

Celtic Evil
A Fitzgerald Brothers Novel
Ian
by
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Prologue

A Circle of light, a circle of five, five into one, one becomes five to unite the circle and protect the light.

Centuries ago, the prophecy foretold the coming destruction of the evil Warlock Sebastian by five warriors united by blood who must face their own demons to prove their worth.

Sebastian has fought to destroy that prophecy with every generation of his ancient foes, and after a fifteen-year banishment has returned to finally succeed in his goal for he has many plans set in motion to defeat the sons of his most hated rival, the late Toryn Fitzgerald.

The silver haired Warlock knew that he had underestimated his foes the first time and had failed to kill the fourth born son of the Fitzgerald clan for a second time.

Now, with a better grasp on what makes them tick and what makes them weak, he knows what he must do to either kill or turn just one of the remaining four.

However, his plan will also work if anything happens to any of them, which is a plan that his current accomplice is still willing to see happen.

Lightning crashed through the dark stormy skies over a well-kept manor in the Irish city of Waterford and it mirrored the dark mood of one of its occupants.

“It should have been easy to claim his life.”

Sebastian had still not grown accustomed to being out of his unearthly realm, yet the richly decorated home of Kathleen Murphy Fitzgerald suited him well.

However, at times the woman’s incessant complaining grated on his last nerve. “We both underestimated your grandsons the last time, Katie,” he turned from watching the storm to see the well-trimmed silver/black haired Irish woman frown. “Neither of us expected the lads to bond that quickly and I certainly wasn’t expecting the little trick that Roarke pulled from his hat. I still intend to burn him and his whore for that.”

The memory of being made a fool of by Roarke Fitzgerald still grated almost as bad as the pain he suffered from the wound and the scars that still showed on Sebastian’s otherwise perfect face.

“Assure me Roarke’s death, Sebastian and I will still deliver what I promised.” Kathleen remarked, sipping a glass of wine and pouring him one. “I’ll give you your freedom and the end of the prophecy so long as you give me what I desire most.”

Smiling, Sebastian took the crystal wineglass and lightly tapped it against hers. "Katie girl, I vowed that you would regain control of Fitzgaren manor and that I'd give you the death of your grandson and I will do both," he assured her then scowled. "However, Kerry will be on guard now so getting close to them won't be easy."

"Aye, Kerrigan has his mother's ability there but there is a way to get close to one of them." Kathleen tapped a nail on her glass. "It hurts a grandmother's heart to think of using Ian in such a way but he's the easiest to handle at this stage and if we follow my plan, the lad won't even suspect the danger he's in or from whom," She smiled as an evil look entered her eyes. "My beloved Toryn didn't have the time to teach Ian not to trust everyone and he believes that he's safe from her."

Sebastian chuckled, clinking glasses with her again. "You, Katie, are a woman after my own heart," he decided proudly. "A toast to a successful plot and to the death of your foe as well as my own. May we each get what we desire most."

"Aye and we shall," Kathleen promised as lightning scored the night sky again. "I've plotted well these past fifteen years for occasions such as this and now promises made will be called in and my grandsons will learn that they should not have spurned my advice."

"As I said, a woman after my own black heart," he laughed, letting himself imagine. "The Circle of Five will soon be no more and once again my power will reign supreme in this land and it will only take one simple betrayal of the most innocent."

Laughter echoed in the manor as the weather outside echoed the evil plans being hatched inside.

Chapter 1

Savernake Forest, Great Britain:

One mile southeast of the historic town of Marlborough in Great Britain lies 4500 acres of deeply mysterious and beautiful Savernake Forest, one of England's oldest woodlands.

While mainly privately owned, some of it is open to the public but on rare occasions, the locations with the best spots for study are opened to Professor Jonas Brighton's class from Trinity University up from Dublin.

This was the case on one afternoon when the class had been camping in the woodlands for several days while exploring the woods, viewing the different species of mammals, birds, reptiles, insects and trees.

While his major was acting, Ian Fitzgerald had long ago accepted that he couldn't count on acting or singing to support him and he didn't like depending on either his foster family or his brothers for that.

Of course, while he found Professor Brighton's class boring as hell, the chance to explore the Savernake Forest wasn't something he was planning to pass up. He'd long since heard the rumors of it being a powerful magic spot and those were things that he was always fond of looking into.

At eighteen, the 5'6" Ian was the youngest of the Fitzgeralds and after events a few months prior he had quickly learned that meant his brothers tended to hover over him even though he knew what his powers were capable of.

Having entered Trinity a full year before he should have, Ian was a junior but still one of the youngest on this class trip, which was why he discounted the feelings of unease that he'd been having recently.

"Nerves about being this far from home is all it is," he decided with the Irish brogue still in his voice when he talked, though he could dispel it easily if he wanted to.

His sunny blond hair blew in the breeze that wafted through the trees around him and his trip partner.

Toby Armstrong was a native to Dublin and totally dedicated to the field of botany. An eighteen-year-old freshman, the red-haired student was sifting through some fallen foliage a few feet away from Ian.

Ian was engrossed in looking at a leaf that seemed unusually withered for this time of year and for the kind of tree that it was from. He thought he felt a change when the hair on his neck began tickling and the pain started building in his head as it had been for days but he chose to ignore it.

“So, still not going to tell me what’s up between you and the Yank that you’re always hanging out with?” Toby called in a teasing tone, looking up at his partner.

Knowing whom he was referring to, Ian pushed down the first comment that popped into his head since he knew that few people understood Molly Jackson as well as he did.

“She’s in my acting class, that’s it,” he replied evenly, rubbing the back of his neck where tension was building. “Molly’s new to Dublin and still gets lost so I show her around.”

“That lass would get lost in her own head if it wasn’t attached, mate,” Toby laughed, looking over his shoulder at a deeper part of the woods. “You could hook up with any of those hot little blondes in that class but you choose to hang with...”

Ian just shifted so that his back was to his friend to keep him from seeing the brief flash of anger that lit his eyes. “Molly’s a friend, Toby, and I don’t recall asking for your bleedin’ opinion on my life,” he muttered.

The other boy just laughed, gathered his tools and decided to go deeper into the dark woods in search of more discoveries.

Scowling at the thoughts that the normal teasing had brought up, Ian tried to shake it off.

He liked Molly and never denied that she was pretty but he refused to admit that his growing feelings for her were anything but friendship. He had to keep believing that.

“Toby, don’t go too far into the woods alone,” Ian called to his classmate, just before the first scream came from elsewhere.

Whirling, Ian’s first look told him that the other boy was not anywhere that he could see. Reacting on instinct and not considering anything else, he ran into the woods where the screams were now getting louder.

“This is not your brightest move, boyo,” Ian was telling himself and could just picture his brother Mac’s reaction to his impulsive move, knowing that Mac was always yelling at Ryan about encouraging Ian’s recklessness.

Concentrating on finding his friend, Ian didn’t feel anything else until he cleared a heavy spot of foliage and found Toby Armstrong...or what was left of him.

“Oh, bloody hell.” the boy breathed, wanting to turn away from what he found but couldn’t.

The red-haired Dublin native had wandered further into the woods to locate the other items on the Professor’s list when he found something else. Something that no one should ever have been expecting to find.

Now, his eyes were staring wide open in terror from what he had seen in his last moments, as his body was torn into multiple pieces by the snarling and frothing beasts that were still gnawing on bits of him.

Ian had seen creatures like this once, several months before at his family estate in Fitzgaren. Struggling to recall what Kerry had called them, the boy soon realized that the name wasn't as important as surviving this.

One beast looked up from the leg that it was chewing on as if sensing its new prey, red eyes locking on Ian.

"No, I don't think so, puppy." Ian's fingers glowed as he began to channel his powers when the sudden pain doubled and took his breath. "What the bloody..." gasping when it became apparent that his powers weren't coming on and that was the first time in his memory that he actually knew fear since he had always depended on the magic that was his birthright to protect him.

He had no idea why those powers weren't working and that caused a deeper sense of fear than he could ever recall. A fear that doubled as the beast prepared itself to lunge.

"You are the youngest of the Five, yet you have powers that have yet to be tested. What are you without your brothers, Ian?" a voice that he knew spoke from behind him but before he could turn a sharp blow like an ice-cold hand went through his head. "It is a pity that the glorious fate that was originally destined for you had to be changed so late. Now, not only will your powers be tested but the loyalty of your entire family."

Ian fought the pain and building fear as a gentle touch to his face turned to agony as he spiraled into an abyss of darkness with only a fleeting thought of betrayal even as the demon dog bared its bloody fangs and lunged for the helpless boy.

The scream from the forest wasn't the only one heard at that moment. As it seemed like screams echoed throughout the magical realms and in a small town in County Kerry, Ireland, a banshee's wail sounded for those who could hear it as the ancient Irish harbinger of death sounded that imminent death was close for the Fitzgerald family.

"Ian," Kerry Fitzgerald looked up from the book in his lap as the ancient wail tore through the quiet night in Fitzgaren and something made the eldest Fitzgerald think instantly on his youngest brother, and didn't care for the meaning of it or the chill in the air.

"Something's happened," Patrick 'Mac' Fitzgerald spoke from the doorway of the library. "I can't see it clearly but Roarke just woke up in agony and Ry's bitching about pain as well. Kerry..."

"Aye, I know. The bastard's back," Kerry sighed.

Unknown to Kerry Fitzgerald, he wasn't the only one who had heard the scream or felt the danger to Ian Fitzgerald.

Snuggled in her bed in her single dorm room, Molly Jackson sat straight up with a scream on her lips.

A freshman at eighteen and a native of Boston, the bright and perky black girl with a light caramel skin had become fast friends with Ian and shared many of the same interests, including an interest in magic and the occult since her own maternal grandmother was a voodoo priestess in New Orleans.

Now, she sat in her darkened room with a deep knowledge that something was very wrong and the sight of the silver owl hovering outside her window made her sure of that as she decided to find out what was happening first thing in the morning.

Trinity University, Dublin, Ireland, six days later:

“What d’ya mean, let it go?” Molly had prided herself on losing a lot of the strong New Orleans accent from being raised in the Big Easy on and off but as she listened to the Dean of Students, it came back vigorously. “Ian’s been missing for almost a damn week, what’s being done about it?” she demanded. “Has his family been notified? Did you call the police? Toby’s dead, Ian’s missing and...”

Dean Peter Quillian sat back in his leather chair and listened to the girl’s rant before finally lifting a hand to halt her mid-yell. “Miss Jackson, the faculty appreciates your concern in this matter but at this point, it’s being treated as a runaway case.

“The assumption is that after seeing his classmate tore apart by wolves in the Savernake Forest, Mr. Fitzgerald was upset and simply ran. He’ll reappear soon and contact us.” He went on calmly and evenly, his tone not brooking an argument from the American student. “His foster family has been informed and also believes this to be the case, as does Mrs. Fitzgerald, Ian’s paternal grandmother who I have just been in contact with.”

That made Molly frown even more, knowing that Ian hadn’t been very comfortable at school since he returned from Fitzgaren, a few months prior.

“What about his brothers? Have you told them about Ian’s...trivial disappearance?” she asked, hearing the sarcasm and not caring by this point.

Quillian reached for his pipe, considering his words carefully. “Miss Jackson, Ian’s brothers are not issues in this case and therefore do not need to be bothered with this matter unless his...”

“Unless his body shows up?” Molly snapped, surging to her feet and grabbing her bag. “That’s what you were going to say, right? The Fitzgeralds don’t need to be told unless Ian’s body shows up somewhere.”

Seeing how this was playing out, Molly decided that this tact wasn’t getting her anywhere. “My Granny told me that coming to school over here would teach me about my Dad’s side of the family but she was wrong.” She paused to look back at the Dean. “My Dad may have his issues but he’s nowhere near as cold blooded as some of you people are.”

Slamming the door on her way out, Molly debated on taking the bus to the part of Dublin that Ian's foster family, the Sullivan's, lived and then just as quickly discarded that idea, remembering that Quillian had told her that they agreed with the idea that Ian had simply run away from fear and shock.

"Screw that!" she snapped, storming from the head building and back toward her dorm to think.

Molly had arrived at Trinity University scared and alone and because of her somewhat quirky nature didn't make friends easily. It was in her first acting class that she had met the handsome blond haired Irish boy. Ian always seemed to have a smile for everyone.

He had quickly taken her under his wing, showing her around the campus, taking her to the good places to hang out in Dublin.

The two had bonded as friends and Molly admitted to having more than a slight crush on Ian even though she knew that he rarely dated. They shared secrets with one another about their families, their dreams and Ian had shared other secrets with her that he wouldn't with Sybil and Brandon Sullivan.

Molly had never really questioned Ian's fondness of all things magical and he enjoyed her tales of her grandmother in Louisiana and her own family mix-ups since she came from a mother who grew up in Louisiana and a father whose own family had come from Ireland two generations before.

Striding across the campus, the sudden chilling wind nearly blew the cap off her unruly black curls until she clamped a hand down onto it.

"Ian would not run away from that crap and there are no wolves in that forest," she muttered to herself. A sudden feeling of being watched made her turn toward the large tree that was in the center of the campus that she and Ian often studied under. "Oh...wow."

Leaning against the tree, arms crossed and casually watching her was a tall man with piercing gray-blue eyes and thick wavy black hair.

Students passed by the tree without giving the man so much as a glance but Molly didn't have to look hard or have a long time knowledge of her grandmother's teachings in the occult to know that she was looking at a spirit.

"A smart lass should probably run when seeing a man fifteen years in his grave," Toryn Fitzgerald spoke in a strong voice, his accent still evident as he watched Molly hesitate only briefly before approaching the tree.

"Yeah, well, a smart lass probably shouldn't have just popped off to the damn dean of students either," she shrugged, stopping a few feet from the spirit of a man that she knew her friend barely remembered. "Talking to a ghost isn't new to me, Mr. Fitzgerald."

A smile flitted on the rugged face looking down at her. "The gift of sight run in your family, Miss Molly Jackson?" he asked curiously, not seeming surprised that she knew who he was. "Or was it a lucky guess that you know who I am?"

"You have Ian's eyes so it wasn't hard to guess when a spirit shows up after he drops off the face of the earth who you are," she shrugged, not feeling particularly silly about talking to herself in the middle of the campus.

"All of my sons share that trait though Ian, Mac, and Kerry got my wife's looks as you will soon learn when you go to see them," Toryn replied, amused when her eyebrows lifted.

"What makes you think I'm going down to Fitzgaren?" Molly asked even though she had already made that her next step if nothing else panned out in Dublin.

Toryn's laugh reminded her of Ian's when he was happy and she felt the tears that had been hiding threaten to come.

"You're a smart lass, Molly Jackson, so don't disappoint me now," he chided her, looking around the campus. "I suppose it shouldn't be a surprise that Ian chose to come here, though of all my sons, he wasn't the one I expected to carry on the Fitzgerald tradition of attending university here."

"You went to school here?" Molly wasn't sure why she was surprised then blushed. "Sorry, I guess Ian just never talked..."

Nodding, Toryn pushed away from the tree to begin walking toward the dorms. "Ian was three when he was taken from his brothers so he wouldn't have been told everything and what he would have been told probably were lies," he sighed, looking around. "Brenna, my wife, and I met here but that's not the issue.

"You've guessed and seen much that someone without the gifts that you were blessed with shouldn't have been able to," he looked over at the young woman, a serious look coming into his eyes as a feeling of dread began coming closer. "Molly, you need to go to Fitzgaren. You need to tell Ian's brothers what you've seen, felt, and heard because he needs both you and them if he is to survive what he will soon face."

"Needs me?" Molly repeated blankly, seeing the silver cat again as she had so many times in the past few weeks. "If Ian's in trouble, then he needs people who can handle that sort of stuff. I just know a few party tricks and a couple simple spells that Gran taught me..."

Toryn must have seen the silver cat as well because he frowned more. "Your grandmother is a smart woman, Molly Jackson, as is your Da's mother who gave you that medal you wear." Shifting a look to the cat again, his eyes seemed to turn darker as he looked at her.

"Leave Dublin, don't go near the Sullivan's until you speak with my sons," he advised, taking a firm grip of her hand. "Tell Kerry everything, Molly. Even things that Ian may have told you long ago that you found odd. Tell him, and listen to him."

Molly stared at her hand as he released it, shocked to have felt the warmth and strength in it but also hearing the concern in the strong voice. "Ian's in trouble, isn't he?"

"My son has been betrayed and needs you and your love, Molly Jackson, as all my boys will soon come to learn." Torny stepped away as the wind lifted again. "Go to Fitzgaren, Molly, and find my sons. They will help you...but Molly?"

She looked up and saw his wry grin as he began to disappear. "You come from a family of nine siblings so you know what it's like but my boys like to bicker and that hasn't changed, just a warning from a father to a girl that's going to walk into a mess if Mac and Ryan are into it."

"I have eight brothers so I know all about..." she stopped when she realized that she was alone again except for the feeling of those glittering blue eyes on the silver cat. "Go to Fitzgaren, huh?"

A quick feel in her pockets told her that she barely had the cash to get a cab into Dublin much less clear down to County Kerry so that left her two options that she could think of.

"A call home to Barry to ask him to wire his ditzzy baby sister cash or an experience that I can tell the grandkids about." Molly considered and quickly decided against calling her brother and ran to find the dorm's janitor to ask for a favor.

Not considering that disappearing for who knows how long could get her kicked out of school, Molly was only concerned with helping her friend. The longer it went the more she was convinced that he needed her and that meant that she needed more help than she was going to find in Dublin.

"That's it, Molly girl as Dad would say," she sighed, hooking her small bag to the back of the borrowed bicycle and not questioning why she just didn't try to call Fitzgerald manor since their father had told her to go. "Just leap into the abyss and the devil take the consequences."

Pausing to take a deep breath, Molly winced at a sudden burst of burning pain. "You damn well hang on, Ian, because I don't plan on doing the next play without you," she muttered, pedaling off and not aware of the glittering eyes of the cat or the watchful gaze of someone else.

Chapter 2

Fitzgaren, County Kerry, Ireland, four days later:

Stepping out into the early afternoon sun, Kerry Fitzgerald reached for the cigar he carried and was forbidden from lighting in the house.

At thirty-four, Kerry often felt much older these days as he handled the day-to-day matters of the manor, the dreaded images that plagued him at night and the bickering of three younger brothers.

All of which had been getting worse these past days since the night the banshee had wailed.

Stepping from the porch onto the gravel of the driveway, he felt the wind blow his well-styled blonde hair in a tousling motion but it didn't relieve his stress.

Ever since they had forced Sebastian back, Kerry had been on edge. Knowing that the Warlock would be furious at losing and would try even harder the next time, but that time hadn't come yet and it worried him.

As the eldest, he took his responsibility seriously. He also took his guilt seriously and he still carried a lot of that.

It had been Kerry's success in singing that had brought his brothers into the act, which had been successful until the day Sebastian had killed their parents and things were torn to shreds, and they were pulled apart until a few months ago when the evil returned.

Lighting the cigar outside far away from Deirdre O'Connor's watchful gaze, Kerry still recalled the events that announced the return of Sebastian and also brought his brothers back home.

The Warlock had been beaten back once but they all would have to face their demons and fears before the circle could be fully complete and Sebastian defeated.

"Plenty of time for him to pull some trick," he sighed, hearing a shout from inside and knowing that his brother Mac must be scrapping with the small but fiery redheaded reporter that he had brought into this mess.

As he walked the roses that lined the drive, Kerry still found it odd to have his brothers back in the house after so long, and when they were fighting, he could cheerfully throttle them all.

He recalled times as boys when his mother and Deirdre would scold them for bickering since all of them had different personalities and tempers and that still hadn't changed.

Ryan still enjoyed tormenting Roarke whenever he got the chance, though Kerry noticed that Ryan was also the one to hover first when the nights in this house still got the best of their younger brother.

It was in the past week that Kerry noticed that all of them seemed to be having issues ever since the banshee had screamed.

Ryan hadn't said anything but Kerry, as a stronger empath, could tell that he was suffering from migraines, which was something he only had when stressed or bothered. His temper was also getting shorter, a fact that was plain when he snapped at their housekeeper just that morning and had Deirdre threatening him with a skillet.

Mac, who was the full-fledged empath in the family, was hiding his stress and problems as well as he could, which wasn't easy considering that Mary Margaret Cavanaugh could see right through him, but even Mac was snapping and Kerry knew that was odd.

Roarke...was quiet, something that Kerry recognized as an issue since he knew that his brother was bottling things up again and only sharing them with Jessica Hadley, his British girlfriend.

Kerry knew his brother was having nightmares again, but this time even though Roarke tried to explain what they were, he couldn't get past the black fear, and that worried his brother.

For himself, Kerry just couldn't dispel the idea that something was wrong and that not knowing kept him awake at night, walking the halls of the house that they all had been born in and hoping that his alertness could protect his brothers...if only he could reach Ian.

"I think it's time to send Ry to Dublin," he muttered, figuring it would kill two birds with one stone.

Getting Ryan out of the house would keep Deirdre from killing him and sending him to Dublin for Ian would relieve Kerry's worry since calling wasn't working.

Just about done with the cigar, Kerry was looking to the fields when he heard the loud engine of a truck wheezing its way up the drive and a dry smile formed on his handsome, rugged looking face.

"Agnus, you were supposed to be here this morning with that meat delivery," he chided the older red haired man who was driving. "Deirdre's been as mad as a ton of bloody hornets when she didn't have her black pudding for breakfast."

Agnus McNash scowled as he hopped out of his truck, spitting into the gravel. "That woman wouldn't be happy if she wasn't harping about one thing or another, laddie," he said, waving the warning away and going to the back of the battered truck to remove a bicycle. "Truck broke down first and then on the way I stopped to give the lass here a ride since she was headin' your way and no one else in town would bother to help."

“Just put that bucket you call a hat on before going into the...” Kerry stopped in mid-step as what the older man said finally registered. “What lass?” he asked, turning to find himself staring into the brown eyes of a petite looking young black girl with a light caramel skin who was staring around in open fascination.

Guessing what the next question would be, old Agnus shrugged as he took a box from the truck next and hefted it to his shoulder. “Don’t rightly know who she is as we didn’t talk much. She just said that she had come from Dublin and was heading out to Fitzgerald Manor to see you and the lads.”

Nodding, Kerry again focused on the young woman and tried a surface scan but was actually shocked when he wasn’t only blocked but the power pulsed back at him. ‘Well, now this is interesting,’ he mused, not knowing anyone but Jessica who could do that.

“Agnus said that you were heading this way...Miss...?” he paused as the girl turned those deep brown eyes on him while removing the bike helmet to allow a mass of unruly black hair to tumble free.

“Jackson, Molly Brianna Jackson, Mr. Fitzgerald, and I’m sorry to just show up on your door like this.” Molly shook her hair before holding out a hand to him.

If he was surprised that she assumed who he was, Kerry shrugged it away since the girl had clearly known where she was coming. “Strangers rarely come out here and as you could tell by the folks in the town, neither do they,” he replied, accepting her hand, surprised by the strength of her grip. “So, what can I do for you, Miss Jackson?”

Molly had been startled by his resemblance to her friend and by the amount of power that she sensed from him. She had a brief idea that she should be wary about doing this but the sense of urgency overrode her good sense.

“Ian’s in trouble, Mr. Fitzgerald and I didn’t know where else to turn and then your Daddy said to come here and tell you everything that’s been happening and...” Molly blurted out all in one breath but still caught the flash of energy in the older man’s eyes. “Guess I should have done that slower, huh?”

Kerry had stared hard as soon as his brother was mentioned, but when his father was brought up he began paying closer attention to this strange young girl.

“Tell me about Ian and we’ll discuss how you saw my father later,” he decided, seeing the tiredness in her eyes and leading her to the steps to sit. “We haven’t been able to reach Ian in several weeks, not since he called to say that he was going on a field trip somewhere.”

Taking a deep breath, Molly launched into a brief version. "Ian and his class went up to the Savernake Forest in Great Britain for a weekend trip about two weeks ago. One night, I woke up and knew that he was in trouble. For six days, I tried to get the school, the police or someone to tell me something and then finally I learned that a classmate who had been with Ian had been tore to shreds by something and Ian did not come back with the class.

"The Dean tried to say that Ian ran away after seeing Toby mauled by wolves but first, there are no wolves in that forest. A friend who was there showed me a picture of the..." she paused at the memory before going on "Toby was tore to pieces but no wolf would have done it that way and Ian wouldn't have run away."

Agitated, Molly began to pace. "The school is useless, his foster family isn't concerned, and the Dean said even your grandmother isn't worried and..." she stopped when Kerry's hand landed on her arm.

"The dean spoke with my grandmother?" he questioned, little lights flickering in his eyes as a cold hand began to clench his heart.

"Yeah, he said that she figured he'd turn up but that's not the way I'm feeling. If Ian hadn't told me some of the things that he had then maybe I'd be less concerned but he's my friend and...he was really uneasy before going on the trip." She sighed, scowling. "And every damn time I see that silver cat I know something's...hey, are you okay?"

Kerry had been frowning as he listened but at the mention of the silver cat, he felt his temper spike and barely forced it back down. "This...cat, did Ian ever see it?"

"Yeah, about a week or so after he came back to school," Molly nodded, remembering the night well. "We'd gone to dinner before going back to his room to study for class, he opened the door and this silver cat was standing in the room just staring at him.

"Mr. Fitzgerald, Ian's the most easy going, laid back, soft hearted fella that I've ever met but that night, he was shaking when he saw the cat and then he got mad." She went on, frowning, "He kept me behind him and told the cat to get the hell out, that he didn't want her there and that if she came back that he was calling home and then he spent the night on the floor in my dorm room.

"I asked him a couple days later what it was about, but he would get real uneasy about the cat and the day I walked into his room when your Granny was there I thought I saw fear in his eyes but..."

"My grand...Kathleen was in Dublin with Ian?" Kerry demanded, swearing at himself for not seeing this. "When was this?"

Molly had to think about that. "About a week before the trip and after that he was more than edgy, he was downright scared, and he told me that if he ever vanished or anything odd happened that I should call you."

Thunder rumbled in the clear sky as Kerry swore under his breath, adding up the time that she had said passed. Ian's disappearance would have been around the time they had all felt the trouble. "The night that bloody banshee wailed," he swore to himself.

"What has Ian told you about his family, Miss Jackson?" he asked, not wanting anyone involved in this if he could keep from it but something told him that this wouldn't be easy.

"I knew about your family's singing act, I've heard the rumors around school about why the act ended and Ian's told me more since he came back." Molly grinned brightly at him. "I knew he was a witch two weeks after I met him, if that's what you're asking, sir."

Scrubbing both hands over his face, Kerry wondered why that didn't surprise him and decided that it was best to have this story told once. "Come into the house, I'll want you to tell the whole story once so that will mean bringing the lads in."

As Molly blinked, Kerry let his thoughts go out to find his brothers wherever they were on the grounds.

Sensing, he rolled his eyes and let out a quick but loud mental shout that got their attention with equally testy replies.

"Ian's vanished going on two weeks, Kathleen was in Dublin and Ian's little friend has come to tell us the tale. Get your damn selves into the bleedin' living room now!" he snapped, then returned his attention to Molly who was watching him with dark eyes.

"I should warn you that my brothers probably will be loud, angry and mistrusting." He figured it only fair to issue the warning since only Jessica and Maggie could deal with them in this stage.

Molly picked her bag up with a laugh. "Your Daddy warned me about that, Mr. Fitzgerald," she assured him, seeing his look. "That's something else that happened that I rank up there with the weirdness in my life recently."

"I think you'll see plenty more in those lines if you choose to help Ian, Miss Jackson, and call me Kerry." He held open the door for her, hearing Ryan shouting from the back part of the house already. "You'll soon learn that there are way too many 'Mr. Fitzgerald's' here and we don't usually stand on formality."

As Molly entered, Kerry felt the cold clench his heart harder and hoped that what Ryan had said about Ian's powers would protect the boy somewhat.

Elsewhere, somewhere dark:

It was the pain and the cold that brought dim consciousness back to Ian Fitzgerald.

Barely recalling events that led up to waking up wherever he was, Ian hissed as pain shot through his entire body but then he saw something else that reminded him.

Sitting a few feet away, as if on guard, and still gnawing on a bone was a large, frothing black beast like he recalled seeing before and that told him that he was far from out of danger.

Slowly moving his limbs to be sure that nothing was broken, Ian nearly screamed as fire seemed to burn his veins at his first attempt to use his smallest power.

"Shit, this is so not good," he groaned, straining to see in the thick blackness and wasn't certain if it was just that dark or if a blow to his head had given him a concussion and blinded him.

"Being alone in the dark, surrounded by who knows what is not an easy thing, is it, Ian?"

The voice was thin and tinny to his ringing ears but the boy still knew it, a feeling of dread curling in his stomach. "Where am I?" he demanded, hoping he sounded calmer than he was feeling as nausea warned him of injuries that he couldn't see.

Sebastian chuckled from the darkness as he watched this boy struggle not to show fear or weakness and he had to admire him for that at least. "Let us say, that you are not where your brothers will think to look anytime soon. Do you remember me, Ian?"

Swallowing the sour taste in his mouth, Ian struggled to move a hand to grip something at his throat. "Sure, mate; I remember the night that my brother shot you. Roarke beat you and so will...argh!" the scream cut his words off as a razor like claw tore through his calf muscle.

"I control your life, boy," Sebastian warned through gritted teeth, straining to rein in his temper. "It would be simple enough to let my pets render you limb from limb and end my problems."

Fighting pain and terror, Ian's finger gripped the Trinity medal he wore but frowned when he didn't feel the Claddagh medal. "So why don't you just kill me?"

Taking a step closer in the darkness, the silver haired Warlock tensed as the same energy again kept him from physically touching the boy, yet his beasts could.

“I have plans for you, my lad,” he replied easily, shifting tactics. “You were Toryn’s last, Ian, but far from his favorite, you know. Each of your brothers shared that spot for different reasons but you?” the Warlock clucked his tongue. “You were more for duty as my old friend knew that he needed five sons to complete the prophecy and you were ever a sickly babe that demanded Brenna’s attention.”

“Shut up, bastard,” Ian hissed, struggling not to listen to words that echoed things he’d heard in whispers as a child. “I know what you’re doing, Sebastian, and it won’t work. My brothers will...”

“Kerry and the lads are all better than you will ever hope to be, Ian, and you know that,” Sebastian spoke quietly, feeling the boy’s emotions waver. “You don’t have to die, Ian, and with my tutoring, I can teach you to be so much more.”

The inkling of doubts that had always haunted him still resided in his heart but Ian finally shot a glare through the darkness. “Go to hell,” he snapped, feeling the sharp pain strike his face and the burning poison from the beast’s claw slowly took him under again, but not before he wondered how right the wizard was about so many things.

“Molly, be safe,” he whispered before pain, fear, and his own dark thoughts pulled him under, knowing that his friend could be hurt if his foes learned all that he had shared with her.

Chapter 3

Fitzgaren, County Kerry, Ireland:

The throbbing pounding migraines that had been bothering him as of late hadn't stopped Ryan Fitzgerald's penchant for card playing, as he was sitting in one of the outbuildings with some workers playing poker when Kerry's mental shout tore through his brain.

"Bloody hell, Kerry!" he snapped back the same way, wincing and knowing that both Mac and Roarke would be doing the same right then. "What the hell d'ya want?"

Kerry's curt reply caused the black haired security expert to forget the cards and bolt for the main house, a knot of fear in his heart that he had only felt once and that was recently.

At twenty-eight, Ryan had always been the more outgoing of his siblings and that hadn't changed. Wearing his thick black hair long and wavy, his gray-blue eyes changed as always with his power or temper and right then as he cleared the back door, they were close to black.

"Kerry, where the bloody hell are you?" he shouted, temper on the surface and not caring for the emotions he was getting even as he felt Roarke enter the house in much the same state.

Not only getting their dark and dangerous looks from Toryn Fitzgerald but also his temper, Ryan knew his temper would be sparking soon.

He also understood that things had suddenly taken a turn for the worse as he slammed the door of the living room to see his older brother talking to a petite looking, pretty young light skinned black woman and he instantly caught the vibes.

"What the bloody hell were you talking about?" he demanded, eyes sharp and prepared for the fight but Kerry's own eyes just flashed in a way that had Ryan backing down slightly. "You don't do the eye thing very often, bro," he reminded edgily.

"No, normally only when you're about to make a bigger fool of yourself than usual," Patrick 'Mac' Fitzgerald spoke as he stepped into the room a mere step behind Ryan and only slightly more relaxed looking.

However that appearance as Kerry knew was only by sheer force of will since Mac, being the second oldest, had plenty of years to learn to hide his darker emotions.

Wearing his own blond hair cut short, it still showed signs of the sun streaking it, as he finished buttoning his shirt and got between Ryan and Kerry, looking at their guest curiously.

Shifting a look from Molly to his brother, Ryan couldn't help comment on his otherwise neat brother's appearance. "I expect the brat to come in looking like that since he's been in the barn all day with Jess but little Maggie's reporting sessions must be real...strenuous if you're redressing after one, Mac."

Coming from a huge family, Molly was used to the fighting between siblings so this was nothing new to her. What was new was when the vase on the mantel cracked as Mac's eyes narrowed dangerously.

"Ry, knock it off before Mac lets Maggie fry you," Roarke warned, entering the room after hearing the comment and feeling Mac's temper war with his common sense.

Normally the one that Ryan teased, Roarke wasn't accustomed to being the one breaking up his brothers.

Having taken the time to clean up after being in the horse barn all day, Roarke ran his fingers through his long black hair to push the front out of his face before turning to the young woman that Kerry had mentioned.

Molly had turned to watch and was now looking with open fascination as she got her first good look at her friend's older brothers and with a low hum, she pursed her lips.

"Well, I'll say that Ian sure as hell didn't mention one thing to me," she decided suddenly, eyes looking between the Fitzgerald brothers seriously before looking back at Kerry. "He didn't bother to tell me that all four of his brothers were drop dead gorgeous members of the male species."

Kerry bit the inside of his cheek in amusement as he watched his brothers' reactions to this quirky girl.

"Umm," Roarke blinked at this bold statement, shifting uneasily under the intense scrutiny of the dark eyes watching them until he felt a hand on his arm.

As Mac lifted a brow, Ryan simply laughed aloud and decided to forget his anger for the moment. "I like her, Kerry. Can we keep her?"

"You only like her because she thinks you're cute," Jessica Hadley spoke from beside Roarke.

The young British woman had known all the Fitzgeralds for years and so was immune to Ryan's constant flirting.

"Drop dead gorgeous was her exact words, Jessica Jayne," Ryan tossed back with a smirk, bending to kiss Molly's hand when he felt the spark shoot through his fingers. "Damn," he muttered, frowning and looking up to see Kerry's grim look. "What's up?"

Halfway certain that his brothers had calmed down some, Kerry shifted a look toward Molly. "Molly Brianna Jackson, meet Ian's other brothers," he began, shooting each one a warning silently. "Mac, Ryan, and Roarke and these are our friends, Jessica and Maggie."

“The definition of friend depends on whom you’re talking to,” Ryan grinned, sitting down on the sofa easily and with his usual smirk. “Ask Mac or the brat and you may get a different answer.”

Mary Margaret Cavanaugh reached over and smacked him in the back of the head. “Bucko, one of these days I’m turning you into something hairy.”

“Mac tried that when we were lads and got his hide tanned for it,” Ryan shot back, seeing his brother glare at him.

Kerry closed his eyes in a mixture of temper and patience. Though he got no sense that Molly was upset by the bickering that was happening.

“What’s happened to Ian?” Roarke finally asked, sensing that his brother was reaching the limit of what he was going to take in the way of playful bantering. “Who is she and what’s wrong, Kerry?”

Figuring this would be hardest on Roarke, Kerry was grateful that he was the one who spoke up and brought this back on track.

“This is Molly Jackson, she’s a classmate of Ian’s from Trinity University, and it seems like we have a few issues,” he spoke grimly, motioning to Molly to have a seat. “You’ve traveled a long ways on a bicycle, Miss Jackson, would you like to freshen up before we get into this?”

“No, I want to find Ian before he’s hurt more,” Molly shook her head firmly, seeing the change come over the brothers.

Always an astute judge of character, she could’ve easily labeled each of these men within seconds or so she thought. At the mention of their youngest brother, she saw the change the moment it happened.

There was no easy bantering or brotherly bickering. Instead, they were steely eyed and serious as those identical gray-blue eyes all watched her.

“Start at the beginning, Molly, and tell us everything,” Kerry urged her, now sensing the girl’s unease and seeking to lessen it. “We’ll help Ian but only if we know what’s been going on.”

Taking a deep breath and forcing down the sudden nerves, Molly nodded and began.

“Like your brother said, I go to school with Ian and I guess he’s pretty much my best friend, my only real friend if you really push,” she began slowly, nerves beginning to show now that she was here.

“I met Ian on my first days of university after I stupidly ran afoul of some older students and he backed them down.” Molly still grinned at that memory.

Stretching his arms on the back of the sofa, Ryan shifted a look toward Mac. “Did we know that baby brother stood up to bullies at this fancy school?”

“You know everything else so how’d you miss that tidbit?” Mac countered, feeling a pinch on his neck. “Maggie...”

The petite pixie like redhead shook her head at both men before smiling at Molly. "Ignore the lads, Molly, it's their way of working off the stress that normally would have them scrapping and then Kerry wants to hurt them."

"Anyway, we don't have time to get into the full story of all that but I should start by saying that I was with Ian the day he saw that damn talking crow, and we both saw the stage with our classmates burst into flames," she declared, shaking her head. "I felt the difference but still had a hard time seeing through the image until Ian did something."

As the girl from America went on to describe the events of a few months ago, Kerry met Mac's eyes from across the room, and both instantly connected.

"She saw one of Sebastian's images," Mac slid a look over to where Maggie was sitting on the footstool, trying to keep Molly on track with her story. "Only those connected with us should be able to see his tricks, not a mere girl from America."

Kerry knew this to be true but he also knew something else. "Aye, but she also pushed my surface scan back in a way that not even Jess's power has ever done and I think something happened when Ry touched her."

"Do you think Sebastian sent in a ringer to lure us or is she something else?" Mac questioned, frowning as his concern for his family began to show.

His brother merely shrugged before returning full attention to Molly who was just getting to events that were more recent.

"Ian was quiet after he came back to school, not interested in trying out for plays and was more cautious about his surroundings," she was saying, beginning to tap her fingers together as she did when nervous. "The night that silver cat first showed up though is when I noticed the change in him and every time we would see it he'd get more edgy and almost paranoid."

"Silver cat?" Ryan's eyes glittered as he caught onto the meaning behind that and saw Roarke go rigid at the mere mention. "What the bloody hell is she trying to pull with that crap?"

"Let her go on, Ry," Kerry urged, seeing that Jessica had moved closer to Roarke as he got tense.

Molly was catching the change in the room but chose to ignore it in favor of telling them what she needed to.

"The night we first saw the cat, Ian stayed in my room on the floor and afterward I don't really think that he was sleeping all that good but he wouldn't say anything...until the day I went to get him for class and his...your grandmother was with him."

Thunder crashed in the distance despite the sun shining and it seemed to Molly that for a moment the house shook slightly. She looked around quickly but no one else appeared alarmed.

“Go on, Molly,” Jessica Hadley urged quickly, wanting to distract the younger girl even as Mac was moving around to put a hand on both of his younger brothers, more as a method of support than restraint.

“They...they appeared to have been fighting because the lady was real cold and bitter and told Ian that he’d end up regretting his choices if he didn’t choose wisely. When she looked at me, he got very defensive and told her to leave and that he wasn’t telling her again to stay the hell away...though I didn’t think that he’d told anyone but that cat to stay away.

“After she left, things began to get bad for him at school too,” Molly’s normally pleasant mixed Boston/Creole accent got bitter at this point. “He was up for a part in the lead play for the semester and had it nailed and the professor gave it to a boy with no talent whatsoever. Then his classes were changed without telling him, and his history papers were audited because a senior staff member claimed that Ian cheated, so he was on the verge of losing his scholarships.”

Roarke had gotten up to pace but turned at this, his normally handsome face angry. “That’s bullshit!” he snapped, nerves and temper simmering and this news was close to pushing him to a rare point. “Ian’s smart and wouldn’t cheat on any bloody test and his GPA was as close to a 4.0 as I’ve seen so what the hell’s going on?”

“It sounds like Kathleen or someone is trying to make a point to Ian by threatening what they think is most important to him,” Kerry mused, frowning slightly as he ran a finger over a photo on the mantel. “His schooling and by taking away the scholarships they think he has, he’d have to resort to asking the Sullivan’s for the tuition money and he’s too proud for that.”

“So if they can’t scare him or find a weakness against him, then take away the scholarships that he worked hard to earn,” Mac nodded, scowling. “Low down rotten but it could work.”

“Except for one thing that the Dean forgot and no one else but Brandon Sullivan knows,” Kerry turned to look at his brothers, anger glittering in his eyes. “Halfway through his freshman year, the committee that gave those scholarship funds to Ian disqualified him because of something that Sybil Sullivan put on his application, so he hasn’t had those since that time.”

Molly looked up with confusion “But Ian would never accept money from his foster family, so if he knew he’d lost that he’d have dropped out...”

“The Sullivan’s wouldn’t pay for Ian to go to Trinity since they only agreed to allow him to go if he got a full scholarship for not only school but also room, books, and the full deal,” Kerry told them, seeing his brothers looking at one another.

“I knew I didn’t like that woman for a bleedin’ reason,” Ryan muttered, leaning up on the couch to pin his oldest brother with a dark look. “Who is paying for Ian to go to Trinity, Kerry?”

His brother simply turned to look out the window silently for a long time. "A friend of Da's is still on the faculty and called me when this all happened so I arranged to pay all of Ian's expenses, including his full tuition, room and board, books and his monthly expenses that he believes comes from Brandon and Sybil. They haven't paid anything for Ian since he was sixteen and Da's lawyer opened his first trust fund so he supplies Brandon a monthly amount that he in turn gives Ian," he explained, going on. "Brandon knows not to try cheat him out of that or..."

"Or he gets a visit from one of us?" Ryan finished with a meaningful look back at Roarke and there was no doubt about the thoughts that they shared.

"Later, perhaps but right now, we need to allow Molly to finish her tale," Kerry nodded to the young woman, smiling to reassure her. "We often fight but the bonds our parents instilled make it hard for us not to fight back if one of us is threatened."

Molly shifted a smile that lit her deep brown eyes. "That's what your Dad said when he talked to me in Dublin," she assured him.

"Ah, excuse me?" Mac nearly twisted around to stare at that. "She saw Da?"

"Later. Molly, tell us about the trip Ian went on," Kerry urged, a sense of urgency filling him.

Nodding as she tried to blank out her own feelings of dread suddenly. "Professor Brighton's botany class took their annual trip up to Savernake Forest. He had a cancellation late so he chose Ian to go with them even though Ian was wary since he'd never been that far from Ireland before. I thought when he saw that silver owl the morning of the trip that he wouldn't go but he did.

"I told him to call if anything happened or if the pains he'd been having for the past few weeks got worse but he never did call," Molly sighed, turning to look at all of them.

"The other night when it all happened, I heard him scream and I saw the silver owl outside my window staring at me," she told them, then scowled. "He vanished from those woods, his classmate was ripped to pieces by what the staff and police are saying was a wolf but I saw pictures a friend snapped and no wolf would do what was done to Toby."

"You didn't think to bring copies of those by any chance?" Mac asked, not caring for what she was saying and not caring for what was being said between the lines that the young woman wouldn't know.

Reaching into her bag, Molly tossed him a digital camera. "Liam was able to snap a couple images before the Professor and the local law in that area sealed off the woods but no one seemed upset that Ian had vanished. All of his tools were still in the woods but he was gone but they say he was scared and ran away."

This time there was no mistaking the cause of the rumbling that shook the house as Molly saw Roarke Fitzgerald's eyes go to pure smoke an instant before the house shook.

"Roarke, stop," Mac spoke in an even tone despite feeling his own temper sparking at the lack of concern by officials that were supposed to be caring for the eighteen year old student. "Roarke..."

"He went to school to get an education and he's supposed to be safe while he's there, Mac!" Roarke snapped, his emotions surging because he could recall the fear of not feeling safe in an environment that should have been. "Someone should have called Kerry when it happened!"

Jessica Hadley, a 26-year-old British woman with her own share of secrets and Roarke's girlfriend, gently placed a hand on his arm before he could turn away.

"We'll find him, luv," she promised softly, feeling his pain and the fear for his brother that he was scared to show. "Ian will be fine."

"Sebastian shouldn't have been able to get close to him even though these marks are sure as hell the work of his demon dogs." Mac handed the phone to Ryan before approaching Kerry. "We're missing something."

Looking at Molly, Kerry recalled something she had told him. "You mentioned that the Dean of students had spoken with the Sullivan's about this and that they said to leave it alone as well?"

Nodding, she saw what he was suggesting. "Yeah and so did your grandmother."

"She hates me, not Ian, so why wouldn't she be worried about this?" Roarke asked with pain clear in his eyes. "I know what those beasts feel like so if Sebastian wanted Ian dead..."

"Unless he doesn't want him dead yet and there's more to this plan than we're seeing," Maggie Cavanaugh spoke up thoughtfully. "Each of you must face Sebastian; face your demons and your weaknesses to complete the test that will allow you to form the circle that will defeat him."

Tossing the phone with the images, Ryan chose to approach Roarke but paused to shoot his favorite red-haired nemesis a look. "Yeah, luv, we all know the rules but the old man could have done us in real bloody easily by just having his pets kill Ian flat out."

"Not if he can't come right out and kill any of you," Jessica caught on to what Maggie was trying to say. "Think Ryan, Sebastian first approached each of you in a way that would either play up to doubts you have or begin his process to convert you."

"He played on Roarke's fears and guilt and then he tried to use Jess against him," Mac frowned, seeing the point. "To do that, he'd have to be able to get close to Ian to have his dogs nail him and Sebastian can't get close to him if Ry's on point about his power and the medals he has."

Molly suddenly pulled something from her handbag and held it out to Kerry. "This is his, isn't it?"

"Oh, bloody hell," Jessica whispered, seeing the Claddagh medal in the young woman's hand. "This is bad."

"Where did you get that?" Highly suspicious by this point, Ryan shot her a look that made Mac move in front of him. "Ian would never give that up willingly."

Grabbing his arm, Mac shoved hard to keep his hotheaded brother back then looked coolly at Molly. "I'd answer him, lass, because he's right. Our Mum's mother gave Ian that and he's never been without it."

"I saw your Daddy before I left Dublin and it was his idea that I come here to tell Ian's brothers what was happening," Molly replied, knowing the doubt was clear and she couldn't blame any of them for that. "When he touched my hand before disappearing, he left this in it and ever since I've been feeling Ian a lot more."

"Look, I don't blame any of you for mistrusting me since I did just show up out of nowhere with a story that not even my own Dad's sainted mother could spin in her best day," Molly remarked.

Her own fear and the temper she got from both sides of her family made her cross. "Ian's my damn friend and I know he's in trouble. Ever since he came back from here all he's done was tell me about his big brothers and from what he's said, I don't really think any one of you will risk him like this...will you?"

Kerry held a hand up to stop his brothers from exploding on the girl any further, trying to scan again but found his power tossed back at him. "Outside, you mentioned that my father warned you about his sons' fighting. What was it he said exactly?" he asked curiously.

"He just said that his sons liked to bicker and that's probably what I'd be walking into if Mac and Ryan were going at it like usual," she replied easily, shrugging then gave a shy smile. "He also said that you, Ian, and your brother got your looks from your mother and I can see what he meant since those two got the dark and dangerous look from him, I take it."

Ryan couldn't help but snicker at that, shaking free from the grasp that Mac still had on him. "I can't bloody well help it, but I like you, lass."

"That's high praise coming from the king of flirting, Molly," Roarke sighed, feeling Kerry's acceptance of this girl and relaxing slightly. "We have a plan?"

"The first thing we do, is give me a chance to make some calls while Deirdre gets Molly settled in," Kerry spoke firmly, not wanting to get into another fight this soon. "We need to know things but first we need to be calm and Molly has been traveling for many days from Dublin."

Maggie was quick to her feet, taking the girl's bag and nudging her along. "Come on, Molly, let's find you a room so you can take a bath and change before dinner and these lads can make big plans without the womenfolk."

"I resent that since I don't leave Roarke that often," Jessica replied with a laugh and a look from Kerry told her that she'd be calling in favors soon.

"Let me make the calls and check into things. Go relax, bug Deirdre or something," Kerry urged, wanting a chance to process this alone for a short time.

Mac knew this and knowing that Jessica could get Roarke to do anything she wanted, decided to handle Ryan himself. "Your girl Andi called earlier while you were out playing cards."

A low growl told Mac that he had his brother even before the finger poking his chest did.

"That she-wolf in heels is not now, nor will she ever be, my girl and don't you ever suggest such a wicked thing," Ryan snapped, the mere mention of Andi McCabe, a security consultant that worked for him, still made him snarl.

"When's the wedding, Ry?" Mac teased, backing out of the living room and giving Kerry a short comment about owing him for this beating. "I'm sure Maggie's paper will give you a discount for announcing it and..."

Kerry closed his eyes once alone, sitting on the arm of the sofa with the Claddagh medal clenched in his fist. "Damn it all to hell!" he snarled, anger and guilt mixing that he hadn't seen or felt the danger his brother was in and that raised another issue.

Why in the hell hadn't he or Mac sensed the trouble that was roaming and why wouldn't the boy's own foster family care enough to be concerned...unless...

"They already expected it to happen," he muttered, heading for the study to make the phone calls that would give him answers though he already knew what they would do next. "And heads will roll if Ry's turned loose on this."

Chapter 4

Molly Jackson had been swept away by the redheaded whirlwind that whisked her upstairs to one of the many guestrooms and helped her unpack what she had brought.

“Just ignore the lads as they tend to fight...a lot,” Maggie was saying, eyeing the young woman closely for size since she knew that she couldn’t have much in that single worn tote. “And ignore Ryan because I swear he’d flirt with a toad if he was drunk enough.”

“I grew up in Boston in a second generation Irish household, so I’m used to noise, bickering, and fighting bone-headed brothers as I have eight of ‘em,” Molly assured her, peeking into the bathroom and blinking. “This place is beautiful and it’s a shame that Ian lost all of his childhood and his brothers.”

Maggie knew that was an issue for all of them and she often wondered just how much Ian felt about that loss or what he had been told.

Right then something else had caught her attention. “You say your family’s second generation Irish?” she asked curiously, making mental notes as she talked and lit the fire in the fireplace.

“On my Dad’s side, yes,” Molly turned with a grin. “My Momma’s from New Orleans so they say I’ve had magic on both sides of my family, since my Gran is a Voodoo priestess in the Big Easy and my Dad’s grandmother was said to be a folk healer when she came from Galway.”

“Your Da’s kin give you that Claddagh medal you’re wearing, Molly?” Maggie inquired, seeing the gold medal and realizing suddenly why Kerry would have trouble reading her.

Running a finger over it, the girl nodded. “My great-grandmother Maeve O’Neill gave it to me right before she passed away. She said that I should always wear it since I never knew when I’d come across a need for protection of one kind or another.”

Maggie began to laugh until her eyes ran with tears. “Girl, you are going to give these boys a run for their money without even meaning to.”

“Why?” Molly asked, confused. “I don’t think they like me anyway so I don’t need more issues.”

Wiping her eyes, Maggie grinned and patted the young American’s hand. “Take that bath and change, Molly and we’ll snag Jess later and I’ll fill you in,” she urged, stepping out to close the door with twinkling blue green eyes. “Right after I fill in the Doc.”

Heading to find Mac, it didn't take Maggie long. She found him wiping blood from his mouth in his bathroom.

"Ticked Ry off again did you, Doc?" she asked, already knowing the answer since only Ryan Fitzgerald was able to sneak in a right hook on her Doc.

Hating that nickname she used for him, Mac was more upset by the fact that his little brother again landed that damn punch to the face. "Kerry owes me for distracting that jackass," he growled, seeing Maggie's grin in the mirror and relaxing.

"What exactly are you smiling about in such a fashion, Mary Margaret?" he asked, using her full name since he knew she hated it.

Coming over to take the cloth from him to finish wiping the drying blood, she met his eyes. "Our newest little waif isn't half of what you and your brothers think she is, Doc."

"I think she's a cute Yank with a huge crush on my baby brother," Mac returned, wincing until Maggie ran a finger over the cut on his mouth and the pain left. "I much prefer it when you kiss away those wounds that Ryan makes on me."

Always willing to oblige, Maggie leaned up to lightly kiss him but before he could pull her deeper, she placed both hands on his shoulders. "Molly Brianna Jackson has got magic in her blood, Doc, on both sides of her line.

"Her Da's grandmother was Maeve O'Neill from Galway and she gave her the Claddagh medal that she's wearing." She saw his eyes narrow as that implication dawned on him. "Her Granny on her Mum's side is a Priestess from the Voodoo sect in Louisiana and I bet that girl has seen more than her share of weird without even knowing it."

"Bloody hell," Mac groaned, leaning back on the sink as the full weight of that sunk in. "She's got blood of the fairy folk in her veins. That's why she could see Sebastian's trick in Dublin and..."

"And probably why she can feel Ian," Maggie finished for him. "Think Kerry knows?"

Mac figured he did or at least suspected but planned to find out for sure. "Keep an eye on her until she's settled while I go see Kerry," he decided, giving her a quick kiss. "Check on Roarke and Jess too. It may not be wise to leave him alone until I get Ryan to watch him."

"That's my next stop, Doc," Maggie replied, knowing that Roarke would take this the worst depending on who was involved.

Down the hall, Roarke Fitzgerald was sitting on his bed lost in his own thoughts and his past.

Despite having settled much of the guilt and pain that he had been carrying for the last fifteen years, it was never far from his thoughts and today's revelations had helped to bring some back.

He recalled the day that Ian had been born. There was such joy and music in the house and even though he'd been seven on that day, he had still known that his brother's birth had changed something.

Then the whispers of the prophecy had started but for the five boys, it was still normal childhood days, at least as normal as it got for them being singers and learning the ways of the Craft from their devoted parents.

"Damn," he whispered, looking at Ian's Claddagh medal that was laying next to him on the bed after he had gotten it from Kerry. "It never should have touched you, leanbh deartháir (baby brother). It started with me and it should have ended with me."

The day that their parents died, Roarke knew that he had been Sebastian's target, though he hadn't known then what he did now, and he accepted that if he had died that day or even a few months back his brother wouldn't be in danger now.

"Of course, that would also mean that Sebastian would be back trying to destroy the world," he muttered under his breath, shifting a look toward the closed bathroom door. He knew that he needed this done before either Jessica got out of the bath or one of his brothers came knocking.

Roarke knew that he still held reservations about Molly but that was because he still had a suspicious nature that allowed him to mistrust anyone that he didn't know well, especially given events as of late.

Molly knew some of what had been happening and she seemed to be able to feel Ian when none of them could, and Roarke knew damn well that Kerry didn't care for that when they could always feel one another to some degree.

"Someone or something is blocking us from Ian, so to find out some of what's happening, we need to resort to something else," he spoke to himself and accepted what the easiest method would be.

All of them shared the same magical ability to some extent, though each of them had their strengths and weaknesses as well.

Kerry and Mac had always been the strongest empaths with Mac being the best healer. Roarke knew that he and Ryan could also use both but to lesser degrees and depending on the wound or emotion, the results could be bad.

None of them really had an idea on what Ian really could do with his powers yet and now Roarke worried that it had been a mistake not to gauge the youngest Fitzgerald's power range.

Feeling the breeze from the window that he still had to keep open at times change, Roarke ignored it and the music from the fairy hill outside as he sat down on the floor and reached for the medal.

“Love you, Jess,” he whispered, sending those thoughts out to the young woman who had always been his friend and who had helped to save his soul so long ago.

Taking a deep breath to center his powers and his nerves, Roarke placed the Claddagh medal in his palm, closed his eyes, and then closed his fingers tight and expected the images embedded in the medal to come slowly. He was in no way prepared for what happened next.

For Roarke who never used his healing or empathic powers often because they left him too open, the sudden burst of pain, fear, and vision was too much all at once. As he experienced his brothers’ pain, Roarke wasn’t certain if it was that or his own that he screamed.

“Roarke, what are you...?” Jessica stepped from the bathroom, feeling an odd sensation but found herself shoved back as lights pulsated wildly from the center of the room and she felt both the energy and terror radiating. “Roarke, what the bloody hell are you doing?!”

When her attempts to reach her friend mentally didn’t work and she knew his pain and the lights were getting worse, Jessica took a step closer when flames shot from the lights toward her.

“Mac, get up here!” Maggie screamed out the door that she had just opened upon hearing the noises from within and witnessing the flames shoot close to her friend. “Mac!”

Chapter 5

Downstairs in the office:

"I see, yes well please tell Dean Quillian that Kerrigan Fitzgerald is calling for him and that I'd like a call back at his earliest free moment." Kerry was gritting his teeth by the time he placed the phone back on the desk. "Bloody pompous sod thinks that will work?"

Ryan had been sitting in a chair across his brother, rubbing the sore knuckles that he'd gotten in that tiny altercation with Mac. "Out of town, meeting, or some other excuse?" He had guessed what was going on and his brother's grim look was acknowledgement of that guess.

"It appears that Trinity's Dean of Students is busy with faculty meetings for the next several days," Kerry replied with as close to a snort of disbelief as he was willing to give, reaching for the Scotch decanter on the desk. "He's avoiding me."

"Well, duh, genius," Ryan snorted, rolling his eyes at that remark since that was plain as something made him look toward the ceiling. "If he told the lass to forget this then it's bloody clear that he knows more than he's saying or he's been told to keep quiet. The question is, told by whom?"

Kerry was afraid that he may know that answer but before he could reply, both men felt the pain and the power hit just as the house shook and Maggie screamed.

"Roarke," Ryan's eyes had gone dark a second before he swore in their native tongue and bolted for the steps. "Find Mac, Kerry! The brat's done something that I don't think he should have!"

Having taken the small amount of time to bathe and change into clean clothes, Molly Jackson felt about ready to face what would come next.

Pulling her unruly hair up and back into a ponytail, she was about to reach for something when she felt the low pain and heard the scream from down the hall.

"This doesn't sound good," she decided, reacting on instinct and following the sounds. "Nope, as Granny likes to say, this is some seriously bad mojo."

The memories held in Ian's medal had overwhelmed Roarke's still weak emotional shields, causing his more violent abilities to flame out of control.

"Roarke, calm down," Jessica was struggling to ignore the pain she felt through her link with him but knowing that whatever he was seeing had left him open to something else. "Roarke, please."

Maggie had seen Molly in the door but before she could advise the girl not to enter due to the risk, it was too late.

"He feels Ian through the Claddagh," Molly guessed, having seen similar things during one of her grandmother's ceremonies. "He's fighting it."

“Roarke can’t take deep emotional power because he’s not as strong as Mac or Kerry in dispelling it,” Maggie explained, hearing Mac in her thoughts and throwing a sour one back at him. “It’s a little late for that, Doc.”

Molly reached into the little tote hooked to her waist on instinct, pulling a small bag out of it. “Did he cast a physical circle?”

“Bloody hell, what is the brat doing?” Ryan snapped, entering the room and then being slammed back into the fireplace mantle. “Kerry, we have issues!”

Feeling the energy changing, Jessica shielded her eyes to look for Ryan. “Even though Roarke completed his part of the circle, can Sebastian still use him?”

Recalling the events previous when his brother was possessed, Ryan swore and shot a hand out to use a small amount of power to try to shock Roarke back to the present.

“Whatever the hell he did by opening himself to the Claddagh, opened too much,” he growled, feeling blood trickle down his back from where it had struck hard marble.

“There’s the magic of a really bad *boko* close by.” Molly watched the scene for a moment and then tossed the bag she was holding into the circle of energy. “He blames himself and that’s making his pain worse.”

Ryan started to shoot something off but Kerry just gave him a look as he and Mac entered the room.

The small bag landed next to Roarke and seemed to cause the energy to lessen but not enough that Jessica or his brothers could get to him.

“Mac, try to get to him before Ryan has to do something drastic,” Kerry encouraged, seeing Molly snatch up the pack of Camel cigarettes that Roarke smoked when tense.

Going on what the voices in her mind were saying and not on common sense, the girl whirled. “Rum, get me a bottle of rum!” she snapped, looking for a lighter or anything.

Kerry looked at her curiously until Mac touched his arm. “Do it, Kerry,” he urged, seeing Maggie’s nod. “Trust her,”

A small teleportation spell required little effort on his part to bring the bottle of aged rum from its place in the liquor cabinet to Kerry’s hand. “Is there a reason for this, Miss Jackson?”

“He cast his circle in order to keep you and your brothers out to protect you from whatever happened. You need him brought out of the state he’s in. I damn well bet that this nasty son of a bitch that’s trying to kill you guys won’t be expecting magic from the Big Easy,” Molly replied, snatching the bottle from him.

“Can I beat the crap out of the brat later, Kerry?” Ryan asked curiously, wincing as he held out a hand to Jessica.

“Maybe later,” Kerry sighed, starting to ask what she was planning but deciding to remain silent.

Molly quickly uncorked the rum, wincing at the smell and pushing down her nerves as instinct took hold. Lighting the Camel, she took a quick swallow of the rum, then a puff on the cigarette and finally a larger gulp of the rum.

This gulp she didn’t swallow but instead spit it into the air toward Roarke and then used the Camel to put three puffs of smoke into the air as well.

“I call on *Ezili Danto* to enter this realm to offer your protection to this soul who struggles to find his balance in this world,” Molly’s normally mellow, cheerful voice had taken on a slightly older tone as she repeated the process twice more.

It was on the final time that a strong wind blew in through the window from the direction of the fairy hill, sifting the curtains and lifting knick-knacks without breaking anything until it shifted to nudge Roarke’s closed fist and his fingers opened on reflex.

Dropping the medal seemed to break contact as the lights dimmed and his eyes rolled back with a groan.

Mac was moving to catch his younger brother as soon as he could, tossing the medal to Kerry. “Get that away from him!” he snapped, laying a hand on the younger man’s cold cheek and picking up the residual effects of what he saw and felt. “Damn, he’s cold.”

“He took in too much and normally I’m with him to buffer it,” Jessica said, as she sat on the floor next to her friend, her fingers shaking as they ran through his black hair.

While Mac tended to this brother, Molly crushed out the cigarette and put the top back on the rum bottle. “My Granny would know how to help him to recover but...”

“*Go raibh mile maith agat* (Thank you very much),” Kerry’s voice was quiet as he placed a hand over her own, his eyes expressing the gratitude that he knew Ryan would never express vocally.

“Gran’s Irish lessons didn’t really hold but...” Molly grinned with a shrug. “I just did what I could. Ian’s my friend and I want to help those who mean so much to him.”

“First I get to beat him senseless for doing that,” Ryan growled, his voice sounding harsher as he tried not to show his concern.

Molly, unaccustomed to his more gruff ways, whirled to poke a finger hard into his chest. “He was just trying to help Ian! Don’t you dare hurt him for that you...you bully!”

“Well this should be fun to see,” Mac decided, easing back slightly as Roarke slowly came around. “I thought you were the expert on handling the opposite sex, Ry. They sure seem to be bothering you a lot lately.”

Shifting a look to his brother that meant pain later, Ryan narrowed those same intense eyes at Molly who was still glaring at him.

"Someone remind me to talk to Ian about his taste in females," he finally muttered, kneeling next to his brother but waited until the young American had turned away to grin dryly. "The Yank has guts, I'll give her that."

"She's protective on instinct," Mac spoke lowly, while smoothing the rest of the negative energy away before giving his brother a not-too-light tap to his head. "You back with us or should I distract Kerry while Ryan smacks you for doing that stupid of a bloody stunt?"

Groaning as his head pounded and his stomach twisted, Roarke opened one eye. "Let the world stop moving then you can do what you want," he muttered, sitting up to lean against the bed. "What happened?"

"You, my darling, caused one helluva reaction when you touched Ian's medal," Jessica told him while supporting him as he tried to stand. "Remember anything?"

"Sure, I remember pain, fear, and...shock...and then nothing," he sighed, wincing and nearly falling until Kerry's strong grip caught his arm. "Ian was scared, Kerry, and he felt...betrayed."

That fell into his own feelings. "Come downstairs, we need to talk and then we deal with this on our own terms," he decided, seeing Molly's concern. "We'll find Ian, luv. That I promise you because I'll move all of hell before I see anyone else claimed by that evil."

"Which we might have to do," Mac sighed, feeling what Kerry wasn't saying and knowing it wouldn't be easy.

Chapter 6

Having Deirdre O'Connor place snacks in the living room beforehand, Kerry stood in front of the fireplace silently for a long while.

"Mr. Fitzgerald, I really shouldn't be included in this," Molly spoke up from a chair, biting her lip as she normally did when nervous. "This involves your family and..."

"Ian trusted you with his secrets, Molly girl so that does mean this involves you," Ryan replied from his seat on the couch. "Despite being the baby of the family, that does not make him daft so if he didn't trust you or see something in you then he wouldn't have shared those things."

Mac shifted on the footstool that he had settled on. "Our Father also saw something in you or he wouldn't have shown himself to you," he added, still wondering about that. "Da has only shown himself to Roarke, so the fact that you spoke with him means that you are involved in this."

