

CELTIC EVIL

A FITZGERALD BROTHERS NOVEL:

Roarke

By

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Celtic Evil: A Fitzgerald Brother Novel: Roarke

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Prologue

Deep within ancient walls of a stone fortress long thought forgotten a hand waved over wrinkled and aged paper with text written in a tongue no longer used.

“ ‘A circle of light, a circle of five. Five into one, one becomes five to unite the circle and protect the light.’ ”

The hand waved again and pages turned to ash as the man sneered. “Rubbish. All it will take to break the chain is for one to fall.”

Appearing in his 60’s with well-kept white hair and healthy for his age, the man walked to a pool of water near a fire. Flicking a hand toward the pool, images formed of the past and present.

“Fifteen mortal years have gone by since the last solstice, since the last time the circle was almost shredded. My ancient foe gave his life to save it then. This time, will those born from him and his witch have the strength to stop it or will one of them fall?”

Images flashed in the pool before him until settling on five men, all sharing the smoky eyes that came from their father. With a sneer, the ancient witch known only as Sebastian took five stones from his pocket and cast his spell before dropping them into the now swirling water.

“Let us see how strong the sons of Torny Fitzgerald have become since they’ve been apart this decade and a half. Go, my minions.”

The water boiled and the man laughed as he sets in motion events that would kill him or those who he has hated for years.

CHAPTER ONE

Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland:

“I don’t see how you can be so calm. This is the first major rehearsal of the play, in front of the whole drama club.” Molly Jackson, a freshman at Dublin’s Trinity College, complained to her companion as they strolled across the campus toward the outdoor amphitheater.

Originally from New Orleans, Louisiana but grew up in Boston, the perky, highly energetic black girl with curly black hair and deep brown eyes loved Trinity College and the city of Dublin but had a hard time fitting in a lot of times because she had a tendency to be over-talkative at times.

It often amazed classmates and teachers alike that her best friend was the young man currently walking along with her as he was a complete opposite in many ways.

“Been there, done that.” Ian Fitzgerald loved that quote he’d heard on television once and loved using it when he could, especially when he knew it annoyed Molly.

At 18, Ian was a junior at Trinity since he had entered a full year earlier than most did. Majoring in drama while in college, he often felt he’d been on stage since he’d been born and in many ways he’d be right.

The youngest of the singing Fitzgerald Brothers, he’d been on stage with his older brothers at the age of two but hadn’t sang publicly or even been united with all four brothers in 15 years. Not since the funeral of their parents had he seen all his brothers at once.

Ian didn’t recall his early years or much about his family. His basic memory was of growing up in Dublin with distant cousins Sybil and Brandon Sullivan.

As their only child, he knew he had had more than most and even more than his brothers, so he didn’t question too much.

At 5’6 with wavy blond hair that the sun often turned to a lighter color and reached his shoulders, he was used to the girls at school staring at him. In fact, he was often making his classmates upset by turning away dates but Ian just wasn’t ready for that. He dated when he wanted, did well in his classes and loved acting.

His bright smile and smoky gray-blue eyes were also another plus he knew but he was happy that Molly just liked him for himself. Ian was also happy that Molly didn’t mind and understood his need to sometimes talk about other things.

“So, still having the dreams?” she asked after they’d past a group of students.

Having grown up in New Orleans with a grandmother who was a devout voodoo priestess, Molly understood a lot about dreams and had understood the one thing about Ian that very few others even knew.

Setting his satchel of books down to pick up a fallen feather, Ian sighed. “Yeah, they come every night now.” He admitted his Irish accent still present even though he could dispel it when he acted. “Don’t like ‘em.”

“Talk to the Sullivan’s about them?” the girl asked carefully. Being careful to phrase that right since she knew that even though her friend had been a toddler when his parents died he never considered his foster parents as his real ones.

“Nope, they’d never understand.” Ian blew the feather into the air but felt something change close to them. “Sybil and Bran are great and they’ve given me everything I could have wanted but they’re too modern to understand things like that.”

Molly was about to reply when something made her turn to look at the stage and she barely repressed the scream. “Ian!” she gripped his arm hard but knew already her friend was looking.

