low bench beside a pond. Sidhe was leaping around, trying to catch butterflies. It was a good distraction for the meantime, the girls sitting quietly and smiling at the little cat launching herself into the air, her front paws waving to swat the fluttering critters. Suddenly her head jerked to the side as she heard something, and she darted off to give chase. With a sigh, Eveline sat back and looked up to the sky.

"What do I do? This is...this is nothing like I expected, nothing I wanted... I don't understand how he could be so..."

"So what..?" came a male voice from across the clearing. The girls both gasped and looked up, tense. However, on seeing those perfect blue eyes, Eveline let out a sigh of relief. At his feet was Sidhe. Now it was clear why she had darted off.

"Caelan..." Eveline breathed, standing and walking to him, feeling better at once as she drew close enough for him to wrap her in his warm, strong arms, an embrace of support and relief to see her again.

"I'm sorry, I couldn't say anything at the dinner, like you... I wasn't meant to be out." He chuckled as Eveline led him back to the bench. She introduced him to Sylvia, and he kissed the back of her hand and kindly greeted her, in a way that made Eveline's heart swell. He asked if she was alright, and she began to explain what had happened that night and the days after. Prince Caelan's eyes widened on hearing the truth, believing her at once, taking her hand and listening to her explanations, a pained expression on his face. "This is... I can't believe it, you had been gone for so long and he brought you here just for this?! And you didn't have the chance to know before that night. Gods, I am so sorry, Eveline, had I known who you truly were at the festival, I would have taken you aside to explain things--" Eveline shook her head and waved a hand.

"I don't mind, if you had, it would have ruined our first meeting. I am glad I got to see the real you before all of this was laid at our feet." She smiled, his own lips curved into a mirrored expression and he seemed to feel relieved that she was not angry with him. However, his expression darkened.

"We need to do something. As Miss Sylvia said, your father's true colours have been shown to you, and in no way does he deserve his throne if he is so cruel a man, to his own blood!" The young man shook his head, disgusted. "How can I help?"

"Are you sure? Will that not cause you trouble with your people?" Sylvia asked, leaning around Eveline.

"Well...if we do this, and you actually take the throne...would you uphold a treaty with my country?" he asked, looking at Eveline. Her cheeks flushed.

"Are...are you...?" Suddenly he moved to take one knee before her and grasp her hand.

“My lady, if you were to become queen I would gladly be at your side as long as you would have me. I have not met anyone like you and I would not wish to be devoid of your company. If, in the future, you and I grow closer, I would be honored to ask for your hand.” He smiled, his blue eyes glimmering with determination and genuine affection. He was giving her time, and a choice, more than anyone here had yet. She nodded at once, her eyes filling with happy tears and her heart swelling with appreciation. She swept forward and took him into a strong hug, so thankful for his kindness.

After a moment she drew back and wiped her eyes, a smile on her face and hope renewed in her heart. “So...how do we begin?”

Thus it began, planning and chatting in whispers, nothing written, nothing drawn, a secret that began with the three of them, extending through whispers to find those who also knew the King was not a kind man, that he was not worth the crown on his head. Now the seed was planted, the whispers spread like wildfire, about the ill-tempered king, the lost princess and the hope renewed since the kind and warm Queen Niamh had left them, to know her daughter had come back, to rise up in her place. The rebellion began in the markets, some of the citizens standing against the guards, rebelling against their collection of taxes. It was like the breaking of a glass, a silent gasp before the crash. The wave hit and there was chaos. Fighting broke out in the streets, the soldiers were sent out to quell the rebellion and their harsh tactics were only successful in riling up the people even more.

The King fortified the castle, even locking Eveline in her rooms for days, refusing to allow anyone to see her. Her messages to Caelan came via Sidhe, and occasionally Sylvia. She could not turn away from the people now she knew they fought for her. She lingered at the window, day after day, and while she could not reach them, she hoped her voice could.

*“Lips raw with trust,
I like it raw,
Honest to the touch,
Unashamed, alive,
Raw is my trust,
Feel it in my touch,
Raw is so sweet,
Come be raw with me,
I am raw,
We are raw,
The world is raw,*

Come take me there!” As she sat on the balcony she heard the voices call back to her from somewhere, from the people fighting, for the families that needed freedom, for the people in the kingdom that needed help.

*“I am raw,
We are raw,
The world is raw,*

Come take me there!” The chanting through the battles, through the halls and into the hearts of those who called for their princess.

RAW, RAW, RAW.

They wanted change, they wanted the truth, a ruler they could trust, one they could believe in.

RAW, RAW, RAW.

Eveline felt the hope in her rise, that magical creatures could return to the realm, that her mother and her village would be safe, that her father would not harm anyone else.

RAW, RAW, RAW, RAW, RAW, RAW, RAW.

“Lips raw with trust,

I like it raw,

Honest to the touch,

Unashamed, alive,

I am raw,

We are raw,

The world is raw,

Come take me there!” Eveline was locked up for days, isolated, listening to the fighting grow ever closer, seeing fires spread with no way to help. She had to get to her father and stop him.