"Your involvement may be risky, especially once Kathleen or others realize that you are more than simply Ian's schoolmate," Kerry finally spoke, turning to look at her. "You can walk away from this now and feel no guilt, Molly. You came and told us what you needed to."

"We were born to this burden and those involved with us accept the risk freely, but this is something that you can still walk away from," he stated and then merely waited.

Molly stared at her hands for a moment. "My Momma was killed when I was six by a man possessed by an evil force trying to strike out at my Grandmother, so I'm not afraid of evil," she told them, looking up, concern still evident in her dark eyes. "Ian's my friend and has been even when it's cost him so I'm not leaving here until he's home safe."

"*Aontaim* (Agreed)," Kerry nodded simply, taking a moment to look at his brothers before settling on Roarke. "Tell me what you saw."

Still hazy on it, Roarke laid his head back on the couch to think and only tensed when Ryan's hand brushed his shoulder.

"I saw Ian in the forest but there were things that he didn't see," he began quietly, frowning. "He was looking at leaves and singing that silly song that Mum would always sing when working in the gardens."

Squeezing Jessica's hand to keep centered, Roarke could see his younger brother in the forest. "He seems to be in pain but was ignoring it, like Ry does when he's being tough, but then the other lad screamed and..."

"And just like you and Ryan, he headed toward trouble rather than away from it," Mac rolled his eyes before shooting his smirking brother a sour look. "I told you about encouraging him, damn it."

"The brat did the same thing so why is it just my fault?" Ryan shot back, leaning forward.

Kerry stepped between them, not needing another fight. "What else, Roarke?"

"He saw the hounds, Kerry." Roarke looked up, eyes grim. "They tore his classmate apart and then eyed him but his powers shut down, they wouldn't work and then he heard something that scared him more. He heard a voice that he knew and it was her power that took him out."

Considering, Kerry frowned. "Did he hear Kathleen?" he demanded cautiously, knowing he had to be careful with this since his brother still reacted to their paternal grandmother's name badly.

"No, it was a voice that I've never heard," Roarke sighed, deeply upset. "That whole trip was nothing but a bleedin' trap for him, Kerry."

"Why wouldn't his powers work?" Molly was confused and angry. "And who would he know well enough that could do that?"

Kerry took his time to answer. "If the trip to Savernake was just to ensnare Ian, it would have been simple for someone with the skill to create a spell that would block his powers, especially if he was also taken by surprise."

"He never should have left the damn country," Mac growled, not caring for the fact that someone his brother trusted would betray him. "I don't care what power he may have, leaving the country would have left him weak."

"Ian wouldn't have known that issue with our powers, Mac," Roarke spoke up quietly. "None of us thought to warn him."

"Doc, did you forget to tell me something else?" Maggie inquired in the sweet tone that she used to annoy him.

Groaning that she'd never let him live this slip down, Mac sighed and looked at the red-haired reporter. "We keep our abilities no matter where we are," he began slowly, seeing Kerry frown. "However, because of them and our ancestry, if we leave Ireland then the powers get weaker and it takes more strength for us to use them."

"Real big pain in the ass for Roarke and me since we don't normally spend a lot of time in the Emerald Isle," Ryan piped up, his head beginning to hurt again. "Though there are ways to counter that little issue."

Molly considered it. "So being that the trip was to Great Britain, Ian's magic wouldn't have been as powerful." Then she looked puzzled. "What stopped them fully though?"

"Someone who was able to cast a spell strong enough to bind his abilities." Ryan's eyes were dark because he knew with the untapped potential Ian had that would have been hard for anyone to do.

“We need to find out exactly what the hell is going on up in Dublin and that means turning Ry loose to a certain degree,” Kerry decided, accepting that they couldn’t go on guesses much longer, especially when he also felt pain even though it was impossible to center on it.

“Does that mean I get to go rip someone’s damn head off for touching what he or she shouldn’t have?” the security expert lifted an eyebrow curiously, seeming pleased with the idea.

Kerry just smiled indulgently as he had seen their father do so many times. “No, that means that Molly is going to take you to Ian’s dorm so you can do what it is that you do best and get me an opinion on what you pick up,” he replied, looking at Jessica and swallowing the distaste this request brought.

“Can you get Nick or one of his kind to go up to Savernake and see if they pick up anything?” he asked her, not wanting to take the risk of opening his brothers up to that if he could keep from it.

Knowing how the Fitzgerald brothers felt about her resident mystics told Jessica how serious this was and she nodded simply. She figured Nick O’Malley would bitch about the extra work but he’d do it.

An internationally successful business owner, very few people knew that the auburn haired British woman had some very exotic friends that included mercenaries and powerful mystics.

“Jess and I could do up to Savernake, Kerry,” Roarke frowned, also realizing that his brother was more than likely protecting them.

Ryan snorted and started to offer a pithy reply to that offer when Mac’s eyes lit and he felt the slap, choosing to shut up for that moment.

“No, because I want you and Jessica to meet up with Cam in Dublin, call in some of her clearances or favors and see what the local constabulary say or how they explain Ian’s disappearance and the Armstrong lad’s death,” Kerry replied to him, seeing Jess grin.

“I don’t want you or those mercenaries shooting the cops, lass,” he warned, throwing that warning to his brother as well. “Leave the gun at home, Roarke.”

As the two exchanged looks, Kerry wondered if he wasn’t making a mistake in sending them in but had to hope that Cameron Young, the leader of Hadley Industries main subsidiary, would keep things calm...at least unless the situation required something else.

“Mac, I want you to go with Maggie and play up her reporter angle,” he went on, needing to phrase this one carefully. “Go see the Sullivan’s and find out if they really are as calm about their foster...” he cut himself off, refusing to call them that any longer. “Go see how they’re reacting to Ian’s disappearance and just get a basic reading.”

Maggie leaned forward from her seat. “I can rely on my reporter credentials to get us in the door but won’t they know Mac?”

“Don’t see why since I haven’t seen either Sybil or Brandon in several years,” Mac told her, shrugging. “Besides, if they really are grieving or concerned then they shouldn’t be paying any attention to me, the perky reporter’s bumbling assistant, Mary Margaret.”

Eyes flashing, she leaned down to tug a piece of hair that he’d allowed to grow too long. “I’ll make you regret choosing that role, mate,” she promised with a grin before asking. “What do you want me to find out subtly?”

“Mainly just ask the typical questions any reporter asks of people who have possibly lost a...son,” Kerry hated using that word in this regards and saw his brothers’ reactions to it. “Mac will pick up on the lies or things that they won’t be saying.”

“Mac sucks at being subtle,” Ryan pointed out, wondering how he had been stuck with the boring part of this trip. “I could get the information out of them.”

“Yeah, but Kerry probably doesn’t want them flash fried right off the bat either and that’s what you’d end up doing,” Roarke pointed out; grinning at the dark look he got in return. “Da always said your temper was your worst trait, Ry.”

Leaning over to lightly cuff his brother in the head, Ryan chose not to reply to that since he was certain it would come back on him in some way. “Fine, so what am I looking for in Ian’s room?”

“Anything that may be out of place or if you can tell someone was there before us,” Kerry told him, looking at Molly. “You’ve been in his room so you’ll know if something’s gone or...”

“His book is what you’ll be looking for mainly,” she offered. “Ian’s kept a journal for as long as I’ve known him. He told me that he started it when he was thirteen because he once had a premonition that he’d die before he was nineteen and he wanted to leave something for his brothers.”

“Okay, I do not like that,” Mac muttered. “After this is over, we’re finding out just what the hell he can do, Kerry,” he decided, getting an agreeing nod.

Roarke also didn’t care for the sound of that simple statement but chose to ignore it for now to focus on the here and now. “What will you be doing while we’re scattered all over Dublin?”

“Me?” Kerry smiled easily, reaching for the pressed beige jacket that he had tossed over a chair. “While keeping a close eye on Ryan, I’m going to be paying a not so casual visit to the Dean of Students of Trinity University and God take him if he doesn’t have the bleedin’ answers that I want or that he should have,” he declared firmly.

There was no mistaking the edge of danger in the eldest brother’s voice or the power in his eyes as he looked around him. “Sebastian can play but if others are involved then they had better have made piece with their maker if Ian’s hurt.”

“And I’m the one with the temper?” Ryan snorted, cautiously eyeing his brother. “Mum and Da would frown if you turn Quillian into something, bro,” he remarked easily, not sure if he liked Kerry’s anger since he knew there was a reason that Kerry strived to maintain calm.

“There is more than one way to harm a person, Ryan,” Kerry assured him, going on coolly. “Quillian, aside from being the Dean, is also the head of the charity and donation sections. I can quietly tear the little, cheeky bastard down just by ending my donations to the school. This happens to include the new wing they just broke ground on.”

Mac lifted his eyes, surprised. “Da taught you well, I’d say.”

“No, Kathleen taught me that money buys power and in this case we’ll find out how right she is,” Kerry replied, laying a hand out. “We go to Dublin and find out just who it is that doesn’t want us involved.”

“And bury the son of a bitch in a bog if whoever it is betrayed baby brother to the wolves,” Ryan agreed, laying a hand over the one that Kerry held out.

Roarke stood, doing the same but remaining silent. His thoughts were too concerned with what their brother could be enduring and at whose hands.

“Fine, but if those damn dogs get involved we’re calling a demon dogcatcher,” Mac threw in, laying his hand on top and sighing as sparks shot, making Molly gasp.

“You should see it when all five of them do that, luv,” Jessica remarked, going to make the two phone calls that would get her the aid she’d need for this as Maggie began making plans to get in to see the Sullivan family.

Once they were alone, Roarke grasped Kerry’s hand tight. “We need to find him, Kerry and soon.” The pain was evident in his voice.

“We will, Roarke, I promise you that we will find Ian and we’ll make them all pay,” Kerry swore, shifting a look for Ryan to handle their brother while he went to make travel plans.

“Kathleen’s involved so having Roarke close may be what she wants,” Mac warned from behind him, frowning. “Evil’s close, Kerry but Ian’s the baby. We don’t know what his weakness is or how strong he is. Can he hold out against Sebastian if he’s offered the right thing?”

The thought that one of them could be turned made him sick but Kerry also knew that if in the right state of mind, or in enough pain, any man or woman could be broke.

“We won’t abandon him again, Mac, and I have to hope that Ian knows that and that he doesn’t listen to their lies,” he sighed, silently hoping but the nagging guilt and doubt made him wonder.

‘I’ll find him, Da, just keep him safe until we can,’ he urged silently, too absorbed to hear the weeping spirit from close by as darkness closed in around them from many directions.

Elsewhere in the dark:

Ian Fitzgerald seemed lost in a swirl of fevered dreams and fears as the poison from the wounds inflicted by the hounds that still circled nearby burned his veins.

He'd lost track of time since he woke in this cold darkness. Sometimes there would be food, other times there wouldn't be.

However, by this time his fever and the wounds he had, along with the spells keeping his abilities down, had made him too weak and sick to think on eating.

Ian's thoughts, when lucid, were mostly of home; of his family and...in a brief moment of lucidity he forced the doubts and fears away.

"Your biggest fear has always been about being abandoned or being forgotten, hasn't it, Ian?" a soft voice spoke in his ear as gentle fingers stroked over his blond hair.

The voice registered in his mind and tore his heart. "Go...go away," he whispered, speech slow.

"You want to believe that those you now call brothers will come to rescue you from this cruel situation," the woman's voice, with a proper Irish accent, went on. "You should have taken your Grandmother's wise advice, my lad, and stayed away from those who have now doomed you to this suffering and don't care."

"My brothers...they'll come," he struggled against the doubts that tried to penetrate his mind. "You won't turn...me on them; they'll come for me..."

"They could have come for you as a child, Ian. Kerry could have petitioned the court for you at any time and he didn't," the woman's tone turned chiding. "You've always been a lost little boy, abandoned by those who should have protected you and now you lay abandoned and forgotten in these cold, dark depths with Sebastian's pets prowling close by."

"You were destined to a much greater life," she seemed to sigh, fingers stroking against the boy's fevered cheek.

Ian jerked at the loving, familiar touch and heard the low growl of the beast nearest him. "Go to hell, bitch."

A sharp slap that would have stung his face could he feel anything drew blood. "You will still mind your tongue, Ian Brandon Callum Fitzgerald," the female in the darkness spoke with a mother's tone. "You were taught better than that."

"You...are not...my mother," he gritted, feeling power tingling in his fingers but agony seared his body as the binding spell blocked them from working. "Just kill me."

“Their plans don’t allow for that, my darling boy,” she replied gently. “Sleep now, Ian and think on how you’re suffering while your brothers aren’t even looking for you.”

His secret hidden fear was bursting and as he was pulled back into darkness, he couldn’t fight the doubts that maybe everyone was right and he would never be found. Maybe he had been left for dead...his thoughts trailed off with that fear, curling up into a ball as the pain and fear increased in his heart and mind.

Ian’s sinking thoughts of his brothers were one of his last ones but he knew they’d never feel him, even if he believed they were looking. Then his thoughts turned to his heart and went out to the one person that he hoped he had protected well enough. “Molly, be safe.”

Chapter 7

Trinity University, Ian Fitzgerald’s dorm: Dublin, Ireland:

“What the hell is this crap?” Molly Jackson’s brown eyes were staring at the dead bolt on the door to her friend’s room. “If everyone thinks that Ian just ran away due to fear and shock, what’s up with this?”

Ryan Fitzgerald’s blue gray eyes were serious as he looked at the lock on his brother’s door. “I’d say that someone in this school doesn’t want just anyone getting in his room.”

“That includes us since I don’t carry a skeleton key for...” Molly had started to say when a quick click and pop made her stop in mid-sentence and stare. “How’d you do that?”

“Molly girl, both Roarke and I have been more than good upstanding citizens in our lives. Despite owning a security consulting firm now, I can still crack the best lock in no bloody time,” Ryan replied with a grin and a wink as he pocketed the small packet of lock picking tools that he always carried, along with the lock.

Opening the door slowly, Ryan’s calm exterior turned wary as his sixth sense began to work. “Keep back a second,” he urged the girl from Boston.

Hearing the change come in his voice, Molly nodded silently and chose to stay close by the door so she could watch the hall and see into the darkened room.

A risk taker and gambler from a young age, Ryan had always been eager or willing to take risks. He recalled his Mother often saying that of all her sons that he’d be the one to give her gray hair with some of his stunts.

Living in Clare with distant relatives after the murder of his parents when he had been thirteen years old had done nothing to slow his risk taking. Only one person had been able to do that and Ryan immediately cut off any thoughts of his long dead fiancée.

Anastasia Cleary had been his childhood sweetheart. A local girl from a neighboring farm, they had become engaged the summer that Ryan had been seventeen.

All should have been bliss until the night that a young, bitter, and inexperienced witch had attacked Ryan, killing Annie in the process and sending the hotheaded young Irishman down a path that he knew could easily one day end his life with the risks he took.

“Not today, though,” he told himself, his eyes searching the room for threats until he was finally satisfied that there were none and he flipped the light switch on and frowned. “You have got to be bloody kidding me.”

Living briefly with Ian back at Fitzgaren had taught Ryan that his youngest brother, like most boys his age, wasn’t the neatest person. However, what shocked him more was the décor in the room.

Posters of Shakespeare, Lord Byron, John Barrymore, and other older writers or actors littered his walls with a Celtic trinity knot poster hang over the neatly made bed.

“What’s with the skull?” he asked Molly after picking up a simple plastic skull that he detected no images from – and was hoping he wouldn’t since that would mean his baby brother was into a bit more than Kerry thought.

“It’s a leftover prop from Ian’s first play,” she answered, stepping cautiously into the room to see the black haired Irishman scanning the room with an expert eye. “Hamlet or Macbeth, I forget which he said.”

Sitting the skull back on the shelf, Ryan didn’t have to use much power to know that someone had been through this room and that someone had been careful not to leave clues.

Too careful, since Ryan knew his brother couldn’t make a bed without creases or lumps and the bed in this room had perfect military creases.

“Take a look around and see if everything is where it was when you were last here,” he told her, heading for the closet for a look.

Opening it slowly, Ryan shifted the clothes aside to tap the back of the closet on instinct and years of looking for hidden doors in places.

“Well, it’s too clean in here, so someone has been here,” Molly called out, running a finger over a spotless desk. “Ian’s a great student and a wonderful actor but his cleaning skills leave a lot to be desired. I do a better job and my Granny’s always saying how bad that is,” she stated.

“Yep, that’s what our housekeeper says too,” Ryan muttered, moving to the book shelves to see dozens of poetry books, some classic stories and a few more modern novels that made him roll his eyes. Then he caught the other selections that were shoved way in the back and his concern tripled.

Several books showed sign of intense study, some with pages or paragraphs marked and a couple had sheets of notes stuffed inside. “Since when did he learn shorthand or whatever the bloody hell this is?” he muttered sourly, having no clue what the notes said but knowing what the books were.

“Molly, Ian shared what he was with you but did you ever see him practice?” he asked without looking up, looking closer at the books and not liking the feelings that he was getting.

Shifting from where she was sitting on the floor, looking for something in the desk, Molly considered the answer. “He was still wary about that since I think in some ways his powers scared him, so no,” she frowned upon seeing Ryan’s expression. “Why? What did you find?”

“Something I don’t like,” he muttered, showing her one of the books. “Any ideas if these were by any chance more props for some play or class or something that wouldn’t make me concerned?”

Biting her lip at the book on satanic rituals, Molly shook her head slowly. “No, but those may tie in to some of his dreams that he said he didn’t want to mention to you or your brothers.”

“He has the damn gift of sight,” Ryan swore under his breath, shoving the books into the bag that Molly had brought with her. “Only Kerry can control that power to any degree and we didn’t even know that Ian had it. What was he seeing?” he demanded, feeling the pain growing in his head again as it did when he used his powers a lot or great evil was close.

“Demons, mutated or slaughtered animals, blood, and...” the girl turned away from his intense eyes.

Feeling more than seeing her fear, Ryan made himself go slow when he reached for her. “Molly, to help Ian we need to know what he was doing or what was happening,” he spoke gently, laying a hand on her shoulder and instantly felt her feelings of fear and concern but he also felt her deeper ones. “What was Ian seeing that would make him have these?”

“Death, he was seeing his death at the hands of those he loved,” she whispered, turning to meet Ryan’s startled eyes with tears shining. “He said that he was always afraid of being abandoned or of being lost because that was what he had been told as a child, but that no matter what the dreams said that he didn’t think his brothers would...”

Shock more than anger shot through Ryan and his eyes showed both but he quickly buried it, pulling away from the girl to stare hard at the well-made bed.

“He thought that one of us would...” he cut off, anger simmering when he picked up a worn out stuffed elephant that he recalled had been a gift on Ian’s first birthday. “Who told him that he’d been abandoned?” he demanded suddenly, feeling his brother in the stuffed toy and feeling the loss and fear.

“I guess he heard it from his foster parents when he was growing up – that your oldest brother had been offered the chance to keep Ian but he refused.” Molly didn’t say how sad her friend had looked when he repeated that.

A sharp crack from within the room told her more than the simmering rage in Ryan’s eyes ever could. “They lied to him, right?”

“Kerry fought our paternal grandmother, Kathleen Fitzgerald, to keep all of us but she insisted that we get split up so that he could concentrate on his own life,” Ryan slowly replied, fighting not to grit his teeth.

“I went to Clare, Mac went to County Cork, and Roarke went through the torments of hell in Mayo thanks to Kathleen, while Ian lived here in Dublin with the perfect Mr. and Mrs. Sullivan,” he went on slowly, looking down at the toy in his hand. “Kerry fought for us, especially for Ian since he was the baby but it didn’t do any good. Brandon and his wife kept Ian but they couldn’t keep him away from us though they never liked when I’d drop in.”

“I think Ian was scared of his foster...Mrs. Sullivan because he’d start to say things then he’d stop,” Molly couldn’t explain that. “I met them once and she always seemed cold, controlling, and when I shook her hand...I saw fire.”

Ryan’s gaze shot to her own, both impressed and concerned. “Well Molly girl, it looks like big brother Mac was right about you,” he grinned, wincing as a sharp pain went through his head. “You said that Ian kept a book?”

“Yeah, it should have been in the desk but he might have moved it.” Molly was ticked that her friend picked that time to be neat.

“Keep looking while I call Mac and fill him in on some things to keep an eye out for while visiting the Sullivan’s.” Ryan reached for his cell phone. “Any idea why Ian believed that he’d die?”

As Molly got down on the floor to peek under the bed, she let out a small grunt before pulling out a chest. “All he’d say was that if something happened to him and if I found out about it that I should tell his brothers to ask Brandon, I’m guessing that he meant his foster father, about Emily because he’d be dead before he hit nineteen just like her.”

“Okay, I seriously don’t care for that,” he sighed, starting to offer to pick the lock on the chest when it popped open easily. “Well, you are certainly full of surprises, Molly Brianna Jackson.”

“I have eight brothers and grew up in Boston with loads of cousins,” she shrugged with a grin. “Daddy would still spit nails if he knew what the boys taught me on his trips out of town.”

Ryan considered then groaned. “What is it with you and Maggie having so many brothers?” he asked aloud, shifting away as the phone on the other end picked up. “Hey, how’s the interviewing going?”

Across town in Dublin’s more expensive suburb, Patrick ‘Mac’ Fitzgerald rolled his eyes while stepping out of the parlor so he’d have more privacy.

“Try having a tooth pulled without any painkillers,” he sighed, rubbing his neck. “That’s what listening to Sybil Sullivan is like. Too sweet, too nice and all the time I’m waiting for a knife to be thrown at us.”

Watching Molly go through things that Ian had clearly meant for no one else to find, Ryan leaned on the dresser next to the window so that he could look outside.

“I’d tell Maggie to put on more pressure then because I’m thinking that they have more to do with things than they’re letting on,” he remarked easily, kneeling down to peek into the chest to see various tools for spell casting.

Much to Ryan’s surprise, his brother had an impressive collection of crystals, herbs, candles, an old if tiny cauldron, a deck of tarot cards, and an athame.

However, what concerned him was the stained dagger laying in a black velvet cloth.

“He’s got books on satanic rituals and other things that really don’t have much to do with White magic, Mac, and Molly said that when she met Sybil she pictured fire,” Ryan went on grimly, hearing his brother draw in a breath. “He’s got notes in a couple of the books but they’re in shorthand or some language that I can’t read.”

Considering that, Mac didn’t like it nor did he like the images that were beginning to flash. “Did you find the book that Molly said he kept?”

“Here it is!” Molly held up a leather bound book with a clasp, pleased that she had located it but then something else caught her attention. “Ryan?”

Mac had heard her and breathed a sigh of relief. “Get out of there, Ryan,” he instructed quickly, not caring for what he was picking up now. “Ryan, damn it, take Molly and get out.”

Even though he knew his brother couldn’t see him, Ryan smirked. “Mac, I think I can handle...” he drew off slowly when four armed campus security guards appeared in the door to the room. “I don’t suppose you blokes care to listen to my explanation about this, right?”

The first guard, a large, burly man who was well over six foot tall and probably outweighed Ryan by a good seventy-five pounds chuckled, removing his mirrored goggled to show eyes that were as black as coal.

“Your mother taught you about breaking and entering didn’t she, Ryan?” he scoffed, the voice echoing deep and clearly not his own.

“Ah, shit,” Ryan muttered, slowly moving so that he was between Molly and the guards and then remembering that his brother was on the cell phone. “Mac, what are Kerry’s rules about using magic or frying guards?” he asked casually while removing his black leather jacket.

Mac scowled at the phone in his hand. “You know that Kerry would bitch for a week if you used offensive magic on normal people, Ry,” he sighed.

“Uh-huh,” Ryan held the phone between his shoulder and neck while handing his jacket back to Molly who was watching the scene unfold warily. “Does that rule still apply if they’re possessed by the bad guy?”

“It doesn’t matter what kind of...” Mac stopped as it dawned on him what he’d heard. “Shit! Ryan, get out now!”

As the four guards entered, blocking the only way out, Ryan knew that option wasn’t in the cards even as a blow of power took his phone from his hand.

“Ryan!” Mac snapped when the call ended abruptly, swearing and yelling silently for Kerry and Roarke.

“Get in the closet, Molly, and stay there,” he ordered the girl, eyes going dark as his powers increased slowly. “Call Kerry, Mac. I’ll handle this lot.”

“You have too much pride and overconfidence, Ryan,” the guard spoke with malice, his black eyes looking at Molly. “I wonder if this one will be as tasty as Roarke’s little whore?”

Ryan’s eyes sparked and he lifted a finger to ignite his power and send a wave of energy out to block the guards.

“You’ll never find out, bastard, as she’s not for you,” he gritted, backing up more but knowing that in the small dorm room he didn’t dare cut loose with even a fraction of his power for fear of harming Molly. “Where’s my brother?”

A shorter guard threw a punch that the security expert easily dodged but he felt the blade of the third man slice through his side.

“Bad move, mate,” Ryan hissed, fighting the black pain caused by the knife and flame shot from his fingers to rip through the guard, who screamed and fell to the floor. “Molly! Run!” he snapped, refusing to allow the girl to come to harm.

Aware of the danger they were both in, Molly Jackson was still hesitant to leave the black haired Irishman alone to face three to one odds. “I can’t leave...”

The larger guard used a surprising burst of strength to knock Ryan back through the desk and had him crashing to the floor.

“Run, girl,” a voice spoke in her head and she realized that her presence was keeping him from cutting loose.

Eyeing the distance between the closet where she had taken shelter to the door told her that the odds of her escaping with the book that they needed were slim.

Shoving the book into her bag, she quickly wrapped his jacket around the bag and cast the fastest spell that she could think of over both and then made a break for the door.

“Get to Kerry and tell him...argh!” Ryan went down as an electric blue light seared through his body but before he crashed to the floor he was able to block the guards from attacking Molly.

Looking back briefly, Molly swore but jerked the door open to run when she hit solid rock. “*Merdre*,” she muttered, rubbing her head and looking up at a near giant.

“My master desires to meet with you, American,” he spoke, easily lifting the struggling girl up by her throat. “The Master and Mistresses know how easy it is to control the spawns of Fitzgerald through their women and you will suit his purpose fine enough.”

Molly fought uselessly in his grasp, hearing herself scream once before darkness came for her.

“Molly?” Ryan heard her scream and saw the girl in the grip of something he had seen only in night terrors but before he could clear his head enough to summon a spell, burning pain cut into his head and brought him to his knees.

The first possessed guard smiled evilly, having taken a curved blade from the chest. “Your baby brother has an interesting collection of ceremonial blades, Ryan Fitzgerald,” he mused, testing the edge on his finger.

“It was a shame that Sebastian needed him like this as his destiny was ever to be used for the family’s greater good.” He shifted the blade for a better grip and prepared to shove it into the Irishman’s exposed back.

Ryan knew of the danger but with the burning cut on his side and the agony shooting through his head, he couldn’t bring up a spell to ward off this mere physical attack.

An accomplished gambler, he knew that this was one gamble that wouldn’t be paying off for him as the guard slashed the knife down.

Chapter 8

Dublin, Ireland

Pulling the rental car up to the curb outside of the highly decorated home of Brandon and Sybil Sullivan in one of Dublin's more expensive neighborhoods, Patrick 'Mac' Fitzgerald sat still for a moment to just look.

While all of them had tried to keep some contact in their youngest brother's life while he was growing up, Mac had to admit that normally he would arrange to meet Brandon in a nearby park rather than come to the house. Something about this house bothered him and that still hadn't changed.

"This is where Ian grew up?" Mary Margaret Cavanaugh asked from beside him as she reached for her reporter gear. "Fancy place."

"Yeah, Brandon was a childhood mate of Da's and they supposedly offered to take Ian after Sebastian killed Mum and Da on Skelling Michael that day," he frowned, recalling things that still didn't make sense.

"They wanted to legally adopt him which Kathleen was all for but Kerry downright refused that."

Maggie shifted to watch him. After spending so much time with him, she'd gotten to the point where she could tell when things were bothering Mac.

"Is that the reason that you don't care for them or is there something else?" she asked curiously, reaching over to straighten his tie. "You're putting off waves of dislike, Doc."

"I don't dislike them, Maggie," he muttered, seeing her smirk at him. "Brandon was a nice man though I always got the feeling that there was something that he wanted to say but couldn't."

"Well, maybe today we'll see what he has to say," she grinned, stepping from the car to smooth down the front of her light blue pants suit.

Mac took a longer look at her and frowned slightly, reaching to take her bag of reporter gear that he knew contained recorders, a camera, and notebooks.

"Hey, how come you weren't dressed like this when you showed up on my door?" he asked, recalling that day well and still wondering if this perky reporter wouldn't be the death of him yet.

"I'm going for the professional reporter trying to help grieving foster parents look here," she grinned at him, taking a quick look around before wrapping her arms around his neck to give him a quick kiss. "With you I was going for..."

"The slightly dim-witted, absentminded, but sexy reporter look?" Mac shot back with a grin. "I thought that was your normal self, Mary Margaret."

“That’s cute, Doc, real bloody cute,” she pouted, stepping back and heading for the front door. “I can still take Ryan up on his offer to sail off to Cancun.”

“You’d kill him within a week, luv,” Mac replied, turning serious as she knocked on the door and he reached into his pocket for the glasses that he only wore when pressed. “Here we go.”

It took several moments before the ornate door opened to reveal a tall, slender, trim looking man in his mid to late forties with an unruly shock of brown hair.

“Yes?” he eyed them warily, as if waiting for something to jump from the shadows.

“Mr. Sullivan, my name is Maggie Cavanaugh and we spoke on the telephone,” Maggie began in a polite and respectful manner, being careful to maintain a neutral smile. “My newspaper is interested in speaking with you and your wife about the recent happenings.”

The last time that Mac could recall seeing Brandon Sullivan, about two years ago that fall, he seemed energetic and proud of his foster son, yet he could also recall noticing that his gaze was often sad.

This man seemed tired and twenty years older than he was.

“I told you, Miss Cavanaugh, that our son is not missing and that this whole affair has been blown out of proportion by the ravings of some American looking for attention,” Brandon remarked in a strong, clear tone, his accent still heavy after all these years. “Now, please take your...”

Just when Mac believed that he was going to shut the door in their faces, Maggie again showed him another side of her personality: the stubborn pit bull that wasn’t letting go of a story.

“My paper will run a story regarding the mutilation of a boy up in Savernake Forest, Mr. Sullivan,” she cut him off briskly, her hand slapping against the door.

“Your foster son, Ian Fitzgerald, knew this boy, went to Trinity University with him. Toby Armstrong, according to my sources and I can supply images, was torn to shreds by something that had nothing to do with wolves.” Maggie was pleased to see the other man looking uneasy as she went on.

“Fifteen years ago, you and your wife took in a three year old lad whose parents had been slaughtered in much the same way as Toby Armstrong, now he’s dead, your foster son has vanished and no one seems to be very worried about that,” she arched one fine brow. “Now, my paper can run the story this way, making your family, the school, and others in authority look bleedin’ bad or you can tell me your side of this and why you don’t feel that your foster son is in any danger.”

Pausing, Maggie added one final dig. “My paper is interested in anything about the Fitzgerald brothers and with the fifteenth anniversary of their last performance coming up, it will also be relatively simple to bring attention back to the fact that you raised the youngest of that family and yet you seem unconcerned.”

Staring down at the cool, firm eyes of the reporter, Brandon Sullivan seemed to consider the options before finally stepping back. “Come in and have a seat in the parlor,” he invited. “I’ll find my wife.”

Waiting until he had walked down the hall, Mac turned to give Maggie a quick and hard kiss. “That was bloody inspired, Mary Margaret.” He still wasn’t certain how she’d done it and if it had been his brothers then he’d have wondered if magic had been used.

Knowing that Maggie, a hereditary witch, didn’t like to use her skills in that fashion, he knew that she had gotten them into the Sullivan’s well kept, highly decorated home all on her own.

“That little speech got us in the door, Doc,” she sighed, a feeling in her gut saying that this next stage wouldn’t be as simple. “I think he’s the weak link. I don’t think his wife will be as easy to talk my way around.”

Chuckling, Mac sat her bag down so that she could get out a digital recorder and a small notebook. “Maggie, I grew up with Ryan and Roarke fighting every time our mother turned around. If I could handle them, I can handle Sybil Sullivan.”

A step sounded announcing the arrival of the couple and as Mac looked up his feelings, both physical and emotional, turned bad.

“Miss Cavanaugh, Brandon says that you’re doing a story for your paper,” a soft voice with a musical lilting Irish accent spoke from the door. “I fear that you came all this way for nothing as there is no big mystery.”

Maggie had been working up a pitch for the woman when she all but felt the change come over Mac as he looked up at Sybil Sullivan.

It had nearly been ten years since he had laid eyes on the woman and now when he looked up, expecting to see a slightly older version, he was taken aback to see that she had hardly aged a day.

Sybil Sinead Sullivan had always been a beautiful woman, a fact that she had never denied. Taller than her husband at almost 5’7”, she wore a well tailored dress of a deep maroon with gold trim, her fingers carried several rings and her mascara lined eyes showed no signs of grief or concern.

More to Mac’s concern however was the simple fact that as soon as he laid eyes on her every sense he had started screaming bloody murder.

“Well, Mrs. Sullivan, unless you can produce your foster son to me so he can tell me what happened in those woods then I think there is a mystery,” Maggie countered with a sweet smile. “As I explained to Mr. Sullivan, there are too many things unaccounted for that ring similar to how his actual parents died.”

Sitting down in a deeply cushioned chair, Sybil smiled and let a hand brush at her strawberry blond hair, almost dismissively. “Nonsense,” she scoffed, at ease in her element as she crossed her legs at the knee to allow her dress to slide up slightly.

“Toryn and Brenna’s deaths were the results of a lost and angry child looking to get revenge on no longer being the sole object of their attention,” she replied calmly, then appeared to consider her next words while regarding Maggie. “I do hope you will use this with caution as Mrs. Fitzgerald would be deeply upset to learn this dark secret got out.”

Shifting a wary look toward Mac, Maggie coughed slightly. “What secret?” she asked, though already guessing how this was going to play out.

“Ian, the poor innocent baby, has no idea that the stories told of his parents deaths were lies to hide the awful truth that his own brother killed Toryn and sweet Brenna.” Sybil shook her head sadly. “That’s why when Kathleen asked us, we immediately agreed to remove Ian from the hell that he’d be in otherwise.”

Struggling to maintain his outer composure, to not show the rage that was building, Mac made himself count backward from five thousand until he was certain that he wouldn’t break his own vows.

“Down, Doc,” Maggie thought harshly as if picking up his bitterness and anger. “That must have been hard on you,” she said aloud, and shifted a look at notes that she’d made after doing a routine background check. “A young couple who had just lost a child, taking in someone else’s son to raise but knowing he’d never be your own fully.”

“We wanted to adopt Ian but his oldest brother contested that and we decided not to upset the lad anymore than he was,” Brandon spoke slowly, as a housekeeper entered carrying a tow-headed girl of about three years old wearing a pink dress.

Maggie saw Mac frown and picked up on his questions. “What a lovely little girl,” she smiled at the child as Sybil took her from the older housekeeper. “Babysitting?”

With a laugh, Sybil lightly stroked the child’s hair. “No, this is Bridget,” she explained, smiling. “Our daughter.”

Hearing Mac nearly choke, Maggie was quick to go on. “What happened on your foster son’s trip a few weeks ago?” she asked curiously. “You don’t seem alarmed by the fact that he’s vanished.”

“Miss Cavanaugh, Ian is eighteen years old and was clearly upset by whatever happened in those awful woods,” Sybil smiled, handing the child to her husband so she could focus on the reporter and the man with her. “Ian, while smart, has always been a bit flighty and unpredictable. That’s one of the reasons that Brandon and I didn’t want him to go to college this soon.”

“We thought Ian should take some time to explore his opportunities,” Brandon broke in. “Sybil’s family wanted Ian to intern with them for awhile,” he murmured.

Mac didn’t buy that since he knew from his own checks that Sybil had no immediate family to speak of or that they knew of. Before he could bring that up, he felt his cell phone vibrate.

Leaving Maggie to ask the questions, he flipped the phone open to check the ID screen and nearly frowned as he saw Ryan’s number pop up.

“Excuse me, it’s a member of the crew so I should take this,” he gave a small apologetic smile to the Sullivan’s but as he passed by her, his hand pressed against Maggie’s back.

Reading that by crew he meant that it was one of his brothers on the phone, she chose to keep talking. “What do you believe happened in Savernake Forest?” she asked of the couple, watching for reactions.

Brandon shifted restlessly but Sybil merely shook her head, reaching for the antique teapot to pour afternoon tea. “A terrible thing really, that poor boy being attacked by wolves,” she sniffed, offering Maggie tea.

“What makes you think that your foster son wasn’t also ‘attacked’ by the so-called wolves?” Maggie countered, shaking her head to the offer of tea while watching Mac in a mirror on the wall and by his expression knew that Ryan had called.

“Or do you think that Ian’s Claddagh medal would have protected him?” she dropped the question innocently and wasn’t disappointed to see Brandon look up quickly.

“If he hadn’t dropped it then I’m sure it might...” Sybil stopped in mid sentence at her husband’s cough, looking coolly at the red haired woman. “I mean, one of the local police up there told Bran that Ian’s Claddagh had been found and...”

Maggie tuned the rest out, her gut warning her that they had gotten onto the right track. “You mentioned an American before,” slipping away onto to safer grounds since her senses warned her of danger. “Who would that be?”

“A Yank that Ian went to school with,” Sybil shook her head in mild disgust. “So much lower than him in class, a mixed breed girl as it was, and she’s so mentally ill that she’s making up silly stories.”

Taking a sip of tea, she looked up at her nervous husband with a smile. "The Dean assured me that he was arranging for her to have a...mental exam and that she wouldn't be a threat to anyone else pretty soon."

Not caring for the tone or the hidden meaning of those words, Maggie was about to ask something when Mac shot a mental comment at her and she frowned more. "What does the name Emily mean to either of you?"

China clattered as Sybil sat her cup down a little too hard, clearly not expecting the question. "Why do you ask?"

"It came up in some background research, that's all," Maggie deadpanned the counter question, feeling Mac get more agitated. "Who is she?"

Sybil stood up to go look out the window onto the street while Brandon sat the toddler on the floor. "Emily was our foster daughter," he finally replied, going on slowly. "She was killed on the night of her nineteenth birthday while returning from a party. Ian would only have been with us about six months at the time."

"Let me see if I understand this correctly, Mr. Sullivan," Maggie was adding timelines in her head and not caring for what she was coming up with.

"You and your wife had a child die in his sleep when he was just a little over three years old, you took in Ian when he's three years old but lose a foster daughter the night she turns nineteen. Ian's close to turning nineteen himself, now he vanishes, and you're adopting another child who happens to be three years old," Maggie shifted a look at the man then over to his wife. "Is there something that you'd like to explain as to why that all seems a little hard to believe?"

Brandon was biting his lip, clearly uneasy as Maggie's green eyes drilled into his. "Miss Cavanaugh..."

"Shit!" Mac snapped, eyes flashing as he came back in. "We need to go, Mary Margaret," he spoke quickly, anger and concern evident in his voice.

"Is there something wrong, Miss Cavanaugh?" Sybil inquired smoothly, turning around to gaze at them with eyes that remained cool but unpleasant. "A sudden unexpected turn of events that..."

Mac stepped between the women, jerking off the glasses to meet the gaze full on. "You know damn good and well what has happened, Sybil," he accused, glaring hard as Maggie snatched up her recorder. "You knew that Ryan would be attacked if he went to Ian's dorm just like you know more about Ian's disappearance."

Not making excuses if she did or didn't, she gazed fully at Mac for the first time. "Do I know you, Mister...?"

"Fitzgerald, Sybil, and yes, you know me," he replied evenly, eyes flashing dangerously as he still could hear his brother's call getting cut off and didn't like that he could not reach out to him.

Pleased when he saw both Sullivans' eyes widen slightly, he went on in a tone that Maggie had heard him use twice since they had met.

"I am Patrick MacKinley Fitzgerald, second born son to Toryn and Brenna Fitzgerald. I vow this to you now Sybil Sullivan, the minute that I have proof that you know what happened to Ian, or that you knew about the guards at Trinity being possessed by Sebastian's power, I will ruin you," he spoke low and slow but the threat was plain in his darkening blue-gray eyes.

"Later, Doc," Maggie snapped, grabbing his arm. "If Ryan and Molly are in trouble then we need to go."

Giving the couple another look, Mac finally nodded and started to turn away when her voice stopped him.

"Tell me, Patrick, does your brother Roarke still have that terrible phobia about closed in places or of being touched?" she asked, lifting her new daughter into her arms.

"You stay away from my brothers," he gritted, beginning to turn when Maggie gave a hard yank. "Protect your own family, Sybil and steer clear of mine."

Maggie snapped something under her breath, jerking him out the door and toward the car. "You call Kerry and Roarke, I'll drive," she urged quickly, suddenly wanting very much to be away from this house. "I know a shortcut."

"Ry cut off but I heard Molly scream so hurry, Maggie," he took a deep breath, wanting to cleanse the bad vibes that he'd gotten toward the end away but knowing he didn't have time. "She's involved in this. I know it."

"Yeah, Doc, so do I, but the vibes I got off that woman weren't even like I felt from Sebastian," she muttered. "She's something way beyond what I think we were thinking."

Remembering what Ryan had mentioned he'd found made Mac wonder just what else Sybil Sullivan was and how she was involved in this.

Though right then he had the worry of getting to Trinity University in one piece with the way Maggie was driving. "Mary Margaret, for the love of God, watch where you're going!"

Back at the Sullivan house, Sybil had calmly laid the toddler down for her nap before rejoining her husband in the parlor. "I suppose I should have expected one of Toryn's sons to come visiting."

"Damn it, Syb," Brandon snapped, slapping a glass with brandy in it down hard on the bar. "You told me that Ian was fine, that a friend took him out of those woods, and that he was recovering elsewhere until this nightmare is over again," he fought to keep his voice low but the things that Maggie had said were making him wonder.

“Did you lie to me again?” he demanded. “Sybil, you swore after Emily that it wouldn’t happen again. Ian...oh my God, Sybil...”

Pouring a drink, the woman smiled easily at her husband. “Emily was a troubled girl who got herself killed that night and Ian, Toryn’s beloved little light, is beyond the destiny that the family had chosen him for,” she replied sadly. “Pity as he would have suffered less if Kathleen wouldn’t have needed him.”

Finishing her drink, she reached for her purse. “Watch over Bridget, Bran, as I’m off to the store for a new dress for the ceremony in a few days,” she urged, kissing him lightly. “It’ll all be fine soon my dear heart, though I may have to see if Kathleen will loan me Ian’s little chum in his place.”

Sitting down at the bar, staring at his drink Brandon Sullivan lowered his head to the bar. “May the Lord preserve me and may you forgive me, Toryn,” he whispered, fear of what his wife had become keeping him from acting on the one thing that could still save the life of a boy he loved.

Chapter 9

Police Headquarters, Dublin, Ireland:

“No, Peter, you cannot take a scalpel to the local coroner,” Jessica Hadley spoke into her cell phone, rolling her eyes. “Just examine the body, get the data, and call back without making enemies.”

Leaning against the bumper of the car outside of impressive stone structure that was the headquarters to the local Police force in Dublin, Roarke Fitzgerald smirked.

Knowing how members of the Mavericks, the main subsidiary team of Hadley Enterprises, reacted to things and people, the first reaction to their main medic didn’t surprise him.

Turning the collar of his jacket up against a stiff wind that blew his unruly black wavy hair into his eyes, Roarke let his eyes roam the people on the street and his surroundings with a caution born of years of childhood abuse.

Abuse suffered at the hands of the foster family that his paternal grandmother had placed him in the care of.

In addition, he liked to think his more cautious nature came from the years of covert activity that he had done.

Watching Jessica finish the call, he smiled slightly before his thoughts turned dark as they again went to his younger brother and wondered where he was and what was happening.

Roarke, more than his brothers, knew what both Sebastian and their grandmother were capable of doing.

His greatest hope was that either Ian was strong enough to resist Sebastian or that he was just being used as a tool to get at the rest of them. However, the cold feeling in his gut told him that his brother was in dire danger and needed them quickly.

“Luv?” a soft voice next to him made him glance down to realize that Jessica had been speaking to him for the past several minutes and now was watching him with concern in her eyes.

“I’m fine, Jess,” he assured her with a wane smile. “I was just thinking to myself.”

Jessica had a hunch that she knew what he had been thinking of but didn’t mention it.

Instead, she turned to eye the building with caution, not caring for police in any country despite being a free agent for various agencies in the government field.

“Peter says that Cam is already inside talking with the Chief Inspector,” she announced, seeing his grim eyes take on a brighter light while thinking the same thing. “Yes, odds are good that he’s probably either shot someone or got himself arrested.”

Unzipping his jacket so he’d have quick access to the sheathed weapon he carried, Roarke held out a hand. “Let’s go find out then, luv.”

Opening the door to the building, instincts kicked in from his days working covert operations, security, and things that he’d rather not recall doing.

Expecting the usual police bureaucracy, both Roarke and Jessica were surprised when they were simply ushered through the front security and back toward the Chief Inspector’s office.

Voices were clearly heard coming from the office as Chief Inspector Liam Shea bellowed.

Shea, a long time officer of law in Dublin, was a well-built native to the city. 6’7” tall with red hair that had a tinge of gray, he was a former boxer in his youth; he tried to still keep his 230-pound form in shape.

While he admitted that he couldn’t keep up with the younger officers on his force, he still ruled with an iron fist and usually could intimidate with just a hard look on his rugged face.

At least until that morning when the tall, black haired Yank arrived with papers signed by the Prime Minister and Shea’s direct superior, and it became plain the man wasn’t going to be intimidated by a mere look or his bellowing.

Sitting across from the Inspector with his long legs stretched out in front of him, Cameron Young shifted a look over the mirrored sunglasses that he usually wore and gazed at the older man with faint amusement.

“Are you done bitching yet?” he asked curiously in a tone neutral of any accent, tapping the official looking papers that were sitting on the cluttered desktop. “If not and to cut this short, since I am working on a bit of a time crunch, I could just call the PM’s office so you could yell at them in whatever language it is that you’ve been cussing me out in,” he offered easily.

“You have a smart mouth on you, Yank,” Shea growled, snatching the paper signed by the Prime Minister to read it over again. “Smart mouth blokes usually get tossed into a cell in my district.”

Despite the seriousness of what he was looking into, the older cop was the most amusing thing that Cameron had dealt with in weeks.

“Yeah, you try that and I can promise that your retirement will come a helluva lot sooner than eighteen months,” he smiled, leaning forward to finally remove his glasses and eye the cop levelly.

“Let me explain this, Inspector,” he began coolly, feeling the hair on the back of his neck lift, which usually meant either his employer was close or there was a Fitzgerald brother nearby with their power close to the surface.

Either choice, Cameron knew, would not be good in a building filled with cops determined to stall them.

“Now, my medic is with the local coroner going over the body of Toby Armstrong. I already know what I think he’ll find and I’m halfway certain that you know that I know what he’ll find, so the question is do you stop giving me crap or do you start doing your job?” he demanded, seeing the man scowl back at him.

“Now, you wouldn’t be accusing me of not doing my duty in upholdin’ the law, would you, lad?” Shea glowered, starting to shift in his seat to stand when his door opening had him looking over.

“Got on his bad side already, mate?” Roarke asked, picking up the negative vibrations in the office even before he opened the door.

Cameron snorted, waving that comment off. “Hell, I did that the first five seconds that I walked in here. I think I broke my own personal record for pissing someone off,” he stated, grinning. “I honestly don’t think that he’s a bad person, just a little ticked that we have more power in this investigation.”

“According to others, there is no investigations,” Shea rolled his eyes, his old cop senses coming back as he looked at this black haired, blue-gray eyed new arrival. “The lad in question is one of those spoiled, troubled ones who get into trouble and expect their parents to bail ‘em out then they...”

He stopped in mid-sentence as the water in the water cooler out in the outer office actually seemed to boil.

“My brother is not spoiled, Inspector,” Roarke spoke evenly but the usually quiet and casual accent that he spoke with had all but vanished in his anger, his voice going cold and quiet.

“Ian’s worked hard for every damn thing he’s gained in life and the Sullivan family sure as bloody hell are not his parents. Ian’s parents, our parents, are dead and I would thank you to not refer to those people as his.”

Knowing well the danger that Roarke could be when upset or angered, Cameron stood up in order to carefully, if casually, place himself between the former Irish singer and the police Inspector while Jessica’s hand laid on her friend’s arm.

“Hearts and minds, pal,” he chuckled, looking back at the portly looking officer. “Inspector Liam Shea, my employer Jessica Hadley and our friend and Ian Fitzgerald’s older brother, Roarke,” he introduced, seeing a startled look come into the older man’s eyes.

Shea took a step back from his desk to eye the young man whom was still glaring at him with a much closer look. “Fitzgerald...” he murmured, thinking when it finally hit him. “Bloody hell, it never dawned on me about that name until I saw this one,” he muttered, sitting back down slowly but keeping his eyes on Roarke.

Curious, Jessica nudged Roarke’s arm lightly. “I know damn good and well that you haven’t been back to Ireland until a few months ago, but what are the odds that Ry probably got himself on the police’s bad side one time?” she questioned curiously.

“Ryan?” despite his emotions, that question made him laugh. “Jessie, luv, Ryan gets on the bad side of the police in any country, city, or hemisphere that he goes to,” Roarke replied, not caring for the intense scrutiny of the cop. “Fitzgerald is a common name in Ireland so what’s...”

“You’re one of Toryn’s lads,” Shea interrupted him smoothly, seeing the uneasy look that entered the young man’s eyes. “You’re the next to last one if I had to chance a guess on it.”

A man who guarded his privacy and identity, Roarke’s already rigid stance was close to going to the next step, a near reflexive combat wariness that both of his friends were aware could go deadly in a second.

“What do you know of my family if you didn’t even recognize Ian’s name?” Roarke demanded, a natural instinct warning him of possible danger but the onyx stone he wore along with the Trinity medal didn’t go warm as it did when a threat was close.

“Toryn’s third son had a wilder look in those eyes of his,” Shea spoke, chuckling. “I told your Da once that that one would be a handful as he grew.”

Always wanting to know who and what they were dealing with, Jessica shot her subsidiary leader a hard look. “Background check?” she spoke over a radio link that would carry her words without a sound to Cameron.

Swearing sourly about this unexpected development, Cameron only shrugged. "I did run one," he complained bitterly. "Shea's a native of Dublin, a former boxer before going into law enforcement full time. Nothing in that check hinted that he would know Roarke's old man."

Meeting the police Inspector's gaze full on, Roarke sought answers of his own but didn't feel any negative intentions. "How did you know Da?" he inquired.

"My own sainted Mum was ill with cancer and your Mum would often, when time would allow, bring you lads up to visit her," Shea replied, not blinking from the intense look that was examining him. "Your Da would come along sometimes and we'd chat on the patio while Brenna and Mum talked and you and your one brother would play in the yard," he hesitated before continuing with a laugh. "Well, fight is more like it which is why I told Toryn that he'd have his hands full with that one."

"Had to be Ryan," Jessica muttered, still not quite ready to trust this gruff Irishman. "You didn't recognize Ian's name but..."

Nodding, Shea finally reached for a folder. "When I was handed the case, the surname on it was Sullivan and after personally speaking with Mrs. Sullivan, I got the idea that her..." he stopped at the hot look shot his direction. "That the boy had run away after a fight with the family over college, at least that's what she told me."

Sitting back down only after he was partially certain that Roarke wasn't going to either pull a weapon or fry the Inspector, Cameron didn't like that answer.

"That woman's telling a lot of stories, isn't she?" he asked, knowing from what Jessica had relayed earlier what the original story was.

"Sure seems like it," Roarke frowned, hoping that Mac could get clearer answers from the couple so they could finally know the truth of what happened. "Ian's never used the Sullivan name that I know of, Inspector."

Shea sighed, looking at the order sent by his highest superior and the Prime Minister to over at his visitors.

"I only saw pictures of the lad supplied by Mrs. Sullivan and I didn't place that he would look as Brenna did," he began slowly, looking at Roarke. "You look like Toryn which is why I finally placed the name. Though it also would explain why my superior, not the one whose name is on this letter, told me to drop the missing person investigation and why I saw that fancy looking older woman talking with him."

Roarke closed his eyes, fingers clenching. "She bought the bleedin' cops off to abandon her own grandson," he gritted, having no doubt as to whom he was referring to.

"We don't know that your grandmother was who he saw," Cameron pointed out, needing to keep him grounded and calm, but he sighed at the look he received. "Yeah, that sounded stupid even to me but we need to keep a level head here."

"My baby brother has been missing for over two bleedin' weeks, Cam!" Roarke whirled on his friend, eyes flashing in emotion that he didn't bother to bury. "Kathleen has told everyone to ignore it; his own foster parents have done the same thing, why?"

Feeling his anxiety getting worse, Jessica gently went to slip her arms around him in comfort. "That's what we're in Dublin to find out, luv," she murmured, meeting his eyes. "Calm down."

"The locals up in the area of the incident didn't send a lot down for us to go on." Shea seemed disgusted by that, finally handing the file over. "So much of that investigation was botched from the bloody start that my nine year old grandson could have handled it better and came away with more clues."

Flipping through the few pages, Cameron's handsome face frowned more as he read it and got more disgusted by what he wasn't seeing. "The cops in Great Britain in that area claimed that the site was contaminated by the students before they got there to do it proper," he muttered, tossing the file down. "They didn't bother questioning the others on the trip since none of them were close to the attack area."

"SOP is to still drill possible witnesses for information," Jessica remarked, well aware from growing up in a military family from Great Britain that usually standard operating procedure would always be followed. "What about after they returned to the University, were they questioned on Ian?"

"My officers tried to question the rest of class that had been on the trip," Shea said, spreading his hands in helpless frustration. "The Dean of Students told me that due to the stress of the trip he had arranged for them to see a private therapist at a retreat for the next three months."

"Oh, to be a fly on the wall in that office when Kerry cuts loose on him," Cameron muttered, getting a better idea on who they were dealing with but not the why. "I'd say the Dean is probably up to his beady eyeballs in this mess."

Roarke was about to agree when he felt the pain shoot through his side like a burning knife. "God, that hurts," he hissed, grabbing his side on reflex. "I haven't felt pain like this since that job in the Sudan."

"I hated the Sudanese job," Cameron muttered, scowling even more as his medic walked into the office. "Shit, you have that look that says I'm going to like what you found out even less than what's causing his pain."

Peter Daniels didn't let the tone of his leader bother him. The prime medic for the Mavericks had heard worse before.

A young man with short black hair and dark eyes hidden behind wire-rimmed glasses, he took a quick look before choosing to play medic rather than relay his news.

“Real or a by-product?” he asked, voice tinged with a mixture of an accent since he hadn’t shaken the Alabama accent of his birth or the German one he’d learned by growing up in Bonn, Germany.

“Well the last time I looked I hadn’t been stabbed so I’d say this is something else,” Roarke muttered, clenching his teeth when the pain increased and spread to his back. “Bloody hell.”

Inspector Shea watched this interesting scene silently while Jessica quickly knelt by her friend.

“Hey, what did you find out and did you kill that coroner?” Cameron asked of his medic, trying to split his attention multiple ways.

“No, but not for the lack of him being annoying,” Daniels returned in a sour tone but then dug into his back pocket for a crumpled file folder. “Cam, wolves usually only attack if cornered, hurt, or hungry and I’ve seen the rare wolf victim,” he said as he handed the file to his leader. “That boy wasn’t killed by no damn wolf, at least not one from this dimension.”

Shooting a warning look that reminded the medic of the local police Inspector, Cameron sighed and read the autopsy report. “Why is he missing internal organs?” he demanded, reading that part twice.

Still working through the pain and increasing agitation, Roarke’s head snapped up. “What organs?” he demanded, feeling ice cold.

“The heart, eyes, and liver,” Cameron read from the report, meeting the eyes of his friend. “This doesn’t sound right.”

Cameron Young had been dealing in the weird and supernatural for about as long as he had normal troubles. Those dealings told him that the taking of body parts wasn’t part of any normal magical practice or spell.

That usually spelled something far darker and much more dangerous and that worried him.

Clearly considering the same thing, Roarke was about to suggest they call Kerry when pain hit him again and he doubled over. This time, however, something flashed in his mind. “Ryan,” he whispered.

By means of an inner vision that he rarely used, Roarke saw his brother surrounded by what appeared to be men dressed in guard uniforms, but that same sight showed him that they were actually something far darker.

Always assured that his older, brasher brother could handle himself, Roarke wasn’t immediately concerned until he felt the emotions change, saw that Ryan was actually hurt and watched a light glint off a bloodstained dagger just as it was plunged toward his back.

“Ryan, no!” Roarke’s eyes had gone black with the vision even as his cell phone went off in his pocket.

“That does not fill me with a good feeling,” Cameron muttered, snatching the phone while his employer worked on calming Roarke down. “Talk to me.”

Listening a moment, the mercenary rolled his eyes. “I’m talking on his phone because your damn brother just had some kind of vision and...” he hesitated as Mac’s voice was terse. “Shit! Yell for Kerry and I’ll see where Mike is in this city and get a team over to the damn school.”

Shea had gotten water and though he was curious, he had the strange feeling that what he was witnessing was beyond a simple cop. However, Trinity University was in his district so if something had happened there...

“What’s going on?” he demanded briskly, seeing the black haired Yank frown.

“Peter, buzz Mike and tell him to get his team over to the dorms at Trinity,” Cameron ordered, kneeling on Roarke’s other side. “According to Mac, Ryan’s been attacked by the guards and the girl that he had with him has been kidnapped.”

Reaching for the radio to locate the Mavericks’ second in command, Peter was off quickly.

“Demons,” Roarke whispered, finding it hard to break contact until finally Jessica’s voice got through to him. “They look like men and Sebastian’s energy is there but there’s also something darker...something viler and it...oh, bloody hell.”

Being violently ill before he could stop it, Roarke struggled to break the link with his brother, but he found that hard.

“Roarke, stop,” Jessica raised her voice, placing a shaking hand on his trembling shoulder. “Let go, luv,” she urged quickly, rubbing a hand on his back.

Of Toryn and Brenna Fitzgerald’s five sons, Roarke was the one who had always been the most susceptible to energies, dark or light, and he had always been warned about opening himself up to them.

Grasping both the shiny black onyx stone that his father had given him on this sixth birthday along with Jessica’s hand, he silently recited a protection spell in his mind and slowly felt the images and feelings withdraw.

Falling back, his long black hair hanging into his haunted eyes while he struggled to regain breath, strength, and composure, the lanky Irishman looked up.

“We need to go,” he murmured quietly. “Ry needs us.”

“And I need my head examined for getting involved in this crap again,” Cameron muttered, extending a hand down to help his friend back to his feet. “Let’s go.”

Inspector Shea had grabbed his hat. "I'm going with you lot," he announced, shoving a finger into the Yank's chest. "Trinity is on my watch, laddie, and if a lass has been kidnapped then that's a police matter."

More amused than frustrated at that turn of events, Cameron met his employer's grim eyes before shrugging. "Okay, Inspector," he sighed. "You can come but just remember those papers you're holding. My people are in charge and this may be a bit more than you're expecting."

"You bloody well think so, mate?" Jessica muttered under her breath, not liking Roarke's ashen face or the clamminess of his hand. "I already know it's going to be more than we were expecting."

Roarke seemed oblivious to the comments as they left the police station quickly. Rather his thoughts were still on surface scanning for his brother and not liking what he wasn't feeling right then.

The dark cloud slowly sifting over the bright afternoon sun boded dire tidings as he knew well.

Chapter 10

Trinity University, Dublin, Ireland:

“Good afternoon and welcome to Dean Quillian’s office, may I help you?” a slender, pert, and perky looking blond secretary spoke without looking up from typing her notes.

It was plain that it was a normal routine, as she didn’t make a mistake in her typing. It wasn’t until she lifted her eyes to finally see who had entered her office that her fingers fumbled on the keys.

Kerry had learned early on in his life how to make the greatest impression on people when he wanted to, although since he was nineteen, he tried not to attract too much attention unless he desired it. Knowing where he was coming today and the hassle it would probably become, he decided it was time that he did draw attention, both in the way he presented himself physically, and the emotional energy he portrayed.

The latter was harder since he found it extremely difficult to concentrate since stepping foot into this building.

Normally a casual dresser, his normal attire was slacks and a shirt. Today he opted for the more formal, slacks, pressed shirt, and matching tie and jacket, all in a neutral color that he preferred.

His blond hair was well styled and didn’t move as he set the dark glasses that he had been wearing up onto the top of his head.

“Good day, Miss,” he began easily but with just the perfect amount of cordial calmness. “Could you buzz Dean Quillian and inform him that Kerrigan Fitzgerald is here to see him?”

Blinking at the handsome Irishman that was standing in front of her desk, she stared for a couple seconds more before something akin to amused patience lit his eyes and she snapped back.

“Oh, I’m...I’m so sorry but...but the Dean is...” she stammered in an accent that got heavier the more flustered she became.

Not surprised by this excuse, Kerry’s smile remained but it seemed to tighten slightly. “Yes, he’s been too busy to speak with me since my brother vanished off the face of this bleedin’ planet,” he replied, going on in a more formal tone. “That’s fine, I can discuss my business to withdraw my donation and grant money with his superiors.”

Kerry had just started to turn away when the secretary quickly stood up, motioning him to wait.

“I’ll just pop into his office and see if he can’t take a moment to speak with you, Mr. Fitzgerald,” she said, then immediately knocked on the closed door before stepping inside.

Taking the time while she was gone to get a firmer grasp on the feelings that being here was giving him, Kerry couldn't help but hope that the others stayed out of too much trouble.

"Mr. Fitzgerald, Dean Quillian will see you now," the perky blond announced as she reentered the office with a bit more caution now. "He's deeply sorry about the miscommunication before."

"Oh, I'm just sure he is, lass," Kerry smiled back at her, stepping into the Dean's office and almost feeling like a fist slammed into his chest, so thick and oppressive was the atmosphere that he walked into.

The Dean was just as Kerry remembered him to be when they had last spoken face to face over Ian's tuition and the donations that he was willing to make to the University.

This time, Kerry went into the meeting with his empathic abilities keyed low and he picked up the man's nervous energy. There were also other feelings that he couldn't place.

It wasn't until the man finally turned the chair around to meet his eyes that Kerry got the inklings of danger and corruption.

"Dean Quillian, I'm so pleased that you were finally able to pull yourself away from whatever it was that had kept you from returning my calls these past days," he began cordially, the Irish accent tight and his tone cool.

The Dean clearly wasn't happy by the interruption but he was an expert at hiding these baser emotions. "Mr. Fitzgerald, Kerry, please do come in and sit down," he extended a hand to a chair. "Can I offer you a drink? The trip up from Fitzgaren must have been long and tiresome."

Waving away the offer of a drink, Kerry sat down slowly to face the man. "No, I'm sure that you know what I've come to talk to you about or more to the point, what isn't being done."

Pouring himself a drink, Quillian took a quick sip before sitting again. "I assume you've heard about the unfortunate incident up in the Savernake Forest," he began uneasily, not able to meet the stern blue-gray eyes across from him.

"'Unfortunate incident' isn't exactly how I'd describe my brother disappearing and the mauling of another of your students," Kerry replied evenly, motioning with a hand but feeling a tightening in the back of his mind. "My brother has been missing for nearly two weeks and I don't hear about it from you, your staff, or anyone here at the school. I hear about it from one of his mates."

Quillian couldn't quite keep the look of distaste off his face at this comment, coughing to cover it. "Yes, Miss Jackson I can only assume, and you have my deepest apologies that the poor deranged lass bothered you with his trivial matter." He sighed, shaking his head sadly. "She had excellent references when she applied and of course her father's side of the family is considered alums of the school but I fear that she is slightly off-sided at times."

'That's not how I'd describe her,' Kerry thought to himself, then focused on the Dean of Students. "Yes, Molly Jackson came to Fitzgaren to inform us about Ian's disappearance and that you told her to leave the matter alone." He pinned the now sweating man with cool eyes. "When I paid Ian's tuition after his scholarships fell through, I assumed that I was leaving my brother in the care of a well thought out, dignified place of learning."

"I believed that he would be taught, cared for and safe while in the care of your school and its faculty," he went on, voice growing harder as little lights of anger sparked in his eyes. "Where exactly did my thinking go wrong?"

Quillian coughed, nearly gulping his drink now. "This school takes great pride in both our curriculum, the success of our students, and also their care while they attend school here," he tried to sound indignant but couldn't quite pull it off.

"Your own father went to school here at one time and that's certainly one of the reasons that we have overlooked many of Ian's little oddities," he continued, knowing that he would have to throw up some blocks to keep this from getting worse. "His falling grades, missing classes while he associates with that Jackson girl, and of course his sudden dabbling in arts so dark that I had to remove him from..."

Glass cracked in the bookcase but the only visible evidence of Kerry's anger was the vein in his forehead that had started to throb slightly.

"You seriously do not want to start slinging lies around about my brother, Quillian," he spoke in a low tone, leaning forward in the chair to make his point.

"Ian has a 4.0 GPA or as close to one since your teachers have begun to single him out and you can't tell me any different since I've already seen his transcripts." Kerry was pleased to see surprise in the other man's gaze.