His eyes had caught something and when he looked, Ian nearly blinked his eyes right out of his head. Staring at the outdoor stage as it burned and his fellow classmates screamed, or dropped to roll on grass running red with blood, he stared.

“My God! We have to get....” Molly started to run forward but soon found herself pulled back. “Ian, we need to help them! Get....” She stopped when she had spun to look and saw that her friends’ eyes had gone almost totally to smoke. “Ian?”

“It’s not real, Molly.” He replied quietly, already sure of that even as he felt the pain in his head start to build. “Nobody but us is even seeing that.”

Still not positive, Molly stared harder at the stage but could still only see her friends but deep inside she could also sense something else. “What’s causing it?” she whispered, looking around but only hearing the loud annoying cawing of a huge bird in a tree not far from them.

Knowing her Irish friend would understand her question, Molly didn’t have to explain it since she was one of the few people on campus that also knew that aside from acting and singing, Ian’s other interest was magic. However, she didn’t know why a Dublin raised boy knew so much or had such interests.

Ian had heard his American friend’s question but was busy fighting the building migraine in his head and trying to ignore the buzzing caw-caw from the bird when the bird’s tone actually changed, yet he realized only he could hear the change.

Looking closer at the bird, Ian’s eyes narrowed as he focused deeper as his hand closed on the claddagh medal he always wore.

Sitting high in the tree while the stage seemed to burn, the bird’s burning yellow eyes seemed to stare into the boy and his caws turned to words only Ian could hear.

“You were born of the Five. Five into one, one to become five but it only takes one to fall and break the circle.” It seemed to crow, the voice harsh as the flames below grew. “It only takes one weak soul to break the chain. Will that one be you, Ian Brandon Callum Fitzgerald? Will it be you who breaks as your worthless father did before you?”

Fingers clenched tighter on the medallion he wore as it dawned on Ian what was causing the vision and probably his dreams of late. Not sure of all the answers yet, he was aware that this bird was apart of it and he didn’t like it.

“Go back where you came from, demon.” He spoke through the loud bird caws, feeling his hand warm on the medal as he threw out his other hand that had been in his pocket and the small stone he’d blessed in his mind hit the bird in the chest and it exploded with a scream. “And leave me alone.” He finished in a whisper.

Staring at where the crow was sitting, Ian finally shook himself back to reality when Molly began shaking his shoulder.

“What the hell was that?” she demanded, knowing she’d missed something just by how pale her friend was. “Ian?”

Not sure how to answer, Ian could recall his foster parents talking once about his real parents and the real reason they had died. “Fifteen years is a hell of a long time to keep something at bay.” He muttered looking at his medal and feeling the warmth go through him.

Reaching for his satchel, Ian looked at Molly and read her concern for him. “I need to go, Molly.”

Blinking at his sudden change and never hearing this tone from the usually easy-going Irishman before, Molly frowned. “What? Why? Where?” she asked all in one breathe as she jogged to catch back up to him. “What about the play?”

“I have an understudy. Professor Yates can get Willie to do it and he’ll understand.” Ian replied, not ready to tell her the rest but if Molly was one thing he knew it was obstinate.

Stopping shortly from the Administration building, Ian finally sighed. “I need to go to County Kerry to Fitzgaren to see my brother.”

“I thought you were raised away from them.” Molly frowned, sensing his unease. “What happened with the bird, Ian?”

“My foster parents and my Da’s mother told me my parents were killed in an accident on Skelling Michael Island the day they died.” He turned to look at the sky and tried not to consider the pain this was bound to bring.

Molly sat down next to him, frowning. “That’s what the talk around the campus always said.” She blushed when she saw his look. “Your parents did have five famous singing sons so their deaths got some attention I take it when it happened.”

“Kerry was the famous one.” Ian laughed then turned serious. “I was about eight, five years after they died, when I heard Sybil and Brandon talking one night about how they were concerned about how safe I was since no one knew how long my Da had managed to shield us from the evil that killed him and Mum.”

Thinking on this caused Molly to frown deeper. “Your father died...” She stopped to think of the right word.