“I am raw,

We are raw,

The world is raw,

Come take me there!” She sent word to her allies, to the courtiers that believed in her, to Prince Caelan... They came for her in the night, to break her out. She could hear the fighting in the halls. Now was her chance.

“I am raw,

We are raw,

The world is raw,

Come take me there!” She stormed down the halls, her hair and dress flowing behind her, her prince at her side, turncoat soldiers following her lead.

RAW, RAW, RAW.

The swords clashed around them, Caelan showed his strength and skill, protecting her from anyone that dared get too close with a swing of his blade.

RAW, RAW, RAW.

Time seemed to slow around them, men cried out in rage and pain as they fought, some attacking the princess, others attempting to protect her.

RAW, RAW, RAW, RAW, RAW, RAW, RAW.

The chanting was in the heart of the rebellion, an unheard song as they fought their way to the throne room.

RAW, RAW, RAW.

The gates could not be held, the people broke through, calling for the king to come forth, to stand for his crimes against the people.

RAW, RAW, RAW.

The chanting became louder, the song of the rebellion would not be quelled until they stood at the feet of victory.

RAW, RAW, RAW. RAW, RAW, RAW, RAW.

"I am raw,

We are raw,

The world is raw,

Come take me there!" Her song echoed in the halls, the throne room doors were ahead, soldiers standing as the last defence of the King, their faces drawn and serious

"I am raw,

We are raw,

The world is raw,

Come take me there!" A tension came across them, the soldiers ready to cut each other down, when Eveline stepped forward.

"I am raw,

We are raw,

The world is raw,

Come take me there!" She called for them to stand down, that she wished for no more bloodshed, for no one else to be harmed, that the fighting needed to stop. She begged them to lay down their arms.

"I am raw,

We are raw,

The world is raw,

Come take me there!" Another tense moment passed, pierced only by the clang of swords as they dropped to the stone floor. They had surrendered.

Raw...!

The doors to the throne room opened.

On the throne sat the man himself in his regal splendor, though significantly more ruffled now than before.

"You!" he shrieked, pointing a crooked finger toward them. "I offer you my home, my hospitality! I am your father! Your *KING!*" he roared, his face once more turning red in rage, the advisor beside him flinching while the distinguished general on his other side merely glared at the group approaching.

"You are no king of mine!" Eveline cried. "I would not be here were it not for your own selfish desires! You use people like pawns! The people of magic origin you look down on as lesser! You tax your citizens so highly they can barely afford to feed their children!" She glared back, unafraid as she slowly approached. "When they speak against you, you burn their homes and temples! You are no king! You are a tyrant!" At this the general wavered, the mention of the burning churches had him look to Lorcan with a glance of horror and thinly veiled rage, as though he were betrayed.

"You told me they would not be targeted...!" he hissed in a harsh whisper.

"If they defy me, then they must be punished!" Lorcan screeched. His hair was dishevelled, hanging in his eyes, he was in need of a shave and looked like he had not slept. He looked positively manic.

"That is madness! How can you govern a people when you detest them so?" Eveline gritted her teeth. This man was nonsensical, and wonderful at making her angry.

“I am the king! Those peasants will remember that! My rule is divine! I will never let you take my throne from me!” He launched at her then, his bejewelled sword raised, ready to take his own daughter’s life.

Time slowed, and she was frozen to the spot for a moment, the life she had led to this point flashing before her eyes. Her mother, Sidhe, Sylvia, her friends in the village, the people she met at the festival... Caelan...

Clang!

Steel met steel, both the general and Caelan leaping to her aid, crossing swords with the king and pushing him back, blocking him from harming Eveline. The General shoved him back to the ground, his golden crown clattering, rolling across the floor...resting at Eveline’s feet. Slowly, she reached down to pick it up, looking at it closely.

“No! Nooooo!” Lorcan shrieked, reaching for her, but the General once more shoved him down, kicking away the sword.

“Take this cur to the dungeons!” he bellowed, soldiers leapt forward, four of them, grabbing his arms, dragging him kicking and screaming out of the hall, his screeches eventually fading as the sun began to rise, breaking the horizon and spilling in through the large windows. It was over.

“My lady, I have stood with the King while he took as he wished and ignored my advice. Too long have I suffered a selfish ruler. Knowing you in your time here in the palace, I know you are not as he is...may I?” He held out his hands and she nodded, offering him the crown. “It may not be official, but in the light of the new dawn, I am honoured to crown you our new queen,” With that, he laid the crown on her head. Cheers erupted behind her as she turned, her followers now smiling, raising their arms in joy and celebration.

“Hail to the queen!” Caelan cried beside her, “Hail to the queen!”

“Hail!” cried the soldiers, servants and courtiers. “Hail!”

A smile crossed her face, a new dawn to the new beginning...now, Eveline had the power in her hands to choose her path, her destiny. She took Caelan’s hand, looking forward to her new tomorrow.

The End...?