"As you mentioned, my father, both of my parents actually, attended this school and still have friends in the higher faculty who were only too interested in learning about Ian's more recent troubles, including your refusal to contact me when he vanished two bleedin' weeks ago," he commented.

Waiting to be sure that he had the man's full attention, Kerry sat back again. "Now, you can either tell me who is paying you off to ignore my brother's disappearance and to cause him trouble, or I pull all of my donations to this school and that will put the new wing and library in serious trouble, wouldn't you say?"

“I certainly don’t know what you are referring to,” the Dean snorted, insulted. “I treat all of my students the same and any trouble that your brother is in is of his own making and...”

This time there was no denying the anger that flashed in Kerry’s darkening eyes as he stood to slam his palms onto the desk. “You’re covering for a murder and a kidnapping, you blatantly did not inform Ian’s true family of what happened to him and by telling Molly that my grandmother told you to ignore the situation, that gave you away that you are deep in Kathleen’s pocket.”

Quillian began to deny those accusations when his perky secretary poked her head into his office, chewing her lip worriedly.

“Excuse me, Dean,” she began, eyeing Kerry warily and clearly upset. “Mr. Dugan of security just reported that the little matter you sent them to handle in the dorm would soon be taken care of and that two of the guards have taken Ms. Jackson into...”

Lights flashed in his eyes and Kerry threw a mental spell at the door to slam in the startled woman’s face before rounding on the now stuttering Dean of students.

“You bloody bastard, what in Hell’s name have you done?” he demanded harshly while silently reaching out for his brother. ‘Ryan, you bloody fool, answer me.’

Swallowing the sudden fear, since he had full knowledge of what Toryn Fitzgerald’s sons were and what they could do, Quillian shook his head. “I was told by my superiors that due to Miss Jackson’s obvious mental breakdown, that should she return to the school she should be taken to a hospital for observation and...”

“Where the bloody hell is she now, Quillian?” he demanded, still trying to reach Ryan when the first shot of pain came and that warned him of the danger. “Ryan, answer me!” this time he didn’t bother to make the contact silently.

“Your brother will be dead by now,” Quillian spoke lowly, sitting down heavily in his chair. “The guards were ordered to take the girl since she’s important for some reason and if they wanted to have sport with your other brother then they...”

One of Kerry’s biggest fears, aside from failing his brothers again, was of losing control of his powers. He had done so only once in his life and had sworn to always keep a tight rein on his emotions and powers so that he never lost that control again.

This time however, his temper and the fear of losing another of those he swore to keep safe made his control snap and his already darkening eyes turned to complete black smoke.

“You damned, bloody, deceitful bastard!” he snapped, energy flashing from his hand and nearly striking the now backpedaling school dean. “You not only sell out students that trusted you, but you’ve all but sold your very soul to the devil’s own consort!”

There was anger rumbling, and he barely heard the sound of distant thunder in the clear skies over Dublin as his power built.

“Your own Gran told me that you won’t use your powers to hurt, Fitzgerald!” Quillian sneered, hoping that he had been told correctly but with a sudden burst of energy found himself slammed across the room and held to the wall with an invisible fist to his throat.

“This advice is from a woman who has clearly gone to the other side and wants the death of her own blood.” Kerry could have laughed at that.

Anger made thunder roar in his own ears and he knew that he was within an inch of breaking the one vow that all of them had sworn never to do.

“Do what you will, so long as it may harm none” – Brenna Kerrigan Fitzgerald had taught her sons long ago that vow that all who held the Craft in respect followed.

Struggling against his own temper and the pain that was now searing in his side, Kerry shook for control.

“Kerry, what in the bloody hell are you up to?” Mac’s voice snapped from behind him. “Kerry!”

Having barely survived the wild ride to Trinity, Mac had chosen to come to the Dean’s office first to get Kerry before heading for the dorms.

Leaving Maggie to calm the nearly hysterical secretary, he’d entered the office to see a scene that he had honestly never thought he ever would again.

“Kerry, damn it! Let the man go!” he snapped again, hating this situation because while he’d always been able to easily break Ryan and Roarke up when they’d fight, handling Kerry’s darker emotions wasn’t quite as easy.

“He knew all about it, Mac,” his brother gritted, clearly fighting for control but wasn’t to the point yet that he was willing to ease off. “He knew the danger that Ian was in, he knew the guards would attack Molly and Ryan and...damn it!”

Glass shattered from the bookcase and the office windows as his rage simmered but the grip holding Quillian finally did release and the man slid down the wall, unconscious.

Waiting several more seconds to be certain that his brother was back in control, Mac approached him. “Well, that was interesting,” he snorted, shooting him a look that would have reminded Kerry of their mother if he had been paying attention. “Tantrum done now?”

“Shut up, Patrick,” the eldest Fitzgerald growled with his temper still on the surface, a fact evident by his use of his brother’s given name rather than his nickname while jerking the sports coat off in a rare show of frustration. “Why

are you here harping on me instead of finding the dorm and Ryan?" he demanded crossly, leaving the office to see Maggie calming the secretary.

"You were putting off waves of bad energy and lightning was coming from the damn windows, Kerry," Mac shot back as Michael White, the second in command of the Mavericks, entered the office. "You promised Mum and Da that you would never let that happen again."

"I know," Kerry whispered, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "Michael, do I need to ask?"

White, a blond haired mercenary, looked grim. "Cam called my team in after Roarke hooked a link with Ryan that was pretty bad because it made him sick," he explained, looking at the calming woman and figuring a call to their resident mystical family would be called for. "I have half a team of Mavericks securing the guard force here on the grounds but we really have no idea where Ryan's at."

"We can find him," Mac assured the American, feeling the pain flare again. "I seriously don't like this and I don't like what Ryan told me before he cut off, Kerry."

"Tell me on the way," he urged, glancing back into the office at the groaning Dean. "Mike, keep him from going anywhere because I think he knows more than what he said earlier."

White nodded as Maggie glanced up. "I'll stay here so that maybe I can finish calming Patty here down and see if she knows anything secondhand that may be of use."

"Watch your back, Maggie and if anything happens, yell for me," Mac urged, sharpening his gaze at her smirk. "I mean it this time, Mary Margaret. This isn't all Sebastian this time if what Ryan was talking about is true and..."

A noise like white static filled his head just as Kerry swore, grabbing the doorframe. "What the bloody hell caused that?" he asked, seeming to recall a similar feeling once but not being able to place when until he caught the dark look in his brother's eyes and then he knew when he had felt it.

Mac recalled the day fifteen years earlier having experienced a similar feeling and that was on the day their parents had been murdered. "Ryan."

"I'm going for him," Kerry snapped, knowing that he had to keep the others away from this. "You head Roarke off, Mac, because if he's been sick once I don't want him any closer to the dorms than necessary."

"Kerry, don't go in there blind," Mac snapped, not liking the idea of his brother going alone but also knowing why Kerry did not want Roarke close if he'd hooked a link in any way. "Shit," he muttered, feeling the ice cold on his heart again.

Chapter 11

The Dorm area:

Pain, nausea, and a near bone numbing lethargy had come over Ryan Fitzgerald even as the bloodstained knife flew down toward his unshielded back.

‘Ryan!’ a sharp feminine voice snapped in his head. ‘Move, now!’

His years of instinctively knowing his surroundings, of knowing how to beat the odds, and the best ways to survive had taught him one thing: when something, be it a voice, a ghost, or an inner sense said to move, then you had better move.

The guard had gotten overconfident in the defeat of his downed opponent.

So overconfident that he was taken completely by surprise when Ryan suddenly moved, instinct telling him where the threat was, and he rolled long legs into the guard, knocking him off balance.

The tight space of Ian’s dorm room didn’t allow for much space for an adequate defense, especially when his side and back were flaring with pain from the knife slashes and his head seemed cloudy from shock.

“You’re just prolonging your death, boy,” the guard sneered, easily regaining his footing to kick Ryan’s legs out from under him and then gave a double kick hard to his midsection. “Stay down.”

Grunting at the kick to his stomach took the wind out from under him, the black haired gambler hit the floor hard.

Reaching out more from instinct than anything else, he caught the man’s foot before it could connect again with his body and twisted hard, bringing him down with him.

“I don’t fold...a hand that easily, mate,” Ryan gritted, nearly screaming when his opponent landed a fist to the side that had been stabbed but lashed out with a stiff fingered jab that caught the other man in the throat.

With any normal opponent or if he’d had his normal strength, that blow would have taken the guard out, but it barely affected this man and Ryan wasn’t expecting the returning blow to his head that knocked him hard into the bookshelf.

Knowing that he was quickly losing ground, not to mention strength and without the time to concentrate to bring his powers to bear, Ryan was about to admit that this might be his end when a shimmering from near the door made him squint to focus.

Between the knife gashes and whatever energy was now in the area that was affecting him, Ryan was having a hard time seeing past the growing shadow of the guard but the shimmering in the door took his breath.

“Annie,” he breathed, positive that the wounds or shock were making him see things that couldn’t be real.

That and the knowledge that Sebastian had caused him to see the image of his former fiancée once already made him doubt this image as well. That was until she spoke.

“Despite your best desire to say otherwise, it isn’t your time to die yet, a stor (my dear),” her lilting musical accent seemed to flow into his mind as a smile that he recognized came over her pale skin. “You have so much yet to do, so much to become and it’s also time to quit being such a bloody jackass, Ryan.”

Anastasia Cleary’s smile was sad but sweet as she seemed to hold out a hand to him. “Trust your brothers, trust yourself, and above all, learn to trust your stubborn heart again.” She seemed to wink as the shimmering began to fade. “Oh and I’d duck if I were you, luv.”

“Last time I trusted my heart, you died, my luv,” Ryan muttered, pain numbing as the instinct of danger reminded him of the guard but as his eyes refocused he didn’t see the guard but the dark energy emitting from him.

“My Mistress will give your dying regards to your brother, boyo,” he remarked coldly, hefting the knife again as he aimed it toward Ryan’s heart. “Now die, son of Fitzgerald.”

Light flashed off the blade as it went to plunge fully into the black haired Irish gambler and security expert’s heart.

A brief moment of clarity caught Ryan as the fog in his mind cleared, so that he could see the blade but knew that he couldn’t block the knife in time.

Three loud shots echoed in the small dorm room and the dark guard seemed to falter as the shots struck him in the back, whirling him around to face the door with an expression of shock.

“Wha...no, I was promised...” he sputtered, looking down to see blood soak through his uniform shirt and was even more surprised when the knife was knocked from his hand with a well placed spinning kick.

The kick from the door had the knife flying up into the air, landing in an outstretched palm.

“Sorry, slick, but if I want to get paid for the last job I did then I can’t have you sticking the boss with this thing,” a sultry voice that spoke with an accent that was hard to place unless one knew its speaker remarked casually.

The speaker examined the knife before discarding it for one pulled from a boot sheath.

“Go back to the hell that spawned you as my great-great grandmother on either side would likely have told you.”

Tossing the knife into the heart of the now dying guard, a deep howl was heard somewhere and as the guard screamed in rage and agony, a thick black cloud shot from his eyes and up toward the ceiling while he collapsed to the floor.

“Y’know, when you told Olav that you didn’t need any help unless he knew a good demon hunter I honestly thought you were being your usual arrogant self.” Dark eyes under long lashes glanced down at the corpse before lifting up to Ryan’s. “That is until I just saw what I did. Boss, you really do attract all the wrong sort of trouble, don’t you?”

Pain, shock, and exhaustion all had made Ryan tired enough that merely keeping his eyes open was a strain. However, the soft, sultry voice with an accent that seemed to mix East European and Ireland that pierced his ears actually made him groan.

“God, they were all right.” Ryan muttered, his mind clearing but the pain was still intense. “All the rotten things that I’ve...done and I get stuck with you as the incarnation of Hell incarnate.”

Andrea ‘Andi’ McCabe rolled her jade green eyes, slipping her knife back into its sheath before kneeling next to the injured man, slipping her glossy long black hair over a shoulder.

“You’re even more charming while you’re bleeding, Ryan,” she remarked sarcastically, seeing the pain that he was in but pleased by his reactions to her. “Going to tell me who Mr. Personality with the interesting sacrificial knife was?”

Ryan’s eyes closed, just wanting to sleep but his more basic instincts still didn’t trust his surroundings. “Something bad, babe,” he whispered, making one eye open to gaze at the black haired woman with a bronze tan on her normally creamy white skin. “You real, Andi?”

“Ask me that after you wake up in the hospital, hotshot,” the woman rolled her eyes, lightly brushing hair away from his closing eyes. “Any orders before you pass out?”

Knowing that he was losing this battle, Ryan let his eyes close and began to allow his consciousness to slip. “Aye,” he whispered, the Irish accent coming on heavier now. “Don’t shoot my brother when he comes in the...door.”

“How the hell will I know...?” Andi started to ask but swore bitterly in Latin when her current employer and arch nemesis fell over against her, unconscious. “How am I supposed to know what your damn brother even looks like?”

As the security agent began to lift her boss’s shirt to examine the one wound a strange tingling began tickling the nape of her neck. She moved a hand slowly to the weapon she had sheathed under the electric blue leather jacket that she wore when a glance to a reflection in the mirror showed the new enemy.

“Stop right there, ace,” she warned evenly, whirling on one knee to pull and aim the 9mm Beretta but nearly gasped when the new arrival just moved a hand and the gun vanished.

Kerry had felt the pain as he entered the building but as he had gotten closer to the room that he knew was the epicenter of this threat, the emotions had changed, though he did admit that the gunshots he heard had startled even him since he hadn't seen guns anywhere in any images.

"Sebastian is a bigoted, racist, chauvinistic warlock so I can't see him employing a woman to do his main dirty work." He eyed this raven-haired woman cautiously as she knelt next to his brother. "Who are you?"

Andi had learned early in her life not to be backed down by any man and even though the sheer power in this one's eyes was enough to make her wary, her own attitude had her sneering.

"Sure, ace, as soon as you give me your name," she shot back, standing quickly to place herself between the prone body of her boss and this new blond haired man. "I don't know what in the hell this stuck up arrogant jackass has gotten himself mixed up in and I don't care. That thing on the floor was trying to use him as a target with a rare sacrificial knife," she snapped, jade eyes shining.

Kerry's eyes sharpened as he looked at the body of the guard to the knife and for the first time he felt the emanations from the room. Nodding slowly, he tried a surface scan of the woman but felt it blocked and this time his sigh was disgusted.

"Why in Finn's name can't any of my brothers bring a woman into this that I can scan?" he wondered aloud, not liking this but also not getting any negative vibrations from the woman. Something from her words told him who she was but not what she was doing in Dublin.

"My name, Ms. McCabe, is Kerrigan Douglas Nolan Fitzgerald and that's my brother you are currently keeping me from seeing to," he spoke calmly, meeting and holding her eyes.

Considering herself a good judge of character, Andi watched this man for another moment before finally realizing his eyes were the same as her employer's.

"You're one of his brothers," she reasoned, slowly stepping aside but not too far as he quickly knelt down. "He needs a hospital."

Kerry had lifted Ryan's bloodied shirt to look at the side wound, seeing that it wasn't deep but it still would have caused pain and by judging the knife for what it was, he also knew that it would have caused sickness.

"Mac, come up here," he called mentally to his stressed out brother. "Bring Cam with you."

Slowly easing Ryan over to his side allowed Kerry to view the knife marks on his back and a gentle touch also showed him the other wounds and bruises that were visible yet.

"He'll be cared for but not at the hospital," he told her, seeing her start to argue. "Ms. McCabe, I realize that Ryan probably has not shared his heritage

with you or those he works with so that will make this very difficult for you to comprehend.”

As he was considering how much he should reveal, Kerry flipped a mental coin to make a choice that would probably send his brother into a tantrum when he woke up and discovered it.

“I’ll explain what I can after we get Ryan to a more stable and safe location but you must trust that my brother Mac and I will do everything we can for Ry’s injuries,” he assured her, looking up as he heard running steps. “I suppose I should have told Mac to leave you outside?”

Roarke threw him a hard look and started to comment when he caught site of Andi and stopped, concern and caution making him hesitate. “Who’s she?”

“I assumed that she’s Ryan’s current favorite topic to complain and bitch about, other than you,” Kerry replied, seeing her look between them as Mac walked in. “Ms. Andrea McCabe, Ryan’s brothers Mac and Roarke.”

Blinking at the men, Andi made a quick note to smack her employer for keeping things to himself. “Okay, so I knew he had brothers that he hadn’t seen in awhile...though he was obsessed with knowing where this one was usually,” she eyed Roarke for a moment then back to Kerry. “I still say he needs a hospital.”

“Cam’s got his medic in town and as soon as we get him out of here I can see how bad those knife cuts are.” Mac nudged Roarke back slightly so that he could kneel down. “The issue is where do we go? Fitzgaren is too far, as is my place in Cork, but we can’t trust any Fitzgerald holdings in Dublin.”

Kerry knew this, standing to look around the room. “Perhaps, but the Kerrigan side of the family does have a home in the city that we can use while we figure out what happened here today and where they took Molly,” he declared, picking up images from the room prior to the attack.

“Ian, what the bloody hell have you been up to?” he asked aloud after seeing the same books that had alarmed Ryan.

“Kerry,” Roarke had been kneeling down after seeing something in the closet. “Ryan’s jacket has something interesting in it.”

Mac turned to look over his shoulder, determining how much he could treat on site. “Knowing Ryan, that jacket could have anything from a rat to a deck of marked cards in it.”

“Umm, actually it does have cards in the inside pocket,” Roarke snorted then held up the leather bound journal for his brothers. “It’s Ian’s journal. Anyone want to take bets that this is why they snagged Molly?”

“I’m leaning toward Molly being taken because someone learned that maybe she could be used against Ian and also because they could believe that she has control of that journal,” Kerry nodded, seeing Cameron Young in the door.

“We’ll take Ryan to our Mother’s family house in Fitzwilliam Square,” he told the mercenary leader, motioning to the room. “I want the chest, the books, and anything else that you feel is out of place brought there.”

Cam had a strange hunch after looking around that would be practically the whole damn room. “I have a chief Inspector down below who wants a chat with the Dean.”

“No one but you, O’Malley, or one of us gets near Quillian until I get out of him exactly who he’s taking orders from and where his guards were ordered to take Molly Jackson,” Kerry replied, using a cloth to lift the fallen dagger from the floor. “Handle that.”

Rolling his eyes, Cam merely nodded. “Sure, I’m used to working miracles,” he muttered, choosing to add. “Nick’s back from Savernake. He’s snarling in a dead mystical language so I can guess what he found out isn’t good but he does say that he can take care of your little slip earlier with the secretary.”

“What did you do?” Roarke asked curiously.

He’d noticed that both of his brothers’ emotions were high but was still too close to Ryan. A fact that Roarke knew was the reason that Mac was keeping him from actual physical contact with their brother.

“I lost my temper earlier in a way that I swore I’d never do again,” Kerry slowly replied, moving to help Mac get Ryan up. “You can go get Jessica and Maggie while I help Mac.”

Roarke clearly didn’t like that idea but chose to keep silent when he figured that the black haired woman who was slowly tapping a booted foot wasn’t going to keep her own opinions silent.

“One of you will explain what in the hell is going on, right?” she demanded, surprised by how easy and effortlessly they handled Ryan’s deadweight.

“Why was the guy on the floor trying to kill Ryan, what’s he been keeping from the rest of us, and just who has been kidnapped and why?” Andi went on, ticking points off on her finger. “I’ve felt better vibes listening to my gypsy relatives tell tales, not to mention my Gaelic roots.”

Mac nearly lost his grip as he saw Kerry’s frown grow deeper. “Gaelic?” he repeated, feeling like taking a sharp object to his own head. “Where exactly do those roots come from?”

“My Dad’s family has roots from the Donegal area. He still says that we have kin there as well,” Andi replied easily, not seeing either brother exchange knowing looks.

“We have a black haired gypsy with Irish/Gaelic roots. Guess that explains why she’s been driving him nuts,” Mac muttered under his breath, shooting Kerry a wry look. “Are you going to drop that little bomb on our hot headed, so-sure of himself brother?”

Kerry sighed at the question that only he heard. “No and neither are you,” he replied, seeing that the woman had no problem going ahead of them to open doors or dealing with possible obstacles. “This is Ian’s turn to face both his fears and his future and I’m afraid that unless we crack this mystery soon, he may not have that chance.”

“Then lets hope that baby brother is still alive to give us the time to find both him and Molly,” Mac sighed, exiting the dorm to see that Maggie had brought their rental car around so that they could place Ryan inside.

“He’s alive or we’d all be in agony, but I can’t say how much longer Sebastian will leave him that way,” Kerry sighed, seeing Mac’s eyes. “I guess you didn’t like what you learned at the Sullivan’s?”

Mac slowly eased his brother into the car. “You could say that,” he muttered, looking at Kerry. “I think that woman is tied into this mess more than we thought.”

“First, let’s get Ryan to the house so you and I can handle the wounds and get him back on his feet,” Kerry urged, looking across at Roarke. “We’ll need to keep him away until the worst is over and then we’ll figure out how to find Ian and Molly.”

Hoping that he sounded more confident than he honestly felt, Kerry silently sent out his strongest empathic message to his missing sibling. ‘May the white circle of light, the God & Goddess of Spirit and the Lord of our ancestor find and protect you.’

If Kerry felt the tiny tingle along his skin or the tiny tinkling of music from nearby, he didn’t let on as they left Trinity University.

They were also unaware of the hooded cloaked figure that watched from a distance, red eyes flashing in rage before a swish of silk took her away.

Chapter 12

County Wicklow, Ireland:

Waking up with a feeling worse than the time that she drank an entire bottle of rum from her Dad's liquor cabinet, Molly Jackson could have sworn that she was dead.

Barely recalling her last moments for a long time, she decided to stay still until her head and stomach settled.

Slowly the young light-skinned black woman began to remember the last moments before things went black.

Molly recalled being back at the university in Ian's dorm room with his brother, Ryan, and they had located things that the girl knew Ryan had found disconcerting.

It was when they found Ian's journal that things had gone bad and she saw in the back of her mind guards coming in and Ryan telling her to get out. She remembered something grabbing her in the hall and that was it until slowly waking up...wherever.

"Charming place," she muttered, wincing as her own voice echoed in her head. "Okay, Molly, time to see where we are."

Slowly opening her eyes, she moved her eyes slowly to gauge her location and curiosity overcame fear for the moment.

The room that she found herself in was dank and damp as it was pure concrete and while it obviously was meant to be a cell, it had a twin bed with brass headboard, a tiny sink, and a single curtain that covered a toilet.

Sitting up carefully to check for injuries, a part of Molly was surprised to have only a few bruises so far. However, a deep feeling in her stomach warned her that would probably change soon.

Noticing that her satchel was gone, Molly was nearly giddy that they, whoever they were, had left her waist bag on her.

'Not so smart after all,' she decided, feeling with what her grandmother had always called her inner eye and knowing that there were no cameras in this cell.

Quickly working, she took what she felt that she'd need from the pouch and put a couple things together that she learned from both sides of her family.

She had placed the final object back into her pouch when she heard the door open.

A tall gaunt faced...creature since Molly couldn't define the eight-foot tall giant with the sunken face, pasty white skin, and black eyes a man, beckoned her to come.

“Come into my web said the spider to the fly,” she muttered, hooking the pouch back on before slowly following the creature since she knew there was little chance of escaping this place yet and she had no intention of that anyway until she learned more or found her friend.

“Hey, big guy?” she tried conversationally as she was led up a good ways until she actually felt like she had crossed another plane of reality from the cell to a well decorated home. “Where’re you taking me, *mon ami*?”

Utter silence was her only reply, as her guide led her along a long hallway that was covered in darkly painted portraits.

Taking the silence as a way to get her bearings, Molly slowly looked around.

She saw many windows but couldn’t tell what was outside them, but the main thing she caught was a side hall that led to a servants’ kitchen and an unbarred back door.

Her excitement for that was short lived as she saw another gaunt faced giant guarding the door.

Stopping by a heavy wooden door, the giant pulled it open and motioned her into a room that was far longer than she was expecting.

Always an avid reader with a strong imagination, Molly’s favorite tales had been of the medieval times where knights had gathered around long tables feasting on fine foods.

The table that she was looking at now reminded her slightly of those tales, only the knights at this table were sure to have been the blackest, meanest, and cruelest ones in the kingdom. The table was of heavy oak, draped in a deep red cloth, and surrounded by many high backed chairs.

Sitting at the very end of the table was the same silver haired man that she had seen in recent dreams. Only this time he was dressed more formally in a blood red shirt with sleeves that seemed to puff at the wrists like a robe and black slacks.

The silver haired woman whose hair still showed signs of her natural black hair caught Molly’s attention and she remembered seeing her before.

“*Dia duit* (Hello), Molly Brianna Jackson, great-granddaughter to Maeve O’Neill,” Sebastian said, standing to greet her cordially, motioning with an elegant hand to a seat. “Welcome to my...home for the moment. Please, sit down.”

Wary now, Molly did sit but several seats away while the giant remained close by her. “I always thought evil warlocks lived in dusty castle towers or caves on islands where they could plot,” she remarked casually, fingers gripping what she had tucked into her fist for support.

Sebastian's silver eyebrow lifted over the scarred part of his face, considering the young woman's insolence. "I suppose your blood has been diluted over the generations since your family left for that backwater country they call America now. Also, to have it diluted by marriage to lesser races I shouldn't expect you to know how dangerous it is to speak to me in such a manner," he mused, sitting back down to lift a wine goblet to his lips.

"She's merely a child with no true knowledge of the heritage that was spurned," Kathleen Murphy Fitzgerald assured him, sipping her own wine and viewing the girl with interest. "If she had that knowledge she would have known to leave matters that did not concern her alone."

"Curiosity always kills the cat as my Momma used to say," Molly shrugged, this woman bothered her more than the man but she refused to show it. "Though where I come from most grandmothers don't try to kill their grandkids."

Sebastian hid his smile behind his goblet, impressed with this child's moxie at speaking to Kathleen in such an impudent manner. "Despite what Kerry or his brothers have no doubt told you, neither Kathleen nor I actually want any of her grandsons to die," he explained calmly, leaning forward to address the girl fully.

Waving a hand in the air, images began appearing to help explain things. "As I'm sure you've been told by now, her grandsons are the final embodiment of an ancient prophecy that was created eons ago."

"You look pretty good for an evil Warlock who stays alive by spells, sacrifices, and eating the souls of others," Molly snorted, shifting a look at the woman. "That how you keep your looks too?"

Before Kathleen could snarl, Sebastian grabbed her hand to urge restraint. "Again, one of the lies that Toryn, Kathleen's only surviving child, told his own sons in order to make them fear what could be a most wondrous destiny," he scoffed, allowing the images to change.

"Yes, I am very old and I make no denials that I use the abilities granted to me to keep myself alive and also to keep power over my servants. That is a choice I made, as any witch chooses the path he or she will follow," Sebastian tried to make the explanation seem reasonable.

"For many generations, it was a constant battle of wills, wits, and amusement between myself and the current Lord of Fitzgaren. Neither of us had any true advantage, nor was any Lord able to bring about the possible completion of the foretold prophecy that could very well end my life and power."

Molly was following this tale with more interest than she was showing as she ignored the food and drink placed before her. The story that this silver haired devil was spinning was one that her great-granny had regaled her with many times.

"The prophecy could only happen if the Lord and Lady of Fitzgaren had five heirs live to adulthood. Then if they each completed a task, a part of their own circle, then the full circle would be formed and you'd be toast," she finished for him, lifting an eyebrow coyly. "That about right?"

"Well, well, well, you are certainly full of surprises, little Molly," Sebastian frowned, not certain that he liked her knowledge. "Kerry or Patrick told you more than I was expecting them to this soon."

Molly eyed the plate of heavy beef with an odd gravy on it cautiously and despite having her stomach rumble, pushed it away. "Ian's brothers didn't tell me jack, sport," she replied, shrugging. "My family on Dad's side loves to tell old stories and legends of their homeland and that was the one that my great-granny was always telling me."

"For some reason, she seemed to think that it was important that I knew about it," she went on, looking between the couple. "Kerry told me that you killed their folks while trying to get to Roarke and that she still wants him dead."

Kathleen slapped a fork to the table, her patience with this impudent girl growing thin. "Evil is as evil does, girl," she snapped, eyes bright with hate. "I lost my son that day when it should have been his son and the whore that died. Now, I'll help Sebastian claim what is rightfully his and he will grant me what I desire most."

"Is that power or death?" Molly asked, thinking. "You want the death of one grandson but someone else wanted Ian's death or else he wouldn't have been expecting to die by the age of nineteen."

"If Ian was killed, then the brothers would have been reduced to four and the so-called prophecy couldn't have been completed, so why not wait a few more months?" she challenged, watching the warlock's expression change. "Is it because you'll get more of a thrill out of killing him or the joy of hurting his brothers?"

Sebastian leaned back in his chair, crossing one leg over his knee as he regarded this girl who was much brighter than he had counted on.

"No, actually I couldn't be assured that Ian would have been killed as Kathleen was told," he replied, shrugging. "Mortals, even ones with pure evil intent, can often be deterred from acting in a way that they should."

This one stumped Molly until something she had seen in his dorm room returned in a flash. "Those satanic books, the dagger, and other things that Ian had...he had them because he was seeking a protection spell against something far darker than you or his Gran, wasn't he?"

Finally, he couldn't help himself and Sebastian laughed aloud, pounding on the table in amusement. "By the Dark Gods, Katie girl, but I like this one's spirit." He laughed again. "She's smart. Now I see why she was chosen for him."

If anything he would have said caught her by surprise this odd comment had done it. "Say what? Who chose me and chose me for whom?"

"Ah so Maeve didn't tell you everything, I see," Sebastian nodded, not surprised by this. "There is a part of the prophecy that rarely gets told in these modern days with the free-thinking ways of females.

"Yes, it takes five heirs to begin it but for each to complete their own circle, to face their darkest fears or secrets, they must also find the correct soul mate that fate has ultimately chosen for him." Sebastian noticed his companions' sneer. "Or in some cases, the mate that my esteemed rival chose had a say it in herself."

Considering that, Molly was figuring how that actually played into things but then shoved it out of her mind for more important things. "Who was going to kill Ian and where is he?"

"Who is no longer an issue, girl," Kathleen replied coolly, not bothering to hide her dislike of the young American. "Ian will serve another purpose now since I know the length that Kerrigan will go to protect his younger brothers."

"As for where the boy is," Sebastian smiled reassuringly but it reminded Molly of the alligators she'd seen in the bayous of Louisiana, "he's being prepared to join us soon.

"While we wait, I wanted to explain why you were brought here." He tried to look serious but didn't really accomplish it in her mind. "Kathleen and I are hoping that you can convince Ian to help us break this chain of ever constant battle between myself and the Lord of Fitzgaren."

Trying to recall the stories that had been told in her youth, Molly wasn't clear on how that could be done without death.

However, one thing was clear to her and that was that this silver haired, silver-tongued devil was lying through his teeth.

"Master," interrupted a butler with wrinkles but dressed in fine clothes spoke from the door of the grand dining room. "The men have fetched the boy."

"That's very good, Giles. Have them bring him in so that perhaps his young friend will see that he's basically fine," Sebastian instructed, smiling reassuringly at Molly. "Ian, much like his father, is a stubborn, hardheaded boy so he did bring some early harsh treatment on himself."

Molly swung dark eyes to stare at the ancient Warlock when she heard the heavy door open and shifted to look, feeling her heart skip a beat and her stomach drop into her boots.

Two pasty-faced giants half-led and half-dragged Ian Fitzgerald into the dining room.

The youngest Fitzgerald had always been bright eyed with a healthy tan and his wavy sunny blond hair usually tended to fall into those same eyes.

Now as he was led along, it was evident that life since his disappearance had not been easy or healthy.

Ian's tanned skin showed the signs of bruises and scrapes and he was a sickly color. The same sunny blond hair that so many girls on campus had admired was filthy and his eyes were sunken, shallow and clearly having trouble focusing after so long of being held in total blackness.

While those conditions alarmed the girl from Boston, what really upset her was when she saw how her friend was dragging his right leg and then noticed the dark stain that covered the material of his jeans and she realized it was blood.

"He brought this on himself?" Molly demanded, reacting on instinct and not caring about possible risk to herself when she shoved to her feet, pushing the giant nearest her aside and running the distance to her friend. "Ian!"

Ignoring Kathleen's expression, Sebastian motioned his servants not to touch the girl.

Blinking rapidly to allow his tired, weak eyes to readjust to light and reality, Ian had a hard time seeing fully and so didn't immediately recognize Molly until she was close enough to wrap her arms tightly around his bruised mid section.

Hearing him gasp in pain, she loosened her grip but only marginally while throwing a look over her shoulder. "What did you people do to him?"

Up close, Molly could see more than she wanted to of the young Irishman's numerous injuries and she also could tell by touch and an inner sense that not all of these wounds were caused with a physical hand.

Visions of black power and snapping jaws seemed to come at her in a virtual wave of nauseating emotion and pain.

"Oh, Ian, *mon cher*," Molly whispered, fighting to keep the tears from showing either in her eyes or in her voice. "Are you okay?"

Having jerked at the initial physical contact, Ian's foggy brain that had been suffering from the shock and pain of his injuries and whatever spells used to keep him dormant slowly seemed to clear with the soft touch.

The voice, the accent in it that he'd found exotic from the moment that he had first heard it finally began to weave into his thoughts and Ian slowly also recognized the small, soft body pressing against his exhausted, agonized one.

"Molly?" he whispered in a voice barely audible, the Irish brogue of his birth strained by endless hours of not using it except to scream in pain.

Either not hearing him or not caring, Molly's eyes were snapping at the two giants holding Ian's arms.

"Get your damn, filthy hands off of him and keep 'em off!"

Fear and anger had now taken hold of her as the girl was starting to whirl back to throw her opinion of Sebastian, his line, and what he could do when she was taken by surprise, feeling her friend's arms suddenly grasping her to him.

"Why...what's Molly doing here?" Ian finally demanded, as his eyes cleared more so that he could see his surroundings.

He saw the massive dinning room, the giants that were ancient servants to Sebastian and...emotions changed when he finally saw not only Sebastian but also his Grandmother.

Looking down slowly, Ian found himself gazing into the big, deep brown eyes of his best friend and he saw the fear that she had been hiding.

"Molly," he whispered, slowly reaching up to stroke a shaking finger down her cheek almost to reassure himself that she wasn't a cruel joke by his captors. "*A Dbia dbilis* (My God), you...you're real."

"Well, duh, Irish," Molly tried to keep her voice light but she heard the tears in her small laugh, wanting to reassure him. "You know anyone else with an accent like I have?"

Not sure if he wanted to laugh or cry, Ian's arms tightened around her on instinct as his relief at seeing her quickly turned to bitter anger at Sebastian. "Molly doesn't have anything to do with this. She's not like Jess," he stated, fear building for the girl. "She's normal. Just a friend from school and..."

"She's actually far more than that as I'm sure your brothers have learned by now, Ian," Kathleen replied, looking at both her grandson and his friend coolly. "Your little 'friend' has...a unique Celtic bloodline deep in her diluted blood and so that makes her far from normal."

"She's also a good tool to assure me of your future cooperation," Sebastian remarked, spearing a piece of meat with his fork. "You proved far more resilient and stubborn than I counted on, boy. So I have had to resort to other means of control and assistance."

The pain in his leg from the hellhound's teeth and claws had left him not only in pain, but also fevered and weak. Knowing this fact, knowing how his powers had been blocked since his capture, and imprisonment, this excuse seemed stupid but something else did sink in.

"I won't let you use Molly and I won't be used as a tool against my brothers," he spat, blue-gray eyes sparking in emotion. "Kill me now but you won't touch Molly in any way or I swear that I will find a way to destroy you. Both of you."

Sebastian's eyes narrowed but Kathleen shot to her feet in outrage, her timeless features that she kept due to magic spells began to slip in that anger.

“You will mind your tongue, boy!” she snapped, lifting her hand to magically strike her youngest grandchild but found something interfering like static in the room. “Your death may be someone else’s desire but that can be easily changed.”

“Why? You never intended for any of my father’s sons to live through this,” Ian shot back, wincing as Molly shifted slightly so that she could support him more.

“The only way for you to get back the house in Fitzgaren and the power that comes from being Lady of the bloody Manor would be for all of us to be dead,” he went on.

He was too tired, too emotionally drained to care about the possible danger even as he felt the poison in his blood burn. “You’ve been planning this probably since the day he butchered my parents.”

“I did tell you that these lads got Brenna’s intelligence, Katie,” Sebastian spoke, amused even while turning serious. “Ian, keep a civil tongue or it may not only be Ryan who ends up dead this week.”

Ian had been about to allow his friend to help him into the chair farthest away from Sebastian and Kathleen when that last comment sunk in and his eyes shot up.

“What about Ryan?” he demanded, seeing Molly pale a little. “What?”

Recalling the attack in the dorm, she also recalled the attack on her friend’s brother. “We...we were in your dorm room looking and these guards showed up and...” she stopped, seeing the alarm in his gaze but this time knew it was more from what they might have found. “These guards showed up and Ryan told me to run. That’s when I was grabbed.”

Already sickened that Molly had been pulled into this hell because of him, the thought of his brother, any of them, being harmed in any way made him wish that he had been killed.

“You bloody bastard!” Forgetting his wounds and lack of powers, Ian’s eyes flashed and even he was shocked by the wave of fire that shot out from the normally calm fireplace toward Sebastian.

Throwing a hand up to quickly dispel the flames, it was obvious that the ancient Warlock hadn’t been expecting the boy to do that. He exhibited rage in the form of the invisible blow that knocked Ian across the dining room, crashing hard into the wall.

“Leave him alone!” Molly screamed, feeling a sharp tug as she ran to where Ian was still laying motionless but ignored it, not realizing until much later how vital that would be to them both.

While dropping to her knees, the young woman from Boston suddenly realized with a jolt of terror what she was going to be used for, and not wanting to a tool against her best friend, Molly quickly decided it was time to do something. Even if it was something stupid that could get them both killed.

Ian was groaning and beginning to stir when she lightly touched him, relieving her that he hadn't suffered worse.

"Ian?" she whispered, taking a quick look over her shoulder to see that Sebastian and Kathleen had returned to their meal. "You in there, Irish?"

Somewhere between wanting to throttle her for that nickname and throw up, he slowly opened his eyes to look up and saw both fear and a look that he recognized as one that always got her into trouble.

"*Tá brón orm*, Molly (I'm sorry, Molly)," he murmured, forgetting and lapsing into his native language as he did infrequently. "This crap never should have involved you...I never should..."

"I got myself involved first, pal," she countered, not sure how much time they'd have as she pressed what she had been holding into his hand. "Listen to me, Irish."

Molly, as a bored but creative child, had created her own little language combining the languages that she had been raised around, French, Irish, and a Cajun French. It had been a great tool that she and her brothers had used many times and she had taught it to Ian soon after meeting him.

Now, she hoped that secret language would be a bonus in her desperate plan.

"I think your powers are coming back because I had that close to you and the Claddagh medal is what protected you mainly," she spoke in a low tone, seeing his eyes widen at the mixed languages. "Ian, we need to try to get away from them and...I don't know if your brothers, whom we really need to talk about, will find us in time or what's happened since I was caught."

It took Ian a moment to catch up on his translation, looking at the Claddagh medal and feeling the warmth of it in his palm. "Molly, I don't have the strength yet to make a spell strong enough to defeat both of them. I'm also too hurt to make a run for it, assuming we'd even get out a door." He realized that she was scared and as someone who had seen the lengths that Sebastian and his grandmother would go to, he couldn't blame her.

"You don't have to do either, Irish," the girl assured him, unzipping the pouch on her waist to take out two small vials along with the small pouch of ingredients that she'd whipped up earlier. "Can you...teleport?"

"Teleport?" Ian repeated, frowning but considering. "As a lad, I could but it's been years since I tried that spell," he admitted, going on slowly. "It takes a lot of energy and concentration to work a teleportation spell and those are two things that I'm lacking today."

Shaking her head, Molly had already worked it out in her head. "You know the spell, I have the strength to spare, and we both have the firm desire to get the hell outta this place," she remarked, feeling the cold in the room change. "Ian...you have to trust me or..."

"I gave you the chance to play nice with this arrangement, boy," Sebastian laid his napkin down, standing up to motion to two of the giants. "That little act of disobedience will cost both you and your little friend a great deal."

Eyes that seemed to glow black with dark energy, Sebastian shook his head sadly at his young captives but shifted a more interested look at Molly.

"Though before I turn this one over to someone who has an interest in her, I may try her myself." His smile was cruel and there was no mistaking the intent of his words. "The short time that I had with your brother's whore reminded me that there are certain games that I can only play with a slave."

Molly swallowed the burst of terror that brought. "I'd kill myself before I let you touch me," she snapped, feeling Ian's hand grasp hers as he struggled back to his feet.

"Little girl, I can certainly make you wish for death. However, you won't be dying until you've served a much grander purpose," Sebastian returned, nodding at his servants. "Take the boy back to the realm of pitch but place the charming young lady in my private chambers."

Squeezing her hand a little tighter, Ian forced both pain and fear aside as he struggled for power. "I can't work a full spell in this house, luv," he whispered against her ear, feeling her shiver and knowing it was from fright over the Warlock's words. "We need to clear the threshold."

"Okay, I can do that," Molly returned softly, whispering a silent prayer to her ancestors for help, guidance, and protection before opening the one bottle in her hand. "Go to hell, demon and while you're there take that bitch with you because you aren't hurting Ian anymore."

As Kathleen chuckled and Sebastian laughed, the second bottle was opened and both were tossed across the room, landing between Molly and Ian and their captors.

"Smoke and ash, ash and smoke, cast your cloudy spell to shield and deter," Molly chanted as heavy black, gray smoke began to fill the room, and she didn't waste time.

Grabbing Ian by the wrist, she bolted for the main door of the dining room that had been left unguarded.

"No!" Sebastian roared, shocked by the spell and the smoke that filled the room. "I do not want them to escape and I will not be bested by a child witch with no clue to her heritage! Find them!" he snapped at his servants, whirling to see his accomplice scowling. "Your grandsons are proving far more tedious than I desire, Katie."

She couldn't agree more as the smoke from the minor spell began to fade. "I blame the Galway whore that my son married but don't worry, Sebastian, they will not get out of the house," she reassured him, certain of this fact.

"What did you do back there?" Ian demanded, admittedly shocked by the trick his friend had pulled but also in too much pain to ask more.

After escaping the main dining room, Molly knew exactly the way to head and kept a grip on Ian. "Later, Irish," she replied, feeling him start to fall when his injured leg almost buckled. "Ian..."

"Molly, just go," he urged quickly, accepting that he would slow them down too much even if they could get out of the house. "I'm...hurt too bad, those damn mutts tore my leg up and I just want you out of here."

Pausing a step to meet his eyes, Molly took a chance. "I'm petrified and out of my league here, Ian," she admitted, lowering her eyes. "I'm scared and I know what that bastard back there wants to do but...I'm not leaving without you. Now come on."

Swallowing the pain and nausea, Ian took a deep breath while pocketing his medal and asking for help silently to those that had come before him. 'Help me protect this woman,' he prayed fervently.

"There's the door," Molly was thrilled that the servants' kitchen seemed empty but caught the giant from the corner of her eye. "Ian!"

The shout warned him in time to avoid the blow that would have crushed his skull. Before he could summon even a small amount of power, a high pitched squelch-like sound blew into the kitchen from the now open door, knocking the demon servant to his knees in agony.

"What the hell was that?" Molly was gaping when Ian grabbed her hand to pull her out the door and into a gray, damp, bleak, landscape.

As soon as they crossed the threshold of the door, Ian felt the burning increase but he also felt the spark of power grow and the warmth of something like fingers brush his face.

"Give me your hands," he told Molly quickly, realizing they only had a small window before his grandmother's servants would be on them.

Reacting without question, Molly held out her hands and allowed her friend to grasp them. Swallowing her questions, she only asked one. "Can you do this?"

"As Ry likes to say, it's a sucker bet to ask me otherwise, luv," the boy hoped he sounded more confident than he actually felt as he did turn serious. "Molly, I need you to listen to my thoughts and just picture us someplace else. Can you do that?"

Swallowing a laugh that would have been choked with panic and only nodding, her hands clasped his tighter but did meet his eyes. "I'm scared, Ian,"

"So am I, muirnin (sweetheart)," Ian admitted, concentrating on the spell in his mind but a sudden urge made him pause a second. "Molly?" he waited until she was looking at him fully before speaking again. "*Tá mé chomh mór sin i ngrá leat* (I love you so much)."

Seeing her surprise, Ian took advantage of that and the unknown power that his American friend was giving off to boost his rarely used teleportation spell. 'Trust me,' he thought to her silently, using their joined hands to pull her closer and sealing his spell at the same moment that he chose to kiss her.

The spell shot brilliant blue lights into the overcast skies but it was the gentle kiss and following explosion of bursting lights that gave the spell the added boost.

Two giants crossing the doorway at that moment exploded into agonized howls as the lights of the spell hit them and they blew apart.

As the lights slowly dissipated, Molly Jackson and Ian Fitzgerald had vanished from that place.

"They wouldn't escape the house, Katie girl?" Sebastian sneered from the doorway, looking at the remains of his servants. "Damn, it takes a lot to make them."

Kathleen Murphy Fitzgerald frowned, tapping a nail on the doorframe. "So, there is more to this girl than we thought and to my grandson, but they couldn't have gone far in the state that he's in," she replied calmly, accepting this. "This location is too far from any place that he would know to go to. Release your hounds since they have Ian's scent. They'll find them sure enough."

"They had better," Sebastian muttered, whistling for his hound master. "Find the children," he ordered, scowling. "Alive is preferable, but just find them!"

As the frothing, red-eyed beasts were turned loose, neither Sebastian nor the Fitzgerald's grandmother saw the tiny glittering lights floating nearby as messages passed from this realm to the realm few believed existed under the many fairy mounds scattered around.

Chapter 13

Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin, Ireland:

The Kerrigan house in the district of Dublin known as Fitzwilliam was maintained in case friends of the family ever needed a place to stay or in this case, in the event that their daughter's sons needed a safe place close by to take refuge, heal, and plan.

Lorcan and Fiona Kerrigan rarely left their family home in Galway these days but felt that maintaining homes in other cities was always a wise move.

The townhouse-like home in the heart of the area was usually open to drop in visitors and the staff knew not to ask questions when people would arrive. The arrival of their employers' grandsons warned that this was one time when questions shouldn't be asked and help would be granted.

"Lord preserve us!" a middle aged butler exclaimed upon being summoned to the rear entrance to the home.

Thinning red hair, green eyes hidden behind thick-lensed glasses, Charles McMillian had worked for the Kerrigan family since his youth as it was a tradition in his family. He had been taking care of the Dublin house since shortly after Miss Brenna, Lorcan and Fiona's middle child, had died.

It had been a sad day Charles recalled when Miss Brenna and her husband were laid to rest, leaving their five sons behind and as he learned from others, mostly in the care of Toryn's own spiteful mother.

Charles had always suspected that one day he'd be able to repay all the kindness that the Kerrigan family had given him over the years. He just hadn't been expecting what he found when summoned to the back entrance by a hysterical young maid.

"Charles, I'm sure you'll understand that calling ahead of time just wasn't in the cards," Kerry spoke to the older man without looking fully at him, trying to concentrate on keeping his injured brother unconscious until Mac could get a handle on his injuries.

Shooing the young woman away with a sharp command, Charles held the door open to allow Kerry and Mac to gently move Ryan from the rental car into the house.

Not asking the questions that he could have, the older man took in the condition of Ryan Fitzgerald with an experienced eye. "What will ye need?"

"Privacy, security, preferably soundproof since Ry's a bloody horrid patient and one that has been blessed or protected," Mac answered immediately, wincing when pain seared his body as he struggled to control the pain and bleeding.

“Fourth room down the hall, on the right,” Charles replied after a moment of thought. “Your Grandpa used that room to mix his herbs and tonics,” he explained, adding with a more exasperated look. “Your Uncle Sean also used that when he was practicing to be a drummer in some Yank rock band so it’s silent as a tomb to block that noise out.”

“Damn it, Doc, what the bloody hell else have I missed about you?” Maggie Cavanaugh demanded, coming into the house behind them while Jessica worked on distracting Roarke.

Knowing that he’d never hear the end of this, Mac rolled his eyes but then let out a harsh oath in his native tongue when pain seared and Ryan’s eyes began to flicker.

“Shit! Kerry, we can’t handle him if he wakes up right now!” he snapped, having been hoping for the time to make proper preparations for a change. “I’m tired of doing this cold.”

Out of all five of them, Mac was the one with the strongest plain healing abilities but he preferred to have time to prepare himself with the proper shields and energy, or the risks increased to both Mac and to the person that he was healing.

In this case, given the dagger used and the foe that caused the injuries, the power and injuries that he would be dealing with would be blacker than a normal knife wound and both could be a problem if Mac absorbed too much alone.

“We’ll cope as best as we can,” Kerry assured him, easing his brother down in the center of the room on a round rug hand woven by their great-grandmother.

Turning to the butler, Kerry spoke plainly. “Ian’s been taken, so has a lass that he cares for, Ry was stabbed with a dagger that I strongly believe is satanic. Jessica’s mates are going to be dropping a lot of stuff on you from Ian’s dorm,” he began, seeing that the older man was listening and understanding as he went on.

“Kathleen is involved so I couldn’t risk taking them to Da’s place in the city, Charles, and I will do my damndest to keep all danger away from this house but it may be better to send the staff away for a few days.”

Accepting what was said, Charles considered the younger men and women on staff, the ones who hadn’t been with the Kerrigan family for years and who might not know or believe the rumors that had always been told.

“I’ll send the youngsters down to the main house in Galway for a brief trip but Eileen and I will stay in case you need anything,” he stated, seeing Kerry start to object and just shifted a sharp look to him.

“Now you listen, laddie, I’ve worked for your grandparents since shortly before your Mum was born and I grew up in that house for years before that, so I know what it is that you’re seeking to protect us from but there’s no need.”

Silently hoping that the older man was right, Kerry heard a crash from behind him and another harsh oath. “Mac, what was that?”

“I take back everything I called Roarke that last time,” Mac muttered, picking himself up from the floor and wiping his nose. “I hate to bleed, Kerry.”

“I still say he needs a hospital.” Andi McCabe had followed the sounds, still wary about trusting these men. She knew that Ryan was leery, mistrustful, and downright suspicious in the best of times so she wasn’t certain totally what would draw him back to a family that he openly tried to avoid for as long as she had known him.

“Ryan’s in the best of hands, luv,” Maggie assured her, feeling Mac’s strain. “Leave him with his brothers.”

Seeing that the other woman was about to balk, Maggie took a breath. “Andi, if Ryan hasn’t shared his past then what’s going to happen next may be a bit of a shock. Come to the parlor, we’ll have tea, and you can pretend to pump me or Jess for answers.”

Andi, admiring the petite redhead’s spunk, was about to refuse when flame shot from the door. “What the hell was that?” she demanded, surprised when the velvet Trinity wall hanging didn’t burst into flame.

“That was Ryan reacting on instinct,” Kerry sighed, easily keeping the flames from doing harm. “His reactive power when hurt and his main offensive power is fire. It has been since he was a lad.”

“That’s not possible.” Andi considered that statement odd. “The boss may not share a lot but the one damn thing I know is that he suffers from pyrophobia.”

“When did he come down with that?” Kerry demanded, frowning and hating the things that his brothers were still clearly keeping quiet. “When we were lads, our parents were always worried he’d go the other way into pyromania.”

Shrugging, the black haired woman didn’t have that answer but if that was the case then she understood the elder Fitzgerald’s concern. “He gets very defensive when asked and I only learned about it because once a house we were working on was firebombed and he was as close to panic as I can ever recall seeing him.”

“Getting anything on that?” Kerry asked, stepping into the room to see that Mac had finally gotten their brother calm again.

"I'm not a bloody mind reader, Kerry," Mac replied shortly, the mere act of just calming Ryan had taken more than he liked. "Ryan has always been a hardheaded son of a bitch and he shields himself more so picking anything up from him is like pulling a tooth without the Novocain."

"Another issue is, unlike when we healed Roarke from the hellhound bites, there were four of us healing him," Mac eased back a little, shaking his hands to attempt to dispel the negative energy he was picking up. "Here we have you and I to try to heal Ryan and that bleedin' dagger is pure black energy."

Scowling slightly at this realization, Kerry met his brother's grim eyes. "I don't want to involve him because he's already opened himself up too many times and Roarke has never been able to heal without hurting himself."

"If you and I attempt to heal him, the dark energy from those cuts could leave us too weak to concentrate on finding Ian and Molly," Mac remarked seriously, reaching for the bag that Maggie handed him. "Even with Roarke, it'll be a damn stretch for us."

Nodding in reluctant agreement, Kerry looked around the room. "Have Maggie help you set the candles out. I'll go find Roarke," he decided, watching Ryan twist uneasily and was about to do a quick spell to ease his pain when he suddenly calmed down.

"He gripes at me," Roarke scoffed from the door, taking his jacket off for freedom of movement and he removed the holster for the 9mm he habitually carried. "Someone remind me to point that out to him."

Staring at the black haired Irishman, Andi looked at the Beretta. "You normally carry a gun?"

Grinning with a grin that actually reminded her of her boss, Roarke just shrugged. "People shoot at me sometimes when I work so it helps to have the gun."

"Damn it, Roarke, how often do people shoot at you?" Mac demanded while sitting and lighting white candles in a certain design around his brother.

"Probably about as much as they shoot at Ry," his brother smiled slightly, his eyes changing as he stepped into the room. "He's in pain and aside from the wounds, the energy connects to Ian."

Recalling what Ryan had mentioned to him over the phone before the attack, Mac looked around. "Directly or indirectly?"

"The feeling isn't from Ian but it's somehow connected to him," Roarke tried to explain, slowly going over to sit down on the floor next to Ryan. "I can do this, Kerry. I can help you heal him."

Knowing that issues still existed between his two younger brothers, Kerry suspected that this was one reason Roarke would attempt a spell that could do him more harm than good.

"Alright, let's do this before he gets worse," he decided, looking at Andi closely. "Do not come close until either Maggie or Jessica says that it's safe."

Not certain what she was going to see, Andi stepped to the threshold of the room to wait. "Just don't turn him into anything or kill him. He still owes me a check from the last job I did."

"Luv, if I was going to do either of those things I would have done it when he was ten and he ruined a perfectly good moment I had with Cheyenne O'Connor," Kerry assured her, rolling his eyes at both the memory and the emotion it brought with it.

Mac had been sitting down when he suddenly stumbled in his effort to stare at his brother. "Cheyenne Mairead O'Connor?" he repeated in open shock. "Little Chey O'Connor? Deirdre's niece?"

"Yes, the one and the same," Kerry scowled, not getting happier with his brother's reaction and then reached out automatically to lightly slap Roarke on the back of the head when he heard him humming a silly little teasing song from their childhood. "You do know that I don't have to stop Ry from teasing you and Jessica, don't you?"

Shutting up but still grinning, Roarke shifted slightly so that it would be possible for them to form a triangle.

"Let's see what we have," Mac decided to see the extent of the wounds before casting his protection circle.

It was normally a wise thing to do except when he carefully removed his brother's shirt, the second born son who had always been known for his patience and easy going nature nearly exploded.

"Where in the hell did he get these from?" he demanded, looking at several older scars on his brother's shoulder, lower back, and a serious looking one close to his heart. "Since when do security consultants end up looking like a cheap puzzle piece?"

Kerry looked at what upset Mac, frowning as he gauged some of the wounds to be only a few months old. Probably from shortly before Ryan returned to Ireland.

"You'd be surprised at the knocks we take in the effort to make a home or a person secure," Andi spoke from the door, wanting them off this topic but seeing the other black haired Fitzgerald look at her with a curious expression before grinning.

"Ry got the one on his chest after he flirted too much with a Mafia Don's mistress in Naples two years ago," Roarke remarked easily, going on. "Now the ones on his back were the result of him intercepting several bullets from a terrorist gunfight in an airport in Prague four months before all this crap started again."

"What in the bloody hell do you and Ryan do that Kerry and I probably won't like?" Mac demanded, exasperated by both of his brothers and hating that neither he nor Kerry had managed to keep track of them.

Roarke didn't answer right away; keeping his eyes averted rather than look at his brothers. "Borrowing a line from Jessica, I could tell you but then I'd have to kill you."

"You just wait until we beat Sebastian this time and get Ian back safely and then I'm pinning one of you down for a damned straight answer, Roarke," Mac snapped, blowing out a breath. "Watch for flames or fists since he's prone to reacting, just like you."

"I have it," Roarke assured him, lightly squeezing Ryan's shoulder. "Let's get this over with."

The grim set of his jaw told Kerry that he was feeling their brother's pain but wasn't showing it.

"Don't absorb," Mac reminded automatically, sitting salves, candles, and an amulet out close to him. "Let the energy, the pain, flow in, and then push it out and away from you. Aside from the protection that I'll cast, keep your personal protection circle up and don't let any of this crap linger."

Seeing Ryan begin to twist again, Kerry laid a firm hand on him and immediately felt pain but also fever, and flame. The latter concerned him the most since that felt almost peripheral.

"Alright, first we're going to picture a field of white light coming down from the ceiling surrounding this circle, surrounding us to keep all black energy away," Mac spoke in a calm voice, keeping it low as he also mentally cast a protection circle around them.

"Picture that light going around you, down from your head, through your body and finally out via the bottom of your shoes," he paused to look toward Roarke to be certain that he was handling the strain.

Confident that the protection would hold, Mac began building his power until his eyes went dark and he laid his hand over the wound on Ryan's side.

The instant contact was made, Mac was nearly overwhelmed with emotions, pain, anger, and..."

"Argh!" The sudden cry didn't surprise them as much as Ryan's instinctive move to escape the pain.

"*Níl* (No)," Roarke automatically spoke Irish at certain times and this was one of those when he caught his brother's arm. "C'mon, Ry, let Mac do his healing thing so we can go find baby brother and Molly."

Roarke paused; wincing as he also felt the dull pain but knew that Kerry and Mac were trying to keep the more negative emotions away from him.

"What the bloody hell kind of knife did he get cut with?" Mac demanded, voice straining as he fought the wounds. "Roarke's wounds from the damn dogs weren't this bad."

“It was a sacrificial dagger used at black masses for satanic rituals,” Kerry replied grimly, increasing his own power to take the wound on his brother’s back that was lesser than the side wound. “Black masses would use darker magic than even Sebastian.”

“What was Ian even doing with such a thing?” Mac wondered, placing his other hand over the wound while hearing a bell like sound from somewhere.

Ryan had begun to sweat as the poison or dark energy that cut him was withdrawn. Groaning, he twisted but Roarke kept a strong grip on him.

“Remember what you told me in Fitzgaren, Ry?” he asked, closing his eyes against the burning pain. “Get off your ass now, big brother because you were supposed to be watching Molly and mate, you dropped the bleedin’ ball by letting her be grabbed.

“You let Molly be captured; you got your ass handed to you by a pudgy guard who probably had no combat skills whatsoever. Then you had to be saved by the very same lass that you bitch about all the damn time,” he went on, feeling his older brother go rigid under his hands and chose to make his final statement. “Annie would not be happy.”

Having been on the receiving end of Ryan’s black temper over any ill mention of Annie Cleary, Mac could have rolled his eyes if he hadn’t been concentrating on keeping control of this spell.

Black eyes snapped open to stare blankly until it registered whose eyes he was staring into and he slowly shifted his hand around to grip Roarke’s.

“Now Kerry, start it while we have his attention,” Mac urged, surprised by how hard it was to keep the black energy from intruding into the circle.

Understanding Mac’s concern and his urgency, Kerry took a deep breath and slowly let it out while laying his other hand over Ryan’s heart.

“I am of the Five and I call on those that have gone before, both in the Otherworld and realms beyond to hear my call,” he began, speaking in Irish as was instinctive when using the magic of old.

“I ask to heal he who is of our blood of the evil that he was inflicted with.”

Mac felt the air in the room begin to change slightly as the candles flickered and tiny bells sang out from somewhere as he prepared his own part of the main spell.

“I am of the Five and I seek the aid of the elders as I remove this taint from my brother,” he recited, concentrating on imaging the removal of the wounds.

Swallowing the sudden burst of pain, Roarke focused on his brother’s flickering eyes instead of the emotion.

“I am of the Five and I seek the blessings of my ancestors who gave me the power of my birthright to aid in healing this man who shares my blood.”

Lights danced around them while the flame of the candles blew in a gentle breeze but Ryan hissed as the wound on his side seared.

“You cannot claim this soul,” Kerry gritted, eyes flashing while Mac took Roarke’s hand that was gripping Ryan’s and held them under his but on top of the hand that Kerry had on their brother’s chest.

“We are of the Five, though we lack one, we share blood, pain, magic, and the birthright given to us by those who have passed to realms beyond,” he went on firmly. “As we seek to heal and protect, I call on the power of the Earth, of the Air, of the Water and finally of the Spirit to join in this circle that we created and remove the pain and injury from both mind and body.”

Now the wind kicked up in the room but the candles remained steady as voices seemed to carry an ancient chant and Ryan shook violently.

“Hang on a little longer, Ry,” Roarke whispered, surprised when he felt the hand gripping his tighten slightly. “Say the words to close it, Ry.”

Not expecting their brother to be that coherent yet, they finished the spell. “Light protects him, the blood of The Gentry and our ancestors bring peace and protection into this circle. As this spell harms none, as I will, so mote it be. Blessed be.”

A scream came from deep in the shadows as Mac felt the knife wound in his brother’s side get fiery hot before dispersing, leaving only a thin scar where it had once been.

After the final burst of wind and light subsided, Ryan’s body went limp on the floor even though his hand still gripped his younger brothers’.

It was several tense moments before Mac finally chose to close the circle and slumped back, running shaking fingers through his short blond hair. “I do not want to do that again,” he muttered.

“Considering things, I can’t promise that,” Kerry sighed, sitting on the floor next to his brothers. “Roarke?”

“I don’t feel the pain like I did,” he glanced up at Kerry, worry still evident. “Except I thought toward the end, I felt Ian just a second and then it was gone.”

Nodding while he felt for Ryan’s pulse, Kerry had also felt that momentary connection with their brother. Now he couldn’t feel him again.

“Help me get Ryan to the daybed so that he can rest and I’ll see if I can pick up anything,” he assured the younger man.

Andi McCabe had remained silent through the entire healing but now after a slight nod from Maggie, she slowly approached.

“Is...is he alright?” she asked, noticing that her employer seemed pale but that he was breathing easier.

“Once he sleeps and regains some strength,” Mac yawned, picking himself up from the floor. “Ryan’s always been a quick healer, so I’d say give it twelve hours and he’ll be up griping and bitching.”

“Oh, the usual then,” Andi flashed a smile, taking a moment to pull her long black hair back before offering to help.

Wary right now, Roarke seemed reluctant until he felt a mental tug and looked down.

Ryan's eyes had opened slightly to look at his younger brother. They were their normal color but not completely clear yet as he struggled with the leftover effects of the wounds.

"*Táim go maith*, (I'm fine)," he murmured in a tired voice, not resisting as his body's natural response drew him under again. "Ian...he's not," he whispered. "Soon he'll go beyond the Otherworld, into...a *sithein* and..."

Startled, Kerry and Mac exchanged worried looks. "Sleep, Ryan," Kerry urged, brushing a hand over his brother's forehead while casting a small spell to help him sleep. "If he's right..."

"If he's right, we have more issues than just Sebastian, a power hungry Grandmother, and whatever the hell else is going on." Mac scrubbed both hands over his face in a frustrated motion.

Roarke, more confident that their brother would be safe, eased away from him clearly exhausted. "Okay, so I didn't pay attention to every story Mum or Gram told us as lads, what was he talking about?"

"Isn't a *sithein* supposed to be the outside of a fairy hill?" Andi spoke up from where she was sitting on the bottom of the daybed. "I remember a great aunt telling tales of the fairy folk of old."

"Memo to self, we really need to find out more about this one," Mac sighed to himself, noticing Roarke's confusion but feeling Kerry's sharp gaze and knowing that he didn't want to go into this yet.

"Leave Ryan with Miss McCabe since it's best that he not be alone this soon," Kerry began when a knock on the door came.

Charles McMillian stood in the doorway, a stern look on his normally easy going face.

"There is someone in the parlor who wishes to see either you or one of your brothers, Kerry," he announced, clearly not liking whoever the guest was. "I wasn't going to let the bloke in but Miss Jessica advised that it may be better if you speak with this bloke."

Still emotionally and physically drained from the healing, Kerry sensed out to get an idea on who it could be, considering that no one should have been able to find them here.

Normally when he did this, he could immediately pick out either the person or something to tell him who it could be. This time, all he could pick up was a wall of angst and near panic.

"That's odd so let's go see who this is," he decided, catching Roarke's eye. "We don't want to shoot up the place so unless this is a threat, keep the gun holstered."

“Yes, Kerry,” the younger man didn’t remind his brother that he had removed his weapon before the spell. “Besides, Jess and Cam can do the shooting.”

Andi decided it best to stay with her employer until she got more data on this situation. That and the tiny voice that she’d been hearing in her head for the past several weeks.