“I only know certain things but I think Kerry would know more and that bird’s quoting about ‘the Five’ means something so I need to go find out.” Ian sighed, shrugging. “Worse thing to come out of it is I find out I’m bloody crazy.”

Molly watched her friend leave and knew deep inside that whatever else Ian Fitzgerald was, crazy was not one of them.

Fitzgaren, County Kerry, Ireland:

The Irish town of Fitzgaren not far from Kenmare in County Kerry named for the first Fitzgerald family that had settled there when it was founded back in the 1600's.

It has always been said that due to the town's proximity to the Druid Circle of stones that the land had magical powers. These days most of that talk was only in whispers but the older folk who remember way back when still recall events. Still recalls whispers and are wary of speaking ill of any of the family, be it living or dead.

Outside of the town proper set the original Fitzgerald home, on the land where a house has always set. This last great house was built some 200 years prior by Angus Fitzgerald for his young bride Molly and passed from son to son until finally Sean Fitzgerald and his wife Kathleen took up residence and then their son Torny and finally to its current owner and sole resident, Kerrigan Fitzgerald.

It was a large three-story manor with over 120 rooms with many outbuildings and a private stable. The encompassing wooded area with a stone circle of its own and a private cemetery.

The eldest of Torny and Brenna Fitzgerald's five sons, it was Kerry's gift for song that started his life in music. Fabled all over Ireland and the world, he sang with his brothers until the age of 19 when it all changed with one fateful day.

Now at 34, Kerry mainly kept to himself in the family manor in the small Irish town his ancestors created. He worked private businesses or investments mainly as amusements or take his mind off troubles and as he stepped outside to the cobblestone patio that was filled with roses and other flowers planted by his beloved mother and tended to by the housekeeper he knew trouble was brewing closer than he liked.

A cool breeze blew his stylishly short blond hair away from smoky gray-blue that was also a Fitzgerald trait. Eyes that could go too near obsidian black with anger. They could also go to pure smoke with power that he had trained himself to keep in check.

Pausing to adjust a vase of white roses, he caught his reflection and blinked. He knew he resembled his father by looks with his eyes and face but his light hair came from his mother, as did his temperament.

He was tall at 6'3 with an athletic build that the regular daily workouts kept trim. His tanned face had a strong jaw and a firm mouth that always seemed more serious these days.

"G'morning lad." The bright cheerful voice of Deirdre O'Connor spoke from the patio table where the ever-present housekeeper was setting up breakfast.

The short, stocky older woman had been a presence in Kerry's life since he'd been a baby and since the events 15 years prior she'd been even more vital to him.

“Just a guess I’d be eating outside this morning?” he asked curiously, his voice still carrying the accent of his birth even though his tone could change easily.

“You always eat breakfast on the patio on Tuesday’s, boyo.” She replied, sitting glasses of fresh orange juice and strong coffee in front of him. “Just like your Da you are, Kerry.”

Sitting down slowly at this, the innocent comment made him think of the dreams he’d been having and knowing the inevitable visit from his paternal grandmother was coming closer.

“How much like him am I, Deirdre?” he asked curiously, interest not on the warm breakfast she was serving but on the memories he had of his parents eating on this very patio, too many memories.

Sitting the tray down on a cart next to the table, the older Irishwoman took a long look at this boy she’d helped bring into the world and saw his worry.

Patting her graying red hair as she took a seat next to him, she gently laid a hand on his arm. “Your Da was a great and gentle man, Kerry.” She began easily, a soft smile forming as she recalled his parents. “Toryn loved life to its fullest and he loved his family. He’d be proud of you.”

“Would he be proud that I let her take his sons away?” Kerry countered bitterly; the one thing he hated himself for was also the biggest thing he despised Kathleen Murphy Fitzgerald. “That I haven’t seen all my brothers together in this house in 15 years.”

“Your Mum and Da would know if it’s meant to happen it’ll happen, laddie.” The older woman replied, not sure what to say to comfort a man who was like a son to her.

Kerry scowled into his coffee, wishing he could see that clearly but his gift of sight wasn’t always clear and what it had been showing him these days he could do without.

About to ask about the new mare that was due to be brought in this week, Kerry was suddenly brought short by the wave of pain searing through his head as the clear blue morning sky darkened with black clouds and howling winds.