“Are we guessing who just suddenly decided to see if we were here?” Mac wanted to know as he followed Kerry down the hall; looking back to see that Roarke’s eyes had a slightly shaded look, which meant that he was picking up on something his brothers couldn’t.

“No, we are simply going to go see who has decided to drop in,” Kerry replied, catching the expression that Jessica Hadley had and suspecting that they were not going to like who this visitor was.

Stepping into the warmly decorated parlor that Fiona Kerrigan redecorated yearly, Kerry could have been expecting any number of people...except for who was actually waiting for them.

“Kerry, I’m so very sorry about all of this. I swear that I had no idea about any of this or their plans for Ian. If I had even suspected I wouldn’t have agreed to take the lad.”

He remained silent as he slowly walked toward the now distraught man that was pacing the parlor. “Sorry about what, Brandon? What didn’t you know?” he asked evenly, hearing Mac nearly choke upon seeing Brandon Sullivan.

The man seemed to have aged ten years since Mac and Maggie had been to the Sullivan house earlier that day. Now his styled hair was ruffled from where he’d been dragging his fingers through it. It was clear that the man was suffering greatly.

“I am so very sorry,” he whispered again. “I swear that it was never supposed to happen. Your Da was my mate and I owed him so much but this...God, I wish I could have stopped it.”

Exchanging looks with his brothers, Kerry concentrated more on the distraught Irishman. “What is it, Brandon?” he demanded, attempting to get a sense of the man’s fears but couldn’t. “What couldn’t you stop?”

“Ian’s death at the hands of my wife,” the man choked. “Just like she killed our daughter in one of her damned black masses, now it’s time for another one and I’m afraid either Ian or that Yank will die very soon.”

Chapter 14

Glendough, County Wicklow, Ireland:

Mist floating in the air nearly covered the thick forest that Molly Jackson woke up in.

Trees seemed to go for miles as a heavy forest of towering trees created a shield of sorts but the silky blackness and silence still made her nerves crawl.

Sitting up slowly, she winced as her stomach rolled and she remembered the last moments before waking up wherever.

“Ian?” Quickly looking around, Molly squinted to try to see through the mists that seemed to be coming off a lake nearby. “Ian, where are you?”

Panic was beginning to set in when she couldn’t see or find her friend and she worried that something had gone wrong with the spell or he had sent her away but stayed to protect her.

Standing to try to get her bearings, the young woman fought the building fear when she heard the sounds of retching from nearby. Molly looked around the dark forest to try to gauge the direction that the sound was coming from. A sudden feeling in her mind and heart just then seemed to tell her which way to go.

“Ian!” Breaking into a run, Molly hurried through the trees to find her friend.

Ian Fitzgerald was laying between two towering trees. He’d rolled to his side when the nausea finally got to be too much and he had to throw up.

Being so hurt, both physically and emotionally, the teleportation spell had taken more energy from him than he had counted on so it hadn’t taken them nearly as far away from the danger as he would have liked.

Right then, the fever seemed to be making him see and hear things. As he lay between the trees, he thought he could hear soft pipes playing very lowly and glittering little lights flew past his blurry eyes reminding him of the tales of fairies that his mother used to tell him.

“Always be respectful to the Gentry or the fairy folk,” Brenna Kerrigan Fitzgerald would tell her sons in her soft musical lilting accent. “It’s said that on both the Fitzgerald and Kerrigan sides that the blood of them run.

“Respect the fairy hills or mounds, never cut a fairy bush but also be wary for some fairies do not like humans and always if you pass into the realm of the fairy, never eat the food.”

“A wise piece of advice to remember now, *a mac* (my son),” Toryn Fitzgerald knelt next to his fevered son to run a gentle hand over his sweat soaked blond hair. “Do you know who I am, Ian?”

Finally able to breathe again after his last bout of retching, the eighteen year old stared as the glittering form slowly became solid looking.

Being only three years old at the time of his parents' deaths, Ian didn't have many memories of either of them.

Staring up silently, he struggled to focus on the black haired handsome man and thought it odd that he didn't feel fear from him. When he looked at his eyes, it began to dawn on him who he was looking at because he saw his own eyes reflected back at him.

"Da?" he whispered tiredly, swallowing the sour taste in his mouth. "Am I dead?"

Chuckling, Torny gave him a small smile while again brushing an insistent strand of hair out of his eyes. "No, you're not dead," he assured him, deciding to leave out that he was much closer to that door than either he or his mother liked. "You're hurt, sick, and that little stunt teleporting didn't do you any good whatsoever, my boy. Too much like Ryan and Roarke you are at times."

"That's...what Mac says," Ian muttered, groaning as pain seared from his leg and his stomach began cramping again. "You're dead, Da, so if I'm not why...why are you here?"

"I'm here because I knew your Mum would be too emotional and you need to stay grounded for a bit longer," Torny replied, easily sitting on the damp mossy ground next to his youngest son while his eyes seemed to shine as he looked deeper at the injuries. "How many of these did she inflict, Ian?"

Not too far under that he didn't understand the question, Ian shut his eyes rather than recall the more hideous moments of his captivity.

"Ian Brandon Callum Fitzgerald, answer your Father," Torny took on the tone that he normally only had to use on his middle two sons during a fight, but he sensed that the boy wasn't going to freely reply, a fact that both concerned and terrified him. "What did your grandmother do?"

"Too much," Ian whispered, not feeling the tears the slid down his fevered cheeks. "Kerry said that I didn't have to call her that because of what she did to Roarke. Do I?"

Even spirits had emotion and Torny knew that had he been flesh and blood still that the dark night skies would be blacker yet with his rage at what his sons were enduring at the hands of his very own mother.

"No, you don't have to call her anything," he assured the boy, hearing Molly calling and knowing time was short. "Your Mum's advice on the Gentry, Ian was wise. Follow it closely because soon the time will come when you will be forced to make choices that you never should be asked to, but some of them will be made for you.

"The danger to you is by far the worst because it comes from another direction that neither your Mum nor I anticipated." Torny laid a strong yet gentle hand on his son's face and remembered so long ago when he'd been a babe first placed in his arms.

“Listen to the lass because despite being a Yank, she has far more inside her than even she is aware of yet,” he urged, pleased that mention of Molly caused his son to pay closer attention. “Your fate rests with her as hers does with you. It will not be easy and the risks are there but you must trust yourself, your heritage, and your brothers. They will see both you and young Molly through the nightmares to come.”

Listening to his father’s voice, Ian was able to focus more and despite the agony that his body was in and the seriousness of the situation his next comment just seemed to pop out.

“Y’know if that...was meant as encouragement, it sucked, Da,” he muttered, feeling some pain ease as his father’s hand touched his arm but the deep laugh warmed him.

“*Ta* (Yes), you are most certainly too much like Ryan in some ways than will please Brenna,” Toryn laughed, amused by the wit his son showed. Nevertheless, he also felt the fear in him as well. “If we could protect you more we would, Ian.”

Forcing his eyes to stay focused, Ian decided to take a risk. “I’m scared, Da. Scared of dying, scared that everything they said is true and Kerry, Mac, Ry and Roarke have forgotten about me or that they...they don’t care...”

“Now listen to me, Ian,” Toryn cut him off firmly, taking care when he gently lifted his face up to meet his eyes. “You have a right to be scared, boy. Hell, I’d be more worried if you weren’t but it will fine if you listen when the time comes.

“As for your brothers, I don’t ever want you to be afraid that they’ve forgotten you. In fact, those lads are doing everything they can to find you, but when you are back with them you’ll have to tell Kerry everything that you’ve been hiding,” he stated, lifting an eyebrow. “You also have to be honest with not only yourself but also with someone else.”

Nodding tiredly, Ian blinked up at his father’s now shimmering form. “You’re going,”

“There are limits to the time that either your Mum or I can stay in this place now, lad,” Toryn smiled at his son, squeezing his shoulder. “You won’t be alone long, Ian,” he assured him, hearing what his son couldn’t.

Hesitating briefly before standing, Toryn looked back. “You were our last child, Ian, and I grieve more that you, unlike your brothers, didn’t have the chance to have more time with your parents.

“We love all of you lads but Brenna always said that you would be the most unique. Trust your powers and never let your fears win out because aside from the strength that you share with your brothers, you have so much more inside you that you need to learn,” he finished as he began to fade from sight. “Take care, my son,”

Ian's eyes blurred but this time from tears as he watched his father's image slowly disappear. "I...I love you, Da," he whispered, not feeling quite so sick now when suddenly another voice registered in his thoughts. "Molly."

"Ian!" Molly Jackson finally broke through the trees to find her friend, relief evident. "God, I thought I'd never find you. I was afraid at first that you hadn't come through the spell or..."

Close enough to see how pale he was, Molly's voice halted while dropping to her knees. "*Mon Dieu*, you're looking worse than before, *cher*."

Relief at hearing her voice, knowing that she was safe from his enemies, caused Ian to chuckle at her rush of words. "Nice...to know, luv," he murmured, groaning when he moved. "Help...help me sit...up, Molly."

"You could be bleeding inside, Ian, you should stay laid down," she argued uselessly she knew because her friend was almost as stubborn as she was.

Easing an arm around him for support, she helped him carefully up until he was sitting with his back against the tree.

"Let me check your leg," she said when she noticed the tear in his jeans, feeling the warmth of the fever from it. "What is it from? The same 'wolf' that killed Toby?"

He closed his eyes, remembering the field trip that seemed like it had happened years ago rather than a few weeks. "Sebastian's pets are hell hounds from his other dimension. Sort of like Irish wolfhounds mixed between a Doberman and a pit bill," he replied, hearing material rip. "He couldn't touch me...but the hounds and..."

Looking up in concern as he trailed off, Molly caught the pain on his face and knew instinctively that it wasn't all from the wounds on his body.

"Ian, what's happening?" she asked him quietly, struggling to see the wound on his leg in the dark forest. "I got a crash course from your brothers but a lot of this still doesn't make sense. Especially your journal and the stuff Ryan and I found in your room."

Flying little lights seemed to hover near them, giving Molly enough illumination to see the long, red, festering claw marks that raked Ian's leg from hip to knee. She also saw the many bite marks on his leg.

"They're infected, Ian," she whispered, not liking the feeling even being close to these wounds gave her. "Where else did they bite?"

"The other leg, my arm...too many wounds to count," he spoke lowly, trying to keep his breathing even by focusing his thoughts on the young woman currently with him. "Don't touch 'em, Molly. The...dark energy and poison from them can hurt you."

Reaching into her little bag, Molly withdrew a can of something with a few sigils scrawled on it. "This will take some of the pain out of them," she assured him, whispering something into the night air in Creole French before lightly wiping the salve of her grandmother's onto the first claw mark.

"Okay, that bloody well hurts," Ian gritted, fighting the urge to grab her hand. "What's in that stuff?"

"Something involving snake heads, snake blood and ash," Molly shrugged, feeling him tense in pain. "So, were you planning on telling me that all four of your big brothers are of the drop dead gorgeous species?" she asked, deciding to get his mind off of himself.

Forcing one eye open, Ian couldn't help but grin weakly. "Ryan loves you if you said that to any of them," he decided.

"I think it was fifty/fifty if they trusted me in the beginning or not," Molly replied, lifting an edge of his shirt up to look at bruises on his side. "They like to fight about as much as my brothers."

"Aye, that's my brothers," Ian nodded, a tingling in his head warning him that danger was closing in on them. "I'm sorry that you got involved. You should have stayed out of it, Molly."

Deciding that her salve wasn't going to be nearly enough to help her friend, Molly finally put it away. "I wasn't going to let you vanish without anyone doing anything about it, Irish," she replied, shivering as the cold night air blew around them. "Tell me what happened to you, Ian?"

"Me being too stupid and naïve to recognize a trap before walking into one," he sighed, laying his head back against the tree but felt her emotions and knew that she was shivering for more than just the cold. "C'mere, luv."

Being fevered, Ian couldn't feel the cold that surrounded them but he was still aware that Molly was being affected by it. Knowing that he couldn't protect them right now, he was determined to at least keep her warm.

Slowly, Molly scooted up until she was sitting next to him. "You weren't stupid, pal," she assured him, feeling his arm move just enough that it slid around her shoulders to draw her against him. "Ian?"

"I can't protect you but I can at least try to keep you warm," Ian assured her, comfortable with her against him which surprised him. "I told you some of my past, Molly but I kept the more recent problems to myself."

"Yeah, that worked," she returned, rolling her eyes. "I'm guessing that the silver cat we saw was your grandmother's familiar or something and that she was trying to warn you away from helping your brothers defeat this Warlock."

Not as surprised as he should have been, Ian nodded slowly. "Sebastian needs one of us to either die or turn to his side so that's why Kathleen was at my dorm. I expected issues with both of them but...it was the other issue that started things going bad for me," he told her quietly.

Lifting her head from his shoulder, Molly heard the grim tone in his normally pleasant voice. "What happened, Ian?" she asked again. "Why did you have those books in your room? Why did you have that dagger?"

"I had the books to see exactly what I was being pulled into and how I could possibly stop it," he replied, not wanting to remember this on top of the rest but needing Molly to understand so that she could tell his brothers.

"You know how in those old movies, the adopted child goes about his or her life totally normal and happy until the day comes when he discovers the big, dark, and horrible secret that his 'family' has been keeping from him?" he asked her, feeling her nod her head. "Well, about a week or so after I returned to school I had one of those moments."

Staying silent, Molly let her friend talk at his own pace because she almost felt his anxiety over this.

"I'd gone to have dinner with my foster parents and Brandon had been called to his office unexpectedly," Ian began slowly, tightening his arm around Molly but frowned when he realized his other arm didn't want to move.

"Sybil had gone to put Bridget, that's the three year old they're adopting, down for the night, and I felt weird. I thought that was strange since I grew up in that house but on that night it felt like it was closing in on me. I was going to make an excuse to leave when I noticed that the basement door was open a little."

Noticing the trouble with his other arm, Molly helped him move it so that he was holding her fully. "That was odd?"

"The basement in their house was always off limits, Molly," Ian told her, not aware when his fingers began to stroke her hair. "That night, I went downstairs and...it was the side room that caught my attention because I heard voices.

"Sybil and some man that she'd always introduced as her Uncle were talking in this little room about the ceremony in a few months and would 'he' be ready? He asked her if the boy was aware of the glorious destiny that he was fulfilling with his death just as Emily had?" He frowned slightly, going on. "It was when Syb assured him that despite the sudden resurgence of Sebastian that I figured out that they were talking about me."

Blinking, Molly looked up at him in surprise. "Oh my God," she whispered. "The dagger?"

"I waited for them to leave the room and snuck in to see something out of a fifties horror movie complete with an altar with a goat's head hanging above it, black candles, an inverted pentagram and other stuff." Ian could still picture that room.

“I looked around and found a book, like a journal that Sybil clearly kept, and after reading it briefly I figured out that my foster sister, Emily, didn’t die by accident on her nineteenth birthday but the cult that Syb’s a part of killed her. They planned on doing the same to me,” he declared, meeting her dark eyes as he fought to explain. “I took the dagger to a professor at Trinity and he explained that it was used in powerful Black Masses and that whoever I had gotten it from, that I should stay the bloody hell away from.”

Ian shook his head, wincing as the pain began returning. “I got the books to try to figure out if there was a way to break whatever plan or ritual that they’d clearly been grooming me for because I didn’t want to tell my brothers.”

“You should have told them, Ian,” Molly argued, sitting up to look him fully in the eyes. “I’ve seen those guys and can honestly say that they would do anything for you but you have to learn to ask for help.”

“Sybil and Kathleen always said that my brothers didn’t want me because I was too much trouble and that if I caused too much more that they’d leave me like Mum and Da did,” the boy murmured, emotion evident in his voice. “I didn’t want to lose my brothers over something they didn’t have anything to do with, Molly.”

Blinking at those words, Molly seemed to snap out of her shock to lightly slap him in the head in response. “You stupid twit,” she scoffed, reaching up to clasp his face between her palms. “Ian, I come from a family with eight older brothers so I can tell when someone’s acting or pretending and I can tell you that your brothers will fight demons from hell for you.”

Hesitating briefly to make sure that he was paying attention, she waited before adding in a softer voice. “So will I, Ian. I won’t leave you and neither will your brothers.”

“Molly,” Ian started but stopped, wanting to say so much, to tell his friend everything that he felt but was unsure.

Ian had made many friends mad by turning down dates that most boys his age would have jumped at. What wasn’t widely known because he had never told anyone is that Ian didn’t date because he’d been afraid of getting close to someone and then losing them, as he had his parents and brothers’.

Molly had been the only one that he was ever really at ease with and he had recently concluded that the other reason he didn’t like to date at school was that he wanted to date someone who was right for him. He hadn’t found that someone until he had met Molly.

That brought another set of concerns for him since he refused to have Molly placed in the same danger that Roarke’s friend Jessica had been placed in, but she had been anyway.

“Ian?” Molly caught the way that he was just staring at her; his blue-gray eyes seemed to be a million miles away. “Where’d you go, Irish?” she asked lightly.

Shaking himself out of his own thoughts, Ian blinked a few times. “I don’t want you to be hurt in this, Molly. I want to try to get you away from this but I’m still too weak,” he told her quietly, seeing her eyes narrow and cutting her off quickly. “No, listen.”

Placing a finger against her lips to keep her from interrupting him, Ian took as deep a breath as he could. “When Sebastian attacked Roarke in the manor a few months ago, he used Jessica as a way to hurt him. He did things to Jess that I’m certain only she and Roarke know the full extent of and I...I don’t want him to have that chance to touch you. I would die before I let anyone touch you, Molly, but I...I don’t know how to protect us until Kerry...”

Realizing what he was saying and remembering the Warlock’s comments made the girl shudder but she caught his hand, holding it tightly in her own.

“I don’t claim to have all the power that my grandmothers did or even know half of what I’m supposed to if I am the one who’s supposed to be helping you with this stuff that you need to do,” she began slowly, seeing his eyes start. “I’m not a coward and I won’t be used, so we can protect each other until your brothers get their acts together. I am not leaving you alone.”

“You are too bloody stubborn, Molly,” Ian muttered sourly, watching her smirk at him.

“Yeah, and you’re not, Irish,” she shot back, and then thought of something. “Before you finished the spell back in that other place, you said something in Irish that got lost in the translation somewhere between my ears and your kiss, care to give me the American version?”

Hesitating on that out of fear for them both, Ian was considering it when the sudden pain in his stomach and leg had him nearly screaming. “God!”

“Ian?” Molly caught him as he doubled over, throwing up violently even as she heard the barks and howls. “Shit! What...?”

Knowing those sounds well, Ian’s hand shot out to grip her hand. “Go,” he gasped out, terror spreading faster than his pain. “They want me, Molly.”

“No, we’re both getting out of this,” she decided, using all of her strength to pull her friend to his feet and then needing to support him. “We just need to put some distance between us and those dogs.”

Under normal circumstances, Ian would have admired his friend’s spunk and tenacity but this wasn’t a time those attributes would help her.

“Molly,” he tried to speak but the pain was burning again and as she slipped on the soft ground, and they both went down.

Twisting on a natural instinct so as to protect her from injury, Ian took the brunt of the fall on his back as his arms caught Molly and held on. “Molly, listen,”

Twisting to look behind them, she was close to panic, for the hounds were getting closer. "Move now, listen later, Irish," she tried to move but his hands suddenly gripped her shoulders.

"Damn it, Molly, listen to me," Ian snapped, pain and worry making his tone harder than usual as he shook her shoulders gently. "It won't make a bleedin' difference how far we run, those are hell hounds, and they have tasted my blood. They'll track me no matter where I am until the poison gets out of my blood."

"You need to run. There's an abandoned monastery close by here past that hill. Go there and stay there until you don't hear the hounds anymore. Then concentrate on mentally reaching one of my brothers, or Maggie or Jessica," he told her firmly, hissing in pain. "Go, Molly. Please, before they get closer."

Seeing and hearing the emotions that he was speaking, Molly swallowed her first instinct and her tears as she watched Ian fall back into shock. The hounds continued to approach.

Looking around quickly, Molly saw the hill that he mentioned but instead of a landmark, she saw something else and tales from her youth filled her head along with other things.

Soft pipes, music, the fluttering of those tiny lights hovering around them.

"It is you that the bastard wants," she whispered, brushing a gentle hand down his face before jerking off the Claddagh medal that she'd had since childhood to place in his clenched hand. "That's why he isn't getting you again, Irish."

Looking toward that hill and laying her gold hoop earrings on the ground near her feverish friend, Molly closed her eyes and thought of the song and spell that her father's grandmother had taught her.

"A child of Erin who once had Gentry blood in her veins, calls on the Gentry, the fairy folk who roam both our realm and Other for help," she whispered, hearing the growls coming closer. "Help me protect this man who is also of your blood, help me..."

A sudden bark next to her ear had Molly nearly screaming as her eyes snapped open to see a huge white dog-like animal with red ears standing near her.

Fear was her first instinct until the animal sat down to watch her curiously with intelligent eyes, its huge head jerking as the sound of the hell hound's howl from somewhere.

"A pal of yours?" she asked the dog, whirling as a step sounded. "You won't take him back, you..."

"Just like a female you are, Molly Brianna Jackson. You call on aid from the Fairies and then get defensive when you get it."

Staring at the figure who had spoken, she wasn't certain if she'd fallen into one of her grandmother's old fairy tales.

Standing a few feet away from them was a man. He seemed taller than what she gauged to be over six feet with long flowing black hair tied back at his neck with a golden ribbon.

Dressed in fine clothes of a rich deep blue silk shirt and black pants with shiny black riding boots, his eyes were a magnetizing blue with just a touch of gray in them.

"You did call for aid, didn't you, girl?" he asked, the musical tone of his accent a match for his powerful voice.

Nodding blindly, it took Molly a couple seconds to find her voice. "My...my friend, he's been hurt by...well he called them hell hounds and this warlock wants to kill him so that this ancient prophecy doesn't happen and I need him safe until his brothers find him..."

Listening to her ramble, the man cocked his head to eye her until finally he shook his head. "Aye, you're of Maeve's line," he decided with a nod. "She babbled like a fool in her youth as well, and it's a fine thing that I know about Sebastian already or that would have made no sense, even to someone such as myself."

"Considering the fact that I have some self-important Warlock, an old woman with delusions of grandeur and hounds from hell all after my friend and I, it's lucky I'm not screaming. I've seen and felt a house shake under power I never really expected to ever be close to. Not to mention I've been teleported." Molly didn't mean to sound cross but she hated to be told that she babbled. "So either you and your puppy are huge reactions to that or...I actually am talking to someone from inside a sidhe."

"So, which exactly do you believe this to be, lass?" the man asked, the soft light that had seemed to be shimmering from all around him slowly disappearing as he stepped closer.

Molly, taking a deep breath, chose to go with her inner gut feeling. "I believe you're a fairy," she replied, going on. "Judging by the style of clothes, the jewels in those rings that you're wearing, and the way you're carrying yourself, I'd say that you're either high up in the Gentry or you're of Royal blood."

"Very impressive for an American mortal lass whose own Celtic blood has been ignored for far too long." He seemed truly impressed by Molly's assumptions, staying silent for several moments as if considering her more until finally nodding. "Do you know who I am then?"

“Gram always said that fairies guarded their real names and only revealed them to trusted confidants or family on either side since she said that occasionally fairy royalty would become infatuated with mortals. They’d either mate here in this world or take the mortal back with them,” Molly said, quoting the explanation so seriously that he laughed.

“Maeve really was quite chatty with you then,” he mused, laying a hand with a turquoise ring on it on the large dog’s head. “That is true though, as we do not reveal our true name to many outsiders,” he acknowledged, kneeling down next to where she stayed by Ian.

Taking a moment to gaze into her deep brown eyes as if gauging her, he then placed a hand lightly on the fevered boy’s brow. “He suffers greatly and needs more care than what meager mortal ointments you may have in that handy bag will provide.”

Looking quickly as leaves rustled and the air grew thicker, Molly glanced over her shoulder. “He needs to be safe from that bastard. He needs his brothers,” she told this strange black haired man urgently, fear building but knowing that she needed to protect Ian. “You’re of his blood, aren’t you?”

“Aye, that I am,” the man acknowledged after a moment of hesitation. “My name is Riordan, Molly Jackson, and as your own Great Grandmother told you, one day a very long time ago even for my kind, I wandered this realm of mortals and met a lovely young lass.

“Aislin was seventeen by your years when I met her wandering the fields near where Fitzgaren would one day be formed,” he explained calmly, not appearing concerned about the growling that was coming closer. “She came from a line of witches so powerful that the magic in her blood actually kept her son from showing the more obvious signs that some children born between my kind and mortals reveal.”

Sitting still while watching as Riordan’s long fingers gently stroked and smoothed Ian’s hair back from his now white face, Molly stared in fascination.

“Then Ian’s line, the Fitzgerald family line began with...” she suddenly realized why she hadn’t been scared of this black haired man. He reminded her of Ian’s older brothers. “It began with the child that you sired with the girl you met.”

“Aislin Fitzgerald’s son, Keegan, began the line that this lad comes from,” Riordan confirmed, frowning when he didn’t like what he felt as the boy twisted restlessly. “He is of my blood so that accords him a special privilege.”

As an undisputed reader of fairy tales and someone who had spent hours in her father’s library reading on the other creatures that existed in the land of her ancestors, Molly had also read books that hinted some about fairy laws.

“Can you keep him safe?” she demanded, feeling her nerves settle as she made up her mind. “Can you make sure that he survives?”

"Aye, but more often than not, changing an action will result in other results," Riordan spoke gravely, lifting his eyes to meet hers. "Are ye sure that this is what you want to do?"

Hesitating briefly as panic at what would more than likely be done to her flashed in her head, Molly slowly nodded. "I grew up knowing that I'd one day make a huge sacrifice for someone I loved and this is as huge as it gets.

"I...I love him and I know that his life is more important than mine considering that if they don't stop that Warlock a lot of other bad stuff may happen." She closed Ian's limp fingers around her medal before brushing tears away. "Take him the hell out of here and make sure that he knows or his brothers know that I made this choice of my own free will."

Riordan considered this caramel skinned young woman before nodding, easily lifting Ian Fitzgerald into his arms. "May the light of the Goddess protect you, Molly Jackson, and know that your sacrifice will not be forgotten," he proclaimed, stepping back slowly. "Be strong and hold onto the strength of that love. Blessed be, child of Zaira."

A mist seemed to form around him as the huge white dog bounded after its master and as she blinked her eyes, Molly was startled by how quickly she found herself alone.

"Well, Molly, you got yourself into this one so let's see how long you can keep yourself alive," she muttered, whirling as something huge and black with glowing red eyes hurtled itself out from the closest bush.

Frightened by the beast's appearance, Molly stumbled back but before she could think of even a minor spell or grab a stick for defense, a heavy net formed around her.

Not expecting the weight of the net, she fell to the ground, struggling to get free but the more she struggled the tighter the net bound her.

"Let me go!" she snapped, straining to see as a step sounded and large teeth seemed to snap at her face.

"Heel!" a sharp voice commanded. A mangy looking man with a patch over one eye stepped into the clearing while holding the leashes to six other frothing hounds. "Well, look at we've caught. A little meddling she-witch," he sneered, looking down. "Care to tell me where the boy is?"

Still struggling but feeling the net beginning to burn her skin, Molly glared up at the one-eyed man. "He's where you bastards will never touch him again."

"That is certainly a bad thing for you, young Molly," Sebastian spoke as he appeared in the forest. "You should have run when you had the chance because I do not brook interference lightly, and you have ruined a well-timed plan."

Fighting against showing fear, Molly attempted her bravest sneer. "So kill me," she invited. "Ian's safe where not even his deluded old bat of a grandma can get to him and you can't use me against him where he's at either."

“Perhaps,” the Warlock conceded with a sigh, letting his eyes roam as the net seemed to be dissolving right into her skin. “Don’t bother to struggle. The net was coated with a type of liquid that will paralyze you except to orders issued by myself or my allies,” he explained, smiling when he watched her eyes change.

“Spells and magic work well on some but with others, other things are needed. Those methods require additional aids and this toxin will assure your total cooperation to both my needs and also to your final fate,” he concluded, reaching down to stroke her face and seeming pleased when her attempt to pull away failed. “I had promised you to someone else since I had need of Ian, but now she will have to wait while you learn the painful lesson of interfering in my plans.”

Struggling internally, her last thoughts before pain took her consciousness were of Ian, relief that at least he would be safe from them, and of her mother.

‘I’m sorry, Momma,’ she thought silently, eyes rolling back. “Ian...”

“Take her back to my private retreat and have the maids prepare her for me,” he ordered the hound controller. “Inform Mrs. Fitzgerald that her grandson has passed beyond our reach for now but that all isn’t lost so long as we hold his whore.”

As his servant vanished with Molly and the hounds, Sebastian stared at the distant hill with a sneer. “You can’t keep him in your realm forever, old friend. Sooner or later, you will have to return him to his brothers, and if he wishes to save the girl then Ian will have to face his part in this prophecy or it will still fall.”

Turning to walk away, he paused to look back. “Will he fail to protect Molly as you failed to protect Aislin? Or will I finally triumph over this family that you created?”

Walking away and disappearing into the mists, a lone howl was heard in a distant land as fairies from many clans wept in fear and sadness as one of their own came close to the shadow of death.

Chapter 15

Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin, Ireland:

Images of fire, fluttering wings, stone circles, along with the sounds of soft tiny pipes playing in a wave of gauze film, to finally a scream of a thousand voices were what caused Ryan Fitzgerald to jerk upright in bed.

Pain seared his chest, side, and back made him lose his breath and decide that maybe being dead wasn't such a bad plan.

"S'okay, what the bloody hell happened?" he muttered, slumping back against the pillows without even looking to see where he was.

The last thing Ryan could recall was the dorm, the guards, and... "Molly!"

Remembering hearing the girl scream right before all hell had broken loose, the black haired Irishman cursed his lack of memory as he struggled to get out of the bed.

Needing to find out where he was, what was happening, and how long had he been out were his first priorities. However, as he went to stand up a hand simply pushed him back.

"What in the hell do you think you're doing?"

The sharp, though still sultry sounding, outraged voice tore through his head like a jackhammer, making him groan for multiple reasons.

Dragging a pillow over his head to stop the hammers in his head, Ryan threw a harsh snarl in Irish out in response.

"While that's not physically possible unless one's an elephant in heat, I'm sure we can find you something else to play with, boss," Andrea 'Andi' McCabe returned lightly, not in the least insulted or intimidated by the words hurling through the pillow. "I thought you woke up in a foul mood after a bad night in the casino but you're making up for it this time. I guess getting stabbed by a demon or whatever that thing was really brings out the nasty side of your always charming temper."

Slowly realizing that the voice echoing through his head wasn't a bad dream, Ryan lifted the pillow enough to open one eye to glare.

"What the bloody hell are you doing here, McCabe?" he demanded in a rough voice, groaning when she pulled the pillow away. "Where is here, by the way?"

Andi had been sitting with her employer in the now silent room and she was shocked that he was awake this soon.

She'd used the time to reconsider what she'd seen, what she had learned, and more importantly, she was thinking back to the family stories she'd heard as a girl.

A solitary child, she'd grown up mainly with her father's relatives while her parents were off chasing their own form of adventures.

Her father, a professional treasure hunter, was often gone for months at a time and rarely had time for his only daughter, while her mother was more interested in touring Europe as a model than raising a family.

So that put Andi either with her father's family in Donegal, Ireland or some of her mother's Gypsy family in either Romania or Brooklyn, New York.

Growing up, she'd learned many odd things from her mixed family, and after graduating MIT with a degree in electronics, she turned to a more interesting career. She became a cat burglar and excelled at it until the night her skills at breaking and entering came up against someone better at it.

Remembering the first night that she had met Ryan Fitzgerald still made her steam because she hated to admit that there was someone better than she was at burglary.

It was that meeting that also gave her entry into Ryan's budding security consultant agency, or as he put it to her that night... "Come to work for me, put those bloody fancy skills to use for the right people, or I turn you over to the local law who frown on little girls breaking into the Mayor's private home."

Therefore, she had gone to work for him, never looking back or regretting it. Though at times, they butted heads, had screaming matches over protocol, and battled over every little thing, Andi would be damned to admit that she'd miss him if anything would happen to her favorite rival.

"According to what I'm guessing is one of your brothers, we're at your grandparents' house in some part of Dublin that I can't remember off hand," she finally replied to his question, again shoving him back. "Try to get up again, Fitzgerald, and I'll break a leg to keep you in that damned bed."

Ryan scowled at her while shoving his hair out of his face and thinking hard, looking around the room that he was in. It brought back memories of his grandfather's laugh as he mixed herbs or tonics together.

"Fitzwilliam Square," he told her, still not clear on how he'd gotten there, or what had happened in the dorm. "Where are my brothers?"

"Someone came while they were trying to stop you from bleeding after that damn demon guard used you for a pin cushion," Andi replied then asked bluntly. "Were you planning on revealing that you were a witch by nature and not just by personality?"

The question didn't necessarily take him by surprise since he'd figured that if she'd been around his brothers for any length of time that she would have seen some things.

Moreover, Ryan had never denied that Andi was a smart woman who would have figured it out by only seeing or hearing a few things. Of course, that didn't mean that he had to like it.

“That’s bloody cute, McCabe,” he muttered, pushing up on an elbow to look at her and was surprised to see that her eyes looked tired. “Jet lag or didn’t want to sleep in a house filled with witches and mercenaries?”

Ignoring the sarcasm, she snorted. “I was more concerned that one of them didn’t turn you into a toad or anything.”

That amused him since it reminded him of the time that he’d tried to turn Roarke into one. “Kerry’s too mature for that type of thing, Mac’s a physician by trade so he’s bound by that hypocrite oath,” he responded, seeing her eyes shift at his deliberate misuse of his brothers’ oath as a doctor. “Only the brat would have the guts to try.”

“If that’s the black haired one then I’d say he was too weak after hooking some link to you after you got attacked, and then I think he absorbed too much while they healed you,” Andi replied easily, not seeing the way he tensed but catching his frown. “What?”

“Roarke did what?” Knowing the reason that their brother couldn’t heal, Ryan didn’t like what Andi was saying but chose to deal with that later in order to catch up on things. “Alright, McCabe, from the time you decided to ruin my vacation until I woke up, give me a sit-rep.”

Silently pleased to hear the normal back to business tone, she shrugged. “First, if this is your idea of a vacation then you are more deluded than I gave you credit for.

“You called, left me a voicemail to get my ass to Dublin and meet you at a dorm room. Even left the number of the room, so I dropped my plans and decided I may as well come and collect the pay you still owe me,” she went on, missing how his eyes were changing.

“When I arrived I found that all hell had cut loose and some rent-a-cop was about to stick you with a satanic sacrificial dagger so I stopped that. He went poof very dramatically and then your one brother made my Beretta go poof when I tried to shoot him.” Lifting a fine brow, Andi sat back on a window seat. “There, all caught up.”

Staring at her in blank shock, Ryan finally sat up as several things that she said dawned on him.

“What the bloody hell are you talking about?” he demanded, frowning. “I never called you, McCabe. The Devil himself could put hot coals under my nails before I’d call you and what were you doing shooting at my brothers?”

“Don’t pull that crap on me, Fitzgerald,” she snapped back, shooting to her feet and tossing him her cell phone. “You called me, it’s on there. There’s some static, but you can still hear it.”

Staring at her, Ryan took the phone and frowned when he saw his own cell phone number. “What the bloody...?”

Listening to the message, the frown slowly faded to be replaced by something akin to a look of disbelief. "Okay, now that's just plain past scary," he murmured, slowly closing the cell phone.

"I'll accept my pay in lieu of an apology that I know you'd rather choke on than give," Andi stated with a smirk that could have mirrored one that he usually used, but then seeing how pale he seemed, she turned more serious. "Ryan? What is it?"

"Huh, I guess I never really thought about it since I haven't heard the voice in fifteen years." Ryan closed his eyes tight for a long moment, struggling against emotions that he would rather not deal with at all much less in front of this woman.

Handing the phone back, he shook his head. "I know what you heard and without knowing I suppose you would have thought it was me," he began slowly, seeing her frown in confusion. "Only someone who knew the voice and knew that his accent was stronger than what I normally use would be able to tell the difference."

"What are you babbling about?" Andi demanded, not understanding. "If that wasn't you on the message then who the hell was it?"

"My father," Ryan replied simply, not understanding it and not really wanting to. "Don't ask because we'll ask Kerry as soon as I can get out of this bed – and speaking of Kerry, which of my brothers did you try to shoot and why?"

Still shaken about what he had said about his father, Andi took a second to catch up to his next question. "I had just seen a guy practically explode, I didn't know who he was, and so I naturally pulled my weapon. He waved a hand and the gun vanished."

"That would have been Kerry," Ryan guessed, knowing his brothers well enough to hazard an opinion. "Mac would have tried to talk to you and the brat would have pulled his own weapon before resorting to magic."

"You have interesting brothers, Fitzgerald," she remarked, lifting a curious brow. "What's your last one like?"

Thinking about Ian reminded Ryan of what he had been doing before being knocked out of the fight. "Ian's like any normal eighteen year old...with the exception that he has a hell of a lot more power than he lets on about and that's a huge part of our problem."

Moving until his feet were finally on the floor, the black haired Irishman began to attempt to stand on his own but felt weaker than he had in years. "Bloody hell, I don't have time for this rot," he growled in self-disgust, trying to shove off the feelings of weakness by centering his powers only to find they were too low.

“Hero, I hate to tell you this but whatever the hell that dagger was that stabbed you did a number on you,” Andi told him, sighing upon seeing a familiar look enter his eyes. “The healing spell your brothers used took a toll on you as well as them so getting up may not be advisable. I wanted to take you to a hospital.”

“Yeah, that would have looked good, luv,” Ryan snorted, rolling his eyes while trying to use the room itself to show him exactly what spell had been used on him. “It would’ve been kind of hard to explain to normal doctors about magic, hounds from hell and stuff like that.”

Hooking a link to the memories from the room, he saw flashes of his brothers, the circle, and the spell. What concerned him about that image was that he doubted either Mac or Kerry saw how much Roarke had opened himself, how much of his pain and dark energy the boy had taken upon himself.

“Brat’s bound and bloody determined to make me ruin my image,” he muttered, sighing and releasing the image to look at the black haired woman. “Help me up so I can go find my brothers and catch up on what they learned while I was playing in the dorm.”

“Fitzgerald, you’d better...” she had started to object when he caught her hands, holding on tighter than she’d ever had him do before in her time with him.

“Andrea, my brother has been missing for two weeks and there’s this feeling in my gut that says we’re running out of time to help him and his pal,” Ryan declared seriously, holding her eyes as he had done so infrequently. “I need to talk with Kerry and you need to find a plane now that you’ve done your good deed.”

Scowling at him, Andi helped him stand up and felt him try to hold his balance on his own since she knew that her boss hated to have to be helped at anything.

“Suck it up, Fitzgerald because you’re stuck with me until I decide to leave,” she informed him, jade eyes firing even as he was winding up to argue. “Hey, you never know when you might need another set of legs to do something or shoot something. Besides, Olav told me not to come back to base without the boss so...”

“The next damn time I need to hire people I’m makin’ certain that they aren’t as hardheaded as the ones I have now,” he growled, nearly snarling at her laugh, choosing to respond in his natural manner.

Twisting suddenly, Ryan was able to pull a startled Andi hard against his chest to stare down at her with glittering eyes.

“If you’re so bloody insistent on stickin’ this out then listen to me carefully Andrea Michelle Colleen McCabe,” he began sternly, using her full name

because he knew that she hated it and he only used it when he needed to drive a point home.

“This is not like the jobs I send you and the crew on normally or even the abnormal jobs that I still take on.” He went on seriously, now picking up other feelings that he couldn’t instantly place but decided to focus on the woman. “Crazy warlocks are one thing, devil worshippers are another thing that I wasn’t planning on facing again in this lifetime.

“I can’t say what will knock on the front door next so no matter what happens, you will do what I say, when I say it or I will personally put your sassy butt on the first plane back to Athens. Do we understand each other?”

Temper warred with common sense as she debated on showing him a trick that her great-Aunt had taught her as a girl until she recalled the dreams that she’d been having and the woman who had been the other reason that Andi had traveled to Ireland looking for her employer.

“He needs you, Andrea, though hell itself will freeze before he admits that,” she had stated in a soft lilting voice. “Go and be there for him even if it may require a good hard smack to his thick skull.”

Slowly taking a calming breath, Andi nodded finally. “Yeah, Fitzgerald, I understand,” she assured him, smirking. “You escaped the manners department growing up, didn’t you?”

“Mum had five sons to teach those to and she figured out which ones it would stick with,” Ryan shrugged, taking a step, when suddenly it seemed like every sense he had erupted at the same time even as clocks began chiming though it wasn’t the top of the hour.

“What the hell?” Andi demanded, looking around quickly before her eyes landed on Ryan, alarmed. “Ryan?”

Frowning while trying to shake his nerves back down to an even level, he closed his eyes to try to sense what had caused that when the image hit. “Oh, bloody hell,” he whispered, shock quickly turning to an emotion that he rarely let himself feel or show, fear. “Ian.”

Quickly forgetting his still sore body or the weakness, Ryan shrugged away from Andi to break for the door. “Kerry! We’ve got trouble!” he shouted for his brothers even as a scream came from the front of the house.

Moments before:

Not knowing what would soon be coming, Kerry Fitzgerald was having a hard enough time keeping control of things in the parlor.

Brandon Sullivan’s last statement didn’t take him by surprise but it clearly did not go over well with his two brothers.

“Care to run that by us again?” Roarke’s tone was low, a sign that his already strained emotions were getting close to the surface.

"I swear on my sainted Mother's grave that I didn't know what she was going to do," Brandon went on. "She swore that after what occurred with Emily that it would never happen again but...after your brother and that reporter visited I realized the truth and I realized why Ian, a month ago, ran out of the house. He must have found out."

Lifting a brow curiously, Kerry sat down, motioning the man to sit also while Mac headed for the bar and Roarke stayed by the door.

"Start at the beginning, Brandon. What did you realize?" Kerry asked, certain that he knew but feeling that the man needed to get to the point on his own. "Can Mac get you a drink?"

Shaking his head, Brandon finally sat on the edge of the sofa but continued to wring his hands. "Kerry, you have to believe that I loved Ian like my own son and I...I would have tried to keep him safe from nearly anything but..."

"Why does that but not make me feel good about what's coming next?" Mac muttered, keeping an eye on his younger brother while Kerry focused on the shaking man. "Why don't you just tell Kerry what Sybil's into that has you scared and how she's connected with what happened to Ian?"

Sitting back in his chair, Kerry's eyes were calm but darkening as he gazed at the other man. "Or, why don't you just tell us how long she's been into satanic sacrifice and how did our brother figure into her plan before Sebastian returned?"

"You don't understand," Brandon whispered, closing his eyes. "Your grandmother and Sybil always planned for Ian to die the night he turned nineteen and even if he escapes this nightmare either he or the Jackson girl will still die," he announced darkly, head shaking grimly. "It's too late to stop it. Ian's fate was sealed the moment Kathleen brought him to us and there's nothing any of you can do now since he's already close to death or dead."

Feeling the parlor shake slightly had Mac moving to intercept Roarke from going for the man's throat. "Stop," he nudged him back, meeting his eyes to see anger mixed with concern. "We'd know if Ian was dead and we haven't felt that so there's still a chance."

"No, it's not that simple," Brandon fought the guilt of betraying not only his wife but also a friend. "Even if you rescue Ian from this warlock, you can't change the fate that Syb has in mind because he's been marked for sacrifice since his thirteenth birthday and the only way to stop it is if someone else were to take his place."

Realizing what he was saying, Kerry realized the truth in the words. "Molly."

"Aye, the Jackson lass," Brandon whispered, shaking his head. "Sybil didn't like her from the first time Ian introduced her at one of his plays. She called the lass horrible names that night and said it would be over her dead body that her son would date or associate with a half-black witch from America."

Wondering if he could break his brother's arm, Roarke shifted to look over Mac's shoulder. "So aside from being a Satanist, your wife's a bigoted racist who already knew about Molly's powers?"

"Tell me that we didn't know or suspect this before you agreed to leave our three year old baby brother with these people," Mac spoke clearly to Kerry while splitting his attention between Brandon Sullivan and Roarke.

Already tired from the events of the day, Kerry's temper was simmering and the silent accusation in his brother's tone made it spark.

"Of course I didn't know that," he snapped, glaring. "May I remind you that Kathleen made all of the bloody choices in where all of you went after Mum and Da died. If I would have had a say in the matter, I would have kept all of you in Fitzgaren at home."

"That's what Toryn intended if anything ever happened to him or Bren," Brandon spoke suddenly, looking curiously at Kerry. "That's why it came as a surprise to me when your grandmother appeared to ask if we'd take Ian in. I was there when your folks made the condition in their wills stating that you were to be your brothers' guardian, but Kathleen told me that you decided that at nineteen, you didn't want the bother or hassle of..."

The windows in the parlor shook along with the ancient glassware that Fiona Kerrigan collected as Kerry's temper shot to the surface.

"Shit, this could be nasty," Mac whirled to grab onto his brother before he could decide to cause a repeat of the events in the Dean's office. "Settle down and think before you do something you'll regret, Kerry."

Roarke had been listening and considering things while one thought bothered him. "Did you?"

In the midst of turning on Mac, the soft doubts in his younger brother's voice brought Kerry to a full stop.

Of all of his brothers, it had been Roarke who had suffered and endured the most after being separated from his family.

He had begun to slowly heal from both the physical and emotional wounds gained from those days but even the possible thought that Kerry could have kept them together but chose not to, brought back waves of pain, guilt, shame, and anger.

"Mac, take Brandon downstairs to see some of the things Cam brought from Ian's dorm. See if he can make sense of the books or his journal and especially that bloody dagger," Kerry spoke quietly but his eyes were watching Roarke closely.

Realizing the real reason for the sudden change, Mac nodded. "Do I get to pump him for more information on this sudden bit of news or just send Cam over to beat the crap out of the lawyer who handled the will?"

“Find out exactly what Kathleen told him and then get a hold of a copy of the will,” Kerry spoke back mentally, not wanting this right now. “If she had it changed or influenced him, we’ll be able to find out, but right now, I want to talk with Roarke.”

“Take it slow, Kerry, because this has brought back the doubts that were placed in his head as a lad,” Mac warned, shooting Brandon a look. “Come downstairs with me and see if this stuff makes sense or why Ian would even have it.”

Brandon was hesitant but realized that something he had said had opened up another issue for this family. “Mac, I’m sorry if what I said upset...”

“Roarke’s past is still a sore point for him and for us. If what you said is true about Da intending for Kerry to keep us together and Kathleen got that changed, then this could be a bad day,” Mac replied, stepping into the finished basement of his grandparents’ Dublin home.

Maggie was sitting on the floor going through books, while boxes of things had been scattered around. “Doc, maybe checking to see what other hobbies Ian has is a good plan,” she spoke easily but her normally light tone sounded heavy with concern. “This is bad stuff.”

“Heavy devoted Satanist stuff is different than witchcraft or even users of black magic, so it would be bad stuff,” Mac sighed, bending down to pick up a book but the vibes shot out. “Okay, we won’t be picking that up. Brandon, tell me about this crap and what Ian found out.”

Concerned with them, Brandon Sullivan lifted a couple books and swore under his breath in Irish. “Damn, the lad’s trying to find a way to stop a destined death but he’s also looking into ways to shield from possible danger.” He held out a book. “Given his natural powers, he may unintentionally unleash something while trying to protect himself and those he cares for.”

“What did he find out that scared him?” Mac asked again, wincing as something like fire seemed to brush his nerves. “You said that you realized after Maggie and I were at your house today why Ian left a month ago.”

“Ian had come to dinner but I had to go into my office for a short while,” Brandon began grimly, sitting the book down to lift the leather bound journal that Ian had been keeping for years. “When I came home, Sybil was livid in a way like I’ve hardly ever seen her.”

Maggie took the journal along with something else that Ian had written in some script that wasn’t close to shorthand. “We need to find out what he wrote and what ticked your wife off.”

“She said that Ian had run off and that she suspected that he may have gone into the basement and found the chamber where she holds meetings, rituals...and he took her family dagger,” he replied grimly.

Those comments made Mac look up before reaching for the wrapped dagger, slowly removing the cloth around it. "I'm guessing this is probably what she meant?"

Seeing the dagger, Brandon seemed to go pale while backing away. "That's been in her family for generations and it's used only for the important rituals..." He paused as darker memories took him over. "The last time she used it was when they murdered Emily and her uncle had brought it over in preparation for the next ritual...which will be coming soon."

"The night Ian turns nineteen," Mac guessed, not caring for that or for the thought that their own grandmother had sent the boy into a home of devil worshipers. "Without Ian, what will they do?"

"Use someone else, someone close to him," Brandon replied easily, not moving to touch the dagger. "The arrangement as I understood it was that Kathleen would provide a suitable replacement if Sebastian had need of Ian."

Maggie stood up, dusting her jeans off while noticing that Mac had gone quiet and looked odd. "How long has your wife been involved in this and what's she get out of it?"

"Her whole family has been devoted Satanists for several generations. She was literally born during a black mass," Brandon answered, shaking his head. "I didn't realize that until after we were married a few months and my business took off. It wasn't until after our son died and she insisted that we foster Emily, a troubled teenager, that I started having doubts."

"It was a night with Torny that began clueing me in more," he went on slowly. "I had been telling him about things like Syb's odd habits, her family, and other weird things. He looked at me and asked me straight out if I knew that my wife was practicing evil stuff. He advised me to be careful and to get out but by then I was in too deep."

"She used her powers to help you succeed and it keeps her looking young," Mac finished for him, starting to understand. "They probably do minor rituals to keep in favor but the big mass, the big important sacrifice, is done at times of vital significance and my brother was supposed to be the next victim."

"Without Ian, they'll use Molly because by now they've probably figured out that she's either important to him or vice-versa," Maggie nodded, seeing the wisdom in that. "Ian found out and has been trying to find a way out of it. Why didn't he tell you or Kerry?" She couldn't figure that out all.

Knowing the answer to that, Brandon hesitated to mention it considering how his last one worked out. "Syb and Kathleen have been pounding it into his head since he was five that the reason none of you really bothered with him was because he was too much trouble and that he'd been forgotten, or if he caused too much hassle, his brothers would forget him."

Little lights began to flicker in Mac's eyes. "You knew those were lies," he replied slowly, glaring at the older man. "If it wasn't, Kerry wouldn't have fought you on officially adopting Ian and from what I've heard, Ryan's been closer than apparently you knew."

"Sybil didn't, but I knew he was keeping an eye on Ian." Brandon shook his head, touching one of the stuffed toys that had been brought along with the books. "Ryan never bothered to hide his presence or his dislike of us."

"Sure and that sounds like my favorite gambler," Maggie grinned, whirling as clocks began chiming throughout the house and Mac suddenly grabbed for a chair. "Doc?"

Not caring for the feelings that he was suddenly feeling, Mac frowned as it seemed like a giant air pressure bubble popped all around him at once even as the doorbell rang.

"This is weird," he muttered, feeling the tension from the parlor easing but not liking Ryan's growing apprehension. "Ry's up and going."

Brandon reached out to lay a hand on his arm. "Mac, I never wanted Ian harmed," he sought to make them understand. "I believed Sybil when she promised that it was over but she's my wife and..."

"And my father was your best friend and if you knew about his and Mum's wills and what they declared then you, as a lawyer, should have talked with Kerry about it," Mac countered, not fully able to hide his bitterness. "Ian, Ryan, and Roarke, especially Roarke, deserved more than what they got growing up."

Maggie blinked curiously but remained quiet. She had believed from what she had picked up from conversations that Ryan had grown up easily in County Clare. Now she wondered if that was actually true.

Feeling the air get thick with an energy like she had never felt before, the reporter was going to ask something when things began happening all at once.

A large handmade white candle sitting in the corner of the room burst into full flame just as Mac heard Ryan shout for them and Jessica Hadley screamed.

"Well, this certainly doesn't sound promising," he muttered, breaking into a run up the steps with Maggie close behind, neither noticing the glimmer in Brandon Sullivan's eyes.

Chapter 16

Waiting several minutes after their brother removed Brandon Sullivan from the parlor to speak, Kerry took the time to calm his already tense emotions since he didn't want to handle this wrong.

"Roarke..." he began finally, knowing what was probably the cause of his younger brother's dark emotions and wondering how best to approach it. "You want to say something to me, so get it off your chest."

Walking a few steps away as if trying to keep distance between them, Roarke seemed unsure and leery. "It's...not important right now, Kerry," he shrugged, not sure that he wanted to bring this subject up to any of them again in fear of losing the confidence that he'd gained recently. "I shouldn't have said anything and..."

"You grew up hearing that you weren't wanted or that I didn't want to be bothered with you and I'm sure that Ian's probably heard the same thing," Kerry began quietly, deciding against approaching his brother just then as he felt the subtle wall of defense that was up again. "Now you've heard that despite Mum and Da setting it up that I would become your guardian if anything ever happened to them, that I didn't want to be bothered with the responsibility."

Shifting slightly so that he was looking at anything except his brother, Roarke looked at his hands silently, struggling not to recall his abusive childhood and the physical and sexual abuse at the hands of others.

"You were nineteen, Kerry, and no one would have expected you to take on the role of full time parent," he murmured, fighting the automatic reaction to recoil when the hand touched his shoulder.

"I told you once that I fought Kathleen to keep all four of you at home with me, Roarke, and I did. Had I known about that condition in the wills I would have used every ounce of power, influence, and friends that Da had to keep all of you," Kerry assured him, not letting on when he felt the shoulder jerk under his hand.

Hesitating briefly and fighting the questions that popped into his mind as doubts ran strong, Roarke finally looked over into Kerry's calm eyes. "If you could have, would you have kept us?" he asked, needing this answer. "All of us?"

"Poor lost lad, will you ever learn to trust us?" Kerry asked himself silently, sensing the deeper questions that he wasn't asking. "I would have moved Heaven and Hell to bring all of you back to Fitzgaren, and that will be the one thing that I will forever live with," he assured him grimly. "The simple fact is that I let our parents down by not keeping you and the others with me and that

will always haunt me. If I had, I like to think that none of you would carry the shadows and burdens that you do.”

Looking fully at Kerry, he was obviously considering those words and realizing that his brother would probably always blame himself for failing to protect them, as much as Roarke still blamed himself for their parents’ deaths.

“Kathleen did it, Kerry,” he spoke quietly, hating to even voice that name aloud. “You had no reason not to trust Da’s lawyer who handled the estate, so why would you have even questioned him that it had been in there to allow her to handle the placement of her grandsons?”

“Because as the oldest I should have been paying more attention to things in those last few months,” Kerry replied seriously, feeling an odd change in the air but ignoring it to focus on Roarke.

“Da and his mother were fighting a lot. Mum and Da were actually fighting to the point where Mac and I wondered a lot if they’d divorce,” he went on slowly, seeing surprise in his brother’s eyes. “I was nineteen and despite everything, I was selfish and didn’t want to take the time to learn the things that Da really wanted me to. The important things like the legal end of taking care of Fitzgaren Manor or you lads and probably so much more.”

Still shocked to hear that his parents, whom he had always believed had a near perfect marriage, might have been considering divorce, Roarke frowned to hear his brother talking like this since he had never once thought of his eldest brother as selfish.

“Kerry, you started the whole bloody group. You gave up your whole childhood to sing and you never once complained about four annoying brothers,” he scoffed, lowering his eyes slightly while adding, “I know that Ry and I could be huge pains at time.”

Chuckling, Kerry slowly moved a hand so that he could lift those matching eyes back up to his. “Aye, I couldn’t agree more that you and Ryan were both huge pains in the ass more times than not, but you were both my little brothers so I overlooked a great deal,” he assured him then sighed. “I was selfish though, Roarke in more ways than you need to know right now but...”

The words cut off when he made a grab to keep his younger brother standing even as he was feeling the same burst of power that overwhelmed Roarke.

“What the bloody hell was that?” he demanded more to himself, surprised to feel Roarke’s hands hold onto him. “Easy, what did you feel?”

“Energy, like a door opened somewhere close and let out a lot of energy.” Roarke blinked past the burning under his skin even as chimes erupted all over the house. “Kerry, what’s going on?”

Frowning slightly as the hair on the back of his neck began standing up, Kerry thought he recognized this energy pulse but it had been fifteen years since he had last felt it. On the day of their parents’ funeral when...

“Oh, bloody hell,” he whispered, certain if this was the same type of energy then something else was coming that he knew his brothers weren’t prepared for.

Hearing the doorbell ring, Roarke eased away. “We will find Ian, right?” he asked, needing to have some reassurance on that. “He’s still the baby, Kerry and shouldn’t have had to face any of this bloody crap.”

“We’ll find both Ian and Molly, little brother,” Kerry assured him, placing both hands on his brother’s neck as he once had done to either calm or reassure. “Ryan’s awake and bitching if you want to go bug him while I pin Mac down.”

Relieved to see a smile slowly form, Roarke had begun to relax at that suggestion even as they both heard Ryan’s sharp voice shout, and then his senses switched gears from relaxed to on guard when they heard Jessica scream.

“Jess?” Roarke was whirling even as he felt his friend’s shock, alarm, and outright terror. “Jessica!”

Bolting from the parlor while drawing the 9mm Beretta that he’d reclaimed, Roarke’s reaction was automatic to a possible threat to the woman he loved.

“Roarke, don’t aim that at anyone or anything yet!” Kerry snapped, following closely though he feared that he knew what was happening.

“Kerry! We have serious issues!” Ryan yelled as he came down the hall, still looking pale but his determination seemed to be overriding anything else.

“You mean issues aside from the fact that you work with a very interesting young woman?” Mac countered, coming out of the basement door in time to hear his brother. “A woman with both Gypsy and Celtic blood and you wonder why she drives you nuts?”

The scowl that had been present went darker as Ryan threw his brother a well-known look. “That’s not the issue and leave McCabe out of this,” he shot back, shoving past Mac to follow Roarke. “Brat! Listen to Kerry! Someone should’ve reminded him that fairies don’t like guns or lead.”

Between concern for his brother, worry over Molly Jackson and hearing the tone in Jessica’s voice, Roarke Fitzgerald was beyond listening to any of his older brothers as he got to the front door first.

Jessica Hadley had been getting Cameron Young and their resident mystic to fill her in on what Nick O’Malley had learned up in Savernake Forest, when things began to go weird all over the house.

Hearing the doorbell start ringing along with a loud pounding, she exchanged wary looks with Cameron before shrugging. “Keep the staff here,” she urged, heading for the door.

Having been sensing the tension going on between the Fitzgeralds she’d chosen to allow Kerry to try to calm Roarke down, but the vibes that she’d

been feeling were so alien to her that she wasn't really certain what she'd find on the other side of the door.

"With our luck it'll be a two headed alien dragon or some such rot," she muttered under her breath, pulling open the door with a common greeting on her lips but it died as soon as it had began.

It wasn't the tall, powerfully built black haired man dressed in clothes that didn't seem to fit this world that caused her startled scream but the battered, pale, sickly looking young man he was holding.

Seeing Ian Fitzgerald in this state caused Jessica to scream, and then her shock for him turned to alarm over the strange man whose eyes exuded a power that she'd rarely sensed in anyone from this realm.

"Jessie?" Roarke had pulled the Beretta on instincts learned over time and was looking for the threat when entering the foyer.

Sharp eyes located his girlfriend a second before they landed on his brother and the stranger.

"Jess, move!" he snapped, casting a reactive spell that instantly brought Jessica from the door to behind him while his weapon raised to cover this strangely dressed man that was holding Ian's battered body.

"You move in one bleedin' way that I don't like and I put a bullet in your damn skull," Roarke warned in a hard voice, eyes going darker in reaction to what he deemed as a threat. "Put him down."

Not seeming concerned by the threat that this young black haired man could pose to him as he stayed on the stoop, concealed by any passers by with a simple spell, he cocked his head as musing.

"Well, I can certainly see that you did not inherit your beloved Mother's good graces or manners, Roarke Michael Quinn Fitzgerald," Riordan spoke casually, lifting a brow as the Beretta moved slightly. "I can assume that little thing is considered a weapon in this mortal realm these days?"

Blinking at the question, Roarke didn't lower his weapon while risking a glance down at Jessica. "You alright?" he asked quietly, feeling her concern but not seeing any wounds.

Nodding silently, her fingers dug into his arm. "Ian, Roarke," she whispered, fear for him more than anything else clear in her voice. "Is he...is he alive?"

“The boy is living but he needs more than I or mine can do for him,” Riordan replied, hearing her whispered query.

Still not lowering the weapon, Roarke’s eyes were suspicious as he looked at his brother to try to gauge his wounds and condition and then shifted that look up to the man.

“If you brought him here for help, why not bring him in?” he demanded, feeling his brothers enter behind him and catching the shocked emotion they also had at seeing their youngest brother.

Laying a gentle hand on his brother’s shoulder to ease the weapon down, Kerry stepped forward. “Because of the spells cast on this house, he cannot enter without an invitation by one of us,” he explained to his siblings and then turned to focus on this man who upon closer inspection did share similar features to their family. “Gram’s magic is cast to protect against the Gentry or any type of fairy, and that’s who has brought our brother home to us.”

Chapter 17

Following his startling announcement, Kerry went on to speak directly to their guest.

“Enter and be at peace, Riordan,” he greeted simply, extending an arm in invitation all the while hoping that Mac and Ryan did recall the lessons taught by their mother of the Gentry. “It’s been a very trying time for us and Roarke reacts more strongly to threats than...”

With the invitation offered, Riordan stepped over the threshold of the home and smirked as sparks lightly flew off his shoulders as he did.

“Fiona certainly believes in casting heavily, doesn’t she?” he mused, examining each of these young men with a firm critical glance as if judging them, their hearts, and their souls.

“Those two remind me of myself centuries ago,” he grinned slightly after eyeing Ryan and Roarke fully. “Hot headed, brash and far too arrogant at times when he shouldn’t be.”

Having finally sheathed his weapon, Roarke had slipped Jessica into his arms but paused to throw a look over at his black haired brother. “He’s talking about you, you know.”

“Shut up, brat, before I choose to tell Kerry about what you pulled during the healing circle,” Ryan shot at him while looking at this man and then at his white skinned brother. “Mac?”

Mac stepped forward without waiting, running a hand lightly over Ian’s sweat soaked hair and fought the initial urge to jerk back as the vile images hit him along with the emotions.

Uttering a curse in his native language, he lifted his eyes up. “Can I take him?” he asked, wondering if his Mother’s lessons ever said anything about an exact tone to use when dealing with high-powered fairies.

“He still suffers from the deeper wounds that were inflicted and he needs nourishment from your food as he could not be fed food from my realm,” Riordan informed him as he gently and easily handed the youngest Fitzgerald brother off to his older brother.

“Thank you,” Mac murmured, swallowing his first reaction to seeing his baby brother so pale, still fevered, and hurt. “Jess, can you find that guy Cameron swears is a medic? I want him while I see just how bad Ian’s hurt and what he needs.”

Jessica nodded, starting to move to go find her mercenaries but hesitated to glance at Roarke curiously. “Is it...?”

“Go help Mac, *a gra*,” he urged, gently squeezing her hand to offer her much of the same reassurance that he’d been seeking from Kerry earlier. “I’ll be up soon.”

“Sir, tell me what you’ll need for the lad,” Charles spoke as he appeared from the side door, looking on concerned.

Mac looked down, simmering. “I’ll know as soon as I check the wounds,” he sighed, seeing Maggie carrying the small bag that had most of his medical tools along with other items that they may need. “I know hot water, towels, bandages, and some clean clothes.”

As the butler nodded and Jessica ran to find Peter Daniels, that left Riordan in the foyer with three men who reminded him hauntingly of his long lost love.

Facing them, it didn’t take long or even a spell to determine which one he should address. “Do you know who I am, Kerrigan?” he asked curiously.

“Aye, I do and I remember seeing you among the mourners at the funeral of our parents,” Kerry replied, leading the way into the living room. “You’re Riordan, a Prince among the Fairy folk here in Ireland and according to family legends, the Father of the very first Fitzgerald when you fell in love with a mortal woman named Aislin,” he continued, pausing by the couch to look back. “How close am I?”

Riordan nodded in admiration. “Impressive you are, lad,” he admitted, silently pleased that the legends had been passed on. “Yes, many of the Gentry attended that sad event because Toryn was a wise man and Brenna, despite being the daughter of a hard-headed woman, was as lovely and gentle as any fairy I can name.

“Now, there is much that you must do and quickly it must be done,” he went on, sitting on the sofa with a graceful elegance. “Ian’s injuries can be healed with the combined abilities that you all share but he will carry scars of his torments for the rest of his life,”

Riordan shifted a wry look toward Roarke. “Much as this one does already,” he added, seeing the boy tense at the mention of his past. “Some guilt and pain cannot be gotten rid of so easily, and though you all are blood of my blood there are limits to what I can do to help you.

“The prophecy you each must face, while it depends on strength in unity, it also depends on strength of will, of independence. Each of you will be facing the inner demons that have plagued you since the day that Sebastian claimed the lives of your parents,” he went on seriously, taking the time to eye each of them. “For now though, your brother is in need of you. Help him over the first hurdle of being back where he is safe and then I will answer your questions.”

Ryan was about to shoot off a snide comment about that when suddenly the whole house shook with a ferocity that made Roarke’s strongest power seem weak.

“Bloody hell, I hope the boy doesn’t fry Mac,” he muttered even as Andi McCabe skidded to a halt in the door.

“Fitzgerald, that brother of yours is upstairs yelling in Gaelic and half of the furniture in the hall just rearranged itself!” she exclaimed, more amazed than alarmed. “Who’s the Fairy and aren’t there rules about them existing in a mortal realm?” she asked upon noticing the new arrival.

While Riordan was lifting a brow at this woman, Ryan was struggling to cope with thoughts flying in too many directions.

“Shut up, McCabe,” he growled, hearing a thud from upstairs. “You’re not supposed to know about the rules of the fairy kingdom anyway.”

Roarke covered a laugh while using his link with Jessica to see what was happening upstairs. “He’s scared and delusional, Kerry.” he reported grimly. “He thinks...oh, God, he thinks we abandoned him to Sebastian and...Mac was just slammed into the wall.”

“I suppose I should have warned Mac that Ian’s nasty when he’s sick,” Ryan sighed, ignoring the glare that he was certain Kerry was giving him. “C’mon, brat, let’s go save big brother and see how bad Ian’s hurt.”

Pausing as he walked past her to whisper something to Andi, her eyes narrowed dangerously.

“I’m going to turn him into a toad before I leave,” she muttered, throwing herself down into a chair for a proper sulk while Kerry hurried upstairs before more damage could be done. “So, can you drink in this world or do the same rules apply?” she asked curiously, heading for the bar to find something. “Because I think I need a stiff drink after all of this crap.”

“I can drink, Andrea Michelle Colleen McCabe, but I don’t think I will yet,” Riordan smiled at her startled look. “Oh, I know who you are, girl, and I know why you won’t do what you threaten.”

“I hate it when people know more about me than they should,” Andi muttered, finding a shot glass and a bottle of aged brandy and was about to pour it when a sound like a shot came from somewhere.

“A-ha!” a sharp voice spoke from the door. “I told you that I smelled something fishy and I was right. There’s a blasted Fairy Lord in our home, Fi.”

Turning at the sound, Andi had to blink to be certain that she wasn’t seeing things because if she hadn’t known better, she would have sworn that the small, wiry, silvery blond haired man jumping around in the doorway was a leprechaun.

Not seeing the black haired woman in his living room, the little man strode up to Riordan boldly to poke him in the chest. “What the Devil are ye doing here?” he demanded. “You shouldn’t have been able to cross the door and I’ll toss you right back...”

“Lorcan! You’ll do no such thing to a guest in this house and not in front of such a lovely young lass as this,” a softly lilting Irish accented voice snapped from the hall.

“Bah, be grateful that my wife has a thing for behaving properly,” the older man snorted before turning to Andi with a twinkle in his blue eyes. “Now, here’s a much better sight to be greeted with.” He smiled, bowing as he kissed her hand. “Lorcan Kerrigan, lass, and may I ask who you are and what you’re doing here?”

As Andi struggled to catch up, Riordan was rolling his eyes at the older man. “Ignore this doddering old fool, Andrea. His only qualifying good trait was that he’s Brenna Fitzgerald’s father or I could have turned him into a mushroom fifty years ago if Fiona had chosen wiser.”

Watching the tiny man puff out of his chest, Andi wondered if this scene was comical or dangerous considering that Lorcan Kerrigan was a good foot or so shorter than the powerfully built black haired Riordan.

“Umm, still catching up to all this and I know that I’ve threatened to turn Ryan into a toad. If there’s a chance that one of you are going to try to turn the other into a non-living thing, warn me first,” she urged, looking toward the door after hearing a soft swishing sound and then a chuckle.

“There will be no turning anyone into anything inside my house,” the same soft voice declared from the door.

The woman that stood there amazed Andi by the way she seemed to glow briefly, stepping into the room with her floor length deep green velvet skirt swishing lightly.

An older woman in her late fifties or early sixties with a few natural wrinkles that she didn’t see a need to hide, Fiona Kerrigan’s long reddish blond hair flowed freely as she eyed her husband.

“Lorcan, you know better than to threaten such a thing and you know to mind your manners inside this house,” she chided both men before turning a warm smile on Andi. “Forgive the lack of manners, child. I fear the lessons that I taught our children did not stick with him and this one here has never been known for manners.

“I’m Fiona and this is my husband Lorcan,” she smiled easily as if sensing the young woman’s nerves. “You’re a friend to one of our grandsons?”

Blinking, Andi slowly nodded. “Friend is a bit extreme,” she replied, shrugging. “I work with Ryan and after seeing someone try to gut him with a Satanic dagger and everything else I’ve seen today, I’m finally thinking that I should take his advice and head for home.”

Still glaring at Riordan, Lorcan did an about-face to stare at the young woman as his wife’s normally serene face formed a rare frown. “Satanic dagger?” he repeated, scowling. “Now just what have those lads gotten themselves involved with?”

The house shook suddenly and Brandon Sullivan stepped into the living room. "Mr. and Mrs. Kerrigan," he greeted warily. "I was hoping one of you would come to help Ian. I'm not certain if his brothers have the strength to deal with what's been done to him recently."

"Fi, my love, I'm thinking that it's not a coincidence that Kerry sent most of the staff to Galway," Lorcan decided, narrowing his gaze as he eyed this skinny, brown haired eyed lawyer. "I knew something wasn't right from day one with that wife of yours, laddie."

"Lorcan, get Brandon a drink while Andrea and I go see what the lads are into upstairs," Fiona suggested lightly, giving Riordan a cool gaze. "The fact that you're here tells me that things have gotten to a bad point."

Riordan had stood easily, lifting his eyes to the ceiling where the light seemed to move. "The youngest lad has suffered greatly at Sebastian's hands and he shows wounds from those accursed hounds of his as well as more sadistic wounds that came from another," he explained, knowing that he wouldn't have to spell it out for this woman. "I'd rather wait to explain my involvement until I can speak to all of the lads."

"So be it," Fiona agreed, sighing at a shout that she heard. "Mac picked up some interesting language somewhere, I see," she mused, extending an arm. "Come with me, lass."

Though she felt no fear, something still made Andi hesitate. "Ryan said to stay clear and he's been in a mood since waking up."

Fiona chuckled, patting the girl lightly on the hand. "Ryan's got a black temper at the best of times and it grows blacker if he's hurt or he's scared," she explained, heading for the stairs and her grandsons. "You were brought here for a reason, Andrea, but now is not the time to begin to doubt either yourself or Ryan because he needs help in ways that his brothers cannot understand."

"Half the time Fitzgerald doesn't understand anything, much less share it," Andi muttered with a sigh, jade green eyes jerking at a shout. "He's also too damn pigheaded to know when to ask for help."

Easing by the older woman to run up the stairs, Andi swore under her breath. "Oh, should that little leprechaun fella be shooting sparks at either of those other guys?"

"Lorcan!" Fiona shouted back, feeling the terror and pain from upstairs. "Behave yourself and find your pouch of salves," she added. "I fear that we may be in need of them before this night is over."

Chapter 18

Patrick ‘Mac’ Fitzgerald as the second son had learned early on that his unusual gifts tended to lean toward full empathy and healing. He had much more patience than his brothers did, even though he readily accepted that he could be pushed into temper.

Never one to settle down to just the simple or easy, Mac had worked hard after his parents’ deaths to make his life exactly as he wanted it.

Though his life in County Cork had been relatively easy compared to his younger brothers, there were things that he’d rather forget and it was those things that had pushed him forward with his successes and his failures in both his personal and business life.

Since the day at his home in Cork when Mary Margaret Cavanaugh first entered his life and he learned that Sebastian had returned, Mac hadn’t been certain which way things would go for him and he still wasn’t.

Right then, he was more worried about his youngest brother and if his skills would be enough to heal him.

After taking Ian from Riordan, Mac had brought him gently upstairs to one of the warmly decorated bedrooms.

While the house itself was one of the first built in the square, and had been in the Kerrigan family since its creation, Mac couldn’t recall a time when it had been decorated in any way but warm and comfortable.

Carefully laying Ian on the king size mahogany bed, the first thing Mac did was wave a hand toward the fireplace in the room in order to bring it to life so the room would have extra heat.

“Doc, Jess said that Daniels is on his way up,” Maggie said as she entered the room carrying his bag, some towels, bandages and a basin of warm water. “Doc, are you okay?” she asked, seeing his eyes were just staring. “Mac?”

Sitting on the edge of the bed, he kept his blue-grey eyes locked on his brother’s sickly white face, while his fingers gently stroked through Ian’s shoulder length blond hair, and remembered too much.

“When he was three, about six months before the incident on Skelling Michael when Mum and Da died, Ian was playing in the back part of the manor that they had just cleared for a new pond,” he began quietly while slowly beginning to remove Ian’s torn and dirty clothes.

“We were supposed to be watching him but as usual at that time in our lives, other things seemed more important. Ry and Roarke were fighting again. I was trying to break them up before they spilled blood, decide on a major once I was out of school, and not growl at Kerry. He was a huge pain in the ass that week because his girlfriend had dumped him or something,” he went on,

scowling after he removed the shirt and saw the bite and claw marks along with the bruises and what seemed like burns.

"Sounds familiar," Maggie grinned from the other side of the bed where she noticed the dried blood on the boy's jeans. "My brothers were always ignoring me when they were supposed to be lookin' after me."

Reaching for a cloth to wet, Mac began to gently wipe over the wounds that still showed while frowning. "Did they ever almost let you drown?" he asked, seeing her eyes shoot to his. "We weren't watching him and he'd always been fascinated by water, so when he noticed the exotic fish that Da had placed in the new pond, he decided to play with them."

"Ian, while he could talk before he was a year old, had a hard time learning other things, such as swimming or floating," Mac explained, hesitating as he reached to remove the filthy, bloodied jeans. "He fell into the deeper end of it and Kerry and I didn't hear his shout over Ry and Roarke's fighting."

"It was Roarke who actually felt that something was wrong and broke off the fight to go check on Ian." Mac found his hands were actually trembling while removing the stained material. "Kerry was giving Ry the usual lecture when Roarke's shout reached us. When we reached the pond, Roarke had already gone in to pull Ian out." He paused briefly to soothe Ian when the boy twisted restlessly. "I applied CPR and he coughed up water after about a minute. He came down with pneumonia a week later and it took a lot of Mum and Gram's power to keep him with us. He looked this pale and lost then too."

Maggie had taken a wet cloth and had begun to clean a long red and swollen gash in his leg while listening to the pain in Mac's voice. "This wasn't your fault, Doc, and neither was that."

"Kerry and I knew that both Sebastian and Kathleen would be striking back at us, Maggie," he replied grimly, slowly letting out a breath that he'd drawn upon seeing the wounds that hadn't been healed by Riordan's magic. "We should have known that they'd target Ian since he'd be considered the next weakest one given what we've learned so far of his life here in Dublin."

"Ian's the baby and despite what we've seen of his powers, we should have made certain that he was safe." He knew that was something that none of them would forget again.

The multiple swollen red bites and claw marks that seemed speckled with black under his skin made Mac's stomach flip at the slightest touch. "Damn it," he swore, jerking a hand back until he could settle both nerves and powers.

Watching Mac and having seen him use his healing abilities before, Maggie knew this could be bad. "How serious is he?" she asked, concerned for the boy. "I've seen murder victims that looked better. What the bloody hell cut him?"

Reaching into his bag for a small tin of salve and several crystals including a red speckled bloodstone that he held in the palm of his hand for several moments to charge it before placing it on the nightstand next to Ian.

“Many of these wounds have been cleaned already. However, the severity of them, the poison in his blood from the bites and claw marks, the infection and lack of food and liquid is making Ian sick,” he replied, motioning to the wound on his brother’s upper thigh which still showed signs of festering.

“When Roarke was bitten and clawed a few months back by those damned dogs, they were glancing blows. It appears that these dogs were allowed to bite, gnaw, and claw Ian repeatedly which allowed the poison in his blood to concentrate,” Mac explained, understanding from his father’s lessons how deadly this could be. “Not even pure Fairy magic could heal all of these and I’m going to have a bloody hard time doing it.”

“Doc, get the others,” Maggie urged upon realizing what he was saying and not caring for it. “You’ve been doing too much lately. You can’t try to heal him without the others and you bloody well know it.”

Taking a deep breath, Mac shook his head. “There is very little that I regret in my life, Maggie, but Kerry isn’t the only one who bears or feels guilt for failing our brothers. Ian has a past that Kerry doesn’t know about, that probably not even Brandon is aware of, and I know that if I would have taken steps when he was thirteen, just five years ago, that much of this might have been avoided.

“Roarke and Ryan have trouble when absorbing serious injuries or negative emotion. I don’t want this bringing up the darker things in either of their lives,” he finished firmly, hearing Peter Daniels enter the room. “I can handle this and then Kerry can take the excess energy off of me.”

Daniels caught the sour look on the petite reporter’s face, figuring that it was probably safer if he didn’t know what was going on. “He looks like raw meat,” he observed thoughtfully, going on briskly. “His skin color and the way it feels when I pinch it means he’s dehydrated. We need to start an IV solution.”

Mac nodded in agreement; never once in his life had he discounted the use of modern medicine. In fact, he preferred using it over his other abilities except when he had no other choice.

While Daniels hooked up an IV line into Ian’s arm, Mac began speaking in low soothing Irish to his unconscious brother.

“*Codladh, leanbh dearthair* (Sleep, baby brother),” he murmured softly, running a hand down from Ian’s shoulder to his hand where, after unclenching his fingers, he discovered something that caused his blood to run cold. “Maggie.”

Looking over from where she'd been lighting the colored and etched candles that she knew he'd need, Maggie focused on what was dangling from the dark blond Irishman's hand.

"That's not Ian's Claddagh medal," she reached for it, recalling having seen it before. "It's Molly's. Oh, Mac, what's she done?"

"Whatever it is I don't think it's good, luv," he muttered, feeling the spark shoot up his arm a second before the IV holder was thrown violently against the wall. "Ian?"

Twisting to check on Peter Daniels who had ducked the IV pole, Mac then whirled back to see that his brother's eyes were still closed but his body was rigid and shaking.

"Ian, I don't think anyone would appreciate it if you smashed Cam's medic with that IV," he chided easily but became more concerned when he realized that the boy's thoughts were too cloudy and chaotic. "Damn, Maggie, change of plans. Go find Kerry...now."

Surprised at the sudden change, she was just starting to respond when a sudden impulse made her look. "Mac!"

Her scream came a moment too late as the bedroom seemed to shake and Mac found himself thrown away from the bed, slamming into the far wall.

"Shit, this looks bad," Daniels muttered, debating on moving to check on Mac.

The reason for his debate was the fact that Ian Fitzgerald, while only semi-conscious, was clearly agitated, confused, frightened, and very dangerous.

"Ian, luv, stay still," Maggie urged him, keeping her voice low and soft in order to soothe the boy while checking on Mac out of the corner of her eye. "You're safe..."

Reaching out to place a gentle hand on the boy's shoulder, Maggie was taken off guard by the normally mellow young man's violent reaction to her touch.

"No! Don't touch me!" he screamed, lashing out blindly with both hands and powers as he struggled to escape the threat that his still fevered mind showed him. "You won't do it again, damn it!"

Not seeing Maggie or even his own brother, Ian's first reaction was fight then flee and in that reaction he summoned a spell on instinct that shook the whole house while blue flashes of energy danced on his fingers.

"Go back to hell!" he screamed, eyes turning black as his powers shot to full and blue flame burst from his hand straight toward Maggie while a heavy statue of a fairy flew from the mantle.

Chapter 19

Groaning as his head throbbed after connecting with the wainscot on the wall, Mac Fitzgerald swore sourly about younger brothers.

"I swear when he's well that I'm going to smack him upside his bleedin' head," he muttered, shaking his head to clear it even as he was picking up the surge in power.

Aside from the power, Mac also picked up terror, pain, and shock, but it was when he caught Maggie's fear that he snapped back to full awareness just in time to catch both the movement of the statue and the energy blast.

"Maggie!" he shouted in alarm, casting a deflective spell to shoot the blue energy away from Maggie, but being still shaken he wasn't able to catch the fairy statue. "Move!"

Even as the blue energy flame missed her by inches, Maggie was ducking the statue as she was too startled by the boy's power to cast her own spell.

The fairy statue suddenly flew away from the fiery reporter's skull by just a half an inch.

"Ian, what the bloody hell are you doing?" Ryan demanded from the door, eyes dark after he had barely caught the statue from smashing his favorite reporter's skull. "Besides trying to bring Gram and Gramps' house down, that is."

Struggling weakly to escape the scenario in his mind, Ian jerked at the voice and accidentally launched a wave of power that shoved Ryan out of the bedroom into the hall.

"I won't let you touch me again and you'll die before laying a finger on Molly!" he shouted, too panicked to hear his brothers or feel them as his now free powers struggled to protect him.

Yet the boy's biggest fear wasn't for him. It was for Molly.

"Bastards won't trick me either!" he yelled, finally able to kick free of the blanket but found himself too weak to stand as one leg buckled. "You won't use my brothers against me! Don't...care what people say...what you say. They won't forget me." He slurred the last few words as shock hit him and he started to fall.

Ian jerked wildly or tried to when firm hands caught him gently. "No...let go..." He struggled uselessly until finally a voice got through the hazy fog.

"Ian, we never forgot you and you are safe," Roarke assured him, keeping his grip firm enough to hold but not hurt the boy more as he got him back on the edge of the bed. "Look at me, baby brother. Do you know who I am?"

Kerry had knelt next to where Ryan had landed in the hallway. He seemed fine if ticked. Kerry motioned him to allow their brother to handle this on his own.

“Ian, do you know who I am?” Roarke asked again, not liking the way his brother’s eyes looked, or the way the bite on his leg and shoulder seemed to hiss at his touch.

Blinking rapidly, the boy strained briefly to pull away but the grip didn’t loosen but burned. “A...shadow demon,” he gritted, finally able to jerk away to roll onto his side in a near fetal position. “Go ahead...hurt me. I don’t care. Just don’t hurt...don’t hurt Molly. I don’t want her hurt like...you did, Jessie.”

Fire flashed in Roarke’s eyes at the mere mention of Sebastian’s attack on Jessica Hadley but it was his brother’s movements, tone, and the memory flashes that were causing his anger to darken.

A survivor of abuse, Roarke recognized the signs in his brother and wondered if Ian himself was truly aware of them.

“Stay here, Maggie,” Mac whispered to the woman after having made sure that she wasn’t hurt. He saw Peter Daniels speaking on his radio. “Tell Cam to keep your people out of this,” he told the medic, who nodded.

Catching Kerry’s grim look, Mac had already gotten the sense of what was happening.

“The poison from the bites, whatever drug he was given, and weeks of fear and abuse are going to cause us issues,” he muttered, watching as Roarke gently spoke to him, but it was Ryan that Mac’s eyes pinned warningly.

Hating to be shoved or pushed in any way, Ryan’s temper always surfaced and as he shook off the final effects of their baby brother knocking him into the hall, it was plain that he was pissed.

“He didn’t mean to do it, Ry,” Roarke spoke over his shoulder, sensing that he wasn’t angry, just worried. “He’s scared and confused.”

“That’s about the only reason that I’m not going to break his fool neck,” Ryan growled, his normal tone more gruff as he struggled to shield the concern he was feeling.

Moving to sit on the other side of the bed, Ryan used a small portion of the energy that he’d regained to look and gauge the injuries. “We need to bring him around before we can heal this crap or at the first touch he’ll react,” he warned grimly, rubbing his shoulder where it had connected to a hall wall. “He’s a nasty lad when sick but this is bloody ridiculous.”

“He’s sick and delirious, Ryan,” Roarke shot back in defense. “Touch him and you can get the smallest amount of knowledge to what that bastard did to him. Not to mention what she...”

Hearing the tone change warned Ryan that his brother’s temper was too close to the surface as memories resurfaced, and that should have been enough to have him backing off.

Still tired and drained from the recent injury, Ryan's own temper was also tight and he didn't feel like backing down yet.

"Stop before you finish that thought, Ryan," Kerry warned sternly, nearing the bed to shoot him a hard look. "We need to work together to help Ian and to find Molly so I don't need you and Roarke killing one another yet."

Ryan rolled his eyes but as Kerry turned to address Mac, he let his eyes move to Roarke again. Seeing and feeling his emotions and fear as Ian seemed to be shaking worse, reaching out to grab his wrist before it could touch a still festering wound.

"No, brat, I do not think so," he murmured in a voice low enough that only his younger brother could hear, waiting for their eyes to lock. "You touched Ian earlier and that wound on him began to burn the both of you, which means you're still too susceptible to Sebastian's powers, especially after you absorbed too much from me earlier."

Roarke frowned, throwing a look back to see where Kerry and Mac were since he did not want a lecture from them. "I didn't absorb anything earlier and I can help Ian," he snapped softly, jerking his wrist back and stiffening slightly when his brother's grasp just tightened. "Ry, let go."

"I see the signs in Ian like I still do in you, brat, so I know why you're fighting so hard to do this. These are too deep and he's too sick for just one of us to heal him," Ryan shot at him, softening his gaze but not his grip as he added. "Roarke, we will help him."

"He's not like us, Ry. Ian should have been able to go to school, be an actor or whatever, and live normally," Roarke whispered, finally able to pull his wrist free and lightly brushed his brother's hair back from his face and off his neck. "Ian should not know or have to know about any of this crap."

Figuring that he wasn't just referring to their new lot in life or Sebastian, Ryan reached over to lightly squeeze the tense shoulder. "He will, Roarke," he promised firmly. "We all will."

Considering a jab at his brother about Andi, Roarke was about to speak when his fingers brushed Ian's neck and caught site of something that made him look harder.

"What the bloody hell is this?" he demanded, feeling Ian jerk at the touch but the boy remained curled tight.

Looking at what he saw, Roarke's lips thinned and he glanced up to see Ryan watching him. "This isn't new."

Hearing the different edge in his brother's voice, Ryan leaned over to view whatever it was that had caused it and his breath caught.

"What the bloody hell is that and how did he get it?" he demanded in a low growl, snapping over his shoulder. "Kerry!"

Turning from helping Mac lay out assorted candles, crystals, and herbs that they'd possibly need, Kerry glanced to see what his brother wanted and his gaze landed on the mark on the back of Ian's neck.

"Brandon mentioned that Ian had been marked since he was thirteen but I thought he was speaking figuratively, not literally," he murmured, bending closer to examine the mark of an inverted pentagram that seemed to have been burned into the boy's neck.

"Marked for what and by whom?" Ryan demanded, hating this. "What the bloody hell did I miss while I was out?"

"Roarke can catch you up later," Mac decided, not liking this new turn because he realized this simple mark could make it harder to dispel the wounds. "This damn thing opens him up more to dark power than he would be normally."

Kerry also accepted this, feeling Ian's energy building but also his fear as he whimpered words that were mostly incoherent and it seemed like he was speaking in some language unknown to his brothers.

"Alright, we need to do this and fast because he's getting weaker," Mac sighed, feeling the energy in the room starting to change. "Maggie, light the candles on the outer rim of the circle," he instructed quickly, seeing the thin shadow beginning to mist. "Shit."

Whirling to see the black shadow, Ryan moved to the other side of the bed so that he'd have an easier path to shielding or protecting his younger brothers. "Who opened the door to this thing?"

"It might have been attached to Brandon," Kerry reasoned, silently berating himself for not suspecting that before. "Ry, shield Ian and Roarke while Mac and I..."

The words stopped as a thin red wave of energy shot through the black mist and a scream seemed to radiate around the room.

"You are not allowed in this house nor were you invited. I denounce your presence and call on the magic that is mine to use to protect those that are also mine," Fiona Kerrigan spoke firmly yet calmly as she stepped into the bedroom, her eyes alive with energy that showed her true power.

Taking advantage of the distraction that his grandmother caused, Kerry moved swiftly to cast the circle around the bed.

"Roarke, talk to Ian. Try to bring him back around to you," he instructed quickly, hoping that the younger boy would respond to Roarke.

Mac had already rolled his sleeves up and silently recited his own private protective spells for both himself and those close. "Y'know, one of these days I hope to actually have the time to do a proper preparation for this spell," he muttered darkly, feeling Maggie close and grateful for her support.

"Hell will freeze over before that happens probably, bro," Ryan replied, waving Kerry off before he could be ordered. "I know what to do, Kerry."

Without having to be told, Ryan was aware that due to his recent injuries and because he was still weak that he wouldn't be able to use his full power to help Mac and Kerry in the actual spell that would heal their brother. But he could still help draw off the negative energy from Ian and shield both of his younger brothers from any of that black power that might be in the air.

"Keep him from absorbing too much," Kerry whispered lowly so that only Ryan could hear him, laying a hand on his shoulder for a brief moment.

Nodding, Ryan started to shrug off the hand until he felt the pressure ease away and he relaxed slightly. "Thanks," he murmured, noticing that Ian was going rigid. 'Here we go,' he told himself silently.

"It's okay, Ian," Roarke whispered, keeping his hand gentle when he eased the boy onto his back so that they'd have better access to the severe wounds he still had. "*Beannacht De ort* (The blessings of God upon you)," he murmured while making the sign of the cross on instinct.

"May God be with us," Mac muttered under his breath, sitting on the other side of the bed to place a hand on the wound closest to him and gritting his teeth.

Grunting as an unexpected wave of emotion shot at him, Ryan swore sourly but was mildly surprised to feel his own energy leveling off and knowing that it wasn't coming from his brothers.

"Fitzgerald, don't get fried," Andi McCabe remarked from where she was standing in the door, having been watching her employer's interactions with his brothers, and noticing a few things that she found interesting.

"Go to hell, McCabe and keep clear," Ryan shot back, growling at Roarke when he heard the teasing little song that he was whistling. "Oh, yeah? When exactly are you going to finally bite the damn bullet and ask Jess that question, brat?"

Deciding to concentrate on Ian, Roarke shifted his eyes away and missed his brother's smirk.

Ian groaned as pain, burning and intense, seared his skin and his blood. "Don't..." He twisted against the hands he felt, but the images in his mind were what forced his more violent thrashing. "Let go...!"

Tightening his grip slightly, Roarke used his other hand to turn Ian's white face toward him.

"Ian, look at me," he instructed firmly, switching to Irish since that was what their brother was speaking in now. "It's Roarke, focus on my voice and come back to us."

The bite on the boy's shoulder seemed to hiss at Mac's touch, which made him frown. "Kerry, start using the salves and herbs on these," he urged tightly, catching the stress on Ryan's face. "Be careful, Ry."

“Ian, you’re safe but you need to focus on us now and let us help you,” Roarke could feel the inner struggle in his brother. “You’re in Gram and Gramps’ place in Dublin right now and no one will harm you. Let the pain and fear go.”

Kerry had taken the same tin of salve that he’d used months ago on Roarke and slowly began to spread the mixture onto the many bite and claw marks.

Lights flashed and windows rattled as Ian struggled through the pain and fear but despite the images of those frothing hellhounds tearing his flesh, his terror had him reaching for something else.

“Molly...stay away...” he groaned, nearly screaming as salve was spread on the deepest gash on his leg. “You won’t hurt her...love her...”

“Shut it, Ry,” Roarke warned, knowing his brother well enough to expect the remark that would be forming.

As the salve was spread and Mac focused spells over them, the festering wounds seemed to hiss, bubble, and burn while the boy screamed.

“Rest, baby brother,” Kerry soothed, straining to heal and to remove the pain that the boy felt.

Mac reached into his pocket for the Claddagh medal that belonged to Molly Jackson. “Ian, focus on this,” he urged, pressing the medal into his brother’s hand.

As the fingers closed automatically around the medal, it seemed to the Fitzgeralds as if their brother calmed down.

“Ian?” Roarke took a chance to look deeper but jerked back at the sudden images of black captivity, the utter desolation, pain, and feelings of loss and abandonment that struck out.

“Roarke, be careful,” Jessica urged from outside the circle, feeling what he was doing.

Laying a hand over the one that Roarke had gripped Ian’s fist with, Ryan struggled to remove those images but frowned as he saw the other images, the more violent ones.

Waiting to see that Ian was calming slowly, Kerry laid the salve aside to reach for the boy’s hand while nodding to Mac that it was time.

“He’s not balanced enough,” Mac warned, understanding the risks of the full spell if Ian was still too weak. “He’s had his powers blocked, his vision has been blinded, and God knows what else.”

“It’s getting too hard to handle him,” Ryan countered, looking down when the boy seemed to relax more. “Hey, why’d he...Roarke!”

Having been on the receiving end of the bite of a hellhound, Roarke knew some of the pain his little brother was in right then. He also understood more than the others some of Ian’s other traumas and he wanted it to go away.

After Ian had calmed some at the touch of Molly's Claddagh, he stretched his already strained powers to reach out to soothe both pain and fear but he also gave something back.

"I have him, he's calm, and I can give him strength." His accent was heavier than normal as he strained to keep control of everything. "Start the spell."

"Brat, once we handle this I swear I'm beating the crap outta you for this," Ryan snapped, concern making him growl rather than show the actual emotion.

From outside the circle, Fiona shook her head mildly as she sat in a chair in the corner. "I see Brenna fighting with her brothers when the lads get like this," she sighed, moving a hand to help ease her youngest grandson's pain.

Shaking violently and sweating as the poison was drawn out from the wounds, Ian's eyes flickered open to stare but his blue-gray eyes were cloudy.

The sniping between Ryan and Roarke had begun to bring the boy around slowly. The medal in his one hand was warming it just as he recognized the firm hand that gripped his other one.

Grasping for that tiny lifeline, Ian's fingers gripped onto Roarke's hand but unlike when Ryan had done so earlier, this was more out of desperation.

"Ian, can you hear us?" Kerry asked after seeing his hand move and lightly brushing the damp blond hair back out of his face. "Ian?"

Struggling to hold onto reality and ignore the past weeks, the boy fought to clear his vision on his own but was too weak. "Can't...see," he whispered, his voice still low and tired. "Why? Kerry, where...?"

"Safe, Ian. You're safe," Kerry assured him quickly, checking to see if his vision was impaired from a spell or something else. "Concussion?"

"From the bruise on his head and the lump, probably," Mac nodded, running a gentle finger over the boy's eyes.

"He was held in a shadow prison for the most part, according to what I picked up from the lass," Riordan spoke from the door, not entering the room yet. "His vision is weak from no light."

Tensing at the new voice, Ian gripped tighter as the pain returned in his leg. "Roarke, please...don't leave..."

"No one's leaving you, Ian," Roarke assured him firmly, seeing Mac's eyes growing darker. "It will hurt, baby brother, but just hold on to my hand and we'll make it go away soon," he promised, forcing his own emotions away.

Ryan watched his brothers a moment before considering something, holding a hand out to silently bring the stuffed elephant toy that had been brought along up from the basement to his waiting hand.

Ignoring Mac's look at using that spell, he gently tucked the worn toy next to his brother before laying a hand on his face. "Push out the pain, Ian, and

picture the wounds going away,” he urged, opening up slightly to take the more dangerous energy before Roarke could.

“Focus on him and not what you may see,” Kerry ordered, placing a hand on the shoulder closest to him. “The same as before, put up your personal protection and do not allow any of the energy or wounds to stay with you.”

“Blah, blah, blah,” Ryan rolled his eyes, wincing at the invisible smack to the back of his head. “Sorry, Gram.”

Fiona’s smile was indulgent but firm as she gazed around the room, looking from her grandsons who struggled to help one of their own to the three young women that watched from nearby.

She had natural concerns if Roarke’s past would allow him to be able to find a woman that he could not only trust but love. Simply seeing him with Jessica Hadley assured her that those concerns were no longer an issue.

Maggie Cavanaugh was as fiery and outspoken at times as Mac was calm and easy going. Fiona was amused that such a small woman could spark her grandson’s unshakable patience and looked forward to seeing the ongoing struggle that the two would soon face. It always amused her to see Mac taken off the safe ground that he preferred.

Shifting a look of appraisal toward the tanned, raven-haired young woman who was new to her, Fiona did not have the trouble that Kerry did when reading Andrea McCabe.

This one, she knew, wouldn’t run when things got bad and as Fiona could see, was not one to easily back down. She and Ryan were both hot tempered, stubborn, and secretive about pasts that they’d rather not remember. And, Fiona had decided already, would be a good match for her middle grandson.

Though she had not yet met Molly Jackson, Fiona had gotten a sense of the girl from what she had picked up from the others and she knew that if the girl was anything like Maeve, then she’d be wonderful for Ian...if they both survived this latest disaster.

Finally, as she watched while Mac and Kerry began the final spell to help their brother, Fiona’s smile turned sad as she watched her eldest grandson.

With his brothers, she could always see the boys with their possible soul mates. Kerry was the wildcard as neither she nor Lorcan could get a glimpse of Kerry’s future, and that concerned her greatly because she feared what he would do to protect his brothers.

Now though, the older woman concentrated on adding her strength to the spell that would heal Ian from the dark wounds inflicted on him.

Taking a deep breath, Kerry let it out slowly while focusing all his energy on his brother and the bite and claw marks.

“I am the eldest of the Five and I use the power that is mine from birth to heal, to soothe, and to strengthen. I freely give that what must be given to heal

this boy.” He recited the words easily, tightening his grip upon feeling Ian tense.

Mac also felt it and added an extra layer to his spells to ease the pain. “As I am of the Five and I will use that power that has been mine since birth to heal this boy that is of my blood, to soothe his pain, and ask that my strength is shared to give him back that which was taken,” he spoke as the candles blew in a light wind that entered from somewhere.

The festering claw mark on his right leg bubbled as the spell began to work and Ian’s teeth clenched in agony. Twisting in pain, he struggled to pull free.

“Soon, Ian, it’s almost over,” Ryan promised, forcing the migraine that was forming in his head away in order to concentrate. “I am of the Five and I shall use the powers that I was born with to heal these wounds, to stave off the fear in his heart and give strength back to my brother.”

“Oh!” Ian struggled against the pain that was now burning his blood while his fingers tightened onto Roarke’s hand.

Squeezing the boy’s hand in reassurance while placing his other hand on his chest, Roarke closed his eyes and opened his powers up more than any of his brothers would have approved of.

“As I am of the Five, I will use this power that has been gifted to me to heal my brother, to remove the pain and fear that he was made to suffer, and give back the strength that he has lost,” he spoke the words firmly in Irish, adding, “Let me take from him what never should have touched him.”

Only Ryan heard those words, snarling under his breath. “Don’t you dare, brat,” he warned, attempting to both shield and protect his younger siblings while seeing Kerry nod, and he reached to lay a hand over the one that Roarke was using to hold Ian’s. “Finish this up, Kerry.”

Kerry waited until Mac had laid his hand over their brothers’ before placing one of his own on top, keeping his other hand firmly on Ian’s face and feeling the tears on his cheek. “Hold the circle and repeat the closing spell as I do it,” he instructed even though he knew his brothers knew how to finish their spell. But there was one thing that needed to be done.

“Ian, I know it hurts but I need you to expel the pain and poison out,” he told the boy gently. “I need you to say the words. Use our strength.”

It was clear that the spell was working but he was still so weak, Ian had trouble focusing on anything but that.

“Think of Molly, boyo,” Ryan urged, feeling the jump of his brother’s heart at the mention of Molly Jackson. “She needs you, Ian. Little Molly risked it all for you and you have to snap outta this to help her.”

Those words caused an increase in Ian’s heart rate and blood pressure and it seemed like he struggled to focus, his free hand gripping not only his medals but also Molly’s.

"I...I am...I am of the Five," he gritted out past lingering burning but the scent of roses wafting through the room seemed to ease his tension as did the feel of his brothers being close to him.

He struggled through a final bout of burning nausea as the poison from the bites dispelled. A quick bout of doubt shot through his mind.

"Kerry, stop her," Roarke whispered, feeling the sudden cold from his brother's hand and sensing the same feeling as he had both in Fitzgaren and as a child.

Brushing a hand over Ian's hair, Kerry narrowed his eyes. "By the light of the Goddess, you will release any hold on him," he ordered.

"You can't...hurt me now," Ian whispered, eyes clearing slowly to look around him but it was another thought that finally was able to bring his thoughts back firmly under control: the memory of him telling Molly that one and only time that he loved her and remembering...

"Did you now?" Ryan smirked, lifting a brow even as Roarke was hissing at him.

"Ian, finish the spell," Mac urged, vowing to smack their brother for every smart remark made.

Thoughts of Molly and the presence of his brothers in his mind, Ian's eyes slowly cleared and darkened slightly as his own returning powers kicked on.

"I am of...the Five and I use the powers...of my birthright to denounce the evil that threatens me and my kin. To dispel the poison and powers that seeks to hurt and to make damn sure nobody touches what is mine," he recited, gripping tighter to his brother as the air seemed to get thicker.

With eyes now smoke as his powers kicked on to full, Kerry nodded for them to complete the spell. "We are the Five and as we seek to complete the Circle that will shield and protect, we now seek to protect that which is ours from harm from both outside and within our bloodline. Heal now these wounds of pitch, protect him and those that seek to help him."

They recited the spell two more times and with the final recitation, Kerry met the eyes of his brothers. "As this spell harms none and by the power that is ours by birth and right, so mote it be. Blessed be."

Having seen them do this once before Maggie Cavanaugh had been expecting something to happen. However, the sudden burst of light that came from within the circle, the music from deep within the room that echoed from elsewhere, and finally the gentle breeze that entered then left certainly wasn't what she'd been expecting this time.

"That was different," Jessica Hadley decided, shielding her eyes as the light slowly dimmed. "Roarke?"

Andi McCabe had never seen anything like that before and she vowed to get answers out of her boss even if it killed him.

“Ian?” Roarke felt weak from the amount of energy they all had used this time but his instant concern was for his brother.

Mac had been shaking his hands to finish getting rid of the negative power that he’d picked up but at the concern in Roarke’s tone, had looked to check on Ian.

The boy seemed to be sleeping peacefully after enduring what he had. Checking for a pulse, he was relieved to find it beating strongly and he was pleased to see that he was getting more color back slowly.

What Mac didn’t care for was that Ian’s right leg and shoulder still showed minor scarring, yet he didn’t feel any leftover negative magic from them as he had been feeling.

“Bloody hell,” he swore, running a hand over the scar on his leg to be sure, yet he felt no fever and Ian stayed still. “They should have healed.”

“Roarke kept several of his scars from those damn mutts,” Ryan sought to remind him, wincing as his side reminded him of his own earlier injury. “How is he otherwise?”

Fiona answered this. “Ian sleeps to regain his strength and to heal. You each have done this more than once growing up. He will sleep until his body determines that it’s safe for him to wake,” she assured them, seeing the doubts that were passed between Ryan and Roarke.

“You both have fallen into similar sleeps after being injured,” she reminded them.

“Fitzgerald, is that why after that incident at the airport you slept for close to a week?” Andi asked, leaning against the dresser casually. “I assumed it was because you’d been shot five times and...”

Snarling at her in his native tongue, Ryan shot her a look that could have killed. “Shut the bloody hell up, McCabe before you start this one on a tangent,” he said, jerking a thumb toward Mac who was frowning at him.

Amused by the bickering, Fiona smiled. “While he sleeps, you four should also get rest because the danger to Ian is not over and he will need all of you for what will come.”

“There are too many questions to get answers to,” Kerry sighed, looking at Riordan who was still in the doorway. “The least of which is also the most important, and it’s also the one that Ian will want an answer to when he opens his eyes.”

“Like how the bloody hell did he escape from Sebastian, how he ended up with a Lord of the Fairy Realm and where is Molly Jackson?” Mac put in seriously, eyeing the black haired Lord of the Gentry seriously. “You have an answer to any of those?”

Ryan had a dark look already and it got darker as he looked at Riordan. “I should bloody well hope he does,” he muttered, still blaming himself for losing the American student in the first place. “I should have taken better...”

“You tried your best to shield the lass, Ryan Fitzgerald,” Riordan interrupted him, understanding a lot about the guilt that mortals could feel. “Just like she has done what she felt needed to be done to protect your brother.”

Having taken the time to gently place the ragged stuffed elephant next to Ian, Kerry smiled slightly when the boy reacted on instinct and curled onto his side to hold the toy as he used to as a child.

The last comment, however, caught his attention and he knew that his brothers had caught it as well since he felt Roarke tensing.

“What does that mean?” he asked warily, not liking the way those words had been phrased or the grim look in the other’s eyes. “What did Molly do and where is she?”

Finally entering the room and giving Fiona a hard look as sparks again bounced from his shoulders, Riordan looked at the bed grimly. “I told you that I would answer your questions soon but I believe that you all should heed Fiona’s advice to seek rest and sustenance for now.”

“Hold on,” Ryan’s hand shot out without thinking or not caring. “Where the bloody hell is that girl?” he demanded, eyes flashing dangerously. “She wouldn’t have left Ian without a damn good reason and if you harmed her...”

Roarke, exhausted as he was, grabbed for his brother to yank him back with a muttered curse. “I know that Mum never said it specifically but I don’t think threatening him is a good plan,” he muttered, seeing the other man’s eyes go black as their own eyes did on occasion and feeling the air charge.

“Shit, Fitzgerald, are you askin’ to get turned into something?” Andi demanded, shoving him back a good full step before rounding on the angry Fairy Lord. “If my Great-Aunt Moira is right, you can’t harm your own kin and especially not if invited into the house by them.”

Ryan shot her a narrowed look but Riordan scowled. Debating on it, he stepped back from Ryan to throw a hard look at Fiona. “Did all of them get their damn hard heads from your side?”

“They are their Father’s sons,” she replied simply, then looked at him fully. “Where is this lass now?”

“If the God or Goddess is merciful, she’s dead, for it is a much better fate than what either Sebastian or that she-devil my kin married plans for her,” he declared grimly. “She sacrificed her freedom so that Ian would be spared, and no braver a lass have I seen since my Aislin laid her life down for our son. Now, young Molly Jackson will be remembered for that deed as she’s most certainly dead by now.”

The atmosphere in the bedroom had been tense before but with the calmly made comment from Riordan, the mood went dangerous.

“What the bloody hell are you talking about?” Ryan demanded, only a sharp glance from Kerry had him deciding against lunging for the Fairy Lord’s throat. “Where’s Molly? You left her...?”

“The lass called on help, boy,” Riordan replied evenly. “She knew the customs of my people and that because Ian is of my blood I could take him to safety even if it meant leaving her to Sebastian’s wrath.”

Roarke had made certain that their brother was fully resting before standing, eyes hard. “You left an eighteen year girl with no experience in shielding herself or protecting herself from that bleedin’ bastard alone?” he demanded, memories surfacing of what Sebastian inflicted emotionally and physically on Jessica.

The idea that Molly, an innocent girl, could face that same terror pissed him off.

“Do you have any idea what either he or Kathleen will do to her?” he demanded, feeling Jessica’s hand close around his. “Did you care?”

Seeing Riordan’s eyes blaze, Fiona Kerrigan stepped up to place a hand out in a soothing motion. “Leave Ian to rest and I want you four to also take a few hours to settle before we speak of other matters,” she instructed firmly, shooting each grandson an arched look to cut off any argument. “Kerrigan, Patrick, Ryan, and Roarke, I’ll not repeat this again. Take yourselves off to bed now and don’t let me see you again until this evening.

“I’ll leave these lasses to handle getting you there while you will come with me to find my husband and be certain he’s not liquoring up poor Brandon,” she finished, giving Riordan no chance to offer an argument as she caught his arm firmly.

“I don’t suppose lightning would work on him?” Ryan sighed, looking to be certain that Ian was safe before waving Kerry off. “We need to find her and stop this.”

“We need to find out what else Brandon can tell us because I think Sybil will be more of a threat in the end to Molly,” Kerry replied, feeling the mild tremor while shaking his head. “You know what I meant, Roarke. I am certainly aware of the danger that Sebastian poses.”

Jessica Hadley took a hold of Roarke’s arm. “How about you follow your grandmother’s suggestion and I’ll have Nick start searching for Molly,” she suggested, wanting to get him out of the room so that he could possibly expend the anger that was building.

“No, someone should be with...” he began to object but Kerry, catching on to what the young British woman was doing, shook his head.

“I’ll stay with Ian until I’m certain that he’ll remain asleep and be safe,” he assured his brothers, catching Maggie’s eye with a subtle nod.

Maggie Cavanaugh rolled her eyes but got the message. Having spent the past few months around the brothers, she'd figured out what worked best in dealing with them usually.

"Doc, I think I might have sprained or bruised something with Ian's last tantrum. Do you want to take a look or should I ask Peter to have a peek?" she casually asked him, figuring that would get the proper response.

"You ask him and I'd have to break that oath I took, Mary Margaret," Mac replied sourly, making a final check on Ian before holding out a hand to her. "Let's go see about these bruises and maybe next time one of my baby brothers throws a fit you'll learn to duck."

"He's aiming that at you, Ry," Roarke remarked dryly before allowing Jessica to drag him out of the room with a muttered curse.

Ryan had just begun to turn to shoot something when Andi McCabe grabbed him by the shoulders to shove him out of the door. "McCabe!" he snapped.

"Fitzgerald, be serious," she tossed back, used to his temper and attitude. "You were used as a damn pin cushion; you should not have been doing what you did earlier. If you don't put yourself back in a bed ASAP I'll either put you in one or I'm on the phone to Olav and I honestly don't think you want him over here."

"It's bad enough I have to deal with you," Ryan growled, wincing as she lightly touched his still sore side. "Fine, but I'm putting you in charge of watching him."

Andi sighed, waving that off. "Whatever, boss. As soon as you get settled I'll sit with this kid," she assured him, shooting Kerry a look. "What are the chances of you making my weapon reappear?"

Giving the young woman a considering look, Kerry nodded after a moment of thought. "When you need it."

"That's big brother's way of saying that he while he doesn't disapprove of weapons, he doesn't want them in the house." Ryan's sneer was without feeling, sensing Kerry's hand on his arm. "I'm fine, Kerry, and I'll sleep because I don't think getting her back will be all that easy."

Waiting until Andi had gotten his brother out of the room, Kerry sat at the foot of the bed for a long while in silence.

Closing his eyes, he squeezed the bridge of his nose as the tension of the past few months, the concern for his brothers, and the ultimate welfare of a young girl that he never should have allowed to get involved began to settle on him.

"Forgive me, *Mathair*, *Athair* (Mother, Father), for allowing things to go this far," he whispered into the silent room, running a soothing hand down his sleeping brother's shoulder. Convinced that Ian would rest, he lit three candles in the room.

“May those that have passed before and those of our line bring their light and shield this boy from those that would do him harm,” he recited, casting a spell to protect and to strengthen while he slept. “As this spell I cast harms none, so mote it be. Blessed be.”

Kerry missed the twinkling lights that hovered near the bed as he softly closed the door. He also missed the slender shimmering form that stood in the corner sadly watching the pain that afflicted her sons.

“You protect when you can, my son,” Brenna Fitzgerald spoke to the room, smiling sweetly down at her last-born. “This battle isn’t all yours, Kerry, and it will be Ian who must make his choices this time.”

She went to Ian and, laying a hand gently over the medals he wore, she added what protection she could. “Ian, you were our last and the one I never worried about because I knew of the power you’d one day have,” she sighed. “Power is one thing and while it will serve you well, your greatest power resides in your heart and it will be your heart that you must trust when the time comes.”

Ian stirred briefly as Brenna stirred the air near the bed to soothe, placing a soft kiss on his forehead. “Sleep, Ian, and when you wake know that your Da and I will always be close,” she whispered, sensing for her other sons and rolling her eyes “Those two are much too much like their father and my father is certainly hyper today.”

“Lorcan has been hyper since the day I met him, *muirnin*,” Toryn remarked from the door, clearly not happy about recent revelations. “If it wasn’t against the rules, I’d deal with Brandon myself.”

Stepping to her husband to lay a calming hand against his chest, Brenna shook her head. “He will face judgment in time, Toryn, though in some way that fault lies also with us,” she replied, realizing that they couldn’t linger. “We should have taken Kerry or Mac aside when we made the change and explained it to them.”

“Perhaps, though that devil my mate married is still a danger to our boys.” Toryn knew this and while he had taught his sons how to protect themselves from magical foes, he wasn’t certain if they’d be able to handle what Sybil Sullivan could cause.

Hearing a shout from down the hall, Brenna chuckled as they started to vanish from the room. “All of our sons share your stubbornness and they will fight for one another. We must trust in that and in the women they’ve chosen.”

“Certainly not a tame one amongst them,” he chuckled, pleased by that. “Our sons have chosen well and will give your folks fine and beautiful great-grandchildren.”

Brenna accepted the hand he offered, and then they slowly vanished from the room, leaving only the twinkling lights behind.

Chapter 20

“You great bloody fool,” Lorcan Kerrigan was snarling at Brandon Sullivan who sat despondent in a chair. “How many of your own children had to die before you saw through the harlot’s lies, boyo?”

Aware that this little Irishman could easily do more than lecture, Brandon could only shake his head. “I love my wife, Mr. Kerrigan. What would you do if it was yours?”

Spitting mad already, this comment did not make Lorcan any happier as he slapped his glass of fine whiskey down. “You’d do well to remember whose home you sit in before asking me such a thing, laddie,” he warned, pointing a finger. “I’ve plenty of kin that I’m not proud of but none of them ever tried to sacrifice a wee babe to the Devil.”

“Lorcan, allow Brandon to rest for an hour before grilling him,” Fiona spoke as she entered the room, turning to pin the man with a firm look. “You have answers that my grandsons need and I’d advise that you answer them honestly, Brandon Sullivan. Now, follow Charles.”

Brandon understood the position that he had placed himself in but also knew that he’d come too far to turn back now. “I’ll do what I can to help, Mrs. Kerrigan,” he promised, standing to follow the butler but then paused. “Do you think I could see Ian at some time?”

“Oh, this should be interesting,” Riordan thought to himself, stepping into the room behind Fiona just as glass cracked.

“You’ll see my brother only when he wants to see you and only if one of us is with him.” Kerry’s voice was hard when it spoke from the doorway. “Not before and not if he refuses. I won’t traumatize him more.”

Brandon started to speak but the cold look in the other man’s eyes stopped him and he nodded, following Charles McMillan out of the room.

“I thought this one was more like Brenna but he has a spark of Toryn, I see,” Riordan murmured, sitting down and this time taking the drink before Lorcan could ask. “The fire is high in this one, Fiona.”

Accepting this, she also accepted something else: the danger that temper could impose if he wasn’t careful – and it was clear that Kerry’s temper was too close to the surface.

“You should be resting as your brothers are doing,” she addressed him with a grandmother’s concern, a sharp look entering her eyes when he poured a shot of whiskey. “Kerrigan, you more than the others know the danger that your abilities give you.”

Hissing as the whiskey burned, Kerry forced down the emotion that this day had brought out in him. "That man knew for the past fifteen years that the lads should have stayed with me and he let it pass," he gritted. "He knew the danger that Ian was in and didn't warn him or us.

"I can protect them from Kathleen and Sebastian but not from things in their pasts," he muttered, sitting back on the sofa. "Ian clearly has things that I don't know about yet but I see the signs in him like I do in Roarke still. Mac and Ryan also have things that would not have happened if..."

Lorcan sat down next to his oldest grandson and would have handed him another drink if his wife hadn't made the decanter vanish. "Kerry, my lad, you take on the weight of this world and not even your shoulders can carry that much," he remarked lightly, reaching over to lay a hand on his neck.

"You're much like your sweet Mother in that regards, as our Brenna was always taking on things that she didn't have to," Lorcan sighed, remembering.

"Brenna was a strong woman with strong beliefs," Riordan declared, kneeling in front of this young man. "Your grandmother is correct as always, Kerrigan. Sleep for now and let not these weights of guilt over what may have been trouble you for they are for naught," he went on, using an ounce of his otherworld abilities in this one to cast a spell that he only could have done on his own kin.

Kerry felt himself relaxing as sleep came even though he didn't welcome it, the need to shield or protect present in his thoughts.

As he slipped under, his tired eyes locked onto Riordan's. "You owe us explanations too."

"Aye, my lad, that I do," Riordan chuckled, waiting for the spell to take hold. He hadn't been expecting such a strong will in even a mortal of his blood. "He was too upset to think clearly, Lorcan," he cut the man off before he launched into the expected tirade. "This one hides his temper but it's close to the brink."

Placing a hand on her husband's shoulder to urge restraint, Fiona laid an afghan over her sleeping grandson after checking to be certain that he was sleeping well and not stressed.

"Leave him to sleep," she spoke softly, eyeing both men. "Continue your games in the parlor or billiard room while I check on the others and dinner."

Waiting until Fiona had stepped out, the two men eyed each other before Lorcan blew out a breath.

"Alright, we both want what's best for the lads I guess it's time we stop the bickerin' and work together," he decided, adding with a huff, "Unless of course I don't like what you say about this lass that Ian's hooked up with, and then I'll try my frog spell again."

"You tried that fifty years ago, Lorcan, and it didn't work," Riordan reminded him, wincing as the sound of a body hitting the floor upstairs was heard. "That little gypsy's going to cause Ryan many a sleepless night," he decided with a laugh.

Upstairs in Mac's room:

"Alright, Maggie, let's take a look at these bruises." Mac Fitzgerald was tired and tense and both showed in his tone of voice as he rubbed his shoulder.

"You ask me, Doc, I'd say you probably have more bruises than I do from Ian's power," the reporter remarked, not hurting as much as she'd let on earlier. "Maybe I should check you out?"

Turning with a dry smile, Mac eyed her curiously. "Too tired to think up a reply to that one, Mary Margaret," he sighed, sitting on the edge of the bed to unbutton his shirt in order to check on his shoulder. "That and the nine older brothers you have can make a bloke wary."

"Rubbish," Maggie laughed, helping him with his shirt before swallowing her next comment upon seeing the livid purplish-blue bruise that covered his entire shoulder and upper back. "Doc, you look like hell back here."

Snorting, Mac would have made a sarcastic reply if he hadn't been busy biting his lip against the searing pain caused by her gentle touch. "Between Ry and Ian this week alone I'm going to be covered with such bruises," he muttered under his breath. "Remind me to return the favor sometime."

"Well, since you haven't had your turn facing the old man yet you might actually get a chance to beat Ry up," she replied easily, reaching into his bag for a tin of salve. "Hold still while I patch you up."

Watching her reflection in the mirror across from them, Mac hated to admit that he was his own worst patient but as Maggie leaned closer to examine the bruise, he tensed.

"Doc, quit squirming. This won't hurt a bit," she scolded lightly, carefully smoothing the salve over the bruise while also using a minor spell she'd been taught as a girl to remove the pain. "Want to talk about what else is bothering you?"

"You asking for yourself or as a reporter who is still looking for that story?" He winced as soon as he heard himself say it and felt her fingers still on his shoulders. "Damn. I'm sorry, Maggie, that was wrong to say."

Not as hurt by the comment as she was startled by the tone in his voice, Maggie laid the tin aside to lean over his good shoulder to view his rugged profile.

"Talk to me, Doc, totally off the record and just between you and me, what the hell else is buggin' you about Ian?" she asked him, knowing that something had been since they'd been in the Sullivan house. "You said that if you would

have acted five years ago that things might have been different for him. What's that about and why is it something that Kerry doesn't know?"

Slowly rotating his shoulder to be certain that it was only bruised, he considered her question a long while before falling back until he was laying over the bed and staring at the ceiling.

"Five years ago, Mary Margaret, you wouldn't have liked the man I was. I was centered on any number of my careers and determined that I would ground my life in the real world rather than magic as I was raised in," he began with an odd seriousness in his voice.

"I took care of things as they pertained to me and while I held my patients in the highest regards, I didn't go all out as I do now."

Maggie moved so that she was laying on her stomach next to him, her head propped up on a hand. "Single bloke, determined to make a name for himself in a chosen career and not let anyone get in the road," she hummed to herself, cocking her head. "Sounds like most people to me."

Shifting to gaze into her eyes, Mac smiled while curling a strand of her unruly red hair around his finger. "Maybe, but toward the end of that summer it didn't feel that way to me," he admitted, recalling those days.

"I can't recall exactly what I was doing that summer but it was the year that Ian was thirteen and one day he turned up on my doorstep in Cork with tales so wild that it seemed silly," Mac sounded bitter. "He was edgy, frightened but he wouldn't say why. He'd just beg me not to take him back.

"At that time, I was involved in getting a clinic off the ground in the area, and having that new horse paddock that you saw built. Trying to take the time to gauge what my baby brother was saying about a loving couple that honestly cared for him just didn't sink in." He seemed disgusted. "I let him stay the weekend but then Brandon called to see if he was there and it never dawned on me that by his tone, it seemed like they knew already where he was."

Maggie considered this and began to understand his feelings. "You didn't know, Doc, and if you had you would have done something."

"That's like telling Roarke that if we would have known about events in Mayo that Kerry or I would have stopped it, Maggie," he scowled, sitting up with a groan. "The issue is, at that time in my life I'm not certain if I would have taken the time to do anything but call Kerry and shift it all onto him, and knowing that he came to me and I sent him back to that bleedin' bitch. Now, I wonder if he recalls those events, or did either Ian block them out as Roarke has done or did Sybil do something?"

"Mac, you are a great many things as I've come to learn but what you are not is selfish or uncaring," Maggie remarked soothingly, shifting so that she could lightly shove him back but then squealing when his arms caught her quickly and brought her with him. "Sneaky, Doc."

Mac yawned even while grinning at her. "I rest, you rest," he told her simply, pleased when she narrowed her eyes at him in that way that meant that she was annoyed. "You could have been hurt today, Maggie, and I don't want that."

"Well, to be honest, I could do without it as well," she laughed, feeling her heart jump as his look seemed to darken. "Y'know, if what they say is true there is no way to keep me safe fully, Mac."

Accepting that didn't mean that he had to like it. "The thought of what Molly could be enduring makes me sick, Maggie," he murmured, thinking of the young American and remembering what Jessica had gone through. "Thinking about you..."

"Sshh," Maggie laid a finger against his lips, not wanting those images herself. "We'll find Molly and stop all this, including some wacky Satan lover, and don't worry about me. I'll be fine," she assured him, not bothering to try to move his arms as they settled her against him. "Y'know, if my Da found out about this he'd be hunting up that old shotgun of his."

"That certainly encourages a bloke, Mary Margaret," Mac chuckled, kissing her deeply but not taking it any further since he felt too tired to give that his full attention.

Wondering if she should mention that her family was getting insistent on meeting him, Maggie decided on another tactic, choosing to throw her friend to the wolves instead.

"By the way, have you noticed by any chance that Jess has been sick for the past few days?" she asked casually, knowing that he was half asleep.

Listening, Mac yawned but didn't catch the meaning. "She deals with Roarke, crazy mercenaries, and mystics daily. I'd be surprised if she wasn't sick all the time after that," he muttered.

"True, true," she agreed, drawing circles on his bare chest before laying her head on his shoulder. "Though she's usually just sick in the mornings and it just started this month."

Mac's eyes remained closed until those words settled and he felt his pulse jerk as his eyes snapped open to stare at her. "Are you saying..." He thought hard and decided it was time to have Kerry push that power to check as what she was hinting at hit him. "Well, well, well, little brother could be in for a shock," he hummed, drifting off to sleep.

Down the Hall:

Still unhappy with leaving his brother alone, Roarke Fitzgerald understood the reasoning behind it. Ian, it seemed, was sensitive in many areas and the angst, tension, and other emotions coming off them would have done the boy more harm.

For Roarke, the visions and feelings that he'd picked up from Ian bothered him more than the others because he could easily empathize more with them.

"Bloody hell," he muttered while trying to relax in the steaming hot shower, but images from his own brutal past mixing with the ones he'd picked up from his baby brother made relaxing impossible.

Having accepted his own life was one thing but the thought that his brother could have suffered even a little of the same torment made him rage, and the thought of adults burning that symbol into Ian's neck angered him more.

A knock on the locked bathroom door made him tense before he picked up the feelings from the other side, relaxing slightly. "I'll be out in a second, Jess," he called, needing a few more moments alone to cover his emotions because he knew that she'd feel them.

Jessica Hadley heard the familiar undertone in his normally charming voice that warned her of his emotional state. "Luv, Nick's got his people using the mystical angle to hunt for Molly while Cam's lads are on the street," she called through the door, not bothering with the knob because she already knew he locked it. "Roarke?"

Turning the water off and grabbing a towel to wrap around his waist, he opened the door to meet her worried eyes with grim ones.

"If they don't want Molly found then we won't until either Sebastian or Sybil makes a mistake," he replied grimly, sitting on the bed wearily to stare at his bare arms and the still visible scars that hadn't been dispersed a few months earlier.

Normally he had a gentle, soothing lilt to his voice but as Jessica knew all too well when he was grim or upset, the tone left his voice soft and nearly listless.

"Roarke, we won't leave Molly and Ian needs to know that he was never left," she stated, watching the familiar motions of her friend that she hadn't seen in him since they'd returned to Ireland. "Kerry promised that and you know it in your heart."

Looking over his shoulder to see not only the concern for the missing girl but also concern for him still evident, Roarke sighed. "I know, *a gra*," he murmured, emotions and using so much power making him more tired than he wanted to admit as he laid back on the bed and rolled onto his stomach so that he could still watch his friend.

Roarke could easily understand why Ian was reluctant to admit his true feelings for Molly either to the girl or to himself.

Up until a few months ago, Roarke had been wary about admitting his feelings for Jessica for fear of either losing her or of having her endangered by this whirlwind that he'd been born a part of.

Sebastian's attack on Jessica in Fitzgaren, the near rape she'd suffered at his hands, still made his blood go cold, and thinking of what any of the people involved this time would do to a nearly defenseless American such as Molly made him sick.

"Molly's stronger than she looks, luv." Jessica knew what was going through his thoughts as she approached the bed to kneel on it. "Get some sleep for now and then you or Ry can beat the answers out of someone."

Figuring his brother would be more prone to scrapping with the new girl, Roarke shook his head. "I should check on Ian," he sighed, wincing as the strain of the last day began to take a toll.

Sensing his tension and weariness, Jessica moved to sit closer to lightly place a hand on his shoulder. "I don't have all of Maggie's knowledge of pressure points for massages but I don't do too badly," she offered.

"What kind of knowledge does Maggie have on giving massages?" Roarke asked, shifting a look over his shoulder with a dry grin before smirking. "Ry finds that out, Mac will kill him with the first comment."

"Something about a field report she did in college," Jessica grinned, waiting to see what he would want since he was still wary on things.

Remaining on his stomach, Roarke folded his hands under his chin but nodded that it was fine and tried not to tense when his girlfriend slowly moved to straddle his back.

"Roarke?" Jessica had felt him go rigid and started to move away when his hand shot out to hold her still. "This brings back too much."

"Aye, it does," he acknowledged tightly but closed his eyes to allow her to feel his thoughts. "I know you won't hurt me, luv, so show me what Maggie's taught you, and we won't mention it to Mac."

Grinning, Jessica didn't think it wise to tell him that she'd also picked up pointers from an actual massage parlor manager while working on a job several years ago.

"Relax and think of things after all this mess with Sebastian is over and things go back to normal," she urged him quietly, lightly rubbing his neck. "Does that hurt?"

"No, it's fine." He slowly began to relax with her touch, thinking of what she had said. "What's normal for us, Jess?" he asked curiously. "Besides, getting shot at?"

Thinking, Jessica continued to rub his shoulders, neck, and then let her hands move to the small of his back but was cautious here since his most visible scars were on his back and evoked dark emotions.

"Well, aside from the getting shot at while working I assumed you could think of other things the future could hold," she replied, lightly smacking his shoulder. "Can't you think of that or of our future?"

“I’m not certain until I know that both Sebastian and Kathleen have been dealt with that I can think of that, luv,” Roarke sighed, his thoughts deep on other things so he didn’t feel his friend tense slightly. “I love you, Jess, but I can’t begin to think about our future until I know that she won’t be able to hurt you.”

Swallowing the lump that had formed, Jessica bit her lip and considered it. “Your grandmother can’t hurt us, Roarke, unless we let her, and if you allow her to stop you from going on with a life, a family, then she has won.”

Staying silent for a moment, he slowly moved so that he could roll onto his back but held her still so that Jessica was still straddling him.

“Jessie, I can’t say that I’ve ever considered wanting children after the past that I’ve had,” he spoke grimly, not liking the thought of bringing a child into his life or his world even with the woman that he loved. “Maybe after this is over and I adjust to things then we can discuss having kids in a couple years. Okay?”

Forcing a smile, she nodded and didn’t resist as he drew her down until she was laying on his chest. “I doubt if this is what your Gram meant for rest, hero.”

Chuckling, Roarke smiled as he rolled her under him. “I’ll rest when you’re ready to rest, *a gra*,” he assured her, speaking Irish as he often did when it was just the two of them alone. “I have a better plan for what we could do since I’m banished.”

“You need to sleep and regain your energy,” Jessica countered, easing him back until she could curl against his side. “Go to sleep, Roarke. I’ll stay with you.”

Watching her, he thought he saw a flash of something deep in her eyes but it was gone so quickly that he shrugged it away as being too tired while nodding, and chose to worry about dressing when he was awake again.

Content with the feel of Jessica being safe in his arms, he fell asleep slowly but soon his breathing had evened off as sleep came to him.

“Roarke?” Jessica whispered, lifting her head to watch his profile as he slept, knowing that he was fully at rest and that his powers and strength would return with that sleep.