“Well, this storm certainly blew in quick.” Deirdre spoke over the howling winds as she grabbed for a plate of food. “You get yourself in before it starts....”

“It’s not real.” Kerry sighed, reaching for his coffee to sip when a strong gust of wind like a hand slap took it from his grip. “Not wise.” He spoke coolly as his tone began to frost over.

Deirdre had heard that tone before in her former employer but not in Kerry. At least not in awhile so as she started to turn toward him the large shadow at the edge of the woods caught her attention. “Lord preserves us.” She whispered, automatically crossing herself. “Kerry, do ye see...”

The hand on her arm that gently nudged the woman behind him said that the master of the house had indeed seen the creature of shadow standing on the outside of the main property line.

“The land’s been protected by circles cast by generations of my family so you aren’t coming any closer than you have.” His voice had gone to icy frost with power that came from both sides of his family; gray-blue eyes were starting to change. “I’d back off if I were you, mate.”

Wind kicked up and swirled as the shadow’s red eyes seemed to glow with hate but even as Deirdre started to gasp, Kerry’s hand that bore a ring passed down from his father raised and the wind stopped.

“Child’s game.” He sneered. “You want to impress me, try something else.”

“Your baby brother has more power than you, boy.” The creature seemed to speak from the wind.

Kerry felt his blood run cold then his eyes went to slits. “Mind your tongue, demon and leave my land.”

A mocking laughter came from around them, as the wind seemed to sing. “You were born the eldest of the five. Five into one, one to become five but it will take only one to fall to break the circle.” It taunted, loudly. “The weak one will fall. Will you fall this time, Kerrigan Douglas Nolan Fitzgerald?

“Named for the whore that brought you into this world, will it be you who falls this time as your weak-willed father fell 15 years ago protecting her and the brat?” it asked in a sneer.

Feeling his temper starting to spike, Kerry knew with a sudden burst of clarity what this was and suddenly felt weak done to his bones. “You have no power here nor does your master. Leave now and tell Sebastian that my father stopped him for 15 years and he should stay where he is because he will not win.”

Smoky eyes showed with power as Kerry’s hand moved and lightning flashed to strike the shadow in its heart. “My father and mother gave their lives to protect what was theirs and he still won’t hurt them.” He murmured to himself as the sky cleared and he sat down heavily.

“Kerry?!” Deirdre was by his side with water and concern. She hadn’t seen or heard the entire event but knew by the way his eyes were still slit and his fingers sparking that something major had happened. “Are you alright?!”

After several shaky breaths, Kerry finally was able to shake off the past and look at the woman. “I’d prepare some rooms, Deirdre.” He sighed, standing uneasily a moment before regaining his balance and heading for his private rooms in the upstairs.

Before the confused housekeeper could ask for whom, Kerry paused to look back with an odd look of mixed emotions. “For the first time in 15 years, this house will have all five of my parents’ sons in it.”

“Blessed be.” The older woman breathed at that thought, unsure of how that would be and knowing that it could cause more problems.

“I need to examine my own damn bloody head for this.” It was hard not to hear the grouching voice muttering to his self as he crossed the yard from the stables.

The voice was strong and with a light and natural Irish accent but seemed to match the rugged build of the tall and lean man it matched.

Patrick ‘Mac’ Fitzgerald easily vaulted over the stone fence of his patio to see the reason he was muttering to himself already setting up a tape recorder.

“Your cook said I could come on out and set up, Mr. Fitzgerald.” A soft, lilting musical voice called his way as Mac approached the table.

Maggie Cavanaugh was a freelance reporter for a local newspaper from Mayo who had been badgering him for months for an interview and for some reason this time Mac gave in and allowed the young woman into his private home in Cork.

Mac had done enough research on her to know she was a decent writer or else he wouldn’t have agreed to talk to her but he hadn’t been expecting the 5’4 ball of energy with long wild and curly red hair that was waiting on him.

“Yeah, well she’s not much on guests so you’re lucky she showed you this far.” He shrugged, sitting in a chair across from Maggie to watch her set up some equipment but what intrigued him most were the glasses she kept pushing aside.