Stroking a finger over his face, she swallowed her own emotions when she laid a hand over her flat stomach and understood that this could be a serious problem for them.

Ryan's room:

"Fitzgerald, quit whining, and strip," Andrea McCabe ordered as soon as she'd shut the bedroom door a few doors away from Ian's room.

Having stormed into the room ahead of her, Ryan had to admit that he'd dreamed of hearing those words from many women in his life but never from this woman.

"McCabe, I know I've been keeping you busy lately but this isn't the time to act out the employee/employer fantasy," he shot her a scowl, then a smirk. "Now, after this mess is over then maybe we could..."

A small bronze cat sailed by his skull as her jade eyes fired. "You'd have to pay me triple to get me to sleep with you, Fitzgerald," she snapped, stepping closer while pointing at his side. "Those wounds you got are still visible and may need looked at, so take it off or I will."

"I don't pay women to sleep with me, Andrea," he countered, the small vein in his forehead beginning to throb as it normally did with this woman. "I can also check my own wounds, so take yourself off and away from me."

Never known for her patience, Andi stomped a foot and let out a stream of curses in a mix of languages.

Only understanding a portion of her words, Ryan lifted a brow. "You can certainly be a shrew at times, can't you?"

"That's normally what my father calls my mother on Thanksgiving so I must get it naturally," she tossed back, cocking her head. "Let me look, boss."

Ryan considered before finally jerking his shirt off and tossing it at her. "Fine, look and then leave me alone," he snapped.

"Boy, she's right. You can be a huge pain in the ass when you want to be." Andi caught the shirt with a grab, throwing it back at him. "I bet you were a handful as a kid."

"Ask Kerry about that," he said and sat down on a stool in the bathroom so that she'd have access to the sink or medicine chest. "Who said what about me? Don't listen to either Jess or Maggie because they don't know the full scope of my charm."

Andi buried her laughter with a choke on that one, rolling her eyes at him. "Sure, and I have been exposed to all that charm," she laughed then shrugged. "I don't who she is but I've been hearing this voice in my dreams and seeing this woman in them for a few weeks."

Looking at the side where the worst wound had been, now all she saw was a thin white line where a scar had formed.

Frowning, Andi moved around to gaze at his back and saw bruises where he'd hit the hallway wall after Ian had tossed him out of the room but again the knife wound seemed to be healing.

“So, aside from being an arrogant bastard and a witch, do you normally heal this quickly?” she demanded, scowling but content that his wounds seemed to be healing.

Using the opposite mirror to gauge for himself, Ryan looked at the bruises that he still had and wondered how bad they had been to begin with. “Remind me to pin Roarke down to check him out if Jess hasn’t healed him,” he spoke mainly to himself but noticed that his security agent had looked up. “Are you happy now, McCabe?”

“I think finding that demon hunter is a good idea considering you have Satan worshipers, fairy lords in the house and who knows what else.” She looked at a small can that seemed good for bruises. “Hold still.”

Wincing as she applied a foul smelling salve to the deepest bruises on his shoulder blade, Ryan began to work on ridding himself of any leftover negative energy not only from his own exposure but also from ridding Ian of his wounds.

“Damn, these brats are ruining my image,” he muttered, hating to lose the self-confident, arrogant attitude that he’d built around himself for most of his life.

“Yeah and you act like you hate them too,” she returned sarcastically, looking up with a grin. “I saw you with your brothers, y’know and you talk a good game, but you’re different with those two than you are normally.”

Ryan batted her hand away to finish checking the bruises himself, hating that she saw through him that easily. “Shut up, McCabe and tell me about the woman you’ve been seeing,” he ordered, wanting the topic changed. “You never told me that you were a sensitive or that you have Gypsy or Celtic blood in those icy veins.”

“You never asked about my family and I don’t know who she is but she knows you pretty damn well,” Andi remarked, nearly snapping his finger closed in the medicine chest. “She seemed to be a young blond woman who likes to call you a blockheaded moron who’s too thickheaded for his own bloody good, and boy I can’t agree more.”

Ryan had been going to snarl when those words hit home and he stopped, feeling his blood go cold and turned away before she could read his eyes.

‘Mind your own business, Annie,’ he thought silently, recalling the times when angered or upset with him Anastasia Cleary had often said those very same things to him.

“So who was she, boss?” Andi hadn’t missed the pain in his eyes at her description and noticed that this was a different type of emotion than she was used to seeing from him. “Another heart you wooed and...Ryan?”

Refusing the anger that came, he walked from the bathroom to pull an extra shirt from a drawer. By the fact that he needed to roll the sleeves up he guessed it had come from one of his uncles.

“Go home, McCabe,” his voice was short when he spoke. “Tell Olav to handle the cases and don’t shoot any clients until I get back.”

“I told you already that I’m staying put, Fitzgerald, so suck it up and accept it,” she snapped, following him and picking up the waves of emotion coming off of him. “What the hell is wrong with you?” she demanded sourly. “You can’t doubt that I can handle things when they get tough.”

Refusing the first comment that came to mind, he decided to ignore her since he had learned early on that she hated to be ignored.

Pissed off now, Andi grabbed her employer’s sore shoulder to pull him around to face her. “Damn you, Fitzgerald! Tell me why you don’t want me here and don’t pull that protecting the weaker sex act on me because I know damn good and well that you couldn’t care less...”

“Don’t tell me what I couldn’t care less about, McCabe!” Ryan snapped, his anger and emotions brought out by his exhaustion making control thin, or at least that’s what he’d later blame this reaction on when he grabbed the raven haired Gypsy by the upper arms to pull her hard against his chest.

Not thinking, only reacting, Ryan allowed the control that he valued so much to slip when he covered her mouth in a searing kiss that blinded him to everything in the room but the woman in his arms.

Never one who had ever been denied female companionship due to the dark and dangerous looks he had, Ryan had never made it a secret that he enjoyed the women he would meet in casinos or other places. However, the one thing that he only admitted to himself was that those other women had never affected him the way that Annie had and none had brought out the burning passion that Andrea McCabe was bringing out in him right then.

Neither noticed the explosive array of multi-colored lights that flickered around them or the burning candle on the mantle that burst into full flame.

The kiss lasted for a full minute or more until Ryan finally came back to his senses and fought the stronger desire to continue to ravage the soft, willing lips. Slowly, more slowly than he felt like, he eased back while automatically removing any bruises his fingers might have left where they’d gripped her arms.

“So, is that a normal kiss for Ryan Fitzgerald or do I just bring that out in you?” Andi was silently pleased that she kept her voice sounding normal despite the pounding of her heart and the inner knowledge that she was just as guilty of prolonging that as Ryan.

Usually her caustic wit would make him smile but this time, knowing how close he’d come to losing full control he merely shook his head. “I won’t apologize for the kiss itself, McCabe but I will apologize for grabbing you like I did,” he replied, stepping back fully to run a shaking hand through his long unruly black hair. “It’s been a bad week and we both know that you bring out the worst in me.”

"A trait I seem to have," she grinned, sensing his unease suddenly and was surprised by it. "So, who was the girl I described since that seemed to be what spooked you."

"Her name was Annie and once, when my life was actually simple and before she died, she was my fiancée," Ryan murmured, seeing her eyes start briefly and a hint of his familiar smirk came back. "I wasn't always the man I am now, McCabe."

Andi was beginning to believe that but she was catching things not being said. "Who killed her?"

"I did," he returned bitterly, waving the topic away. "I won't be held accountable for another woman in this situation so I want you gone."

"Does the 'protect the female' thing run in your line as a rule?" she demanded with a huff, seeing his eyebrow wing up in a sign she recognized. "I mean, I understand why that brother who shares your dark and dangerous looks would want to protect Jessica..."

Ryan snorted, pouring a glass of water and wondering where his grandfather hid the good stuff. "The brat has been hyper manic protective of Jess ever since they were kids so he doesn't count," he told her, drinking the glass of water as he would a shot.

"Sure but how far along is she?" Andi asked curiously. "I'm guessing she's attached to this magic crap since I saw her use it, but depending on how far along she is I can see why he wouldn't want her...Ryan?"

The water that he'd just gulped spit out in a stream as he choked, trying to talk and gasp all at the same time as her words shocked him. "What the bloody hell are you talkin' about, McCabe?" he demanded, struggling to breathe and comprehend what she was saying while his thoughts began whirling.

Realizing far too late that clearly he hadn't known or suspected what both Andi and Maggie did about Jessica Hadley, she closed her lips tightly and shook her head.

"Oh, no you don't you little minx," Ryan growled, swearing under his breath that if his brother knew this and didn't tell them that he'd kill him. "You can't drop that on me and then leave it. What makes you think that Jessica's...oh, no, that's an image I do not want."

"That redhead who spats with your other brother got the idea first, Fitzgerald," Andi snapped, whirling to leave the room. "You're so knowing, why haven't any of the rest of you picked up on it? My Aunt Claire would say she has that look."

Ryan's jaw gritted and wondered about that himself, but before he could comment Andi spun out the door and he found himself staring at the door she'd just slammed. "Yeah, Ryan, boyo, you've found yourself one heaping load of trouble with that woman," he muttered, stretching out to sleep and plan how he'd figure out what his little brother knew or didn't know.

Chapter 21

Later that evening, the Kerrigan House:

"Ha! Top that ya pointy-eared elf!" Lorcan Kerrigan grinned at a particularly well placed billiard shot several hours later.

Riordan eyed the table with the colored balls curiously, leaning on the stick. "So, let me see if I understand the purpose of this game of yours. The object is to put all of these balls in those pockets while not touching the black one until the very end, correct?" He arched a brow at the smaller man.

"Aye, that's basically a simple way of it," Lorcan nodded, motioning with his glass. "Go on, take a shot."

"As you wish," Riordan lined the stick up the way he'd been watching Lorcan do, considered the angles and made his shot. "I believe the phrase would be, top that."

Lorcan slowly lowered the glass to watch as the white ball struck one ball and ricocheted several times and as it hit each ball that ball dropped into a hole, until it came to the black eight ball that neatly fell in.

"I should know not to gamble or bet with a bleedin' Fairy Lord," he scowled, holding out a wad of cash. "What does your kind do with hard cash?"

"Nothing, but it burns nicely," Riordan smiled, turning even before Fiona entered with Brandon Sullivan. "Your husband is a horrid loser, Fiona," he smiled with a charm that chilled when looking at the other man. "So, this is the man whose mate kills her own young?"

Brandon lowered his gaze, still upset by recent events. "I can never take back all the pain that she's caused to others or to Ian."

"No talk of this until after dinner," Fiona smiled to put him at ease, lifting her eyes up. "The boys are awake and will soon join us in the dining room. Ian is still asleep which is better for him."

"Which means no pumping the whelp for what his wife is up to," Lorcan sighed in understanding, smelling the aroma of food then sniffed again. "Fi, why are those pesky brussels sprouts in this meal?"

Stepping into the more informal dining room, Fiona looked back while sliding her reddish blond hair off her shoulder. "Because they're one of Ian's favorite foods."

"Hell, Gram, there isn't much that the lad won't eat, so how do know what food is his favorite?" Mac asked as he stepped in, wincing as he was smacked in the head. "Damn it, Maggie, stop that," he growled.

"No swearing in the dining room, Patrick," Fiona corrected automatically, using his given name in order to make her point while lifting a stern finger to

halt the anger he felt. "Kerry, settle and think before I remind you that no matter how old any of you get that certain rules still apply."

Kerry felt more at ease and knew that the sleep had done him some good but he refused to accept how he had gone into that sleep. "Don't ever do that again," he spoke directly to Riordan before taking the chair that his chuckling grandfather pushed toward him.

"Ah, Andrea, please come and sit by me, lass," Fiona invited with a warm smile, pleased to see that while Andrea McCabe was noticeably nervous she was hiding it well. "I trust that Ryan will be joining us?"

"Oh, sure," Andi waved that off with a typical roll of her jade green eyes. "I knocked, he snarled, so he'll be down soon."

Mac grinned, holding a chair out for Maggie. "How many times have you and Ry exchanged blows since you've worked for him?"

"Actual blows?" she considered that, tapping a painted nail on her chin. "Not physical blows though I'm sure he's been tempted a few times."

"More and more, McCabe," Ryan shot at her, almost back to his old self as he walked into the dining room. "Gramps, you'll have to tell me where you hide the good stuff in this house since when dealing with this one I'm always in need of a stiff drink."

Lorcan laughed, slapping the table. "A boy after me own heart, Ryan," he grinned, shooting his beloved wife a wry grin. "I often felt that same way while courting Fi."

"Not a good thing to say, Gramps," Ryan chuckled, eyeing Andi cautiously before sliding a look to his older brothers. "Kerry, I think you and Mac had better join forces and see what's up with the brat and Jess."

Mac lifted a curious brow while Maggie scowled but Kerry was looking between them. "Fill me in now before you start a brawl at dinner, Ryan," he urged, not ready for more hassles yet.

Ryan started to reply but caught the thoughts and chose to look for himself. "Brat, do we still have mystics or mercenaries in the house?" he asked casually, feeling Andi kick him under the table.

"Jess says that O'Malley's looking for Molly his way while Cam's people are combing the streets for information their way." Roarke's eyes still looked weary but his emotions were more level. "Meaning the boys are out threatening people."

"Cam can be calm and non-threatening when he needs to be." Jessica Hadley saw it necessary to defend her employees, ignoring the snorting laughs heard. "He can be, Ryan."

Laughing at the thought of Cameron Young going into a search action without seeming threatening, he waved it away. "Sure, luv, you go on believing that and I can sell you a flying saucer."

Ryan peered over a glass of red wine to watch his brother and friend closely and quickly realized that Roarke didn't suspect anything.

Yet when he went to scan Jessica, he not only found himself blocked as they normally did by her natural power but he felt an odd tenseness in her that felt like a mixture of loss and fear. He nearly choked when he realized the cause.

"Bloody hell," he whispered, watching as his brother held out a chair to the British woman yet seemed to miss the subtle unease. "He doesn't see it."

Mac must have also caught on to what Ryan was seeing as well but before he could look deeper or nudge Kerry toward it, an unexpected surge of energy entered the room.

"Shit!" Roarke caught the power and its source just a second before Brandon Sullivan found himself physically thrown from a chair near Fiona and into a wall. "Ian, stop!"

"Where is she?" Ian Fitzgerald demanded from the doorway, his normally calm and bright eyes gone to full smoke as his powers channeled higher with his emotions. "You know, Brandon, because there isn't a bleedin' thing Sybil does that you don't know. Where is Molly?"

Brandon, taken off guard by the power, struggled to sit up. "Ian, you have to believe me. If I had known that Syb planned this for you or the Yank I'd..."

"Liar!" Ian screamed, jerking a hand on reflex and the unexpected wave of energy brought an antique sideboard crashing down on the man before anyone could react.

Just a little while earlier, upstairs:

Groaning as his body and throbbing head protested waking up in any manner, Ian Fitzgerald tried to pull a pillow over his head but frowned when the stuffed elephant wound up there instead.

Blinking his eyes clear of sleep, pain, leftover energy, and memories, Ian stared at the toy before looking around the room. Remembering too much of recent days made him wary of trusting these surroundings too readily.

Sitting up slowly, Ian moved the blankets aside to see that most of his clothes were missing but more importantly, the deepest wound on his leg appeared healed.

As he probed his leg gingerly, he found there was minor pain from the thin scar that was still visible. Shifting a look around the room while trying to stand to test the strength of his legs, Ian sensed his brothers and his grandparents.

Not certain where he was but realizing that it was safe made him relax slowly as he located some clothes. Looking in the mirror, he saw both his Trinity and Claddagh medals back around his neck, but it was when his eyes landed on the other Claddagh medal that his breath caught.

“Molly,” he whispered, recognizing the medal as the one that his friend always wore.

Slowly running a finger down the medal, Ian gasped as the sudden images flashed into his mind from the medal.

Ian saw Molly the night of his original attack. He also witnessed her with his father, her trek to Fitzgaren and the attack in his dorm.

“Molly, what did you do?” he asked softly, gasping as the images took on a different feel as they showed him the events of the woods after he passed out. He saw her give him her medal before...

Eyes sharpening, Ian witnessed his friend calling forth a man that couldn't have been anything else but a Fairy Lord and he saw her tears as she told this man to take him away while she stayed behind to buy time.

“Damn it!” Anger glittered upon realizing that his friend, a young woman that he had come to accept that he loved, had essentially sacrificed herself for him.

Clenching the medal in his hand, other images began to surface but not all from Molly.

Ian saw images of fire, shining eyes glinting through the flames, a dagger that struck fear in his heart and...

Stumbling back, he saw the reflection of the silver owl in the mirror as it sat in a tree across the square. Ian spun to face the window. “You can't come any closer,” he murmured, staring at it and easily picking up the cold energy it radiated. “You also can't hurt me any longer and...”

The words trailed off as images shot into his mind since he hadn't been prepared to shield himself.

Violent images of Molly stalked by the same hounds that had tormented Ian; he could see her as she was taunted by voices that he knew but couldn't see and he saw her...

"No!" he barely stopped the urge to hurl something at the owl upon seeing the vision of Molly, her light caramel skin bleeding from cuts and bruises, while Sebastian's slaves held her down as he amused himself at her screams.

"That was a mistake, Grandmother," Ian gritted, eyes turning to gray smoke as another image took shape and he saw the goat head hanging above an altar. "No, none of you will touch Molly."

The owl flew away smugly and then Ian caught the thoughts downstairs that made his blood run cold. "Bran."

Feeling his foster father in the house made an already tense temper ignite as he felt anger rather than the fear that he honestly expected to feel when confronted with either of the Sullivans.

Easily tracking the thoughts downstairs to the informal dining room, Ian picked up the voices of his older brothers, but still emotionally drained from recent events it was the sight of Brandon Sullivan that was responsible for the surge in his power.

Which slammed the startled man out of his chair and against a wall where he laid stunned for several moments.

Both Roarke and Mac had stood when this happened but Ian wasn't aware of them. His eyes locked onto the older man's even as his power surged with temper to tip the sideboard over toward him as every word the man spoke brought back childhood memories.

"Liar!"

Chapter 22

“Ian!” Kerry snapped while starting to move a hand to deflect the piece of furniture but saw that his grandfather had already halted its fall.

Roarke had moved to grab his brother, pulling him back several spaces and careful to keep a firm grip.

“Where is she?” Ian was demanding, not aware of the strong hands holding him back. “Where’s Molly, Brandon?”

Startled by the raw power that he was seeing in this boy, Brandon suddenly understood why his wife’s family desired to sacrifice him.

“Ian, you have to believe that if I knew where she was that I’d do anything to...” he tried to say but he saw the boy’s eyes flash.

“Don’t lie, Brandon,” he gritted, trying to step forward but Roarke’s grip kept him back. “He’s lying, Roarke. Just like he’s lied to me and let her lie to me, he let them...”

Roarke felt his fears, seeing in him so many of the emotions that he had a lifetime to forget while Ian simply coped by forgetting as much as he could.

“Tóg é gobogé (take it easy),” he urged gently, meeting Mac’s gaze as he approached. “There’s no doubt that Brandon’s done wrong but he came here to...”

Twisting free of his brothers the boy shook his head violently. “No, he came here as a bloody beacon so that she’d have some access through the protection spells,” he snapped, turning to look around the room but his eyes kept going back to Brandon. “That damn bloody owl...”

Fiona’s lips thinned at the mention of the owl while Lorcan gripped her hand. “You should have let me shoot that thing years ago, my love,” he murmured.

Giving Andi McCabe a look to stay seated, Ryan moved to his brothers. “When did you see it?”

“Upstairs, before I came down.” Ian’s breathing was going labored as his memories began surfacing. “It was sitting across the street and it...it showed me things. It showed what they were doing to...to Molly and...”

Kerry laid a hand on his youngest brother, feeling his emotion but also seeing the images that were still vivid to him. “Ian, listen to me,” he urged, relieved when his brother’s eyes lifted. “Molly is your weakness and it’s the only thing that they can use to hurt you now.”

“That’s why I didn’t want her involved!” Ian snapped in a rare showing of true anger.

Always laidback and easy going, it took a lot of pushing to cause Ian to come to full temper. His recent ordeal, memories of a fleeting childhood that haunted him and terror over Molly had brought it to the surface.

“That’s why I never date, why I refused to allow myself to admit to myself that I loved Molly, because I didn’t want her to become mixed up in my life,” he went on emotionally, looking between his brothers with pain clear in his eyes. “I never wanted to fall in love or let anyone love me because I didn’t want them to get hurt or to leave me like...”

“Like Mum and Da left you,” Mac finished for him, making no move to touch since he understood that like Roarke, Ian would have to make that first move. “Like you were told we left you.”

The tears were there but they didn’t fall as he merely nodded. “They said that Kerry didn’t want...”

Sliding a disgusted look at Brandon, Kerry reached over to slowly squeeze his shoulder. “Ian, I did not know that Da had it set up that I was to be your guardian and if I had, I would have fought Kathleen and the Sullivan’s to bring you home,” he promised the boy, looking at the others firmly. “I would have brought all of you home to Fitzgaren.”

“Did I miss something in between a demon guard sticking me with a knife and all of this?” Ryan demanded, rolling his eyes. “McCabe, what didn’t you fill me in on?”

“Miss McCabe didn’t know about this matter. I’ll tell you about it later,” Kerry replied, watching Ian for a moment longer. “I know you’re scared and you have every reason to be but I need you to be focused if we stand a chance of saving Molly.”

Hesitating, Ian looked at his oldest brother. “You’ll help me save Molly from them?” he asked in an almost hopeful tone.

“Baby brat, the lass told me off in the first hour or so of meeting me, so of course we’ll help get her back,” Ryan assured him with a dry grin that he meant to calm. “Besides, I asked Kerry if we could keep her.”

“That was only because she called you drop dead gorgeous, Ryan,” Jessica reminded lightly, turning slightly in her chair.

Nodding in agreement, he smiled. “Never denied that either, Jessica,” he replied, turning serious as he looked back to his brother. “Molly’s a strong girl, Ian, and she’s got a spunk that even I can admire.”

“But she can’t defend herself against Sebastian or Kathleen or Sybil, Ry,” the boy argued, turning to gaze between Roarke and Jessica. “I promised her that I wouldn’t let him hurt her like he did Jess, Roarke, but I saw him hurting...hurting her and...”

Looking back at Jessica, Roarke understood what the boy was feeling since he still felt similar feelings when he recalled what the Warlock had done to Jessica.

“Ian, I know what he would have showed you and I won’t say that what you saw wasn’t real,” he began slowly, shifting his brother so that he faced him fully. “They know if they hurt Molly that it will hurt you and Sebastian hates to

lose. She made a fool of him by helping you escape and that would have made them furious.

“All of us, before this is over and he’s defeated, will have to face things that scare us or face those closest to us being hurt,” he went on, seeing that the boy seemed to be calming down some. “Sebastian and Da’s mother will be threats until we complete the circle, and to do that it does require the involvement of people that we care about as much as we may not like it.”

“How do you stand knowing that he could hurt Jessie again?” Ian asked, again looking at his friend but this time seeing something else, something that made him look deeper.

Shaking his head grimly, Roarke didn’t have that answer. “It scares me out of my bloody mind that he could touch her again,” he admitted but went on in what he hoped was a realistic tone. “I just hold to the belief that our love, our bond, and knowing that the threat will keep her safe. Of course, that’s also why I just told her that we’d wait until all this was over to even decide if having kids is something we’d want.”

Hearing Maggie groan had Mac close his eyes and silently slap Ryan in the head to keep him from doing the physical act to their brother. ‘Roarke, you are an idiot,’ he thought to himself.

Fiona had stood, motioning to her husband to help Brandon to his feet. “We should handle this before dinner. Let’s go into the living room and see what Brandon can tell us and how Riordan got involved in this.”

“Gram,” Ian smiled shyly having finally noticed his grandparents. “I’m sorry about...”

“Rubbish, lad,” Lorcan waved the attempted apology away. “A little tantrum now and then is good. Your Mum was the Queen of them when she was small.”

That thought made Ian smile but before his grandmother could head into the living room for this talk, he wanted to see something.

Ian had never denied his heritage. Even as a small boy he knew that he had abilities that his friends didn’t and he had come to realize that his abilities were greater than even what others believed.

Jessica had been standing but stopped when the younger man approached to kneel beside her chair. “Ian?”

“May I?” he asked cautiously, remembering that his brother’s girlfriend was wary with being touched unexpectedly.

Breath catching nervously, she nodded after a moment upon seeing the light in his blue-gray eyes.

“What’s...?” Roarke had begun to ask when both Ryan and Mac smacked him in the back of the head.

“You’re a bleedin’ moron, brat,” Ryan hissed, noticing that Kerry was watching their brother. “When did we decide Ian had the gift of sight?”

Scowling back at him was Kerry's answer but it was Ian's slow, gentle movement as he placed a hand on their friend's stomach that was making him focus his attention.

Slowly Ian concentrated just a little to see what it was that he'd been feeling for the past several minutes.

He could feel the young woman's tension and was briefly confused by it until it began to click into place as he understood what he felt. Smiling, Ian looked up into her eyes.

"Give him time, Jess," he urged quietly, looking down at his hand and even though he knew that it was too soon to feel physically he still felt the emotional link over his present concerns. "She'll be safe, healthy, and blessed," he promised, leaning up to press a kiss to her cheek before standing to meet his older brother's confused eyes for a moment. "Ry's right, you are a bleedin' idiot."

Roarke shot him a dark look while gazing between them, still not understanding until things that Jess had said recently or how she'd been acting hit him, and then it felt like someone punched him in the solar plexus.

"Here we go," Ryan decided, grabbing his brother before he could fall as he paled. "This is where you go to her and beg that she forgives you for being a blind dope since you've pretty much told her that you don't want kids yet, brat," he whispered in his ear, squeezing his arm. "Brat, you can't allow what happened to Mum and Da or to you rule your life."

Roarke's eyes were now locked onto Jessica, looking for himself to see what she'd been able to hide but if the flicker he felt wasn't what moved him, the fearful tears he saw in her eyes took him to his knees next to her.

"You're pregnant," he whispered, kicking himself for not having seen it or feel it before. "You...you didn't tell me, luv."

"Because you don't want it." The tears were in her soft voice, and she tensed when his hand moved.

Ian had caught Kerry's nod to leave them alone but before he stepped away, he placed a hand on both his brother's shoulder and on Jessica's. "Her," he corrected quietly, locking eyes with his brother. "It'll be a girl, Roarke."

Giving Roarke and Jessica time alone, Kerry caught Mac before he made it to the living room. "Did you have a clue about this?" he demanded.

"Maggie told me so I figured Jess was shielding it from us since she can't be sensed by us anyway," he shrugged, eyeing the smirking redhead. "Shut up and sit down with a tape recorder, Mary Margaret," he sighed. "I think we'll need a recording of this."

"He's scared but he'll accept this." Ian seemed hopeful though doubts were in his eyes. "Won't he, Kerry?"

Sometimes hating hard questions like this, he could only shrug. "We'll see. If he doesn't, after we find Molly, I'll let Ry beat the crap out of him."

“Finally, a plan that I can get behind,” Ryan smiled, sitting down and snagging Andi’s wrist to pull her down on the sofa next to him. “Sit and put that memory of yours to good use, McCabe,” he directed briskly.

“Go to hell, Fitzgerald,” Andi threw back but she did sit, crossing her long slender legs to eye things. “So, as the new girl in this, just tell me what has to be done to find this cute little guy’s pal and who do I get to shoot?”

“Ha, but I like this one.” Lorcan Fitzgerald plopped down on Andi’s other side much like an energetic child would do but the hand he laid on her knee reminded her of her grandfather. “She’s a feisty one, laddie. I bet she keeps you on your toes.”

Ryan groaned under his breath. “She’s in this on sufferance only, Gramps, so don’t go getting’ any ideas,” he warned, shooting the older man a look.

“Don’t go picking on your grandfather, Fitzgerald,” Andi scolded, which pleased Lorcan immensely and he laughed. “He’s got more manners than you.”

“That’s what I’ve said since meeting our resident gambler,” Maggie said, laughing at his glare.

Fiona stepped in, sliding the double pocket doors closed behind her. “Sit, Ian,” she urged, lightly stroking his blond hair to put him at ease. “There is time to save her and if she’s anything like her great-grandmother then she’s a strong and determined lass.”

“She’s beautiful, Gram,” he whispered, remembering so much including that first kiss. “She’s smart, funny, and she makes me laugh.”

“Don’t leave out that she talks to voodoo gods and whipped up some nice mojo to yank Roarke back after a stupid stunt,” Mac put in, content to sit on a footstool while Maggie took notes.

Ian blinked in surprise since he knew that Molly was as wary about using or bringing up her abilities in magic as he often was.

“She rarely uses magic unless she has to,” he admitted, staying close to the sofa that Ryan was sitting on and avoiding Brandon Sullivan.

Kerry noticed his unease and decided to nudge Brandon with his tale. “Okay, mate, before we find out from Ian what happened and get Riordan’s version of events after Ian passed out, tell us exactly what you know and if you can actually be of help to us,” he declared, after being certain that Mac and Ryan were in positions to grab Ian if need be.

“As I explained earlier, I was startled when Kathleen brought Ian to us, because I knew that Toryn and Brenna had set it up for Kerry to be the lad’s guardian,” he began slowly, twisting his hands in unrest. “Syb didn’t seem surprised by it and urged me to agree, so I did.”

He lifted his head to glance at Ian who was avoiding looking back. “As Miss Cavanaugh picked up on, it is strange that our baby died when he was three; we took in Emily at Syb’s insistence and then Ian when he was three shortly before Emily died.” He shook his head slowly. “I don’t like to think

that Daniel, our son, was killed, but it was a doctor chum of Syb's that pronounced him dead."

"Lad, you're a sorry excuse for a father when you can't even protect children placed in your care," Riordan spoke from the corner, taking an instant dislike to this man.

"Emily was supposed to be the last sacrifice," Brandon objected. "Sybil swore that it was over but...when Ian was thirteen I began to have doubts and after he ran away to Cork and told Mac about Syb and her family messin' with him...I began to suspect more."

Ian had gone rigid and pale even as Ryan was quick to pounce on Mac about that.

"What the bloody hell does that mean?" he demanded, starting to move but hissed as long nails dug into his upper thigh as Andi saw how pale the younger man was going.

"Wait until later, Ryan," Fiona urged her middle grandson, crossing to take Ian's hands in her own to remove the anxiety he felt. "Be at peace, lad."

Clearly not any happier with Mac than Ryan was, Kerry chose to put it aside for now. "If you suspected Ian was in danger then or later on, why didn't you tell Mac or Ryan, or even myself when I spoke with you the summer before Ian began attending Trinity?" he asked. "You had plenty of time to break this routine."

"Because I was actually scared if I did that I could hasten things and they'd hurt him," he replied, knowing that to these men that was a weak excuse.

"We would have protected him," Mac replied, sighing. "I know that if I would have taken the time to listen to him and looked into it, he would not have gone back to that house."

"You should have called me, Mac," Kerry remarked, knowing that Ian was watching them. "Even the smallest hint of danger or abuse and he would have been back in Fitzgaren."

Brandon looked like he wanted to approach the boy but hesitated. "I knew when Ian ran out last month and Syb bitched about losing that bloody dagger of hers that he must have learned about the room in the basement. That's when things began to change."

"They changed when I went back to school," Ian murmured. "I didn't want to call home or admit that I was scared when things began getting worse because I didn't want to be a problem or..."

"Ian, we're your brothers so protecting you or being there for you is in the job description," Ryan replied, leaning his head back so that he could see his brother. "Ask Kerry, he has the handbook that Roarke and I made up for him years ago."

Hearing the boy chuckle was a good sign but Kerry knew it wouldn't last. "When Sebastian returned, Sybil and Kathleen knew they had to push Ian away from us, so that's why the problems began for him at school even though you, of all people, knew that Dean Quillian could not revoke those scholarships since he didn't actually have them," he stated, eyeing the man firmly.

"I knew that Kathleen was influencing the school because it was important to Ian, but I also knew that to expel him would alert you," Brandon nodded.

"This room in your house, would they hold a serious ceremony there?" Mac asked. Although he was certain that they wouldn't, he wasn't disappointed when the man shook his head.

"No, they never hold the major sacrifices in a house. They're almost always some place with a special value, a major site of magical importance," he replied, trying to think of anything that his wife might have mentioned. "Syb was talking about taking a trip to Avebury or around it so it could be close to there."

There was silence as the brothers digested that news and didn't care for it. "Avebury is on the St. Michael ley-line, so that whole area is believed to be magically powered. It's also believed to have underground caves where rituals used to be held centuries ago," Kerry sighed, sitting down slowly to run a hand over his face.

"Would they take Molly there?" Ian asked, seeing how grim his brothers looked. "What else is there?"

Mac was rubbing the back of his neck until Maggie touched him. "Avebury is in Great Britain, Ian, and that causes an endless amount of problems," he muttered.

"Maybe, maybe not," Ryan returned, reaching into his pocket for a small vial that he opened to pour the contents out in his hand. "They'll be decreased but we all know that there's a back door to that problem of our powers weakening if we leave Ireland."

Ian stared at the dirt in his brother's palm, recalling how odd his own powers had been in that forest before the attack. "So that's why mine were weaker before they were blocked?" he asked. "I'd left home?"

"Because the Fitzgerald line began when Aislin had my child, and that child was of Fairy blood linked directly to the land in Eire (Ireland), your abilities are connected with this land as well," Riordan finally addressed his descendents as he stepped forward.

"So long as you remain on these shores you retain full power but leave it, even to cross a border to those lands now called Great Britain, will weaken you," he went on, smiling wryly at Ryan. "Congratulations on finding even a small way around that clause. Apparently you didn't knock all your senses loose as a lad climbing like a monkey in your Mum's trees."

Ryan still didn't trust this man but curbed his usual reply while dusting off his hands. "Been watching us long?"

"I watch all my kin, Ryan, and I fully agreed with Toryn that you bore more watching than your brothers." Riordan smiled before turning to meet Ian's confused look. "Your woman understood the risks she took that night."

Maggie leaned forward to speak to Mac quietly. "This bloke believes in lighting a powder keg, doesn't he?"

Ian looked at this man for a long moment as other thoughts flashed back to him. "I remember seeing lights, hearing music, and you were arguing with others who shimmered so brightly it hurt my eyes," he frowned. "You're one of the Gentry that Mum always told us stories of."

"Aye and young Molly called on aid that night as she sought to get you the help that she couldn't provide," Riordan nodded, grinning. "A spunky lass since it took guts to do what she did, both in calling for aid and when she helped you to escape...though even I was shocked when you teleported."

Mac spit tea and Ryan groaned, knowing that he was going to be blamed for that. "I didn't teach him to teleport, Mac," he argued while their grandmother chuckled.

"Ian could teleport before he was three months old, my luvs," she informed them, shooting Lorcan a look. "Petrified poor Brenna the first time he did it. Ian was the only one of you lot that your parents discussed a minor binding spell to handle his powers until he was older."

"I want to test his powers after this is over, Kerry," Mac muttered, glaring at the boy. "If you teleport when I'm around, I don't care if you are eighteen I'll still hurt you. And quit listening to what Ryan tells you."

Not knowing if Ian would understand that his brother wasn't serious, Maggie gave the boy a grin before she smacked Mac in the head. "It took a lot of guts to try that, boyo," she told him with admiration.

"No, it was desperation to get Molly away from them," he countered quietly, sitting on the arm of the sofa. "By that point I'd come to understand that I was probably going to die there because they said that..."

As he suddenly stopped, eyes wary when he looked at his brothers. It didn't take them long to understand why.

"Ian, from the night we heard the banshee wail we knew something was wrong," Kerry began seriously. "After Molly came, we've been looking for you but something kept us from feeling you."

"We've screwed up a lot in the past fifteen years but the one thing that you need to believe is that none of us would ever abandon you if we knew that you were in trouble," Mac assured him, approaching the sofa.

Getting the feeling that this was a moment between them, Andi nudged Lorcan until he also got the hint and with a grumble moved.

“He said I was a bother as a baby to Mum and that you guys would react only because of the prophecy and not because...” Ian stared at his hands, surprised by the wetness he felt on his face. “Sybil always told me that no one loved me and that’s why no one came that often and...”

Ryan felt the edge in the room get more intense and chose to break it. Realizing that their grandmother would frown if Brandon was turned into a toad, he decided on another tactic.

Reaching up with a swiftness that he normally reserved only for taking Roarke off guard, he pulled the startled boy off the sofa arm and onto the sofa, and just as quickly got him into a light headlock.

“Boyo, sure it was a huge adjustment for the four of us to have a much younger baby brother,” he admitted lightly, ignoring the warning in Kerry’s eyes while tightening the hold enough to contain but not to hurt the boy as he struggled on instinct.

“Yes, you were a strange little baby. I mean I swear you had fur until you were over a year old but that’s from Mum’s side of the family,” Ryan went on, looking down into eyes that were just like his own as he smirked. “And yes, Da did have to take Roarke for a rabies shot after you bit him once because we didn’t know if you’d picked up some quirks but – and this is where you can start paying attention.”

Ryan had waited for Ian to stop squirming and to begin to realize that he wasn’t fully serious to continue with a light tap to his forehead. “You were, are, and will always be our baby brother, and that means that no matter what else you do or anything, we will always love you.” This time he tapped a finger a little harder just to make a point. “Is this sinkin’ in yet with you?”

“Why didn’t I ever bite you, Ry?” Ian asked curiously, staying still in the headlock now that he didn’t feel a threat, and comforted by the words since he knew that his black haired brother hardly ever sugar coated anything.

As Mac looked away before he could laugh, Ryan’s smirk turned slightly more devious as he released the hold after messing the boy’s hair up.

“You tried once,” he admitted, shooting Mac a look to shut up. “You never tried it again after I bit you back.”

“Got his ass handed to him by Da for biting you too,” Kerry put in, holding out a hand to help Ian sit up. “It’s hard for you growing up and hearing the rot that you have, and none of us can take back these past years, but we will always be there with you.”

Ian looked around as he considered it. “After we save Molly, can I come home for awhile?” he asked Kerry. “I doubt if after all of this if I’ll want to be at school.”

“Of course you can come home, Ian,” Kerry assured him, seeing some of the tension ease away as he laid a hand on his shoulder. “We will get her back.”

"I know," the boy whispered, looking at the Claddagh medal he still held in his hand. "Is it safe for us to love anyone?"

The innocent question had his brothers exchanging looks, but none of them knew the answer since they all understood the risks.

"Of course you can love," Fiona entered the conversation, crossing to her grandsons. "Love is never easy and while your lives do carry an extra margin of danger, when you find the lass that you are destined to be with then it will all work out," she reassured them, silently giving both Lorcan and Riordan a stern command to not snicker or comment.

"Unless Roarke's a moron and then I beat the crap outta him," Ryan decided, looking over to see Andi was deep in conversation with his bright-eyed grandfather and that scared him for many reasons.

Kerry understood that concern since he shared it but chose to trust that Roarke would handle this well, so he decided to focus on their plan. "We need to find the exact spot in Avebury because we don't have time to scour the whole place."

"Those mystics that work for Jess should be able to find a whole sect of Satan lovers," Ryan muttered, having no love for any of the O'Malley's.

"I can find Molly if I concentrate on her or cast a spell to find her," Ian remarked, seeing Riordan frown just as the butler appeared in the door holding a box and the boy's face went white.

Charles handed the box to Fiona who took it carefully. "This was delivered to the lads, ma'am," he sounded concerned. "It's from their...it's from Mrs. Fitzgerald."

Spitting into the fire at the name, Lorcan scowled. "Be cautious, Fi," he urged. "Knowing that she-devil it could be anything from a dead bat to...oh, bloody hell."

"No," Ian whispered, when Fiona opened the box and he saw a gold hoop earring that he knew Molly had been wearing and the waist bag that she never went anywhere without.

What concerned him more was the straw doll laying in the box with strands of curly black hair and pins stuck through both of its eyes.

"Easy, luv," Maggie caught his arm, seeing concern in Mac and recalling her own grandmother's lessons.

Fiona lifted a finely written note to scan it with eyes that narrowed in annoyance. "He's offering a chance to save the lass if Ian takes a place at his side."

Eyes wide with apprehension, Ian looked up from the doll that caused terror to build in his heart. "Why would Sebastian offer that?"

"He's willing to double-cross Sybil to still have a chance at defeating us," Kerry said, seeing the method of this madness. "Though, it's highly doubtful that even if you went to them that they'd spare Molly."

“Give it time, Ian,” Mac urged, sensing that boy was close to panicking at what he was picking up from the doll. “We’ll go to Avebury soon but if we rush this, it could cause more trouble.”

Refusing to touch the doll, Ian was still picking up images from it. “She’s cold and scared, Mac,” he murmured, seeing stone etched in chalk. “I smell blood and...”

“Ian, don’t go into the image.” Kerry gently shook his shoulders to keep the boy grounded. “Wait until Roarke’s here and we’ll help you.”

As a full-fledged empath, Mac was picking up the full strength of what his brother was feeling from that doll and the earring. Frowning, he nudged Ryan. “Go get Roarke,” he whispered, seeing what Kerry wasn’t. They were running out of time.

Chapter 23

Keeping a sense of what would happen in the living room so he’d be up to date, Roarke Fitzgerald knew that he wouldn’t be any good to his baby brother until he cleared this up. He still felt the fist punch him in the chest when it became obvious what he’d been oblivious to.

It hadn’t been until he’d heard the tears in Jessica’s voice that he realized that his own stupid mouth might have just cost him everything.

“Jess, luv.” He had pulled out the chair next to her because he wasn’t certain if his legs would hold him up.

After his family had taken their leave, he had forced himself to look past the emotion, past his own doubts or fears and see that tiny little glimmer that Ian had felt. Knowing that it wasn’t the time to touch her, he simply sat still to consider his next few words.

“*A gra*, why didn’t you come to me when you found out?” he asked, certain of the answer before he saw the shadows in her eyes.

“I didn’t want to just drop it on you and it was such a shock since we’ve been using protection,” Jessica began, wiping her face free of tears but avoiding his eyes. “When I asked you upstairs about kids and you said that...”

Closing his eyes and swearing he felt a light slap to the back of his head, Roarke gently reached over to take her hands.

“Jess, you know more about my past still than even my brothers do,” he began carefully. “Ignoring the dangers we both take in our careers, I always told myself that I would or could never place a child in a position of losing one or both of its parents. I also wasn’t certain if, after the abuse I suffered, if I’d be comfortable with bringing a child into a world like this where people will harm children.”

Nodding, she went to move her hands back but found that his grip had tightened slightly. "Roarke, I know that you don't want..."

"No...I mean, yes, I said that to a degree," he struggled for the right words. "To plan it out, to think about having children in the future wasn't something I planned on but..." He hesitated long enough to lift her face in his hand. "Having it happen, even if it is so unexpectedly, knowing and feeling this little glimmer, is so very different."

Relieved to feel Jessica beginning to relax, Roarke moved one hand to lightly curve on her stomach. "Ian's right," he whispered, amazed at not only his brother's gifts but also the warmth of what he was feeling. "The baby, it's a girl and Jess, it's ours."

The amazement and awe in his voice made Jessica laugh. "Yeah, she'll be ours. Is that okay with you, Roarke?"

"We're having a baby," he spoke it slowly as if still digesting it then he surged to his feet, pulling Jessica up with him and into his arms. "I love you and this baby so much, Jessica."

The kiss he gave spoke more than his words and as Roarke held her against him, he saw flashes of things to come and made decisions that he knew Jessica probably wouldn't like.

"Brat, Kerry wants you." Ryan stuck his head in the door after giving his brother the time that he knew he had needed. "We need to center Ian before he pulls a stunt that Mac will be blaming us for teaching him."

"I know, I saw the doll," Roarke spoke without looking, running a finger down Jessica's cheek. "We're running out of time to find her, Ry."

Ryan had also felt that but was hoping his brothers hadn't because he also knew how close Ian was to reacting in a bad way.

"They're in Avebury somewhere," Ryan replied, eyeing Jessica wryly. "Care to tell O'Malley to make himself useful and find these people?"

Jessica considered the area mentioned and understood that Nick would not be pleased to have to go there but nodded. "Yep, he'll be there in an hour," she assured Ryan, more at ease now that Roarke knew about the baby and had accepted the news, though she knew they still had a ways to go.

"Little sister," Ryan laid a hand on her arm before she passed him, leaning down to lightly kiss her cheeks. "Brightest blessings to both you and this little one, Jessica Jayne."

Smiling, she went to yell for Nick O'Malley and to call Cameron Young back to the house.

"So, do I congratulate you or smack your head in?" Ryan asked curiously, feeling his brother was more at ease with the news that he was going to be a father. "Brat?"

Taking a deep breath, Roarke turned to face his brother fully and Ryan was actually surprised by the raw emotion he saw.

“Jess is having a baby, Ryan,” he still seemed shocked by the idea. “She’s having my baby.”

Laughing, Ryan clapped him on the back of the neck and brought him closer. “Well, I’d bloody well hope it’s yours, brat,” he joked then sobered. “Roarke, it’ll be alright.”

“I want her kept out of this crap now,” Roarke muttered, seeing the smirk that formed. “Yeah, I know how that suggestion will go over with her.”

Knowing Jessica Hadley’s temper, Ryan knew the fight that would occur when his brother sprung that one, but right then he knew they needed to handle other things.

“Let’s go help Ian before Gramps gets any ideas about McCabe and me,” he muttered, seeing his brother return a grin. “Shut up, brat.”

“Are you sure that you haven’t had those same ideas about her, Ry?” Roarke teased, laughing at the glare he got but then gasped as a wave of power shot through him. “Ian?”

Exchanging looks, the brothers both felt the change in the air even as Mac was heard shouting.

“Bloody hell, what did he do?” Ryan groaned, breaking into a run just as lights flashed from the living room that for Ryan meant one thing. “Mac’s going to bitch. Ian just teleported and that’s bloody bad for too many reasons.”

Moments Before:

Ian Fitzgerald was trying to focus as Kerry and Mac tried to get final details out of Brandon Sullivan about what they could be walking into.

As he listened, Ian’s eyes kept going back to the box that Fiona had placed on the footstool.

Taking a deep breath, he reached out to lift the gold hoop earring and, placing it onto his palm, felt the emotions pouring off it.

Even with just a surface scan, he could feel fear, a strong certainty of one’s impending doom and...he had to force back the rest.

“Molly *a gra*,” he whispered, letting his eyes close to picture Molly as he had last seen her.

He remembered the forest, he remembered holding her that last night and as he recalled this, Ian could still feel her in his arms. He remembered telling her to go, to leave him.

“Why didn’t she?” he asked himself, feeling a helpless rage fill him as the images and emotions from these items flooded his mind. “Why didn’t she leave?”

“Because she loves you, *chile*,” the gentle accented voice that was pure Louisiana Creole spoke in his ear.

Looking up quickly, Ian was startled to see a lovely caramel skinned woman with long black hair kneeling next to him in what appeared to be a

lovely green grassy area next to a bayou, even though he knew he was in his grandparents' home in Dublin.

"I mean no harm and no, this isn't another cruel trick," she assured him, smiling in a way that reminded him of his friend. "My name is Zara Duvall Jackson."

"You're Molly's Mum," he said, recognizing familiar brown eyes and the small facial features.

Acknowledging that comment by just a graceful movement of her head, deep brown eyes seemed to look inside the young Irishman.

"You do have great powers inside you, *cher*," she smiled, eyes twinkling. "My own Momma, Molly's Grandma, will appreciate that you understand it and honor it. Now, Molly's Papa probably won't be as accepting of you since she is Keith's only daughter."

Ian blinked, wondering if his recent trauma hadn't driven him over the edge. "I never wanted Molly involved in my life. I knew it was too dangerous and..."

"Ian, my daughter has always known that danger would enter her life, and while her Papa and I would have preferred to have her live a normal life, I knew that wouldn't be possible," Zara Jackson spoke sadly. "Both of Molly's grandmothers, and her great-grandmother on Keith's side, foretold that Molly would fall in love but would have to face great danger before that love could come full circle."

Considering what she was saying, he slowly understood why Molly could have seen Sebastian's first vision and why they had always seemed to click.

He also understood why he'd felt like he'd known Molly for years even before meeting her. Ian had always put off the odd dreams he'd had since childhood to just an overactive imagination. Now he realized that it might have been more than that.

"I want to save her, Mrs. Jackson," he told her, shaking his head. "I don't know how to or if I can in time. My brothers will help me but...it's not their place to fight Sybil, is it?"

"No, *cher*, it isn't," Zara replied, moving a hand to show Ian a small blue vial. "It's your battle to fight and while they will support you and always defend you, it must be you who saves my daughter."

"You're a strong, determined young man, Ian Fitzgerald, so I have no doubt that you'll bring my little girl home safe." She laid a hand on his cheek. "Go now with the brightest blessings of your gods and mine."

The mantle clock chiming made Ian jerk as if waking from a dream, looking down at his hand to see not only the gold hoop he had been holding but also the small blue vial.

"I understand," he murmured, pocketing the vial and the earring, grabbing the waist pack before finally running a finger down the doll.

Violent images of fire, blood, and death threatened to overwhelm him but this time Ian knew what he was doing,

Focusing his thoughts and spell mentally, Ian allowed the basic images to wash over him while he brought the brightest and clearest ones to him. Separating the emotions from the visions, he was slowly able to bring a clear image to his thoughts.

“Got you.” He looked over his shoulder briefly and considered getting his brothers help on this but he understood the meaning of the advice. This was his fight and he wouldn’t allow Sybil or her kind to harm anything else that was his.

‘*Tá brón orm* (I’m sorry),’ he silently sent out while casting his spell and hoping he could pull this off.

Not knowing what their brother was doing, Kerry and Mac had been struggling to pull every detail out of Brandon Sullivan at this point.

“Brandon, you don’t want to make us start to think that you’ve just been buying time for something by stalling now.” Mac was patient to a point and considering he’d grown up with brothers who loved to bicker said a lot but this time it was straining him.

Lorcan Fitzgerald huffed in disgust. “If I could get Fiona out of the room I’d show the lad why stalling with his answers isn’t smart.”

“And may it harm none,” Kerry reminded his grandfather but remembered his own slip at the Dean’s office which reminded him of something else. “If Brandon really doesn’t know anything, we could see if Quillian does, since I believe Nick still has him on ice.”

“The teacher only knows what Kathleen put in his head and very little else,” Riordan spoke from the back of the sofa, his eyes burning with intense power as he gazed at Brandon. “This one knows more to a point but he hides his intentions. Tis a pity that they believe fully in that ‘May it harm none’ rule, but then my kind has been slightly more vengeful than mortals.”

“Ryan would turn him into something two-headed,” Mac muttered, knowing this because he’d seen his brother do such a thing to a local bully who had bloodied Roarke’s lip when they’d been lads.

Andi McCabe had been taking all this in silently, still not fully believing that she was actually in a house filled with witches, a Fairy Lord, and so much more, although she actually understood due to her great-aunt’s penchant for telling tales.

Now as she watched this, her time working for Ryan and before had taught her to read a person, and she knew that the sweating brown haired Irishman was nervous for more than just the possibility of being turned into something.

Her extra sense that warned her of danger was buzzing but before she could mention that, her eyes went to Ian Fitzgerald.

He had been kneeling next to the delivered box, his fingers slowly moving over the earring until he jumped up with a look that reminded her of when Ryan was planning to do something incredibly stupid and reckless.

Almost as if sensing her gaze, Ian's eyes slid to hers to connect fully with a grin that just screamed trouble. 'Take care of him,' he spoke silently to her before she caught the shimmering.

"Oh, shit," she breathed, looking over her shoulder to whistle. "Hey, should the kid be doing this?"

Turning to see what Andi meant, Kerry's eyes shot wide open upon realizing what his youngest brother was doing. "Ian! What the bloody hell do you think you're doing?"

"It's my place to save Molly. I placed her in danger the very first night I introduced her to Sybil, and she said that this is my battle alone," Ian explained, feeling the spell take hold. "Don't be too angry, Kerry, and Mac, you can break my legs assuming I survive this."

"I'll break your whole damn bleedin' body, Ian," Mac snapped, stepping forward and considered trying to block the spell until Fiona laid a hand on his arm. "Who told you this rot anyway?"

"Molly's Mum," the boy shrugged before the shimmering was over and he was gone.

There was a brief silence until finally Mac exploded in a rare show of temper. "Why the bloody hell did we let him go without us?" he demanded, facing his grandmother fully. "We don't know where he went and he can't handle this on his own!"

"Each of you must face your own crisis and this in many ways is part of Ian's test." Understanding his worry, Fiona wished it were possible to keep the lads from suffering any of the pain that they would face. "He will need all of you with him to confront Sebastian, but Ian must face his fear and the love he hides from all by himself."

Kerry had been silent, eyes closed for a moment. "We can track the backwash of the teleport spell to lock onto his location and be close in case he does head into something that he can't handle."

Mac nearly choked while mentally damning both Ryan and Roarke. "Of course he's walking into something he can't handle!" he exclaimed, rolling his eyes at the stupidity of that thought. "He's eighteen and has been picking up way too many bad habits from Ry and Roarke."

"I told you we'd get blamed for this," Ryan spoke realistically as he and Roarke entered the living room. "Ian was already a reckless lad, so you can't blame all of this on the brat and me, Mac," he argued.

"Yes, I can," Mac gritted, seeing Maggie roll her eyes but choosing to ignore that. "Fine, I'll only break half of his body for that stunt. What do we do?"

As Kerry considered this, Roarke's eyes had narrowed while locking on Brandon Sullivan who seemed stunned by this latest event.

"Umm, Mrs. Fitzgerald, I've told you all that I know and I should get back to the house in case Sybil calls or anything..." He had begun to move toward the door but froze at the sound of a weapon being cocked.

The 9mm Beretta that Roarke had kept sheathed until now was aimed and ready to fire as he leveled it at the older man.

"Did you realize before stepping into this house that the protection spells that our grandparents cast on it would prevent Sybil from seeing through you, and that it also prevents you from giving her information?" he asked in a hard voice that was near toneless as it always was when the professional side took hold.

"Roarke, what are you...?" Mac began to move but Ryan's arm across his chest stopped him.

Brandon blinked at the weapon before looking past it to Kerry. "I don't know what he's talking about, Kerry," he argued, spreading his hands out to plead innocence. "You know that I love Ian and your Da was..."

"See, now you played that card when you first got here, and by letting it slip about the condition in Mum and Da's wills and casting doubt, it kept me from feeling it before." Roarke didn't move or blink as he stared at the man. "Your vibes are off and they're just screaming wrong."

"I told you that one felt wrong," Riordan whispered to Lorcan, pleased by what he was seeing of this generation of Fitzgeralds.

"Now see here, lad, I came here to help my son, not to be accused of something by the likes of you," Brandon said, his voice indignant.

Ryan lifted an eyebrow that stopped the man before he stormed out. "First off, he was your foster son and that was on sufferance only as far as I was concerned, mate," he began evenly, going on in the tone that had cowed others. "Second off, if you have issues with Roarke then you have issues with the rest of us – but as for your vibes being off?" he glanced back over his shoulder. "McCabe, give us an opinion."

Andi had always been a good judge of character and that was a trait she used well in her security work for Ryan.

"I've felt blacker vibes off others but he's been shooting off waves of anxiety, fear, and frustration since I first laid eyes on him," she answered promptly, smiling when she saw a brief flash in the man's eyes. "He's not as wholly innocent in this as he wants you to believe."

“Girl comes in handy for more than her looks and that pistol,” Ryan smirked, eyes cold. “The brat picked up the bad vibes and you are now screaming inside because you can’t contact your wife to alert her about Ian headin’ in her direction. You can now try to talk your way around this since Kerry or Mac may buy your crap, but I’m a con artist and liar by trade so I see through you.”

Brandon had started declare his innocence again when he suddenly stopped, sighing. “She’s my wife and...”

“You’re a member of the cult.” It wasn’t a question as Kerry was certain of it as things that didn’t make since earlier slowly became clear. “You were fine with Sybil’s antics until you realized she would kill Ian, or is that an act too?”

“I had things well planned out, Kerry, but things got complicated after you began handling Ian’s school tuition, and I was hoping to keep him out of this by finding them another sacrifice,” he declared. No longer sweating, he seemed coolly determined.

“Roarke, Nick’s calling you names in dead languages but he’s agreed to go up to Avebury while Cam and the lads will go straight up,” Jessica Hadley said as she stepped into the living room.

Lack of sleep, recent concerns, and worry didn’t show the normally alert, well-trained young woman the possible danger until it was too late.

“Jessica!” Roarke snapped, swearing under his breath as he started to move his weapon.

“Ah, put that away, lad.” Brandon had reacted much more swiftly than anyone had thought he would and reached out to grab the British woman’s arm to pull her in front of him while he showed a small dagger. “I just want to leave here and join my family.

“I know what any number of you can do but if you don’t want the lass here to be hurt then you’ll let me leave,” he finished, holding the dagger to her throat.

Images of Fitzgaren a few months back flashed in Roarke’s mind at seeing Jessica in the grasp of a foe, and while his blood had gone cold with fear his temper was sparking.

Seeing the pistol shift slightly, Ryan and Mac both latched onto him to urge restraint while Kerry stepped closer.

“Brandon, harming Jess would be the worst thing you could do,” he warned, reaching out to try to calm the man but was actually caught off guard when he learned that he was already calm.

“I killed my own son, Kerry, so killing your brother’s whore and his bastard child wouldn’t be any harder.” Brandon remarked, tightening his hold as she tensed.

Jessica had been working in the covert operation field for many years and normally could have handled the potential threat that Brandon Sullivan posed.

However, fears from her past had always made being grabbed a problem for her and there was the absolute terror of anything happening to the baby that kept her from acting.

“Let her go, boy,” Riordan spoke firmly, never moving but there was no mistaking the power behind the command.

“Your kind hold no power in this realm or house,” Brandon sounded confident but his eyes were darting around, looking for a way out. “Once I’m out of the house I’ll release her and...” he stopped when something caused him to look at the hand holding the knife.

Lowering the Beretta only slightly, Roarke fought for calm. Keeping his eyes on her, he spoke evenly. “If you so much as nick her or try to hurt them, it will be the last thing you do.”

“Do you want to know what your Gran told us about you, laddie?” Brandon, as a lawyer, had always known he could use the negative against his foes. “It may not look like it but Sybil and I did love Ian as our own. But children grow up and sometimes it’s needed to move on. You’ll find that out one day.”

“Boy, you’re a certain winner for Father of the Year,” Andi snorted, twirling a finger around the chain she wore and looking up. “My Mom’s grandmother would have a nice Romanian gypsy word for you but from me, it’s just strange that a man with a phobia for snakes is holding one.”

Brandon had stared at her in confusion until he looked down to see the knife he was holding has now winding itself up his arm.

“No!” he screamed and tried to drop the snake and in his panic lost his concentration and his grip on his hostage.

Moving quickly, Roarke reached out to pull Jessica to him while Ryan grabbed the now twisting man by the shirtfront.

“Mate, get a grip and be bloody thankful that we have to go bail Ian out or I’d take the time to deal with you,” he growled, looking back to watch his brother with Jessica for a moment before jerking Brandon closer. “If you ever threaten my family again or if I learn that you’ve kept things from us that harms Ian or costs Molly her life, I swear on all that I hold dear that I will make you pay.”

“Too soft, Fitzgerald,” Andi remarked, walking up to where Brandon Sullivan was still trying to shake the snake off his arm. “Real men don’t threaten pregnant women, bastard,” she snapped, lashing out with a well-placed closed fist to his jaw that knocked him down and out.

“And you wonder why she gives me hassles?” Ryan rolled his eyes but he checked to be sure that the man would not be a danger to his grandparents until proper authorities could deal with him. “Brat, how’s Jess?”

Roarke's hands shook as he reached out to touch her, feeling for himself to be sure before nodding. "You're alright, luv," he whispered, more to reassure himself than her.

"Of course the lass is," Lorcan scoffed, feeling the edge on the boy as Fiona was stepping up. "She's strong enough to deal with you lot, ain't she?"

"Hush, Lorcan," Fiona shook her head, coming up to wrap an arm around Jessica. "You lads need to focus on what you must do to help your brother, so leave Jessica here with myself, Maggie, and young Andrea while you do."

This made Jessica to frown, throwing a look to Roarke. "You are not going to start thinking about sidelining me, right?"

"*A gra*, I'm not certain what we'll face or who and..." he hesitated, hearing Ryan humming the funeral march under his breath. "I want you kept well away from Sebastian and Kathleen, especially now. I need to concentrate on this and if I take you there I'll be busy worrying about you."

It was clear that while the young woman didn't like his reasoning, her professional side knew that he was telling the truth.

"Come back safe and bring Ian and Molly back safe as well," she stated, leaning up to kiss him and whispered something.

"I love you too, Jess," Roarke smiled, moving his eyes to look at Maggie who nodded slightly to show that she understood his silent request.

Ryan was content to let Kerry plan this to a point as he drew Andi aside. "Maggie's good with magic and Jess can handle that and a pistol, but I want you on your bleedin' guard from the moment I leave until we return. Are we clear, McCabe?"

She was about to make a smart remark about doubting her abilities until she saw how serious his eyes were. "Yeah, boss, I got it," she assured him, laying a hand on his arm. "I'll shoot anything that your Gramps doesn't turn into a toad first."

"He prefers peacocks actually," he said, and grinned at her while glancing down at the hand on his arm. "Be careful, Andrea."

Surprise at his use of her name, Andi frowned but before she could comment, he was walking away. "Damn him."

"If we follow the backwash of Ian's spell it should lead us to his general location," Kerry was saying, looking at his brothers. "We watch but unless he needs it we do not interfere in his fight."

"Do we get a vote on that decision?" Roarke asked, not happy with that idea.

Kerry just looked at him while Ryan lightly tapped the back of his head in a familiar move.

"Just like before, brat, we're not a bloody democracy," he declared, smirking. "What Kerry says normally goes."

Stepping up to them, Riordan opened a small pouch from which he removed five stones. "These were crafted from rocks original to the land near Fitzgaren and forged by crafters in my realm," he explained, handing one to each man and handing the leftover one to Kerry. "For Ian when you find him. These will allow you to keep full power while in Great Britain and will also offer extra protection."

He slowly looked at each one and then past them. "My time in your realm is coming to an end for no fairy can remain here for long durations without proper preparations, so before I go, I will wish you all the best of luck in completing the circle and finally putting an end to Sebastian's reign of terror.

"Your parents had the love and admiration of the Gentry and so do their sons," he grinned as he stepped away from them. "My beloved Aislin would be proud to see the fierce, wise, and strong willed young men that have come from our son. Blessed be, sons of Fitzgerald."

With that final farewell, Riordan seemed to shimmer until he was out of sight and once again the clocks chimed throughout the house.

"We really need to back track the family tree," Mac sighed, feeling cold all of a sudden. "Kerry."

Having felt the same sensation, Kerry placed a hand out. "If he's hurt..."

"Then the 'May it harm none' rule goes out the bleedin' window and I fry the sons of bitches," Ryan decided, laying a hand on his brothers'. "I'm guessing we'll have mystics and mercs playing backup?"

"More than likely," Roarke nodded, exchanging a final silent thought with Jessica before placing his own hand out. "I'm also guessing the 'do not use lethal force' rule also goes out the window?"

Mac reached out to complete the unit, ignoring the minor sparks that shot out from their hands. "Roarke, if Cameron happens to have a spare rocket launcher with him then you can blow these bastards out of the bloody water," he remarked firmly, meeting Kerry's eyes. "Let's go do this."

Kerry nodded, opening his power up and locking onto the trail left by their baby brother. "I have him," he murmured, casting the one spell that he tried to avoid because teleporting was always risky but this time it was a necessary risk. "Focus and let's go bring them home."

"I really will never get used to seeing them do that," Maggie sighed after the shimmering had stopped and the brothers were gone. "Though I'm sure it's weirder for Andi."

Andi McCabe heard the teasing tone and just smiled. "I suppose I can now tell Olav how the boss gets around so fast at times," she grinned, eyeing the still unconscious man on the floor. "Should you call the police?"

“No, I’ll have Charles place this sorry excuse for a man in the basement until we see how this plays out, and then allow things to run their proper course,” Lorcan replied, still glowering down. “Turning the sod into a damn peacock is my choice.”

Fiona shot him a look that was more amused humor than anger while she placed a hand on Jessica, whom she still considered too pale. “He’ll be fine, my darling,” she assured her, sensing her concern. “Come with me upstairs and I can begin spoiling my first great grandchild by deciding on things that Roarke will have no clue over.”

“If he’s like my brother was with my first nephew, he’ll be lost over everything,” Maggie rolled her eyes, grabbing Jessica around the shoulders. “I’ve got seven nieces and nephews, so stick with me and I’ll steer you right.”

Andi allowed Maggie and the older woman to urge Jessica out in order to be sure that she was alright while she eyed Lorcan. “Would your wife like it if you turned him into a peacock?”

“Hell, no, but Fi often doesn’t like the things that I do,” he grinned, looking at this raven-haired woman and judging his mark. “Play much cards, Miss McCabe?” he asked innocently.

“Some,” she nodded, seeing his smile and recognizing the similar glint that Ryan often got when gambling. “What do we play for?”

Laughing Lorcan pulled out a deck from his pocket as Charles and a couple other men came to remove Brandon Sullivan from the room. “A lass after my own heart you are,” he decided, shuffling quickly and effortlessly while keeping his own grim thoughts to himself. ‘Be careful, lads,’ he thought to himself.