“Near or far-sighted?” he asked offhandedly, figuring it was probably the former since she had spotted him a good five yards away.

Maggie blinked bright green eyes as she paused to think then she remembered the glasses. “I’m near-sighted, really but I only use ‘em when I’m working.” She replied, sitting back in the chair to look closer at her host.

A professional writer and reporter, she’d done a lot of research into the Fitzgerald family in general and the 2nd born son in particular.

He was better looking than she’d been expecting. He seemed more rugged with long legs. His dark blond hair, cut very short, had streaks of a lighter blond running in it and.

She knew from family sources about his singing career with his brothers and that it had stopped when he’d been 16. The information since was sparse and muddled except he grew up in County Cork with relatives and was very diverse in his occupations.

Mac sat and waited, figuring on and amused by what she was doing. “So, what makes me so interesting to your paper that you’d spend months badgering my office?” he finally asked, a small pull in his mind putting him off slightly.

Looking up with a genuinely honest and chipper smile, Maggie just grinned at him. “You’re interesting.” Was her reply, opening a small notebook. “You were a member of the famous Fitzgerald brothers who even sang for the Queen.”

“I was eight and hardly remember that.” Mac shrugged it off, reaching for a glass of tea on the table and shooting a look that clearly spoke volumes but if the reporter caught it she chose to ignore it.

“You’ve got licenses in medicine, law and veterinary medicine.” Maggie went on easily, looking up. “You seem to want to be a lot of things.”

Mac’s smile was easy, the one he used when wanting to distract. “I get bored easily so I have a lot of ways to go.” He poured her tea out of manners his mother pounded into him.

“You stopped singing when you were 16.” Her eyes took on a curious look. “Around the same time as when your parents died.”

This time his smile stayed but it tightened, as did his eyes that Maggie saw actually spark. “That’s a closed subject.” He replied evenly, refusing to speak to anyone about that.

Sensing that he meant it, Maggie let it drop. Figuring it time to change the subject, she looked to the fields. “You raise horses?”

“Sometimes, mostly it’s a hobby.” On safer ground, Mac followed her eyes but he also felt something in the distance that was making his lunch twist in his stomach. “We toured the States once and my father showed us some Appaloosas on a farm in Virginia. I like them a lot.”

The woman felt that love when he spoke of the horses but also caught the loss when he spoke of his family.

After a couple minutes of silence, she coughed and looked at her book again. “My editor gave me a couple mandatory questions he insisted I ask you so I’ll apologize in advance.” She laughed lightly but couldn’t quite cover the unease she had.

“Uh-oh, that’s never good.” Mac grinned to put her at ease because he did like this quirky girl and sensed her unease. “Ask away. Trust me, I’ve been asked everything.”

Maggie wasn’t sure about that but took a deep breath. “Well, the main thing he wanted me to ask was how you manage to do it all?”

“All?” Mac’s brow rose. “Like what?”

“Do everything you do, travel like you do and still manage to be.... a practicing witch?”

If he was startled by the question outwardly, Mac didn’t let on as he grinned easily at the woman but inside his gut was twisting.

“Your editor must have a lot of guts to try that since it’d be real easy for a libel suit on that one.” He sipped his tea in order to gain some time, to gauge how much this perky redhead may actually know.

Maggie took a deep breath but didn't flinch from the cold eyes that were now aimed at her. "How right is he?" she countered then raised a hand to begin ticking off points on her fingers. "You were born in Fitzgaren in County Kerry. The town was founded by your ancestors and legend has it the Fitzgerald family has long held the power. Your mother was Brenna Kerrigan whose own mother never made any denial that she was a..."

"My mother is off-limits." This time there was no denying the edge to Mac's voice but before he could go on a sudden snarling was heard from the fields where a lovely white stallion was heard making all kind of noise.

Looking away from the equally firm green eyes, Mac stood to see what the issue was when he saw the large black wolf in the fenced off area with the horse.

"What the bloody hell?" He whispered, instinct had him laying a hand on the patio fence to jump it and try to help the horse when the wolf raised its head and blazing red eyes stared into his and he felt the blow to his chest.