Chapter 24

Avebury, Great Britain:

Many highly charged mystical spots are believed to exist in the lands that make up Great Britain, Ireland, and Scotland. One of the most known is Avebury, where it's been said that even a portal exists, and people come there for many reasons.

Tourists come to the quaint village for the normal reasons while others come for the odd or paranormal reasons. Then there are those that come to visit places that aren't well known and even the locals tend to avoid.

Outside of the city proper, hidden deep within a ring of trees, is the entrance to a system of underground caverns. Natural springs run through many but others are for reasons far more sinister.

The natural or unnatural energies in the area always attracted various groups, such as Druids, Celts, Pagans, and the more darkly devoted Satanists.

It was in fact in one of these very caverns that Sybil Douglas Sullivan had been born during one of her family's regular black masses and so it was natural for her to return here several times a year to celebrate various satanic ceremonies. This night was no different, except that her intended sacrifice was not whom she had been readying.

"She's not been marked the way the lad was, Syb," Caldon Douglas, her older brother, spoke from behind where she was smoothing down her finest black silk cloak. "It may affect the ceremony."

"Perhaps a little," she conceded, deciding to leave her long hair loose as she preferred it during nights like this. "While Ian has been marked for this night, his little chum will serve us just as well. Eli has been preparing her as best she can in this short time, and since she does come from a magical background that will aid us as well."

A big, husky man, Caldon wasn't as confident as his sister was. "I expected Brandon to have joined us by now," he commented. "What if something happened?"

"Brandon will play his part and that may mean missing Bridget's initiation into the family, but he will alert us if things go wrong," Sybil assured her brother, smiling calmly as she hefted a razor sharp dagger to examine it. "I do wish I could have gotten back Grandmother's dagger though."

He watched his sister as a scream echoed throughout the caverns. "For an American, she's got more spirit than many that we've sacrificed," he mused, frowning. "Syb, we've rarely sacrificed victims that we haven't had some contact with. This lass is a total stranger to us."

“No she’s not,” she returned easily, reaching down to lift her newly adopted daughter into her arms. “Ian introduced Brandon and myself to the trollop a few times and that’s plenty enough. Plus, she’s connected to Ian in some ways so it will work fine. Now, take Bridget for me.”

Handing the child off to her brother, Sybil left to check on the final preparations for the mass.

There were many caverns in this set of caves with the largest set surrounded by a natural spring that ran under the altar. Because of the importance of this ceremony, many of her family members had been preparing the site for days, setting up the proper candles, the correct ornaments and decorations to please their dark gods and preparing the large stone altar for the coming sacrifice.

“Are we almost ready?” she inquired of a matronly woman with short red hair and many wrinkles. “If Brandon was coming he would have been here so he must be having difficulty in gaining what he needed to.”

The woman finished lighting the final few black inscribed candles before nodding. “Aye, the preparations are complete, though the cards are saying that this girl will bring us ill will.”

“Rubbish, Eli,” Sybil scoffed, taking a deep breath of the incense and recalling her many black masses as a girl. “She’s a child with no full understanding of her power or her background. Her blood will please our gods and fully bring Bridget into the family.”

“Is that the reason you chose her as a replacement for your foster son?” Charles Douglas, her uncle and an elder in the cult, asked as he approached her. “Or is it because you have always despised the lass over her mixed blood and her closeness to Ian?”

Sybil’s calm features sneered at her uncle. “I chose her because she’s a likely candidate. What did I care if she was close to Ian? I had enough say in his life that it never would have gone farther.”

“Aye, you had say until the lad returned from his family and began questioning you,” Charles reminded her, hearing a gong and knowing that it was time. “I hope your personal issues do not end up costing the whole coven, Sybil.”

Scowling at him, she made a silent decision that it was about time that the old man had an accident. For now though, she had important matters to attend to.

Standing in an alcove, she watched as the cult members, who had come from all over, entered the chamber. Well over one hundred members, dressed in their finest garb, would celebrate on this night as blood would flow.

Tossing the hood of her cloak up, Sybil waited as black robed cultists dragged their latest victim toward the altar.

Barefoot, garbed in only a short, dirty shift-like dress that barely stayed on, Molly Jackson visibly showed signs of abuse.

Her smooth caramel skin that had glowed with a healthy sheen was dirty, covered in various bruises and marks. Her curly black hair was matted and filthy as it hung in her face.

Between the spells and drugs used by Sebastian to keep her dormant and pliant to his control, to the drugs the cult used to assure control, she was limp while her captors dragged her from where she'd been chained down to the raised altar.

"Be sure to chain her fully to the altar, lads," Sybil instructed them as she stepped up. "Hello, Molly. Do you remember me?"

While drugged to keep her from struggling or resisting, her mind was still clear so she knew exactly what was happening to her, why, and by whom.

Shocked, numb from the cold and pain, and trying to push past the inner fear, Molly saw Sybil Sullivan through a veil of haze.

Reaching out to lift the girl's chin up, Sybil gave her head a not so gentle shake. "Do you remember me, girl?" she demanded again. "Speak!"

Swallowing was hard since her throat was dry and her tongue felt like leather, but Molly was finally able to get sound to come out as she looked at Sybil.

"Yeah...you're the bitch...who raised Ian and...wanted to kill him." She struggled to spit the words out without fear but they came out strained. "You won't get him now."

A hand slashed and long nails raked her face as Sybil slapped her hard across the face.

"Little girl, you may have saved my son for now but you've doomed yourself in his stead," she snapped, grabbing a handful of Molly's hair to jerk her head back up to look at her. "It would have been over my dead body that my son ever associated with your kind."

Tasting blood in her mouth, Molly ran her tongue over her teeth. "You're not...his mother," she gritted, managing to spit in the woman's face.

Silence filled the cavern as the cultists closest saw this act and were in awe that this mere slip of a girl would have the audacity to spit in Sybil's face.

Rage pounded in her ears as she began to draw her hand back for another slap when someone grabbed her wrist.

"Chain the lass to the bloody altar!" Charles Douglas commanded sternly, glaring at his niece. "Your other victims have been drugged for months to condition them for this night, Sybil. This one still has the fight in her."

"Now, are we going to begin the ceremony or do you want to bait her some more?" he asked snidely.

Jerking her wrist free, Sybil whirled away from the older man to stalk to the main altar in the center of the large cavern.

Robed figures chained Molly securely to the stone with her arms spread and tied above her, her ankles chained apart. A heavy chain secured her waist and throat.

Seething at being made a fool of, Sybil forced down her anger to appear in control as she glared down at the helpless girl and then out at the crowd.

"We gather on this night to celebrate our most dark Lord and Master," she began in a loud clear voice that seemed to carry all over the caverns. "As we have so many other times since our coven was created, when we bring in a new family member we offer up a sacrifice to please our Master."

Body chained and frozen, Molly struggled for a spell or anything to free herself but found that she couldn't think of the words. She tried to close her eyes to avoid looking at the robed figures, the glaring candles, or the hanging animal heads above her.

"In celebration of our Master and to bring my daughter into our coven, I offer not only the heart, eyes, and liver from a mortal boy. I also offer this live sacrifice of a white witch." Sybil's eyes shone with malice as she lifted the dagger in her one hand while holding out her other. "Bridget, come take Mummy's hand."

Looking for her small daughter, Sybil frowned when she didn't see her where she should have been waiting with Caldon.

"Bridget, come to Mummy so we can bring you fully into the family and kill this evil witch who seduced your brother away from his family," she called, holding the dagger directly over Molly's heart. "Bridget?"

While several in the crowd began to look for the small child, a sudden commotion from the entrance of the cavern took everyone by surprise as a large burly robed guard was hurled into the main cavern.

"Sorry to disappoint you, Sybil, but Bridget's out of harm's way, where you will never harm her life as you've clearly been trying to harm mine."

Ian Fitzgerald stepped into the main cavern after having dealt with several guards on his way in and removing three-year-old Bridget from danger.

Now as he stood there, his calm blue-gray eyes were darkening with emotion and power as he looked around. Slowly his eyes went back to the main altar where Molly was chained.

"Let her go," he ordered firmly, seeming unaware of the odds against him as he felt for Molly and forced down his temper at what he felt.

Spreading his arms, he took two more steps down the center aisle with his gaze locked firmly on his former foster mother's. "It's me that you planned to sacrifice, so if you want me so bleedin' bad then come on, take me," he invited, thinking suddenly how much Mac would bitch over that comment and he smiled.

“That’s a silly mistake, my lad,” Sybil told him, still gripping the dagger firmly. “You should have stayed locked away in hiding so your brothers could protect you. Interfering in this will cost you not only your life but this Yank’s.”

“My brothers don’t protect me, Sybil,” Ian returned, knowing that cult members had closed in behind him. “Threaten me; don’t threaten my family, and you sure as bloody hell do not threaten Molly.”

Sybil sneered, jerking her head in command. “Kill him,” she snapped, jerking the knife to drive it down into her captive’s heart. “Kill them both so our Master will reward us!”

Even as Sybil Sullivan was issuing that command and robed cultists seemingly overtaken with a sudden bloodlust began lunging toward a young man they believed they could easily handle, Ian Fitzgerald had plans of his own.

Walking into a den of Satan lovers, Ian had known the risks would increase.

Of course, he also knew what Sybil’s people probably did not. His powers were a hell of a lot more than he’d let on, and he was gambling that would be his ace in the hole as Ryan would say.

Knowing that he had to time this move perfectly, Ian waited until the cultists that were surrounding him with knives and clubs had gotten closer to act.

Throwing one hand out to stop the blade plunging toward Molly Jackson’s heart, he whirled to lift his other and a burst of wind blasted from around the cavern.

The wind attack took several attackers away and gave Ian enough time to get close to the center altar while others struggled to regain their footing.

“I was top on the track team, mates, so let’s be serious,” he snorted, knowing that while his magic wouldn’t be as strong here, it would still work, and a stream of blue energy flew from his fingers to disable several other cultists until a choked cry drew his attention. “Molly!”

Sybil was quickly realizing that she’d underestimated the boy that she’d raised. Swiftly acting, she gripped the girl’s hair and placed the dagger to her throat.

“Stop, Ian, or I’ll slit her throat before you can cast another spell or get close enough to stop me,” she threatened, pleased to see that this got his attention. “Now, if you don’t want that, you’ll be a good lad and try not to struggle too much.”

Freezing in mid-step, he considered briefly if she was bluffing, but Ian knew Sybil too well and he knew that she never made threats.

“Damn it,” he swore, tensing as hands grabbed his arms to restrain him while pushing him toward Sybil. “Let her go. You have me. You don’t need Molly.”

Laughing softly, Sybil gently stroked his cheek as she moved the dagger slightly but kept it handy. "Ian, my silly boy, I fully plan on killing this little witch that you became attached to, but I want you to watch as I do it," she explained, seeing the hate in his eyes. "Between her and your brothers, they've turned you against your family and that must stop. I'll punish you later."

Emotions flickered as memories resurfaced, but he forced them down as the medals he wore around his neck, including the one from Molly, warmed his skin and gave him strength.

As the two large men gripped his arms, they forced Ian to watch while Sybil ran the tip of the knife down Molly's face.

"She's aware that you're here, you know," she spoke to him, moving back so that Molly's wide eyes could lock onto his. "She can speak to you if I allow her to."

"Sybil, for God's sake, stop this," Ian pleaded, feeling the fear from his friend.

Laughter echoed from the cavern at his words. "Your God isn't the one we seek to appease, lad," Charles Douglas told him from the side. "Speak to the lad, girl. Speak your last words on this Earth to him as you die because of him."

Molly did know that Ian was there. She'd felt his arrival long before he'd made his appearance known and she could feel his emotions now.

Accepting her death long ago didn't make the moment any easier but she'd be damned if they'd make him feel guilt over it.

"Don't...don't let them win, Irish," she whispered to him. "I...I'll...love you always."

"I know, *muirnin* (sweetheart)," Ian responded while holding her eyes for a long moment.

"Sleep, Molly," he urged, straining in the grip of his captors. "Sleep and don't remember the pain."

Despite the drugs, slowly her eyes seemed to drift close so that whatever else happened, at least she wouldn't have to see it occur.

"That was a sweet gesture, Ian, but it won't save her," Sybil remarked coolly, moving the dagger in her hand in a quick move to bring it down to plunge into Molly's chest. "As you see, she still dies and our Master will be pleased with..."

The woman stopped and frowned. She expected the normal reaction after a sacrifice once the knife plunged into Molly, but nothing happened even though blood slowly began to appear from the wound.

"Why isn't this working?" she demanded, hearing murmurings from the others.

“Because Molly wasn’t supposed to be the one to die here,” Ian spoke to her calmly even as his heart ached at what he’d caused to happen. “I was, and because she didn’t bear the mark your Master isn’t happy.”

Charles scowled at his niece. “So you killed a girl for nothing,” he sneered, looking at Ian. “You put her to sleep so that she wouldn’t have to see herself or you die, because you will die now.”

“No, that’s not why I told Molly to sleep,” Ian corrected, lifting his eyes slowly as they darkened fully. “I didn’t want Molly to see this part.”

Ian moved only slightly and a burst of flame-like power shot out to burn the hands of the two men holding him.

“I am the youngest of the Five. I call on all of those who have gone before me to guide my hand and give me strength to protect and save,” he chanted, feeling the power build slowly and for the first time in his eighteen years of life, he opened all of his abilities to their fullest.

“Stop him!” Sybil screamed, taken off guard by the sudden wave of power that struck her.

The robed members of the cult had intended to do what they were ordered until the boy’s eyes turned from their normal shade to a deep smoke and waves of power radiated from him to strike out.

Three figures, a man and two women, had been closing in when he just moved a hand slightly to sweep them away toward the rear of the cavern while the animals that had been hanging over the stone altar vanished with a look.

Realizing that most of these people were hardly a threat now, Ian concentrated on the two that were, his former foster mother and her uncle.

“Your ceremony is finished, your master won’t be getting fresh blood this night,” he declared, not noticing that the candles in the cave were melting under his powers or how many of the people had run off. “You aren’t facing scared kids you stole from the street and drugged into oblivion.”

Charles Douglas accepted that his niece had underestimated this boy, but he had spent years building this cult and didn’t plan on it failing tonight.

“The sacrifice may not please the Master fully but the lass’s death will still...” he paused at the dark look passed over Ian’s face and fire shot from Ian’s fingers just as the water in the clear spring began to burn. “What are you, boy?”

“I am Ian Brandon Callum Fitzgerald, the youngest son of Toryn and Brenna Fitzgerald. I am part of the Five that will send Sebastian back to join your Master in Hell,” Ian proclaimed firmly, eyes fully smoke by this point and an aura of pure energy of blue light pouring off of him as the rest of the cult members ran.

He glanced over as Sybil was pulling herself up but he recognized the older man was the prime threat right then.

“My issue is with your niece, not you,” he went on, picking up images from within these caverns and trying not to let them bother him. “Sure, you probably encouraged her to choose me and I have more than enough bloody reasons to despise all of you bastards, but you can leave now, don’t attempt to take me right now and I won’t burn you from existence.”

Charles looked this young man in the face, judging by the icy tone and the power he was exuding that he wasn’t bluffing. “May it harm none, boyo,” he reminded lightly, deciding to see how far he’d go when he felt the invisible hand grip his heart.

“Aye, that’s the rule I’m supposed to be playin’ by,” Ian agreed, shaking his head slowly as anger and grief took hold. “You harmed me and mine first though, so I think that might allow me a little wiggle room, mate. Your choice, leave and let this be between Sybil and myself, or go down in flames with her.”

“You do have courage and fire in you, laddie,” Charles nodded, stepping back slowly as he conceded this fight to the boy but then paused. “Where is Bridget?”

“Someplace that your people will never harm her and this life will never touch her,” Ian responded, eyes never leaving the older man’s. “I was too small to save Emily but I’d see you all burn in Hell before another innocent child is touched by you bastards.”

Charles considered this for a short time as he finally stepped back fully to begin walking out of the cavern. “Ian?” he called out as he paused by the door leading to the main cavern. “Let me say two things. The first, Brandon has the copy of your parents’ will that could have prevented all of this from occurring. He told the lawyer handling it that he’d see to it.

“The second thing you need to know is, you still bear our mark. So long as you do, you will always be a target for my people,” he warned, slightly tipping his head in a farewell motion before stepping through the door and disappearing.

“I know,” the boy whispered, hearing a sound from behind him and turning slowly. “Hello, Sybil.”

Sybil had been shaken by the blow that had knocked her into the stone altar but she’d quickly recovered enough to understand her situation. She was confident though that she could still handle the child that she’d raised.

“Ian, my darling boy, you have no idea how pleased I am that you forced Charles away. He was the one who made me do all these evil things to you and your...friend,” she stated, reaching both hands out to him but gasped as she hit a wall of power. “Ian, you don’t understand...”

“I understand that everything that comes out of your mouth is a bleedin’ lie,” he snapped, eyes still smoke while glaring at her. “You put on a pretty act for the public, and if Kerry or Mac ever did learn the truth of what went on behind the façade then they probably would disown me or fry you.”

“Well, I’m certain your pretty friend would feel differently if she was still alive,” Sybil smiled at him, pushing a hand through her hair. “We both know that your powers are limited outside of Ireland, Ian, and you’ve pretty much used up what you had available.”

The honey tone brought back memories from his youth but instead of freezing him as she had expected, they gave him strength as the candleholder closest to her burst into flames.

“You never took me in out of love or concern, did you?” he demanded tightly.

“Of course not,” she scoffed, taking a step toward him. “You were Brenna’s son and she took what was always supposed to be mine.”

Frowning until that sunk in, Ian understood both what she meant, and something his paternal grandmother had said months ago. “You wanted my father.”

Sybil smiled, propping a hip casually against the altar but didn’t catch the flash in his eyes. “Brandon was a sweet man and was useful in many ways, but Kathleen had always promised me Toryn. So when he went and married Brenna and she began spawning, well, I had to resort to Plan B.

“After Sebastian messed up and killed both of your parents, your grandmother and Brandon fixed it so that Toryn’s lawyer never contacted Kerry about the updated will because she needed your family kept apart. She brought you to us to raise and serve a much greater purpose,” she explained calmly.

“As your next great sacrifice,” Ian sneered. “I guess when Sebastian returned that screwed up your plan.”

“He promised me a suitable replacement and I couldn’t have been happier with his choice,” she looked down at the still form on the slab with a smile. “I asked Sebastian when he handed her over to us if she had pleased him and...”

Water erupted from the spring, candles turned to melted wax and a rumbling echoed through the caverns as a strong burst of energy shoved the woman away from the altar.

“Molly had nothing to do with you,” Ian snapped, putting himself between her and the lifeless-seeming body of his friend. “She was just someone looking to help me. You didn’t have to hurt her.”

“You’ve always been a naïve lad, Ian,” Sybil replied, lips pursed in a stern frown. “I couldn’t very well have you sullyng yourself or your blood with that trash, so Sebastian used her for her only useful purpose.”

“Don’t you dare talk about her!” he stepped forward without a thought. “Molly’s a good, loving girl whose only crime was falling in love with me. You’re the one who’s evil and sick. You killed your own son and Emily and...”

Sybil’s hand lashed out to strike across his face, drawing blood. “Watch your mouth, lad. I raised you and fed you and...”

“For your own purposes!” Ian’s hand had grabbed hers before she could strike him again, holding it firmly as his eyes flashed. “You’re a conceited, sociopathic, deluded bitch who uses your power over those who are weaker than you and it has to stop. It will stop.”

Laughing, she found this amusing coming from a boy who barely understood his own power much less hers.

“Ian, darling, you couldn’t defend yourself in Savernake against me, and that was before I gained energy from killing your little friend here,” she bragged, and then frowned at his small smirk. “What? What are your smiling about?”

He tightened his grip on her wrist. “Are you sure Molly’s dead, Sybil?” he asked her. “Sure and be certain you stabbed her but are you certain that she’s dead? Are you certain that it’s the energy of her death that you’ve been drawing strength from or have you been drawing your own strength?”

“What do you mean?” Sybil demanded, whirling away from him to find a mirror covered for the ceremony.

Jerking the black cloth off it, she stared at her reflection and the vision horrified her.

Always proud of her youthful looks, the vision that stared back at her showed her true age with wrinkled skin, sunken eyes overdone with makeup, the jagged scar on her cheek where an intended victim had tried to fight back.

“How...how are you doing this?” she touched her face to be certain she was seeing this horror. “I killed the whore! My powers...my looks...”

“You’ve been keeping those on the deaths of others,” Ian remarked calmly, watching at the rest of her glamour spell went away. “You’ve been drawing on your own strength and power since you stabbed Molly. I just made you think that you were drawing it from her.”

Screaming in rage, Sybil whirled and lunged at him but Ian was prepared for this and stepped aside at the last moment, and she fell to the ground.

“You can’t hurt me anymore, Sybil,” he told her quietly, feeling an odd power around the cavern. “You can’t hurt anyone anymore. For years you’ve sold your soul for power and vanity on the blood of children and the innocent but you’ve failed tonight, and as I learned from studying all those books, your master is a fickle demon who doesn’t take failures lightly.”

Using only a small portion of his abilities to enhance her greatest fears, Ian watched as Sybil seemed to grow old before his eyes and he realized that this wasn’t all his doing.

“Hello, Sybil, I believe this is the time to call in old debts,” a smooth sounding voice spoke from the deepest shadows.

Sybil's reaction to the man who stepped from that shadow was a scream of abject terror. "No, please, I kept my part all these years," she complained, crawling on her knees. "It's his fault," she said, thrusting an accusing finger toward Ian. "He was supposed to die tonight for the Master. He still bears the mark so he still can if it would please him. The girl's death..."

The man was taller than any man Ian had ever seen, with pale skin, and his long black hair had a glossy shine to it as it hung down the back of his black suit.

"Sybil, Sybil, Sybil," he sighed with a shake of his head as he approached without a sound. "True, this boy bears the mark of sacrifice, but you certainly couldn't mark someone who already bears a part in another act.

"Ian Fitzgerald is part of the Five and therefore belongs to Sebastian until he completes his part of the self-proclaimed circle," he went on.

Frowning slightly, Ian coughed. "Standing right here, mate," he muttered.

"The Jackson girl still should have been a suitable..." Sybil tried to argue but again the man shook his head, rolling black eyes.

"Did you even look into her background, stupid woman?" he asked while looking at Molly's still body. "Did you look past your own hate and arrogance to notice that her soul is protected? You can kill her body, nice job by the way, but you couldn't give her soul to the Master and that's why you've lost his favor."

Having drained all her strength, Sybil was finally showing her true age and was powerless to stop as fate dealt a hand that she couldn't control.

"May Sebastian and Kathleen devour the hearts of your family, boy," she snapped at Ian, rage evident in her eyes. "You will never know peace or love because you aren't able to open yourself to those things. No one will love you, little boy and you will live with the girl's death for the rest of your days."

Refusing to show emotion to this woman, Ian's eyes remained smoke but his face stayed flat. His only response was a whispered, "I know."

Having heard enough of this woman's trivial ranting, the man snapped his fingers and a burst of smoke appeared around Sybil. "You made the bargain, my dear, so now it's time to pay the piper, as mortals say."

Sybil's screams echoed in the cave but as it stopped and the smoke disappeared so it had Sybil Sullivan.

"The underworld may very well rue this night," the man in black muttered, turning to eye Ian curiously. "You know, I could undo what was done this night."

Knowing that meant that he was offering to undo Molly's injury, Ian considered for a half a second before shaking his head. "If I'm going to indebt myself to someone I'd prefer it not be someone my faith preaches against, if it's all the same to you," he replied. "Just...just leave me alone with my failures."

Nodding, the man's black eyes seemed to glow red for a moment while looking at the two young people. "Goodbye, Ian Fitzgerald. You've survived this night with your life intact and that is a rare thing when I visit this realm."

As Ian watched the man step into shadows to vanish, he closed his eyes tiredly. "Yeah, pity I lost everything else," he muttered, forcing that away to slowly approach the stone altar.

Molly Jackson looked peaceful lying there, if he ignored the blood that had soaked through the shift-like dress and the dagger that was still embedded in her chest.

"Luv?" Knowing the outcome even before he touched her, Ian gently placed two fingers on the side of her neck to feel for a pulse and swallowed when he didn't find one.

The dagger had struck her in the heart and had been an almost instant deathblow even if Ian had been able to get to her sooner.

Stroking her cheek gently, Ian was unaware of the tears on his own face as it slowly sank in that the brave young woman that he'd given his heart to had given her life for him.

Chapter 25

Rage and grief built inside him until the entire main cavern of the cave system shook with it and he was overcome with that grief. Gently he lifted her limp body up into his arms after removing the dagger and hurling it away into the spring with a harsh oath.

"I'm so sorry, Molly," he whispered against her hair, eyes closed tightly against the pain in his heart and the loss he was feeling. "Forgive me one day, my sweet Molly."

Only conscious of the lifeless young woman in his arms, Ian wasn't aware of the softly shimmering form standing beside him until a light touch on his shoulder made him blink.

"Ian, my sweet little boy," Brenna Kerrigan Fitzgerald spoke from beside him, tears shining in her eyes for not only the events of this night but from the loss she saw in her youngest child's eyes.

Blinking his own burning tears away to gaze at a woman that he had only faint memories of, Ian knew who she was by the emotion he picked up.

"I screwed up so badly, Mum," he whispered, gently laying Molly back down but clinging to her hand. "I was supposed to save her and I got her killed. She shouldn't have been in this and..."

Brenna shook her head, her blond hair loose down her back as she took his face in her hands. "Ian, summon your brothers," she urged him. "The five of you could still help her."

"Sybil stabbed her through the damn bleedin' heart, Mum!" he snapped, grief and emotional exhaustion making him forget who he was snapping at until a sharp tug on his ear made him yelp.

"Not on this earth I may well be, but I'm still your mother, bucko, and I can box your ears still if you take that tone with me," she scolded, rolling her eyes to the cavern roof. "Saints, why did all my sons get Toryn's stubborn streak?"

"Ian, look deeper and see for yourself. Molly wasn't powerless in this despite what Sebastian and Sybil did to her," she told him, seeing his confusion and trying to explain. "Look again and use your heart to look, as you did earlier to see what your brother couldn't."

Staring at his Mother's spirit, Ian placed both hands on Molly's face and this time used all his power and the strength of his feelings for her to search for anything. He was about to give up when something grabbed his heart like a vise.

"Molly?" he whispered, still not feeling a pulse but he couldn't deny what he'd felt. "Mum?"

“She’s got heart and strength in her, Ian but the drugs she’s been given and everything they did to her, she’s too weak to bring herself back, and that knife wound is serious,” Brenna told him slowly. “You need Kerry and the others to help you because only the five of you combined can heal her.”

Ian didn’t want his brothers endangered but the thought that there could be a chance to save Molly with their help...suddenly he remembered something.

“I already have them with me, Mum,” he reached under his shirt to show his Claddagh medal.

He could feel his brothers in his medal and knew that at some time before he’d gotten it back they had all touched it. Those feelings, while not the same as having them all there with him, would give him a similar edge.

“I can do this, Mum. I can save Molly without risking my brothers being hurt,” he assured her, moving quickly.

Brenna sighed while running a soft touch over his light hair. “When Toryn said that your head was as hard as your brothers I didn’t believe it. Now I do,” she pressed a mother’s gentle kiss to his brow. “Your Da and I are proud of you and never doubt that we will always love you. Blessed be, my sweet little boy.”

“Blessed be, Mum,” Ian whispered then turned serious as he pulled his jacket off, dropping it beside the stone while digging the small blue vial he’d been given out of an inside pocket along with a few other items that had been inside the waist pouch. “Hang on, *a gra*.”

Working quickly but intently, he laid several tea candles out and lit them with a simple spell and then cast a circle around the altar with chalk that he’d brought with him.

“You gave me light and hope when I was ready to quit in that place. You’ve taken risks that no sane person ever should have,” he spoke quietly, removing the Claddagh medal that belonged to Molly from around his neck to replace it around hers while going on gut instinct with the vial.

“I know you can’t hear me, Molly, but I guess I should tell ya that I’ve been in love with you pretty much since you dropped like a bombshell into my life.” He stared at the vial for a moment before uncapping it. Taking a cautious sip, he gently lifted Molly’s head so he could use the rest of the liquid.

Lightly stroking her hair, Ian clenched his medal in the hand that he placed over the knife wound while his other hand touched her face.

“Hear me, Molly, and when you hear me reach for me,” he whispered, closing his eyes and beginning to build his powers slowly this time while picturing the scene before him in his mind.

As the scene unfolded, Ian saw the candles flame brighter and he felt the warmth under his hands.

“I am the youngest of the Five and I ask for the help and guidance of those who have passed before me to aid in saving the life of this woman whom I love and who gave hers to protect me,” he chanted softly, feeling energy building around them.

“May the Goddess of Light offer her protection to her child as I call on my ancestors to guide my hand as I give freely what is mine to give to save this woman that I love.”

As a fragrant odor seemed to waft near them, Ian winced as an unexpected pain seared through his chest and for the first time he was scared that being away from the land of his birth would make him too weak to do what he would need to.

Lifting Molly up so that she was leaning against his chest, he kept one hand over her wound while he poured all his energy, strength, and love into healing her.

“Please, Da, give me the strength to bring her back,” he whispered, picturing her wound closing while he saw an aura of white light forming around them and he used that to offer his strength to her. “Reach for me, Molly. Please, don’t give up now.”

Unaware of the tears on his face, he struggled to breathe for a moment but knew he had to finish the spell.

“I ask the spirits of Earth, Air, Water, and Fire to enter me as I seek to undo this wrong that was done. I freely offer my life in exchange for this woman that I am bound to,” he spoke firmly and for a moment he thought he heard thunder but shrugged that off to continue. “Use my flesh to heal her flesh, allow my strength to give her strength back, take my breath so that she may breathe again.

“Take what I freely give and give life back to this woman that I...pledge to protect if you allow. As this spell harms none, so mote it be. Blessed be.”

So intent on his spell, Ian didn’t feel the extra energy that was in the chamber, nor did he see the flickering image close to him.

“There is much pain ahead as healing is often as painful as the actual injuries. I grant a portion of my power to my last born son to allow him to do that which he seeks to do most,” Toryn spoke to those beyond him while moving a hand over his son and Molly.

Watching the glow settle over the young couple, Toryn laid a spirit hand on the back of his son’s neck. “Be patient, love her, but give her space, lad,” he advised softly, then chuckled. “And for your Mum’s sake, you’d better learn to let your older brothers help you more often and stop teleporting before Mac does break something.”

Ian felt the flutter on his neck but ignored it in favor of concentrating on the young woman in his arms.

He had sensed a change in power in the cavern but didn't feel any change in the lifeless girl.

Molly was still limp in his arms even though he noticed the wound had gone away, but he couldn't pick up any change in pulse or heart rate.

"I failed," he whispered, swallowing the lump in his throat as he let his fingers run through her hair. "I'm sorry, Molly," he ignored the burning tears on his face to bring her fully up into his arms.

At a loss to why the spell didn't work, Ian closed his eyes against the pain he felt.

"I love you," he whispered, pressing a gentle kiss against her lips and this time he swore he felt something skim over his skin like a small electric charge.

Lost in his own grief and pain, the boy was oblivious to everything around him until he felt a light touch brush against his cheek.

"Your...timing sucks, Irish."

Nearly losing his grip at the weak voice, Ian eased back far enough to look down to feel his heart jump as he watched her deep brown eyes flicker a few times before opening to stare up at him.

"Molly?" He grabbed his jacket from the floor to place under her head as he gently laid her back down. "You're...here, you're talking to me, you're...alive."

Sore, a little confused and more than slightly scared, the girl watched as her friend ran shaking hands down her arms as if checking for himself.

Letting him ramble a little, Molly took the time to take stock of the situation. She had faint memories of recent events. While she hadn't witnessed the stabbing, she was picking up Ian's thoughts and anxiety.

Finally assured that he wasn't dreaming or imagining it, Ian placed both hands on her face. "Look at me, luv," he commanded firmly, sensing her fear, but was relieved when her eyes met his and he saw that they were clear. "Are you alright?"

"Can you ask me that after I've had a chance to fall apart, Irish?" she countered, looking around her, and memories began coming back of being held in the deeper caves and from before. "Did you mean what you said, Ian?"

Blinking at the rapid change of topic, he realized her memories were frightening her. He also knew what she was asking.

Smiling, he let his fingers brush a bruise on her face until it vanished. "Aye," he murmured softly. "I...love you, Molly."

Hearing the words had brought her back from the deep place that she'd pushed herself but seeing him as he said them again, feeling his emotions while he said them, made a small crack form in the wall she'd built up to protect herself.

“God, Ian...I thought I’d never see you again or...” Tears choked her voice suddenly as she sat up fully and looked at the filthy dress that was soaked with blood.

The spell that had brought her back had also eased the effects of the spells and drugs used, allowing her to think freely and to move. It also allowed her to feel again and some of those feelings she could have done without.

Pulling his t-shirt over his head, Ian quickly pulled it onto Molly to cover the blood and give her an extra layer of warmth. He then bundled her into his jacket.

“C’mere, Molly,” he said and eased her fully into his arms to hold her tightly against him, feeling her shaking. “It’s okay now. You’re safe and I’ll take you home.”

Holding onto Ian, Molly tried to stop the tears but just being with him and the thought that this could all be over was overwhelming. “I just want to get out of here,” she sniffed, noticing something on his chest that she hadn’t before. “Hey, where’d you...”

Wanting her off that subject, Ian was about to pick her up and lower his circle when his right leg began burning and he heard the first growl.

“This is certainly a sweet moment and I hate to be the one to break it up, but there are things we need to finish discussing before I return your whore to my dimension to be a nice slave and I kill you, Ian.”

Chapter 26

Feeling Molly Jackson go rigid in his arms, Ian was quick to move in front of her while he turned to face the voice.

"I really could do without you and the puppy patrol, Sebastian," he muttered with tired resignation.

Chuckling, Sebastian walked slowly toward the stone altar while his servants and hound handlers spread throughout the cavern.

"You've given Katie and me a fine run, lad." He had to admire that despite it annoying him to no end. "However, all of that ends here. I'll give you a choice.

"Join me. Agree to be my disciple and I'll spare young Molly further pain and humiliation." He smiled coyly while meeting the eyes of his foe. "Should I tell you what I did to her while she was my guest?"

The muscle in Ian's jaw twitched but he refused to show anger, shielding Molly from what the Warlock was projecting.

"You will never touch her again, bastard," he vowed firmly, wincing as the scar on his leg ached as the demon dogs snarled and howled upon scenting him.

Sebastian had to admit that this boy was proving far more difficult than he had planned on.

He had chosen Ian for his target because he was the youngest. He had let himself believe that he would be the easiest to control or manage, and thus far he was being proven wrong.

"You can't protect her if you're dead, Ian, and you used up what energy that remained by healing her," he remarked, adding, "You know, you have far more potential than even I considered. It's a shame that you won't see reason."

Standing slowly, Ian felt his leg as if testing if it would hold before pushing that away. He accepted that he would always be susceptible to the beasts but that didn't mean he planned to give in.

"Ian, please don't do..." Molly grabbed his arm to try to hold him close to her. "I...you can't face him alone."

"I also can't run from this, luv," he murmured, looking down at her for a moment and making a choice. "Stay inside the circle, Molly," he told her, seeing the fear in her eyes and wishing that he could shield her more. "Remember to stay inside this circle no matter what and..."

Ian looked over his shoulder after hearing a growl close by. Turning back to Molly, he quickly leaned down to kiss her again. "I love you, *a gra*," he whispered against her mouth, stepping from the circle and away from it so that Molly would hopefully be kept safe.

“Okay, Sebastian, so your plan to wear me down, poison me, torture me, starve me and everything kind of fell through,” Ian declared, stepping down from the altar to the main cavern floor to face the ancient Warlock and his minions.

He was tired. Emotionally and physically exhausted by recent events and using his powers in excess while away from Ireland had left him weaker than he had counted on.

Ian honestly wasn’t certain if it was being so tired, or the knowledge that for most of his life the people he had grown up loving had been lies, that made him suddenly feel so bitter and fed up with being frightened of this man and his beasts.

“I will admit that I had counted on any one of those things being enough to either kill you or make you take me up on my offer,” Sebastian acknowledged while moving a ring-covered hand, causing several rows of stone seats to vanish. “I do prefer having one of you turn to my side rather than kill you. I know your dear grandmother would also...”

“Bullshit, mate,” the boy snapped, the mention of Kathleen Murphy Fitzgerald making him angry. “You aren’t that senile to really believe that she gives a damn about anyone but herself.”

Sebastian pursed his lips carefully. “I do believe that everyone, including your brothers, has underestimated you,” he mused as he shrugged. “Not that it will help you in the end. My pets will rend you limb from limb this time, and eventually I’ll break that pathetic little circle and claim the girl for my own – just like I still plan on taking your brother’s whore.

“Perhaps I should cut my losses with the five of you and just kill all of you. I could then claim the Hadley woman and start out fresh with your brother’s child,” he finished with a cruel smile.

Lights flashed behind Ian’s darkening eyes even as it seemed like the entire cavern shook slightly causing him to smile slightly to himself.

“Mistake, old man,” he murmured, feeling Molly’s terror building and wishing that he could reassure her that he really did know what he was doing. “Threatening Molly is one of them but to threaten Jess and a baby, that you shouldn’t even know about by the way, is a serious mistake that will cost you.”

Amused by this young man’s sudden attitude in the face of certain death, Sebastian had to admire the courage that these two young people had shown him in recent days.

“Perhaps in the end it will, but you won’t be around to see it happen,” he replied, jerking his head at his servants. “Take him alive if you can, but don’t worry about it if you can’t. Just allow the dogs to have him – but bring me the girl.”

Two large scar-faced servants slowly stepped away from the pack that surrounded Ian.

The hellhounds were prowling the perimeter of the room. Their glowing red eyes seemed to lock onto Ian's every move while their handlers and the servants closed in with weapons that ranged from medieval maces, to long jagged poles, to knives.

"Ian, run!" Molly screamed, gasping when one of the hounds tried to jump into the circle that surrounded her but was forced to jump back with a screaming howl.

"Stay there, Molly!" Ian shouted, feeling the strain when he tried to summon a small burst of power to remove the hounds that were closest to her. "Sebastian! Call them off and face me if you want me so bleedin' badly!"

Sitting in one of the stone seats he had left, Sebastian laughed fully. "Boy, you should concern yourself with your own death," he advised sagely then frowned when he noticed the small smile. "What are you smiling about? Your powers are all but drained and young Molly is also too weak and inexperienced to help you this time."

Watching as the servants got close enough to make the scar on his shoulder burn Ian nodded slowly. "Yep, I won't deny either of those things," he agreed and then he smiled fully, stepping back slightly to shift his one hand. "You just forgot to figure one important little thing in your master plan."

"What did I forget, boy?" Sebastian demanded, not caring for the tone when suddenly the servant who had gotten closest to Ian screamed in agony as something struck him in the face and his whole body went up in smoke.

"You forgot that Ian has brothers."

Whirling at the voice, Sebastian saw five more of his servants struck down by a burst of flame. "No, damn it!" he snarled, hurling out a hand to try to burn his current foe but a wave of wind dispersed his attack. "They shouldn't have been able to find this place. Sybil was certain of this."

"Yeah, except for the fact that they more than likely just tracked the backwash of the spell that brought me here," Ian replied easily, suddenly feeling dizzy as a hound got too close and began to lunge.

The discharge of a high-powered sniper rifle sounded in the cavern and the demon dog yipped as it was struck down with a magically coated round while a hand yanked Ian aside.

"The brat needs to aim for their bloody brains for those shells to have max effect," Ryan muttered darkly, pulling a dagger from under his jacket and piercing the dark animal's head to cause an eruption of smoke and black ooze before eyeing his youngest brother. "You do realize that you will be grounded for the rest of your bleedin' life for this stunt, right?" he asked, once he had assured himself that the boy wasn't in too much danger right then.

"Yeah, I figured on that," Ian nodded, not surprised that his brothers were there as he had always figured on them arriving.

He was surprised at the relief he felt in knowing that he wasn't alone to face this.

"Mac, check on Molly!" Kerry snapped as he stepped through the door to face Sebastian. "You thought you could confront him after he'd used up his powers, take advantage of the situation that you and our grandmother put him in, and you honestly didn't think we'd have his back?"

"Trying to use Molly against him hurt your cause, since it made Ian realize what he had to lose and what he could gain." He shook his head. "When will you learn, Sebastian? Love is not a weakness that you can exploit."

A hound handler had let his animal loose to charge but screamed when a large piece of stone from the ceiling dropped to impale him while Ryan dealt with the dog.

"Love and the opposite sex has always been a weakness in the Fitzgerald line, Kerry," Sebastian sneered, not caring for this turn of events as it could push his plans back a great deal. "Look at your brothers as an example:

"Roarke thinks he's overcome what Katie had done to him by spawning a new generation with that British witch. All he's done is open himself to more pain, because he will always be looking over his shoulder for a threat and that will weaken him." He winced as a shot of electricity shot too close to his already scarred face.

"Ian has no clue what he's letting himself in for by falling in love with this child witch, and he's too much of a child himself to understand that risking everything for such a fragile thing as love is pointless.

"Ryan understands this all too well, don't you, lad?" Sebastian smiled as he glanced at the black haired gambler. "You learned all too well the danger of what love is when poor Annie died in your arms because of your arrogance. You swore to never allow yourself those feelings again for fear of murdering another innocent lass like your Annie."

Eyes already smoke from using his powers at this level, Ryan's temper sparked and only a warning hand on his shoulder kept him from either lunging or launching an attack.

"He's baiting you, Ry," Roarke warned evenly, having heard the evil Warlock's taunt as he was descending from the higher level in the tall cavern. "Sebastian is losing power with every moment he gloats and with every slave who goes up in flames, so he needs to draw on your anger to get some back."

Baring his teeth in a fierce snarl, Sebastian lifted a hand to cast a spell aimed toward the boy who had ruined a well-timed plan.

"All of you may think you've won a second round but you forget, my hounds have tasted his blood. They've torn his skin and therefore Ian is weak to me," he growled. "As all of you will soon see."

Ian was already feeling weak from the night's events but he groaned when a sudden spear of agony shot through his stomach again and he dropped to his knees.

Seeing Ian fall, Molly, still weak herself, tried to move to help him but Mac's hand on her arm kept her still.

"Give them a chance, luv," he urged, meeting his brother's gaze and nodding.

Having passed Ryan something before they entered the cavern, Kerry wasn't unprepared for the Warlock's last act to try to claim the life of the youngest Fitzgerald.

"My remaining pets will deal with you and your brothers, Kerry and then the prophecy will be finished and my deal with Katie complete, as she will once again be Mistress of Fitzgaren," Sebastian smiled, confidence building. "You still have a chance at survival if you agree to serve me, and perhaps I'll leave Roarke's new little family intact for the time being."

Stone splintered and water boiled as Roarke's fury finally snapped to the surface. He ignored the advice that he had just given his brother and he lunged forward.

"That worked well," Ryan muttered, quickly kneeling beside Ian as soon as his brother had moved. "Ian, snap outta it, baby brother and listen to me," he urged, hearing a snarl even as another demon hound vanished with a spell from Mac.

Ian had heard his brothers and had felt the threat growing but he was trying to balance the pain when he felt something placed in his clenched fingers.

Upon having the smooth stone placed in his hand, he felt a surge of warmth and new energy flow into him.

'Only you can defeat your fears and Sebastian this time, Ian,' his father spoke in his mind. 'Trust your brothers and follow your heart.'

Hounds and their remaining handlers had all moved in for the kill at the same time as their master found himself under attack. Confident that their superior numbers would help them, they lunged.

"Kerry, this is getting out of hand!" Mac shouted after a small fire spell had dispatched a large servant of Sebastian's, but only barely and he knew that was trouble. "Their powers are not affected like ours are!"

The eldest brother did know this but he also knew something else. Sebastian still had the upper hand in one area.

"Mac, get Ian out of here," Molly urged, feeling his pain again and trying to help him as best she could, but she was still suffering her own aftereffects. "If he's not here then that son of a bitch can't hurt him."

Sighing, Mac could only shake his head and hope the circle around the girl would hold a little longer, and that's when it hit him. "Ry, take Ian out. This circle won't last much longer and I can't shield both him and Molly!"

Trying to keep an eye on possible threats, make sure Roarke was holding on to the fight, and get Ian back to his feet, Ryan wasn't sure he could handle one more thing, so Mac's sudden order had him snarling back in their native tongue.

Hearing Molly's name had made Ian's eyes snap open even as he was looking at the stone in his palm that seemed to glow the longer he looked at it.

Slowly he felt the pain ebb away, and though a hound was closing in while Ryan's attention was elsewhere and Kerry was handling a seven-foot demon soldier, the pain didn't return as badly.

"If I let the pain win, I let them win," he whispered to himself, rolling the stone in his fingers while looking up to see that Sebastian had finally stopped playing and a strong burst of dark magic had seemed to have stunned Roarke.

"Okay, time to fold or show the hand," Ryan gritted after a hound had come to close and tore at his chest. "Mac, grab Molly while I snag Ian. We're getting out before..."

A hand on his arm interrupted him. "No, we're not," Ian told him as he struggled back to his feet. "I'm not afraid of him and I will not allow him to threaten what I love anymore," he vowed, letting out a shaky breath and reaching into his pocket for something while pulling another item from his back pocket. "Get Roarke clear."

The lunge and attack on the powerful Warlock might have seemed rash and an act of temper, when in fact Roarke was following one of Kerry's back-up plans.

He just chose to do so in a bit more hotheaded way since he hadn't had to fake his anger at the wizard's threats toward Jessica and their unborn child.

"Coming after me, using my past and my love for Jess against me was one thing. Trying to hurt an eighteen-year-old boy, torture him, abuse a girl trying to help him, all because you have a huge ego. You can't stand knowing that you will lose," he stated, having rolled away after the lunge took Sebastian away from Kerry and more into the center of the room.

"You want to threaten my family, you hurt my brother, so try your power on me when you aren't holding my girlfriend as a shield." Roarke paused to eye the scars on the man's face. "That bullet I hit you with did some damage, care to see what a second one would do?"

Sebastian snarled at the young man, recalling all too well the night he'd taken him by surprise with a move that he hadn't thought he'd have the guts to do.

“I promised your heart to your grandmother, boy,” he replied with a snide smile while pulling a small dagger from under his cloak. “I should have killed you fifteen years ago and your brothers wouldn’t be facing this danger now, would they?”

Emotion flickered in the young man’s eyes as bitter memories resurfaced but he shoved them aside to focus on the fight since he knew better than to assume that Sebastian would be easy to handle in a physical fight. Despite his aged appearance the man was still quite agile and very well versed in combat.

Ducking on instinct as the older man hurled a huge stone at his head, Roarke hissed and swore as a hound swiped a paw at him and he found himself splitting his attention for a moment.

“Being away from Ireland is making you lads weak and sloppy,” Sebastian boasted, pleased that Roarke recalled his earlier encounter with his pets. “My abilities don’t suffer like that.”

“Yeah, tell me about it,” Roarke muttered under his breath, managing to avoid the snapping jaws and feeling the dog jerk as a sharp bolt of light hit it.

Silently thanking Kerry for the save, Roarke went to move but before he could catch his breath Sebastian grabbed him easily and shoved him against a sharp stone, stunning him.

“Now, while my pets and slaves finish off your brothers, I’ll finish the act that should have ended this fifteen years ago and give Katie your heart before I handle Ian personally,” the older silver haired man decided, pulling the stunned Irishman to his feet while lifting his dagger.

Kerry had finished handling two other attackers when he felt something that made him look and swear violently. “Roarke!” He had begun to move when he caught Ian from the corner of his eye.

“Sebastian!” the boy snapped, stepping fully away from his brothers into the center of the room and several feet away from where the Warlock was standing. “Step away from him and face me if I’m what you want so badly!”

The Warlock smiled, shifting slightly to give him a sneer but then nearly screamed when something slammed into his outstretched arm and a bone snapped.

“Back off the brat, old man,” Ryan had moved as soon as Ian had gotten the attention he desired and easily struck, taking silent pleasure in hearing the bone break in the man’s arm after all the pain he had caused them.

Even with one arm hanging limp, Sebastian’s scarred face still turned feral as he tried to whirl to confront the smirking gambler but Ryan had already pulled Roarke back with him.

“Cowards is what Toryn’s sons have turned into?” he taunted, refusing to show his pain to these whelps. “Attacking from behind and...”

“That’s the demon calling the demon dog black, mate,” Ian tossed back, realizing that he had one shot to do this. “I’m not scared of you, Sebastian. You were wrong before. Wrong about me, about my brothers,” he proclaimed, seeing the man’s eyes flash dangerously. “They didn’t forget about me and nothing you could say will ever break that bond. It’s that lack of understanding that will send you packing again.”

Sebastian’s lips curled back as he took a step toward the boy, but this time did scream as he struck something that sparked in his face and burned like fire.

“Damn you, what did you do, boy?” he demanded, whirling to look around and seeing that all of his servants were gone. Then he noticed the glowing outline that surrounded him in the shape of a pentacle. “This petty sign won’t hold me, Kerry,” he said, guessing who had created it.

“Crushed willow’s root and bloodstone shards mixed with salt and sprinkled with holy water, Kerry said as he nodded slowly, silently relieved that it did slow him down some since neither he nor Mac had been sure it would. “It’s also not meant to hold you long, Sebastian.”

Looking around him at the grim faces, he laughed mockingly. “If you think you can banish me with a mere spell then you lads aren’t as smart as I believed you to be,” he chided, eyeing Ian. “Do you think you’ve won, boy? You needed your big brothers to...”

“I survived the test. I survived what you and Sybil and my so-called grandmother did to me and I learned that to be honest with myself I had to let myself love someone who loved me back for me.” Ian glanced back at Molly and smiled. “I know that the fallout from this won’t be easy, but if I run from it or if I let Molly down then you will have won, and I refuse to shame my family by letting that happen.”

“It’s happened, boy,” Sebastian shouted, enraged and getting angrier that his every attempt to escape the pentacle was blocked by agony.

Ian had flinched at the last attempt but quickly lifted what he’d been holding. “Go back to hell and leave me alone,” he snapped.

The small slingshot may have seemed silly to most people Ian knew, especially when two of his brothers were experts with weapons.

However, a small thing that he’d kept hidden from everyone was that while he shied away from actual guns, he was an expert shooter with other things, including the slingshot that he’d learned to use at age five.

“What do you plan to do, Ian?” Sebastian asked, chuckling. “Hit me with a marble like a schoolyard bully?”

Lifting a small black vial that had a tiny onyx stone as a stopper, he placed it in the slingshot and met the cruel eyes fully. "No, something a bit better," he admitted, eyes darkening. "It's a gift from Molly's Mum to you, old man. Don't ever touch what is mine again or burn."

The vial flew with uncanny accuracy and struck the startled Warlock in the face, breaking with a violent blast of power that seemed to shake the cave. He screamed, using his still good arm to try to brush away what only he could see.

Knowing this was the opening they needed, Kerry held out a hand with the palm facing up.

"A circle of Light, a circle of Five. Five into one, one becomes five to unite the circle and protect the light," five voices chanted into the air.

Each had taken a point of the glowing pentacle and as they recited the chant, Sebastian screamed louder.

"We seek to unite and combine the circle that is ours to combine, twice times five. We are calling on the powers that have come before, in the name of the Air, Earth, Water, Fire, and Spirit, we ask that this second circle seal the gap and protects."

Unable to escape using his own powers, he resorted to another method. "Katie, bring me back to you!"

As a shimmering began to form around him, Sebastian turned a hateful gaze on his foes. "This fight isn't over, Kerry. The next time, blood will be shed and you will bury one of your own before our fight concludes," he swore with venom. "I promise you this on the blood of your parents."

"Not if I have anything to say about it," Kerry murmured, as Kathleen Fitzgerald's spell whisked the Warlock away, and soon the cavern became silent.

"I suppose we should have considered that because she's blood, Kathleen could get around our circle?" Ryan sounded disgusted by that as he waved a hand to dispel the pentacle. "We need a way around that for next time."

Not disagreeing with that, Kerry looked around as he approached Ian who was staring at the stone he still held.

"A gift from Riordan before he left," he explained, laying a hand on his shoulder to check on his brother. "Ian, are you alright?"

Silent while considering this, Ian nodded after a moment. "Just tired and sore," he admitted, seeing Kerry's eyes, and running his tongue over his teeth. "Guess I'm grounded for running off, huh?"

"Mac wants to break you into very tiny pieces, baby brother," he declared sternly and then eased the boy into his arms. "It's over, Ian. You faced your part and succeeded. Mum and Da would have been proud."

Startled and wary, Ian didn't resist the move. "Are you guys?" he asked suddenly.

“Ask Mac that after he bitches for a few days,” Ryan advised, taking the slingshot from him to examine it before tossing it to Roarke with a scowl. “He aimed better with this than you did with a damn bleedin’ sniper scope, brat,” he complained.

“Shut up, Ry,” Roarke shot back, placing a hand on Ian’s shoulder and catching sight of the new mark. “Ian, what did you do?”

Recalling that he’d given Molly his shirt and not wanting his brothers to view any new marks he might have gained, the boy had started to pull away when another sound drew his attention.

“Ian!”

Once he was confident that the threat was over, Mac had cleared the circle that his brother had put around the stone altar and had helped Molly away from it.

Not surprising, once the young woman from Boston was down on the main floor she broke away from Mac and went straight for her friend.

Turning on instinct at her voice, Ian took two steps and caught her up into his arms when she all but jumped into them.

“*Muirmin*,” he whispered, his arms tightening even as she was wrapping hers around his neck and breaking into choking tears as she tried to get words out past them.

“Ian, I thought...he could’ve...Oh, God,” she sobbed as the events began catching up with her and the brave shields cracked.

Soothing her gently, Ian eased down onto the stone floor with her held tightly against his chest. “Calm down, luv. It’s over now,” he promised, feeling the chill as his own adrenaline began to calm down and still present wounds reminded him that they were there.

“How is she?” Kerry asked quietly, noticing that Mac didn’t seem too concerned.

Looking back at the pair, Mac shrugged. “Considering what I’m sure she endured, Molly doesn’t have the wounds that I expected to see,” he admitted with a frown, not sure about that until he saw Roarke looking away. “What?”

“I think you may want to take a look at Ian to see why Molly’s not hurt as bad as we all know she should be,” he advised, recalling what had happened sometimes when he healed people. “He did more than heal her.”

Mac whirled to stare and started to move when Kerry grabbed onto him and told him with a look to leave it alone for the time being.

Not knowing that he was his brothers’ topic of discussion, Ian was concentrating on calming Molly who had stopped sobbing but still clung to his neck while he gently stroked her with a soothing motion and whispered to her.

After several minutes, she finally lifted her head to look at him with eyes red and swollen from crying. “Can we go home now, Irish?” she asked with a hiccup. “I really don’t like this place.”

“Where do you want to go, luv?” he asked a little uneasily.

He was dreading this answer because he honestly wouldn’t blame her if she wanted nothing else to do with him. “My power is shot to hell but I’m sure Ry or someone could take you back to Dublin or...to the States if that’s where you want to go.”

“If either one of you considers that damn teleporting power I will break someone and Kerry can put you back together,” Mac snapped warningly.

Molly shook her head. “With you,” she whispered, feeling sleepy now. “Just take me home with you, Ian, please and don’t let go for awhile.”

“No, *a gra*. I won’t let go of you,” Ian promised, feeling his throat tighten as he looked for his brothers. “Can we go home?” he asked. “Home, Kerry, to Fitzgaren.”

Hearing and feeling the boy’s emotions, Kerry knelt beside him. “Yes, we can go home to Fitzgaren,” he assured him, running a hand over his brother’s hair in a soothing motion. “Hold onto Molly and sleep, baby brother. We’ll be home soon.”

“That might be hard since Mac put the kibbosh on me teleporting us there,” Ryan scowled at his brother.

“What are mystics good for if not for their power?” Roarke asked, rolling his eyes to the shadows. “Nick! Make yourself useful and send us home.”

Nick O’Malley, a mystic employed by Jessica Hadley, hated taking orders from most people and that would include the Fitzgerald brothers, but decided that in this case it would probably be best if he did.

With a motion of his hand, a spell in ancient Latin, and a flash of light, the small group disappeared out of the caverns to allow Nick’s people to clear up the evidence left from the night’s activities.

Chapter 27

Fitzgaren, County Kerry, Ireland:

"I'm going to ground him right after I decide which limb to break first." Mac's voice was a low growl and the first thing that penetrated the fog Ian woke up to.

Not bothering to move at that moment, he stayed still to allow his memories to settle so he'd know what his brother was threatening him over.

Shadows flicked in his mind as memories fought each other. He recalled events up in Savernake forest that started his nightmare, to finally fighting to save Molly's life after Sybill had stabbed her.

It was thoughts of his friend that made his eyes open and had him sitting up too fast; only a sudden arm catching his shoulders kept him from falling out of the bed.

"*Tóg é gobogé* (Take it easy)," Roarke urged him quietly, having been watching the boy intently for the past hour and a half after sensing his growing tension. "You're safe, Ian."

"At least until Mac fries him or grounds him until he's seventy," Ryan chose to add easily.

"One hundred and seventy for this latest stunt," Mac snapped, his well known patience having left him sometime in the past seventy-two hours of hovering over his brother, who had come down with a fever again. He had also been trying to care for a girl who could give lessons on being stubborn to a pit bull.

After having Nick O'Malley transport them home to Fitzgaren, Mac had allowed Deirdre O'Connor to handle getting Molly Jackson settled in a room and cleaned up while he tried to concentrate on Ian.

Knowing exactly the wounds that he had left from his own ordeal, Mac had not been happy when he discovered fresh wounds that he couldn't come up with any logical reason for Ian to have.

It had actually been Molly, in a fit of expressive emotion, who had told a newly arrived Maggie Cavanaugh what she remembered from the time she had been captured to when she woke up on the altar. She actually had flashes of being stabbed and dying, and once she had pointed out where the wounds were, Mac's temper had soared.

"He's eighteen, had been through hell and back, had just used a power that he should not even know how to use, and had fought a horde of Satan lovers," he complained bitterly while pacing the bedroom as best he could. "He didn't heal Molly as we normally do but took many of the more serious wounds onto himself!"

All of them had been exhausted upon arriving home and though Deirdre had tried to get them to sleep or rest while Mac worked, none of them had budged.

“Mac.” Kerry turned from the window where he’d been watching the sun come up. “We all have healed that way one time or another, so while it’s not recommended it may be wiser to see why Ian did it before blowing up on him.”

“Hell, if I told you how many times the brat has taken wounds from Jess or others like that you’d be bitching for a year,” Ryan spoke from the chair that he’d been lounging in, ignoring the sudden glare his younger brother shot him. “There was a time in Hungary that...”

Roarke threw a pillow from the bed to shut his brother up even as Mac was turning on him. “He’s overplaying that,” he assured him, glaring. “Not that he should have known about it.”

“Brat, there’s very little that you have done that I haven’t kept track of,” he tossed back, his fingers running through his hair in a way that told Kerry that his brash brother was getting tired.

The small bickering session had given Ian the time to focus on where he was and who was with him.

Blinking his eyes, he looked around to realize that he was back in his room at Fitzgaren Manor. Noticing that it was clean meant that Deirdre had been in it since he had returned to school, and he inwardly winced at the lecture that would bring.

“How...how long?” he asked, surprised at how tired he still felt and how dry his throat was. He was also surprised at how exhausted his brothers appeared.

“How long has Mac been bitching?” Ryan deadpanned, more at ease with using his normal cavalier attitude now that he was sure that Ian was fine. “I’d say for as long as I’ve known him.”

Hearing Mac growl under his breath, Kerry interceded before he shed actual blood.

“You’ve been asleep for well over three days,” he replied calmly as he sat on the foot of the bed. “It’s a natural response that your body has to acute injury or exhaustion. You’ll sleep until your body feels that it’s well enough.”

Mac’s hand lightly slapped Ryan in the back of the head. “That’s what your body should have done in Dublin after you were stabbed,” he muttered.

Recalling something Molly had said, Ian started to ask when he suddenly grabbed onto Roarke. Panic plain in his eyes.

“Where’s Molly?” he demanded upon remembering that his last memory in the cavern had been of holding her in his arms and promising to be with her. “Roarke, where’s Molly? Is she okay? How bad is she hurt or...”

“She’s down the hall,” his brother assured him, understanding his concern and his fear. “One of the girls has been sitting with her.”

Relieved at hearing this, the boy pinned Mac with a worried look. “So how bad was she hurt?”

“I’d know that better if you hadn’t taken half the bloody wounds,” Mac countered, knowing what he wanted to ask and not ready to burden the boy yet. “Can I mention that when you heal, which is risky enough if not prepared fully, it is not wise to actually take the injuries onto yourself?”

“I had to bring Molly back and I didn’t care what I had to do,” Ian replied. He yawned and didn’t catch the look his brothers gave each other at his exact words. “Now, tell me what the bastard did to her and stop side stepping me, Mac.”

Mac rubbed the back of his neck and met Kerry’s eyes, both wary on this.

“Ian, you know what Sebastian’s capable of doing,” Kerry began slowly, seeing Roarke tense slightly. “To hurt you, both he and Sybil would hurt Molly and...”

“Damn it, Kerry! Just tell me the truth!” he snapped, reaching out to grab his wrist. “Was she...was she raped?”

Laying a hand on his shoulder, Roarke got his attention. “Molly told Maggie and Jess ‘no’, and Deirdre says that while he certainly probably teased her and molested her, Sebastian was saving the rest for later,” he told his brother, understanding the helpless rage he would soon feel.

More than the others, Roarke had dealt with the aftermath of the Warlock’s cruelty and he understood the emotions his younger brother had and those that he would have to learn to handle.

“Kerry, let me talk to Ian alone, huh?” he shot an eye to the door. “And then I’ll go check on Jess and let her convince me to sleep.”

Understanding what he wanted to do, Kerry was unsure until Ryan nudged his arm.

“Let the brat handle it, Kerry,” he urged after catching Roarke’s eye and yawning again. “I’m going to go see what McCabe is getting into and see about some food.”

“Be careful,” Mac warned, not liking this idea, but figuring that maybe Ian would respond better to their brother.

Stepping into the hall, Ryan was waiting for them. “Sebastian came too close this time because we still have too many issues between us,” he declared, searching the house mentally for his employee and silently groaning when he located her in the kitchen with Deirdre. “Before he chooses his next target, we’d better have a plan to handle him, because I don’t think Mac would like it if he goes after Maggie.”

Kerry nodded in agreement, feeling more tired than he had in years but before he could sleep there was one other thing he wanted to do.

"I want to give Roarke Mum and Da's wedding rings," he announced, waiting to see their reactions.

Ryan smirked as he headed for the steps. "Seems fair since we all know he'll ask her soon and hell will freeze before Mac gets it in his head to ask Red," he said with a smile. Feeling jaded on the subject, and while he wouldn't begrudge his younger brother the happiness he had found with Jessica, he just hoped he wasn't making a mistake.

Mac was silent for a couple moments as he thought about it. "I think they'd want him to have them anyway," he nodded, looking at Kerry after another minute. "Do you regret it?"

Realizing what he meant, he slowly shook his head. "No, it wasn't meant to be, Mac, and I understood Chey's reasons for moving on. Go get some sleep," he urged in a change of topic.

"Understood it maybe, but that doesn't mean it had to happen that way," Mac sighed, wondering how much longer Kerry could keep his emotions under control and hating to see the day that he did let them and his powers loose.

In Ian's room, Roarke waited a moment before moving so that he could face his brother. "Ian, listen to me. You've been through hell recently and you did a lot more growing up than you should have had to in that short a time. I wish to God that we could take all the nightmares that you'll have away.

"We will always be with you to help you through this, but now you need to decide that you can handle what happened to Molly and help her over it." He watched as the boy's eyes lifted to meet his and he saw so much of his own feelings reflected.

"I...want to be a help to her but I don't know how, Roarke," Ian admitted, sitting on the edge of the bed to slowly stand. "I don't blame her if she wanted nothing more to do with me after all this rot. How do you and Jess handle it?"

Smiling slightly, Roarke shook his head. "Jess and I have had a lot of years together facing both bad and good things, and we learned to cope with all sorts of crap long before I admitted that I loved her," he replied. "We've both had a lot of bad stuff happen in our lives and it still haunts us. It just takes time, understanding, and a lot of commitment. That's what you need to be sure you're ready for, and that she understands that you're sticking it out because you love her and not of guilt."

Blinking as he considered that, Ian slowly nodded as his brother's words sank in. "Can I see Molly, Roarke?"

"Yeah, I think Maggie's with her right now," he nodded, staying close until he could gauge his brother's strength. "I'll walk with you in case Jess is with them."

That reminded Ian of something else as they walked to the guest room. "Does it seem weird that Jess is having a baby?" he asked, sensing the concern but not as much anxiety as he had before.

“Weird, no,” Roarke considered it. “Scares me still since I know that both Sebastian and Kathleen are out there, but if I let that stop me from living then they win.” He grinned as he added, “The weird part is thinking of asking her to marry me.”

Knocking softly, Roarke opened the door after hearing Maggie Cavanaugh’s greeting. “Hey, Ian wanted to drop in,” he explained.

The young man stepped into the warmly decorated guest room quietly, biting his lip uneasily as he gazed at his sleeping friend.

“How’s it going, handsome?” Maggie asked as she leaned up to give the boy a kiss on his cheek. “Roarke, Mac was by and said that Kerry wants to see you.”

Wondering what his brother could want, he nodded and turned to go see but paused. “Just give Molly time, Ian. Let her open up at her own speed and you do the same.”

Ian slowly sat on the bed to watch his friend sleep and he noticed that while she still seemed pale to him that Molly was resting comfortably. “Molly?” he murmured, lightly touching her cheek with his knuckles and wincing when she automatically cringed in her sleep. “It’s okay, luv. You’re safe here.”

The promise seemed flat to him as he looked for himself and closed his eyes. “I’m sorry, Molly. I wish I could take all this back and that you had stayed safe and away from me.”

“Ian, Molly doesn’t blame you,” Maggie told him quickly. “She told me, Andi, and Jess a lot, and she accepted the risks helping you brought.”

“I love her, Maggie, but how I can I ask her to love me when I couldn’t protect her?” he asked helplessly, images that he was still too tired to block coming to him. “I couldn’t protect her from Sebastian but more importantly I couldn’t protect her from that damn bleedin’ cult and...”

Worried about his tone, Maggie gently took his hands. “Laddie, this is a girl who knew what she was doing. Just wait and talk to her,” she encouraged with a smile. “Now, why don’t you go back, crawl into bed, and Deirdre can bring you something to eat or drink?”

“No, I can’t sleep. I’m too wired yet and I need to think,” he replied, as he leaned over to place a soft kiss on Molly’s forehead. “Sleep and may you know no fears, *a gra*.”

“Ian, wait,” Maggie called but he was already gone. “Damn it to hell,” she muttered, checking on her charge one last time before going to find Mac in the hopes that one of them would know how to handle a boy still unsure of his own emotions.

The door closed behind her so Maggie didn’t see the shimmering form in the corner of the room.

Molly Jackson stirred as a softly scented wind moved her hair and the wind chimes hanging in the open window.

She had been awake several times but this time she knew there was a change in the room.

"Hello, Molly," Toryn Fitzgerald spoke from the chair in the corner. "I'm sorry to wake you but there are only so many times during these things that I or my wife can enter this realm, and I wanted to speak with you one last time."

Blinking sleep from her eyes, she sat up to gaze at him. "Y'know, the first time I thought I was losing my mind, but you're real, aren't you, Mr. Fitzgerald?"

"As real as a spirit can be in any sense, lass," he smiled, standing to approach the bed. "Brenna and I don't care for involving innocents in this mess and you were, by far, the most innocent of those who must be involved, and for that I am sorry for the wounds you suffered."

"I told Maggie and the others and I'll probably be pounding it into Ian's head for months to come," she began seriously, awake now and looking for her shoes. "I went into this knowing the risks, and though a couple of things came as a surprise, I'll...handle it."

Toryn's gaze softened as he looked deep into her eyes and saw the wounds that his son's powers alone could not heal.

"Your love and your courage saved my son, Molly, and for that his Mother and I are in your debt. While there are limits to my powers in this form, I can offer you a boon if you ask it of me," he declared. He saw her face wrinkle in confusion and chuckled. "If you want something of me, ask it and if it's possible I will give it to you."

Molly had to think on that a second to understand what he was saying. "I came here because I was coming here anyway," she remarked, finally giving up on finding her shoes. "I helped Ian because...well, because I loved him and if I could ask anything, it would just be that he still cared for me despite what's happened."

"Luv, even if it was in my power to affect the minds and feelings of my sons, that wouldn't be something I would need to grant because Ian loves you more than he's willing to admit," Toryn assured her. He continued grimly, "He's afraid that you will hate him for your injuries and that he didn't protect you."

Frowning at that, Molly rolled her eyes. "Answer me this, are all your sons so boneheaded and stubborn?" she asked. "Maggie says they are."

"I fear my boys have a strong sense of tradition and even as small boys Kerry and his brothers believed it was their place to look after people, especially lasses like Jessica." Toryn coughed at her look. "They get their stubborn streaks from their mother."

A short but loud crack of thunder came from outside the window and Molly could see him wince. "I'm guessing that was a disagreeing sound?"

“Ian was our youngest and being raised away from his family hasn’t given him the same foundation of confidence that the others have,” Toryn explained to her as he took her hands. “His recent experiences and how my so-called friend raised him has left him very insecure and with the thoughts that failure will make those he loves abandon him.”

Molly had already known that because she had caught signs of it in her friend from shortly after they had met, and with that knowledge came a decision.

“Can you take me to Ian?” she asked him curiously. A quick glance in a mirror told her that she probably looked like a worn dishrag, but she had a gut feeling that the longer she waited to see her friend, the harder it was going to be to get through his thick Irish skull. “I want to see him without having to go through the third degree just to get out the front door.”

Considering that, Toryn knew that she meant dealing with their long-time housekeeper and since he recalled her scathing lectures, he could fully understand Molly’s desire to avoid that.

“I can do that,” he agreed and then he smiled. “You make him smile, Molly and you haven’t let Ryan scare you so you’ll fit in well,” he decided. “You both are young and you will face trials unlike others your age and many will cast doubt because of your differences but seek strength and courage from each other, child, and you will always be protected.”

With this declaration, Toryn’s blue-gray eyes that shined much like his sons lit with power. “As requested, I send you to he who is the last of my children. May you both find the peace and love that his mother and I once knew. Blessed be, Molly Brianna,” he murmured, waiting until the shimmering had past to let out a breath. “Now, to deal with other things.”

Downstairs in the office:

Knocking was still instinct to Roarke who recalled when the office was one of his father’s two private places in the house. It still slightly shook him to hear his oldest brother’s voice on the other side.

“Come in, Roarke,” Kerry instructed. He had felt his brother for the past several moments even before he knocked.

“Maggie said that you needed to see me,” he remarked, entering to see his brother sitting at the desk with a small jeweled box in front of him. “What’s up?”

This hadn’t been a quick choice or an easy decision, since family legend told certain heirlooms went to the eldest son or surviving child.

Kerry, as the first-born son, had been brought up on these tales so he understood the significance of his decision.

“Sit down a minute,” he invited, seeing the weariness finally beginning to show. “You look tired, Roarke.”

A brief smirk reminded Kerry that his brother shared many attributes with Ryan. "Have you looked in a mirror lately?"

"Touché," Kerry smiled, leaning back in the high back leather chair with a sigh. "I know you're tired and you want to check on Jessica, but I wanted to give you something before you did."

Opening the chest, he removed two boxes. The first was smaller and had the Fitzgerald family crest embedded on the lid while the second box was slightly larger.

"I know that you still have fears and reservations about being home, about your past, about Sebastian and Kathleen and their parts in Mum and Da dying," he began seriously, seeing the other set of eyes lower slightly. "You have every right to have those fears, especially now with Jess having a baby, but it's important to know that you aren't alone now. As Ry, Mac, and I discussed, we want you to have these."

Sliding the boxes across the desk to his brother, Kerry watched as Roarke took them and he saw confusion turn to shock as he opened the first box.

"This is Mum's engagement ring," he whispered, lightly touching the stone with a trembling finger. "Kerry, this and their wedding set should go to..."

"Roarke, there is a time when traditions can change and as it's said that the house gets titled to the first to be married, I think the rings should go to the first considering marriage and that, little brother, would be you," Kerry interrupted, standing to go around the desk. "You are going to ask Jess, aren't you?"

Lifting his eyes from the antique wedding band set that he could still recall seeing his father wear on his hand, he nodded. "As soon as I can," he said, frowning. "What if I screw it up, Kerry? Being a husband and father was not something I'd allowed myself to plan on because of my past."

"What happened to you has made you the man you are and it will continue to make you strong," Kerry replied, placing a hand on the opposite shoulder. "Jess loves you and all you need to know is that the love you share will help when things get tough." He paused to smile. "Well, that and the fact that Ry, Mac, and I will kick your ass if you screw it up with her."

Chuckling, Roarke took the boxes and stood. "Thanks, Kerry. That fills me with confidence," he muttered.

A knock sounded on the door, and Jessica stuck her head into the room.

"Mac's bitching that you need to sleep and he can't find Molly." She didn't sound worried, which told Kerry that she suspected where the American had gotten to.

"I'll look into it," Kerry assured her, nodding to his brother. "Go get some sleep while I go banish Ry to do the same before Miss McCabe hurts him."

Deciding he needed to look into his brother's employee more, Roarke nodded while he reached for Jessica's hand. "Kerry," he looked back. "Don't do anything about that one thing until we talk about it, okay?"

"It's tradition, Roarke," Kerry reminded him, understanding what he meant.

Glancing at the boxes he was holding, Roarke just gave a dry look. "Some traditions are meant to change," he quoted his brother's own words. "Just wait until we can talk about it."

"Agreed," Kerry finally gave in, hearing a burst of thunder from outside and frowning, knowing that he hadn't caused it. "So, either Maggie's pissed Mac off or Mum's upset," he decided, going in search of his brothers as a strong feeling told him to leave Ian and Molly alone for the time being.

"I'd ask what that was about but I'll wait until after you wake up," Jessica declared as she and Roarke walked upstairs. "In fact, you can sleep while I help Maggie prod Andi into giving her details on Ryan."

Catching her hand, he gently pulled her into his room and shut the door. "I need to talk to you first."

"It's never good when you say that, luv," she frowned a little, wary since she was having a hard time reading him right at the moment.

Smiling at her, Roarke moved slowly when he drew her to him. "Nothing bad, *a gra*," he promised, deciding to wait until he was fully alert to do this. "Sleep with me, Jess. You need to sleep as well, especially now, and I want you with me."

"That's a cheap way to keep me from bugging Ry," she grinned, gasping when he lifted her into his arms. "Well, I suppose this is better than bothering your brother."

Laying her on the bed, Roarke paused to snort. "It bloody well better be, Jessica."

As Roarke worked on pleasing both himself and Jessica, his thoughts wandered to his younger brother and he hoped that Ian didn't make the same mistakes that he had at that age.

In the Kitchen:

"You'll not be ruining your dinner with that thing you call a sandwich, Ryan Fitzgerald," Deirdre O'Connor was saying sternly while replacing all the lunchmeat and condiments that he'd gotten out.

Fighting his basic urge to snarl, Ryan slumped in a chair at the table to scowl instead. "Dinner isn't for hours and I want food before I crash for the next several days," he argued, reaching for a cookie from a tray cooling on the counter and did snarl when his knuckles were smacked.

“Try a carrot then, boyo,” the fiery housekeeper snapped. “Take yourself out of my kitchen and up to bed so I can cook in peace.”

“Cook in peace with all that yammering you do, woman?” Agnus scoffed from the door where he was standing with a half a leg of lamb.

Ryan saw sparks begin to shoot and chose to desert the kitchen, grabbing Andrea McCabe’s arm as he did to stop her from entering the kitchen.

“Deirdre’s going to be cooking Agnus’s goose in a second, so it’s best to avoid the splatter,” he told her, feeling tired and wanting sleep but needing to finish this first. “Here, McCabe.”

Glancing down to see the check he’d shoved into her hand, Andi frowned. “What’s this?”

“The pay I owed you that you came to collect,” he rolled his eyes. “Now you got it, go home and tell Olav that I’ll be back soon.”

“I thought I told you that I was sticking this out with you, so you can sod off if you think paying me is going to make me run home,” Andi snapped, poking a finger into his chest. “I don’t know what your issue is, Fitzgerald, but it’s time you accepted that for some reason I was involved in this and I’m not leaving until I find out why.”

Looking at her, he wondered briefly if Kerry would bitch too much if he murdered her. “You don’t know what you’re getting into, McCabe,” he argued, feeling his head pound.

“So I’ll figure it out,” she shot back, sensing something under the surface. “Why do you want me gone so badly, Ryan?”

‘Because I don’t want you to die’ was on the tip of his tongue and then just as quickly he shoved it away. A dark anger was building inside him until a hand slapped him in the back of the head “Leave me alone, Andi,” he muttered, needing to get away and think this development through.

As he stormed away and upstairs, Andi stared blankly after him and started to move when Kerry’s hand stopped her.

“Let him go, lass,” he advised, meeting Mac’s eyes as they both thought the same thing. “Ryan’s got Da’s temper and it’s worse when he’s tired, so let him sleep the edge off. He’s concerned for you so that’s one reason he’s snapping.”

“The Ryan Fitzgerald that I know wouldn’t be concerned about me unless hell froze over, sport,” Andi laughed, but her heart wasn’t in the normal sarcasm.

She still recalled the kiss back in Dublin and her dreams of late. “He’s a pig headed son of a bitch but I’m not running away until I know why he’s so intent on pushing me away,” she stated, turning sharply on a heel to march into the kitchen.

“Now there’s a woman who will either give Ry a run for his money or they’ll end up killing each other,” Mac decided, frowning. “He’s comparing her to Annie and that could be a problem, Kerry.”

Understanding what Mac meant, Kerry knew that their overly confident and cocky brother was either seeking to protect the woman or he was shielding himself, and neither option was good in the long run.

“Did you cause thunder a moment ago?” Mac asked suddenly. “No reason for you to have had to but it’s usually...”

“Mum was upset would be my guess,” Kerry shrugged, hearing something crash from the kitchen. “Keep a light touch on where Ian and Molly are in case something does try to cross the borders again, but I think they’ll be fine.”

Rolling his eyes, Mac had heard that before. “They’re eighteen. How were you at eighteen, mate?”

“Shut up, Mac,” Kerry muttered, hoping he was making the correct choice.

Chapter 28

Sometime before outside the main house:

The lands that had been in Fitzgerald hands for generations had seen much expansion and growth but it wasn’t until Torny managed it that it grew to its present size and scope.

Aside from the horse and cow barn, there was also a well-sized garage for housing his collection of antique sports cars. The cars still sat inside along with the more modern vehicles.

A lover of all things with speed, Ian loved the cars, but his particular thrill other than tinkering with his motorcycle was playing under the hood of the 1966 Mustang that Kerry said was the last car their Father had bought for his collection.

Needing to clear his head and think, he had chosen to bury himself in the garage under the hood of the car, at least until Mac found him or he could work up the guts to face Molly.

“Or I jump in a lake to avoid facing her,” he muttered to himself over the blaring radio and loud engine, so intent on tuning the car that he didn’t feel or hear anything else until his music clicked off.

“Damn, Irish, it’s a wonder you don’t have hearing issues if you blare that crap that loud.”

Startled at the sudden unexpected voice, Ian jumped and slammed his head into the raised car roof that he’d been leaning under. “Ouch!” he yelped, grabbing his head with one hand as he came up to blink at Molly, who was standing next to the driver’s door after she’d shut the radio off.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you,” she apologized, concerned. “Are you alright?”

“If I didn’t have a bloody concussion before I probably do now,” he muttered, wincing as he touched the back of his head. “Mac will probably insist on X-rays or an MRI or something equally overdramatic.”

Leaning on the car, she watched him. “What are you doing out here, Ian?” she asked. “You’re hurt.”

“I slept, so I feel fine,” he shrugged, turning away to reach for a rag. “How’d you get past Mac?”

Feeling his unease told Molly that there was more to him being outside than he was letting on. “Your Daddy said he owed me so he did it,” she replied simply, pleased when he finally turned to face her. “That’s the same look your brothers gave me when I mentioned talking to your Dad in Dublin.”

“You’ve spoken to my father before?” Ian was surprised by this fact, though after thinking about it, he supposed he shouldn’t have been. “Did you tell them that you normally speak to ghosts?”

“Hell, no,” she scoffed, waving that off. “They thought I was weird as it was.” Pausing a second, she bit her lip. “Why are you out here, Ian?”

Not wanting this discussion right then, he tossed the rag aside and reached for a timing light. “I was restless and wanted to think so I came out here,” he shrugged, adding, “You’re still hurt and should be in bed. Go back inside, Molly. You need to rest.”

“Don’t you take that tone with me, Irish,” Molly told him, stepping to the front of the car and not surprised when he edged back. “Ian, what’s wrong? Besides not helping you the way I intended, what did I do wrong?”

Hearing the sudden fear in her shaky voice made him look at her fully for the first time and he caught the tears that she was holding back.

“You haven’t done anything wrong, Molly,” he assured her with a sigh. “I’m the one who made mistakes. Things that I can’t take back and...I wasn’t sure if you’d want to see me after...”

Molly, to be honest, didn’t want to remember certain things, just as she was certain that Ian had memories that he would rather forget.

Having a sister-in-law who was a therapist for assault victims, she knew all the common lectures and discussions, but Molly knew that she needed to make Ian understand something.

“Ian, I wasn’t raped by them.”

Fingers tight, the mere word made him cringe and he suddenly wanted to be anywhere else in the world.

“I put you in danger, Molly,” he stated quietly, slowly laying the tool aside to look at her. “Just knowing me has probably gotten you kicked out of school, it’s gotten you hurt, traumatized, abused, and who knows what else.”

"I knew there'd be risks and I accepted them. I don't blame you, Ian," she assured him, noticing how rigid he was standing. "They hurt you too."

Taking a deep breath, Ian reached out to take her hand. "Yeah, they did, and I was hurt as a lad, but you..." He led her out of the garage and into the stable where it had always seemed more peaceful.

"Ian, these are beautiful," Molly gasped upon seeing the stalls with horses that lined the stable.

Watching as she moved to each stall, talking softly to the horses, Ian leaned on a pole to gaze at her.

He looked deeper to see the internal wounds, both physical and emotional, that she had. He also noticed that despite the chill in the air, she was wearing a pair of cut off sweat pants that ended at her knees, a short-sleeved shirt, and no shoes.

"I wanted to protect you, Molly," he spoke suddenly. "You were the first thing that I thought of when I woke up in that place, because I was scared for you and I probably would have given in if it hadn't been for you."

"Seeing you the first time in that dining room made me realize that I had to survive in order to shield you from Sebastian but I couldn't. I will never forgive myself and I don't blame you if you hated me."

Turning from the horses, Molly stared at her friend as if shocked by what she was hearing. This was the most serious that she could recall ever hearing him and that frightened her more than even these most harrowing past days.

Ian, from their first meeting, had a bright personality. Only in more recent months had she begun to see past that, to understand that much of what he felt he kept to himself, much as he was doing now.

"I don't hate you, Ian," she walked slowly back to him, surprised to find him shaking. "Even if I hadn't been head over heels in love with you, I still would have gotten involved. Sure, I wasn't expecting to be used as a sacrifice for...Ian!"

Whirling away at the memory of seeing her on that altar and watching the woman who had raised him shove a knife into Molly's chest Ian still felt sick, but what bothered him the most were the images of her being held down by Sebastian's slaves.

"Why didn't you run like I told you to?" he demanded suddenly, the buried emotions coming out. "I told you the night in the woods to run, to leave me. Why did you call on Riordan to save me when you knew that would leave you alone?"

"Because I knew that you needed to be saved and that your life was more important than mine," she replied plainly, dropping her eyes to the stable floor while crossing her arms. "I knew the legends, Ian, so I knew..."

His hands gently touched her shoulders. “*Muirnin*, your life means so much more to me,” he murmured. “You had helped to remind me that my brothers would come for me, so that’s why I wanted you to leave me and be safe.

“When I was over the poison and woke up, I was terrified for you. Your Mum helped me decide what I should do and how I should do it when I went to find you,” he continued, seeing her eyes lift slightly. “Your Mum looks like you, Molly. She was so beautiful.”

“You saw Momma?” Molly was shocked since her mother’s spirit rarely came to people that weren’t family. “She talked to you?”

Recalling the dream like vision he had before leaving his brothers in Dublin, he smiled at her. “She told me that I would save you and that you were my destiny. I knew that already from the first day we met, because on that day you not only made me laugh but you captured my heart.”

“Ian,” Molly swallowed the lump in her throat, as his eyes seemed to get a darker color while gazing at her. “I...I fell for you the first time you sat through one of my silly stories as if you were interested and you didn’t tell me to shut up,” she told him.

“I like your stories and being with you made me happy,” Ian shrugged, lightly running his hands down her arms. “You make me happy, Molly, but now I need you to tell me one thing.”

Slowly, he led her toward the rear of the stable to an empty stall used to store dry bales of hay and sat down. “Look at me, luv,” he said as he gently cupped her chin. “Tell me if you can still trust me to love you, tell me if you still love me, and tell me if you trust me to touch you.”

“That’s three things, Irish,” Molly was quick to counter as she was suddenly nervous. “You said one thing and that was three things and...”

“Molly, luv,” Ian recognized the signs of her edginess, frowning. “You told Maggie and you’ve told me that Sebastian didn’t...”

Looking over at him, she bit her lip and automatically brought one leg up to wrap her arms around. “He didn’t,” she whispered, feeling his hand stroking her back and waiting.

“Ian, yes, that crazy warlock hurt me,” she began slowly, realizing that she had to be honest with him. “He didn’t do that. He threatened, he...played and touched me, but I think he has serious issues when it comes to performing, if you know what I mean.”

Blinking, he did understand, and it made a lot of sense if one considered Sebastian’s attack on Jessica had been much like that as well.

“What about in the caverns, Molly?” he asked, knowing Sybil well enough to know what she was capable of doing. “Did something happen there?”

“Nothing worse than Dublin,” she shrugged, wincing when she heard her own words and something cracked dangerously close as her friend shot her a look. “I mean...I didn’t mean...damn.”

Ian's gaze shot straight to her face, his eyes firm. "What happened in Dublin and when the bloody hell did it happen?" he demanded. "After I left the first time or this time or...Molly, damn it, answer me. Tell me what happened."

"It was actually a few weeks after we met," she began warily, really not wanting to do this since she had vowed never to think about it again. "A couple days after you and Barry Cabot had that fight."

Recalling that it was more of a warning than a fight, Ian didn't correct her. He did remember Barry Cabot had been bothering Molly a lot when she had first come to Trinity and finally when the larger, more muscular upper classman had cornered her after a class, Ian had had enough and stepped in.

Cabot and his pals, in Ian's opinion, were typical bullies. Coming from wealthy families, they believed that they were above most at the school and especially the new girl from America.

"So what happened?" he queried, feeling her edge closer to him and on instinct he slipped an arm around her. "Luv, tell me."

"It was over a weekend that you'd gone away with the Sullivan's, so I guess they thought with you away that I was an easy target – and I suppose I was," she murmured, closing her eyes. "A couple girls in the class asked me to go to a club with them and gave me directions on where to meet 'em by the library."

Ian groaned inwardly. Molly was too trusting and that was one reason that he had stuck to her when she first started school. He was often accused of being trusting and naïve, but Molly often believed the wrong people and he had a hunch that was what happened in this case as well.

"I waited but they didn't come so I started walking back to the dorm when..." Molly paused to look up at him and in that one moment he saw her memories. "They grabbed me and I couldn't see the faces since a bag was put over my head but...I knew the voices and...he said that you weren't there to protect me and..."

When her voice finally broke, Ian was quick to wrap his arms around her. "Barry and his mates attacked you while I was off," he spoke quietly, the slow loss of his accent told of his growing anger but her sudden tears made him calm down. "Why didn't you tell me, Molly? Did you tell the Dean?"

Despite her sudden emotional outburst, that last question made her give a small hiccupping laugh. "That guy hated me to start with and they said if I told you that they'd...Cabot said he'd hurt you," she told him, realizing that he could probably see her thoughts but she didn't try to shield them. "I was afraid if you did find out that you'd either not believe me or you might go do something stupid."

“What, like beat the bloody hell out of Barry Cabot?” Ian rolled his eyes, deciding that he still might. “Molly, you should have told me or someone,” he told her, easing her back from him so that he could gently wipe the tears away. “I wouldn’t have left you alone there if I would have known or...”

“I stayed at school because you were there,” she suddenly blurted, unsure if it was the memories of the assault at school or her more recent ordeal, but she suddenly burst into tears, trying to turn away to bury her face in her hands.

“Hey, easy,” he soothed, catching her fully in his arms to hold her against him. “Sshh, it’s over now and I promise that I will never let you come to harm...if you want to stay with me, that is.”

The last part was spoken quietly but the words still reached Molly who was trying to stop crying.

Slowly the tears stopped and she met his eyes, seeing his pain and fear. “I love you, Ian,” she told him quietly, sniffing. “I...I don’t want to go back to school yet and I don’t know if I’ll go back there but...I’d like to stay with you if you’ll let me.”

“Of course you can stay with me...well us, since I’m stuck with my brothers,” Ian remarked with a grin, reaching into a pocket to remove a small oval turquoise stone that he’d had in his pocket since waking in Dublin.

The stone had confused him until other memories began to return to him. He could recall waking in a strange place and he remembered Riordan placing the stone in his pocket. He also recalled his words: ‘Giving a bauble was always a favorite ways to impress the girls. Give this one and it will always hold your love, devotion, and offer her not only your protection but also that of your kin.’

“I wish it was set in a ring or pendant. I’ll have it made into one for you if you’d like.” He held the stone out to her, glad to see that some of the fear leave her dark eyes. “I love you, Molly Jackson, and I swear to see you kept safe if it’s the last thing that I do.”

The stone felt warm when he placed it on her palm and she felt both the magic and Ian in the smooth blue stone. “Y’know, my Dad will probably give you grief and I have eight annoying older brothers.”

“I have four annoying older brothers and I’ll risk your Da,” he laughed, relaxing slightly but tensed as she touched his face. “Molly, I...”

As their eyes met, Ian considered briefly his next move until she leaned up to kiss him lightly on the mouth.

“Every time you’ve kissed me, I’ve either been shell shocked, zoned out or scared,” she complained quietly, a faint blush showing on her smooth caramel colored skin. “Kiss me please, Ian.”

Watching her eyes and trying to gauge her emotions and his own told Ian that this was probably a bad time, but as if she had guessed the reason for his hesitance and Molly began to move back, his hand cupped the back of her neck.

Ian was slow as he kissed her this time. Not being in fear of their lives or exhausted, he wanted to savor this kiss.

Gently, his fingers moved through her curly hair which framed her face after Maggie or Jessica had fixed the damage the cult had done to it. Deepening the kiss when she leaned into him, Ian shifted slightly to move back on the bales of hay.

"Molly," he murmured, breaking the kiss finally to look at her. He tried to look for signs of fear or unease but his own emotions were making that part of his powers not want to work.

Realizing where this would head if he wasn't careful, Ian needed his friend to understand the same. "Be sure, luv," he advised softly, seeing her eyes lower. "As my brothers are likely to point out, we've both been through hell so this may not be a wise option."

"Is it because I told you about Cabot?" Molly asked warily, eyes staring at his shirt rather than his eyes. She gasped when he suddenly lifted her chin.

"No," he was firm with that point as he held her eyes while gently running a thumb over her bottom lip. "Luv, you were a virgin before that bloody bastard and his mates hurt you and...I...I don't have..."

As he struggled for the right words, Molly's smile was shy when she leaned up to wrap her arms around his neck. "I wanted you to be my first, you know."

That didn't help his straining willpower and Ian decided that the girl knew that. He was careful when he lifted her into his arms. "I love you," he whispered, moving his head to cause a blanket that had been over a saddle to spread itself on the floor as he lowered her slowly.

Molly wondered if it was still the shock of recent days, because she had expected to be afraid of any deep intimate contact with anyone after her attack at school but she wasn't feeling any of that with Ian.

"Irish, any chance of your brothers coming out here?" she asked nervously.

While she wasn't scared yet, she wasn't dumb to say that she wasn't worried.

Sensing that, Ian smiled as he lay down beside her to gently kiss her. "If he's smart, Roarke's proposing to Jess. Kerry will be brooding in the office, Ryan's either playing cards or threatening the new woman who I still need to find out about, and Mac will be pissed at me still while Maggie annoys him," he replied easily, lifting his head to watch her. "We can stop, luv." "I don't want you to stop," she assured him, watching as he sat up to peel off his t-shirt and a little thrill shot through her. "Y'know, I see another thing you have in common with your brothers, Irish."

Ignoring the nickname, Ian was sure that he'd regret his next question just by the way she was grinning. "What's that?"

"You're in the same drop dead gorgeous category," she replied, giggling when he blushed. "You're cute when you blush, Ian."

"Shut up, Molly," he muttered, deciding it would be best to shut her up and found her mouth for a kiss that he wasn't expecting her to meet.

Groaning, he struggled to keep his thoughts clear but when she reached for his hand and placed it just below a breast, he knew this was going to be hard to do.

"Go slow, luv," he urged, voice strained from following his own advice. "We have time."

"It didn't take a lot of time when...Ian!" Molly squealed when he kissed her hotly.

"*Muirnin* (sweetheart), what you and I know about sex couldn't fill one of Deirdre's ladles," Ian began slowly, holding her eyes. "What I do know is that what's happening between us right now is not going to be like what Cabot did to you."

"Do you trust me, Molly?" he asked.

Nodding, Molly watched her friend's hands shake as they reached for the hem of her shirt to ease it over her head.

Images and dreams could not prepare him for the real thing as he felt his breath catch at the first sight of her smooth skin. "You are so beautiful," he whispered.

Feeling more than a little self-conscious as his eyes darkened slightly, Molly moved an arm to cover herself but stopped when he gently smiled.

"I won't hurt you, luv," he promised, hesitating a second before sliding a hand over one breast and feeling his skin grow hot. "You can touch me too."

While watching how intense he seemed as he concentrated on each move he made or each touch, Molly considered something. "Ian, have you ever...?"

Easing down beside her, his mouth found a soft spot to kiss on her neck and he murmured a reply in Irish before answering her. "No, kind of learning as I go," he admitted, looking up with a small smile. "Is that bad?"

"No, not bad," she sighed as his fingers gently moved down to caress her stomach while her own fingers itched to touch him.

Seeing the scar on his upper chest, she knew where he had gotten it and lightly ran her fingertips across his chest. "Does it hurt?"

Having trouble concentrating on breathing much less talking, Ian had to think a minute. "No, not anymore," he replied, feeling her move into his arms fully and he rolled onto his back. "Mac or Kerry can remove them fully when Mac's not so pissed off. Don't worry about them, luv."

Easing up on an elbow, she ran a finger down his chest and grinned when he grabbed her wrist. "Ian Fitzgerald, you're ticklish."

“So are you, Molly,” he reminded her, finding the spot on her side that he had found out early made her laugh, but he wasn’t quick enough to grab her other wrist as she began tickling him.

Laughing, Ian tried to stop the attack but discovered that the girl was as wiry and agile as he was and he soon found himself pinned when she straddled him.

“You lose, Irish,” she was breathless and laughing as their eyes met and held. “Ian?”

“No, *a gra*, I didn’t lose,” he murmured, emotions held in check making his voice deeper than normal as he sat up to draw her closer to him. “I’d only lose if I ever lost you.”

Meeting his mouth for a kiss that made her forget everything, Molly’s moan was soft when he laid her back and with fingers that shook shed his jeans. “We need to stop soon, Molly,” he warned, explaining at her blank look. “I don’t have...I mean, I didn’t think about it before now and I don’t have...protection.”

Shaking her head, she stood to slowly remove her own cut-off shorts and the pink cotton bikini panties, seeing his eyes were locked on her. “Ever since Cabot, I’ve been on the Pill, so that isn’t an issue, Ian,” she assured him, voice shaking slightly.

“I thought I’d be scared of making love after what they did and I am,” she admitted softly, eyes looking at him and she shivered but not from cold. “Not of you or of what we’re doing, but I’m scared of messing up and disappointing you or...”

Having had every ounce of blood rush to his head at the sight of this beautiful young woman, Ian felt his nerves and concerns vanish suddenly as he smiled and held out a hand to her.

“Molly, *a stor* (my dear), you could never disappoint me,” he promised, taking the hand that she placed in his to draw her down slowly into his arms for a gentle kiss that made her tingle. “I love you,”

His kisses slowly made all reasonable thought dissolve until she was barely aware of things and she only tensed when he laid her back and she felt him press against her.

Jerking once as a memory flashed of hands holding her down in a utility room, a dirty bag covering her head with a rag stuffed in her mouth to muffle the screams, she recalled the feeling of the being violated that first time.

“Do you want to stop, Molly?” Ian had caught the reaction and her memory and while he didn’t move away, he didn’t do anything else except wait. “It’s okay to be scared and to wait.”

Opening her eyes, she looked into his gentle blue-gray ones and recognized his concern. “If I said yes, could we stop?”

The tone of doubt made his heart break and slowly he nodded. "If you want to stop then we stop," he promised. "Just tell me."

She knew he would. Molly had no doubts that her friend would stop if she said those very words. However, just as she was sure of this, she was also sure that if she did, then everyone else would win and that wasn't something that she was ready to allow.

"Kiss me again?" she asked softly, seeing his concern and moaned softly as this kiss was a gentle, loving touch that she chose to deepen by interlacing her fingers behind his neck. "I don't want to stop."

Ian groaned deep in his throat as his body throbbed with need but he fought that down as he continued to kiss Molly until she was limp, and as his hands gently caressed her, he was slow to move into a position between her legs.

"You won't hurt me, Ian," she sensed his wariness and adored that about him. "The memories hurt because I feel him shoving and grunting and a part of me wonders but..."

"Don't wonder,luv," he whispered against her mouth before he proceeded to make love to her body, kissing her neck, her shoulders, to finally her small breasts that seemed to fit perfectly in his hands.

As he did this, Molly relaxed under his touch to begin to return his gentle gestures. Her smooth hands ran over the muscles in his chest and back.

"Ian, please," she whimpered when he nuzzled the spot just behind her ear.

Letting his hands and mouth soothe and distract, he was careful when he eased between her long, slender legs. Touching her gently there, he groaned when her hips shifted on instinct.

"I love you, Molly," he whispered against her mouth, pressing a kiss that seared and caressed her soft lips as his body moved with a natural shift that surged into her.

Being careful to hold back as much as possible, Ian felt her go rigid briefly and he took her small cry while his powers automatically soothed any pain she had, but then his body flamed with heat as it was enclosed tightly.

"God," he groaned, willing his body to stay still until he regained control, but when Molly moved slightly to bring him closer that control slipped. "Molly, wait a sec," he urged, not expecting this much this fast.

Dark brown eyes watched him, watched his concentration and his control and Molly realized it was for her that he was keeping his control. "I love you, Ian," she replied, tightening her muscles a little and feeling him jerk. "You're not moving like they did and it's hurting you."

"I...I won't hurt you," he gritted, feeling her mouth on his neck. "Molly."

"We both need to feel, Irish," she murmured, running her hands up his arms. "Don't be scared, Ian. No one can hurt us now. If they try, I can get Ryan to shoot them. He likes me."

The bizarre comment made him laugh. "Ry likes any female who appeals to his ego," he told her, groaning when his hips moved and she gasped.

Not really knowing what to do, Ian finally let his body's own natural instinct take over a little as it moved gently while Molly's legs wrapped around his.

As the young couple made gentle love, exploring, touching, and feeling, neither was aware of the gentle glow of lights pulsing around them or the sound of soft chimes on the air.

"Ian?" Molly felt panic only at the new feelings pulsing within her as she crested with a cry that he swallowed with a kiss that took her breath, and she gasped at the wave of power that passed between them as Ian climaxed.

Watching with fascination, she wondered if her friend knew that his powers were on or how he'd explained to his brothers what happened to put the bales of hay on the ceiling.

It was several moments before Ian could think, see, or reason clearly, but when he could, his first thought was for...

"Molly?" he rolled to his side, with her curled against him. "Luv?"

Instantly concerned when she didn't respond right away, his alarm tripled at the tears he saw. "What's wrong? Are you okay?"

Leaning up to kiss him, she smiled into his worried eyes. "You made this so wonderful for me. Thank you."

"Molly, you're wonderful." Gently, he stroked her face. "I'll protect you from now on."

"We'll protect each other, Irish," she corrected. Seeing his eyes roll, she pinched his arm. "Your Daddy said you were stubborn and he was right."

Ian snorted at that, reaching for his shirt to slip on her. "Da was certainly chatty with you," he observed, seeing her smile. "I missed your smile, Molly. There were times when I doubted if I'd see you or my brothers again and..."

"Shush," she laid a finger on his lips, not wanting to think on that at this moment. "You beat him and you guys will keep beating him because that's how the good guys always save the day."

"Yeah, Ry loves you when you say stuff like that," he decided with a laugh, rolling over to kiss her again when a sudden tug caught him and he tensed.

"Ian, what's wrong?" Molly felt the change in him even before she saw that his eyes were changing. "Ian?"

The sudden fear in her voice made him shake his hand, squeezing her hand. "No,luv. It's fine," he assured her, frowning as he searched for what he felt and then blinked. "Hmm, company." He saw in the thoughts of some of the gardeners. "Tall man, dark blond hair, gray at the temples with green eyes, your nose and mad as nest of hornets."

Molly's eyes jumped at the description, swallowing a squeak as she grabbed for her clothes and threw his jeans at him. "We need to head him off before he gets in the face of one of your more hot headed brothers," she decided quickly, tugging on his arm.

"Who is it, luv?" he asked, pulling his jeans on but not bothering to button them or mention that she had his shirt. "Molly?"

Running a hand through her hair, she sighed. "That's my father."

Chapter 29

Mary Margaret Cavanaugh had a pencil clamped in her teeth as she reworked a filler story to keep her editor happy.

"Isn't the bloke getting anxious or curious about the story he sent you to Clare for?" Mac asked from behind her, leaning over her shoulder and scowling at her version of shorthand, which made no sense to him. "I mean, he basically sent you for my life story, which once I strip it of all the interesting stuff is very boring."

"So long as I give him interesting filler stuff and check in so the paper knows I'm still alive, he's happy to have me out of the office," she replied, leaning back in the chair so that she could view him upside down. "Who said I was writing a boring story about you?"

Curling a finger around a strand of her unruly red hair, he tugged it lightly. "Since I'm the one giving the interview, I say."

Laughing, Maggie reached up to take a handful of his shirt to pull him closer. "Doc, by the time I'm done wearing you down, you will have given me a Pulitzer prize," she teased, not bothering to tell him that she hadn't decided if she would turn the story in or not.

The fire in the parlor fireplace suddenly bursting into flame, along with the sound of chime singing through the house, took them both by surprise.

"What's up with that?" she asked, seeing his brow furrow as he closed his eyes with a muttered curse that his small smile took the heat from. "Mac?"

"That was my baby brother doing something that Kerry and I should have talked to him about," he sighed, not sure if he was comfortable with this much knowledge.

It slowly dawned on her what that meant and she bit the inside of her cheek to keep from smiling. "He's eighteen, Doc," she reminded before a pounding on the front door cut off the rest of her words. "Did the doorbell stop working?"

“Let’s go find out,” Mac decided, silently wondering what else could happen.

“The man is a brute, an ox, a dimble-brained moron,” Deirdre O’Connor was ranting while she used a butcher knife on a cut of meat. “He’s always late, rude, and trying to undermine my kitchen.”

Kerry coughed into his hand, knowing better to get any closer to the woman in this mood. “Agnus has always been that way, Deirdre,” he remarked carefully, deciding to change the subject. “Have Gram or Gramps called recently?”

Placing the lamb in a pot and beginning to season it, she nodded. “Mrs. Kerrigan phoned to say that things are being handled to make sure that the Sullivan’s have no more of a hold on Ian. The local police in Dublin have taken both Mr. Sullivan and the Dean in on questioning on recent events,” she explained, adding, “She also stated that the poor wee child that those monsters were trying to adopt would be cared for.”

“Good. I’ll handle seeing the lawyer about the default will since I also need to discuss things about the house.” Kerry sighed after he opened a hand delivered letter from the Mayor of the town. “Well, I suppose I should have seen this coming.”

Knowing that Kerry was the strongest of her former Lord’s sons, the shaking in his voice made the older woman set aside her cooking chores to cross to him.

“What is it, lad?” she asked, taking the letter he held out and feeling like going into town and taking a skillet to that fool Mayor. “Will you discuss this with your brothers?”

Taking back the letter with its invitation for the Fitzgerald brothers to sing at the town’s annual celebration, Kerry shook his head. “It’s been fifteen years since we’ve performed together, Deirdre. I’m not certain how any of them, especially Roarke, would react to that.”

“Aye, but you should discuss it with them,” Deirdre told him, patting his cheek with a smile. “Oh, I got a letter of my own this morning.”

He smiled at her attempt to take his mind off his own brooding problems even as he was picking up signs in the house that reminded him to pull Ian aside to teach him basic control on situations. “From whom?” he asked. “Perhaps it was from an old suitor seeking to woo you away from this drudgery?”

“Now, don’t ye be givin’ me sass, lad,” she scolded with a laugh. “It was from my sister-in-law in America. She wanted to tell me that my niece is coming home for a visit soon, which will be so wonderful since I haven’t seen the lass in ages.”

Kerry had been turning to leave the kitchen as the sound of chimes sang out when her words sank in, and he felt a swift punch to the gut. "Cheyenne's coming back to Fitzgaren?"

"Aye, Liz said the lass has business to handle in Dublin so she's going to come spend some time with the family." Deirdre didn't see the odd strain in his eyes as she smiled. "As I recall, I boxed your ears more than once for tripping over your tongue with her."

Forcing a tight smile, he nodded, but as he fought to settle his emotions over this news, he heard the pounding on the front door and felt the dark anxiety. "What else has come calling?" he muttered.

"So is the boss still breathing, Andi?" Olav Vanhoove, the large Swede who ran the security agency when Ryan Fitzgerald was in the field, asked over the speakerphone in her room. "I'm guessing that he hasn't killed you."

Andrea McCabe twirled a bracelet around her wrist while rolling her eyes. "He's breathing until I kill him, which may be soon since he's being a son of a bitch," she muttered.

Chuckling, the Swede wished that he could see the fireworks that were going on between the two. "That's the boss being his normal self, girl," he laughed.

"The boss appreciates your confidence, Olav," Ryan spoke from the door, scowling at the speaker. "Do you have issues at home that I need to know about or are you just exchanging gossip with McCabe?"

"Nope, all is well in security land, except that Baroness DeCourtier has been calling and leaving twenty messages a day for you," Olav reported, glad that his employer couldn't see his smile. "You want me to convey one back to her, boss?"

The mention of the pushy, arrogant German made Ryan's skin crawl, but of course his customary attitude made it impossible to show that so he sneered. "Tell her that I fell into a fairy hole and that I won't be back for twenty years, so she can bug you," he replied. "Olav, I'll try to come back to catch up on paperwork but you'll be handling the day to day stuff for a while longer, mate."

"If you need help you know that I can ship a couple lads over to you," Olav reminded him and then just as quickly waved that away. "Yeah, I know. It's your business, and your problem, so just send Andi back before you kill her. She's the best we have second to you."

"Tell her to go home then because she's not listening to me," Ryan snorted as the call disconnected with another laugh. "I should fire him."

“No, because then you’d have to handle the office and the field work,” Andi pointed out smartly. “Where would you fit in your loose women and casino time?”

Still surly and edgy, Ryan had to remind himself not to throttle the woman. “I’d promote you to that position except you’d shoot every cheating husband or louse who hired us,” he shot at her, seeing those jade eyes fire at him. “Look, McCabe, I have reasons not to want you here, and maybe you have reasons to stick it out, despite wanting to get under my skin.”

He picked up a small hand painted shell-like dish on the nightstand. He recalled making the dish for his mother when he’d been six years old. There were many trinkets still in the house like that and many of them bothered him for reasons he’d rather forget.

“Strange calls on my cell phone aren’t things I’m willing to walk away from, Fitzgerald,” she shrugged, facing him fully.

“My father brought you into this and I don’t like the implications as to why,” he admitted, noticing something from outside the window and going closer. “If you stay, the same rules apply. I give an order and you follow it without lip, without order, or I will personally teleport your cocky ass back to Greece. Are we clear?”

Normally that comment would have caused her to shoot something equally arrogant back but his eyes stopped her.

Ryan’s eyes always showed his arrogance. This time she caught shadows in them that she hadn’t noticed before and that made her concerned. “Whatever you say, boss,” she agreed while silently deciding that she was sticking this out with him whether he liked it or not.

A light pink pillar candle on the dresser came to life in a soft glow that soon melted the candle down to nothing but the wick.

“Okay, now that is something new for me.” She stared at the melted wax before noticing that his attention was on the glow of lights coming from the stable. “You tell me, is this normal?”

Ryan sensed out to judge the cause before snorting. “Mac will be bitching about this,” he muttered, sliding his eyes over to meet hers with a smile that was a touch devious. “Baby brother really needs lessons on discretion.”

“Oh, oh my,” Andi murmured, hearing the pounding start on the front door. “So how do you handle the normal lecture on a boy’s first time?”

“Hell if I know, McCabe,” he shrugged, deciding to go see who was pounding on their damn door without reason and also check on the waves of bad vibes that he was picking up. “Kerry and Mac can have that honor. I’m the bad influence so I’m supposed to corrupt my younger brothers, which according to Mac I’m very good at.”

Andi watched as he walked away to stroll downstairs and she followed slowly. 'I think you're also very good at pretending that you don't care, Fitzgerald, but I remember what you did to that man who sold your brother out in Athens,' she thought to herself. 'A man who doesn't care wouldn't have done what you did and he wouldn't have done everything else that you have for him.'

Sighing, she followed even before the yelling started. "Maggie's right. There is never a dull moment in this house."

Having slept a little, Roarke mostly laid in bed and thought about things. Ever since his parents' death, he had accepted his guilt over that. He still had issues from his past that he coped with nearly every day, and for most of those he had his friends to thank that he had even survived them.

Sitting up to reach for his shirt, he glanced over to the antique vanity that had been his mothers' to watch as Jessica Hadley brushed her auburn hair. "I recall making a comment on that habit," he remarked easily.

Recalling that night in her New Orleans' townhouse before this nightmare all had started, he had never considered that they would have come this far.

"I also recall telling you what to do with that opinion," she tossed back with a laugh, watching his reflection in the mirror. "Do you think they'll leave Ian alone now, Roarke?"

He'd been considering the same thing. "Doubtful, but he'll focus on someone else now. Ian will be an afterthought," he replied, reaching into his pocket. "Until the circle is complete, Sebastian will always be a threat to us, but he has limits."

"Which is why he needs help from people like your grandmother, and the Sullivan's," Jessica reasoned, laying the brush down to turn on the seat to see his eyes. "You're worried."

"Sebastian, Kathleen – they know how to hurt us," he sighed, moving over to kneel down next to her. "It's harder but Ry, Mac, and Kerry all have secrets, things that can be used to hurt them, and I'm worried that since he's been the strong one all these years that Kerry could be the most vulnerable."

"Kerry's been strong because that's who he is, luv," she assured him as she ran fingers through his black hair that tended to fall into his face. "I've never known him to be anything less."

Roarke had once, and he feared from what Nick O'Malley told him had happened at Trinity that Kerry was close to losing the control that he worked hard to keep, and that worried him.

The chimes hanging in the closed window began to move gently as the fireplace roared to life.

“Roarke?” Jessica was startled and still uneasy after her attack in the house a few months previous. “What’s causing that?”

Having found the source of the disruption, Roarke chuckled and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “It’s nothing, luv,” he reassured her, grinning. “One of us though really should have given Ian the birds and the bees lecture I suppose. Mac will complain.”

“You still think of him as a baby.” She knew this was so, and knew that more than the others Roarke would be concerned about Ian’s personal involvement with Molly. “He loves her, Roarke and you saw how she feels for him.”

“Yeah, but they’re still young and that love could hurt them,” he sighed, understanding that danger all too well and that brought him back to his most current thoughts.

Jessica laid a gentle hand on his face, smiling. “Leave Ian and Molly alone,” she urged, remembering her first time with Roarke. “He won’t hurt her.”

“I’m more worried about that being the other way around,” he muttered, seeing her dry smile and nodding. “I know, but he’s the baby so we’re protective of him and...”

“Roarke,” Jessica chided lightly, looking down when he laid a hand on her still flat stomach. “Still upset about the baby?”

Despite being too small to kick or have movement, Roarke could still pick up the life growing within the woman he loved and that tiny flutter made him smile.

“No, *a gra*, I’m not upset about our baby,” he murmured, slowly lifting his eyes up to hers. “I love you, Jessica.”

The tone was different, more serious than she had heard from him in a long time so that caught her attention. “What’s wrong, Roarke?” she demanded warily.

“Nothing’s wrong, Jess,” he assured her, silently cursing events in both their lives that left her so mistrusting.

Running a finger along the item in his pocket, he took a deep breath. “I have loved you since we were both children and I’ve often said that you’ve saved my life so many times,” he began slowly, reaching for her hand. A loud pounding on the front door nearly distracted him but he chose to ignore it.

“When you and Cam took me from Mayo, I had already decided at that young age that I would never allow myself to be that vulnerable or at risk again. I would not allow myself to love or get married, much less think of having children.” Roarke was careful now since he knew this was a huge step for both of them and his family.

“Jessica, I...I can’t promise what the future will hold, because until Sebastian is dealt with the risk is there. However, I can promise to do everything in my power to keep both you and our child safe,” he promised her, looking into her eyes as he withdrew the small velvet box from his pocket and seeing them widen.

Opening the box to reveal the engagement ring that had been passed down in his family, Roarke held it up so the light could glint in the diamond. “I will never love anyone as much as I do you and I will give you all that I can,” he vowed, his accent thick with emotion. “I grew up in a loving house with loving parents and I hope to give our daughter that same type of home. I want to spend my life with you, Jessica, and I want to give you my name. Will you marry me?”

Jessica had been staring at him, taken off guard by this move as she had known of his fears of marriage. “Oh, Roarke,” she whispered, feeling tears fall. “I...I...”

As he waited what seemed like a lifetime for an answer, Roarke briefly caught the edge from downstairs but he was more distracted by the pounding in his chest as he waited.

Meanwhile downstairs, the pounding on the front door had gone past persistent now as Mac reached it.

“Did the bloody bell break or what?” he demanded, pulling open the double front doors. He wasn’t prepared for or expecting the sharp powerful fist that slammed into his face, jerking his head back as pain exploded and he saw stars.

“Okay, I’ve been more than patient with people in this damn country, but I want to know what you bastards have done with my baby girl. You’ll tell me now or I’ll beat the crap outta you!”

Chapter 30

As the outraged voice spoke and prepared to strike again, Mac Fitzgerald's sense returned and he was able to deflect the next blow by shifting back.

Once his attacker was off balance, he caught the offending arm and restrained it as best he could, since the new arrival was about his height and weight but agile as a fox.

"Calm down, mate," he urged, tasting blood and hating that. "What's this about?"

The man, in his late forties or early fifties, had graying blond hair with green eyes and was in good shape for his age as he jerked free of Mac and prepared to attack again.

"I want answers to where my daughter is and I was told I'd get them here!" he snapped, eyes bright with anger and worry.

Painfully touching his face, Mac glanced up to see Ryan halfway down the steps. "Ry, there's a bloke here about his daughter. You know anything about that, or should I just send him your way on principal's sake?" he asked, seeing the smirk turn into a glare.

"Shut up," Ryan snarled, eyes turning dark as he took in the new man. "I'm about the only one who can smash my brother's face in, mate," he remarked dangerously. "Who are you, what brings you to our door, and why shouldn't I put a bleedin' hole in you?"

"I'm Keith Thomas Jackson and I'm looking for my daughter," the man declared firmly with an accent that still had the sounds of Ireland in the proper Boston tone, not appearing intimidated. "My mother-in-law contacted me last week with a warning, and when her school refused to tell me anything I flew to Dublin, and all that got me were several days of stonewalling until the chief Inspector told me to come here."

"Then you'd be Molly's father," Kerry spoke as he entered the foyer with Maggie following him.

Keith Jackson nodded, still not unclenching his fists. "That I am," he acknowledged, looking between them. "Who are you and where's my little girl?"

"I'm Kerry Fitzgerald, Mr. Jackson," he held out a hand in hopes of putting the man at peace. "These are my brothers, Mac and Ryan."

"He met Mac's face already," Ryan smirked, sitting on the bottom step. "That thing's taking a beating this month, bro."

Mac tried to snarl at his brother but Maggie was wiping blood from his nose and it was too painful to split his attention.

Jackson wasn't ready to relax or to calm down yet. The call from his mother-in-law, along with his own nightmares and those of several of his boys, still bothered him. He was in the midst of a new tirade when a voice spoke.

"Daddy, Ian's brother isn't bleeding because of you, is he?"

The quiet disapproving tone his only daughter had reminded him of his late wife. "Molly!" He looked to see her coming in from the rear of the house.

Grabbing her up in his arms, he hugged her tightly to him, relieved to see that she appeared to be fine but not willing to trust that.

"What happened?" he demanded, sitting her down to grasp her shoulders. "The people at the school told me that you'd been missing for weeks. They were talking about cults and witches and then your grandmother called one night to say that you'd been hurt. Connor and Doug have been having dreams and..." He stopped to finally take a breath and that was when he felt the intense gaze of the young blond haired man who had entered behind Molly.

"Daddy, calm down and take a breath," Molly urged, quickly wanting to get him onto a safe subject. "I'm fine. The school got confused because I...missed some classes because a friend needed help and they weren't doing anything about it," she explained.

"Somehow I don't think that'll calm him down any," Ryan muttered under his breath, lifting his eyes to his brother and snickering. "Neither will that. Hey, baby brother, did you lose something between the stable and the house?"

Shooting him a dark look, Ian stuck his tongue out even as Mac was groaning. "Mind your own business, Ry," he shot, meeting and holding the suspicious gaze of his friend's father.

"Molly, you should have called if you had trouble," Jackson was saying, while he tried to ignore signs that he knew he would not like. "Honey, where are your shoes?"

Looking down at her bare feet, she shrugged. "Oh, I haven't had a chance to get my extra sneakers from my bag, and I lost the first pair in a fight with a crazy demon warlock."

"That might have been a bad thing to drop on him," Maggie decided, amused that the girl thought that sounded normal even as her father was staring at her.

"What?" he exclaimed, starting to pull her behind him as if seeking to protect her, but Molly shook her head. "Molly Brianna, what have you been getting into?" he demanded.

Seeing that Kerry was about to intercede, Ian stepped forward. "I'm Ian, and I'm afraid that Molly got involved because of me, Mr. Jackson," he began while placing a hand on the small of her back "It's rather hard to explain but..."

“Fitzgerald?” Jackson repeated the surname warily as if considering, stepping back to examine these young men more closely. “The stories always said there were supposed to five of you.”

“Roarke’s upstairs,” Kerry replied, motioning to the living room. “Would you care to sit down and have a drink, Mr. Jackson?” he asked, noticing Ian’s almost protective stance. “I can understand your concern for Molly and I apologize that no one told you anything.”

Molly snorted, crossing her arms and noticing for the first time that she had Ian’s shirt on. “That school wouldn’t miss me if I fell off the face of the earth,” she muttered, fighting not to blush over the shirt. “They’ll be glad if I don’t go back.”

Having gotten the feeling while speaking with teachers and staff that his daughter had not been having an easy time at school, he didn’t correct that opinion.

“Molly’s great-grandmother used to tell stories of Fitzgaren and a prophecy.” He frowned as he looked around. “I stopped paying attention to the legends of Ireland but the blood and the power runs in me still, so I know what I’ve felt from the moment I arrived here. You’re witches.”

“Daddy!” Molly exclaimed, mortified, but Ian’s hand rubbed her shoulder gently while shaking his head.

Ryan leaned on the mantle as Andi entered with an icebag for Mac’s face. “You accuse me of being blunt?” he scoffed.

“No, Kerry says you’re rude and sarcastic,” Mac corrected, hissing as he touched the ice to his nose. “Do we have a protocol for an outsider guessing what we are?”

“Yes, my brothers and I are hereditary witches, Mr. Jackson,” Kerry slowly acknowledged, feeling his brothers staring at him in shock. “Just like your daughter is.”

Molly blinked at that, knowing that she could do some things but nothing like Ian or his brothers. “I don’t know about that.” She frowned but noticed that her father was looking away from her. “Dad?”

“Your Mom and I decided to wait until you were older to talk to you, darlin’.” He sighed, meeting Kerry’s eyes. “You know about Molly’s family?”

Kerry nodded. “I know her great grandmother was Maeve O’Neill on your side and that gives her magical powers, and she more than likely got more abilities from your wife’s family.” He glanced around the room. “You know of the prophecy which means you have a clue to what it calls for.”

Keith Jackson did know and it scared him that his only daughter had gotten involved, but again his gaze went to the young man who seemed to hover near her and he recalled another dream that he’d had.

The dream he'd had where his late wife had told him to back off and not break anything on that boy when he met him.

"Molly's my only daughter and my youngest, Mr. Fitzgerald," he sighed. "If I could, I'd pack her away like fine Waterford glass and keep her safe."

"So would I," Ian spoke softly, sitting on the sofa arm. "I don't want her mixed up in this but since she is, I'll keep her safe or die trying."

Molly groaned and closed her eyes while muttering about stubborn morons. "I'll protect myself, Irish," she shot at him with a huff.

A fight was sure to explode just as it seemed that music was heard all through the house. The tense atmosphere seemed to lighten for a moment as a shout was heard from upstairs.

"Sounds like the brat actually asked her," Ryan surmised with a snort. "I honestly didn't think he'd be the first to get married. I had a hundred pounds bet on Mac and Red for that."

Maggie turned before Mac could and offered her own very silent opinion on his bets and soon Ryan chuckled.

Jackson had heard the tales of the Fitzgeralds since he'd been a boy and he'd heard of the latest generation, but seeing them in person still made him doubt that leaving his child with them was a wise choice.

"She said yes!" Roarke skidded into the living room in a way that reminded Kerry of when he'd been a boy running to tell their parents news.

"Who said yes to what, brat?" Ryan deadpanned, aware of what he was talking about but not willing to show it.

Roarke blinked at the question until he felt Jessica slid her hand into his and he remembered. "Jess. She agreed to marry me."

"Well, there is no accounting for even her taste," his brother sighed, wincing as Mac slapped him on the back of head. "She could have sailed away with me instead of settle for you."

Molly noticed that while the black haired security ace's words sounded cavalier, his eyes had a different look. She had seen briefly a flash of pride but also concern before he covered it.

"Daddy, trust me and trust them. Momma likes Ian," she whispered to her father as the Fitzgeralds congratulated the couple while Andi hissed at her boss.

"Yes, that's what I was afraid of," Jackson sighed, framing her face and seeing so much of her mother. "Can you handle this, Molly?"

Looking over to meet Ian's eyes, she nodded. "It's what I was meant to do."

Keith Jackson was also worried about that, but he couldn't deny that he felt that she would be safe here in this house. As a father of nine children, he just had to hope that he wouldn't live to regret this choice.

“Brightest blessings to you both.” Kerry met his brother’s eyes while Maggie pulled Jessica aside to eye the ring. “I know your fears, Roarke, and I swear to you that Sebastian will never harm them.”

Roarke nodded, shifting a look to his younger brother. “Ian, where’s your shirt?” he asked, seeing the blush form and throwing an elbow back before Ryan could comment. “Kerry, I want the house to be in all our names,” he announced.

Mac and Ryan both quieted to see how that would be handled since it had always been tradition that the house was titled to the first son to be married.

“You said some traditions were made to be changed and I want this one to change,” he went on, seeing Kerry was thinking. “We were all born here and I don’t want to be here without my brothers. I want my daughter to come into this world in this house with her uncles right there.”

Considering, Kerry took a long moment before answering. He had walked to the French doors to gaze outside. As he did, he noticed the shimmering form of the parents again as he had seen them once before.

‘The house belongs to all of you, Kerry,’ Toryn spoke silently. ‘Each generation can make the choice but the house is the center of your strength. Find my will, lad. So much was changed that should not have been because you didn’t have the will that your Mother and I made last.’

‘Find it, handle your emotions before they handle you, and don’t stop believing in her,’ he urged, smiling. ‘Protect them because the danger that comes can’t be stopped though I blame myself for much of it.’

As he watched his parents walk off into the garden, he turned when Mac’s hand nudged his elbow.

“If that’s what you want, Roarke, then that’s how it shall be,” he agreed, laying a hand out. “Your daughter will come into this world safe.”

“Not to mention spoiled as hell,” Mac put in, laying a hand on his brothers. “Although we may have to set ground rules on Ryan teaching her bad habits.”

With a snort, Ryan extended his own hand. “Like I told McCabe, it’s my natural born duty to be a bad role model to baby brothers and nieces or nephews,” he argued. He glanced at Roarke to say something but changed his mind at the last minute.

“I think it’s neat, having a baby niece,” Ian grinned, noticing Ryan’s hesitation but not commenting on it. “I appreciate what you did for me and for Molly.”

Roarke was the final one to lay his hand out and heard a gasp from Molly as the shower of lights came from the center. "Ian, that's our job as big brothers," he replied, adding. "We will survive this and Sebastian will get what he's owed for all the pain he's caused, because I want him gone before my baby is born."

"*Aontaim* (Agreed)," they all spoke as the lights settled and Kerry held back as Roarke went to let Maggie gush over him and Molly was trying to get her father off the topic of her shirt.

"How long do you think we have?" Mac asked seriously from beside him.

"He won't take being defeated twice lightly," Kerry mused, watching his brothers.

Twice they had defeated Sebastian. Two fifths of the circle of Light was complete but Kerry understood that each test to come would just get harder.

"After we celebrate not only this win but also Roarke and Jessica's engagement, we need to talk about things, Mac," he sighed, handing his brother the letter from the Mayor.

Reading it, Mac frowned. "I don't think it would be good," he replied, a feeling that this letter wasn't the only thing bothering his brother. "Our first performance was at that festival and our last one was too. That's too many memories to bring up to them."

"Aye, but it seems like memories of all kind will be haunting us," Kerry muttered, walking away as Deirdre carried in a tray with drinks. "Those thoughts are for later, tonight is for blessings. I won't ruin that for them."

Mac looked to where Ryan was exchanging growls with Andi and sighed. He and Kerry each had issues to exploit, but Ryan could be hurt bad when his turn came.

"So, we just make sure he goes last," he decided, grinning as Maggie handed him a glass of champagne. He wondered how hard it would be to get her out of this before he fell any harder.

As toasts were given and the Fitzgerald manor returned to a state of peace, none inside were aware of the silver owl sitting in a tree just outside of the property line that seemed to glare toward the manor until it flew off with thoughts of next time.

Epilogue

“Twice now I’ve been beaten by children,” Sebastian scowled into a swirling pool. His face had healed from the last attack but he showed more scars and his hatred for Torny Fitzgerald’s sons simmered violently.

“We’ve allowed them to get the upper hand by underestimating them,” Kathleen Fitzgerald spoke from the edge of the pool, trailing a nail into the water as it settled on her grandsons. “We believed that Roarke and Ian, because they were the youngest, would be the easiest to defeat. Now we have a better idea on how to handle them.”

He glanced at her, knowing that while his hatred was simmering for the boys, her own was outright dangerous. “Roarke and Ian have completed their circles, and while they can still be used, I can’t focus on them totally.”

“Leave Roarke to me because I will still have his death,” she promised firmly, smiling. “Ian’s a babe. He’s not an issue so we shall leave him and the child witch alone for now.

“Kerry, Mac, and Ryan each will be hard to task but not impossible for they each have their own weaknesses and problems to cope with.” Kathleen looked up to meet his eyes. “You have your weapons, so do I, and I vow that I will have the prophecy destroyed and what we both desire before that British whore can bring the next generation of Fitzgeralds into this world.”

Considering, Sebastian tossed a stone into the water to see which image it would show. “Well, well, this should be more fun,” he smiled at her. “I look forward to my next meeting with Torny’s sons and this time not even intervention from the Fairies will save them,” he vowed, striking a hand as the image in the water dispelled, as only he would know which son of Fitzgerald would be his next target.

The End.....for now

Watch for Ryan’s story coming next in the Celtic Evil series.

Author Biography

Sierra Rose is a pen name for the author. She was born, raised, and still lives in the rural Ohio Valley. Ms. Rose's background is Hungarian, French, and Irish.

A 1993 graduate of Buckeye Local High School, she strongly believes that if one holds onto their dreams they can accomplish them.

She has no professional writing background except for an avid love for books and for writing. Aside from penning the Celtic Evil series, she also writes in the action genre with a series titled S.E.A.L. Team Omega. The first title in that series is also published and available.

She resides in Ohio with her family, three spoiled cats, and a smei-fierce Beagle who likes to think he is a pit-bull.

For more information on the author, her titles and more, see her website: <http://sierra-rose-books.webs.com/>

Coming Soon:

Celtic Evil: A Fitzgerald Brothers Novel: Ryan

The third born son, the third Fitzgerald who will face his destiny and secrets he believed long buried as Sebastian returns with a bitter vengeance.

Ryan had long ago made peace that he'd never have the life he had originally dreamed of but when a part of that past is disturbed he finds himself fighting not only the evil Warlock seeking the death of his family but also his inner demons.

Andrea McCabe has made up her stubborn mind to stay with her employer until she learns just what it was that brought her into a part of his life that she had never suspected existed.

Unknown to either, Sebastian and his allies has tricks up their sleeves that will force this two hot-headed people to learn to co-exist or perish. As secrets from Andi's past returns, Ryan must find a way to overcome years of burying his own fears to confront them and the secrets that he would rather his brothers never learn.

To do this, he will need to accept the help of a woman he desires but one that he has sworn to never involve in fear of his past repeating itself.