"Oh My God!" Maggie screamed as the wolf jumped on the horse and began to shred it but she also knew she couldn't leave Mac in this shape as she dropped to her knees next to him, shocked to see what she was but also shocked to see his eyes.

His smoky gray-blue eyes had gone totally to smoke and his words, muttered to himself, were in Gaelic. A language she only knew a few words.

"The wolf..." the horses scream was ringing in her ears but then so was something else, like the taunting laughter of a child. "It's not real." She slowly came to realize, grabbing at Mac's arm. "It's not real, is it?"

Not hearing her, Mac focused fully on the wolf as he shook off the blow. Leaning on the wall, his eyes sharpened to stare at the big black wolf tearing into his horse but he could hear above the noise the words in the winds.

"You were born of the five. Five into one, one to become five but it only takes one to fall and break the circle." The taunting child crooned from somewhere. "Which will it be? Who is the weak one this time? Will you fall, Patrick MacKinley Fitzgerald? Will you fall like your whore mother and coward of a father?"

Mac's eyes flashed but Maggie's grip on his arm held him back as she threw something from her huge bag into the tree line.

"You can't enter here, monster!" she shouted defiantly, eyes dark with anger that whatever this was would use that which this man loved to hurt him. "Get away or...."

“Hush.” Mac’s tone was quiet but firm as he edged her away from the wall to face the now snapping wolf but it hadn’t come any closer. “You won’t win by taunting someone who grew up with the brothers I did, demon. Go away and try that on someone else.”

The wolf seemed to sneer but the boy on the fence looked straight into Mac’s eyes. “Three have refused my master, two there are to go and two with the temper of your father. Which of your brothers will accept the offer that your despised father spurned? It only takes one to fall to break a circle.”

It was several seconds of uneasy silence after both wolf and boy had vanished did Mac breath fully then it was a harsh Irish oath. “Shit.” He muttered, slumping down in a chair then remembered the reporter. “You saw that?” he asked, wondering how hard it would be to get her to forget.

Maggie was staring at him in plain shock but just as Mac was about to pour a glass of whiskey, she sat down. “You’re one of the five.” It wasn’t a question but a statement in almost awe.

“What?” Mac blinked, hoping she wasn’t catching onto too many things.

“What that thing said, about the five into one and all that.” She gestured. “You’re one of the five that forms the circle said to shield the world from evil.”

Knowing his day couldn’t get much worse; Mac poured himself a glass of whiskey and drank it with a hiss. “What’s a nice Mayo reporter doing knowing about such paranormal things like that?” he tried to make light but his chest was hurting too much and his head was pounding.

“My Gran’s Book of Shadow had a whole section in it about ‘the five’” she replied, still shocked at everything she’d seen.

“Yeah well most of...” Mac stopped in mid-sentence to stare at her. “Book of Shadows?” he repeated warily. “You’ve seen an actual book of Shadows?”

Maggie shrugged. “My Gran on my Mum’s side had a Book of Shadows which came to me after her death. She also kept this big book on you and your brothers.” She smiled slightly with dimples that winked. “Always said ‘those dang Fitzgerald lads were of the five’”

“Your Grandmother on your Mum’s side?” Mac stared hard, for the first time actually looking deeper, and again started muttering under his breath. “Oh, this is just bloody great.” He slumped back and closed his eyes, “You’re a bloody witch.”

“I prefer the term ‘user of everyday practical magic.’” Maggie shot back with a sniff then blushed as he just lifted a brow at her. “Alright, but I haven’t really practiced seriously. I mostly know enough to know which spells to use to not blow my brothers up from time to time.”

“Well isn’t that just fine and dandy then.” Mac muttered, making a choice that could doom them both. “Well, I hope you like traveling cause you’re about to meet my family.” He decided.

“What?” Maggie stared at him, “Why?”

“First off because you saw the same thing I did which no one should have been able to so that means you could be in danger.” Mac replied then sighed. “And second, because you’re a hereditary witch with a Book of Shadows on the one thing that we need in order to stop another disaster.”

Still reeling at this sudden turn it took Maggie a second to realize he’d left the patio. “Wait a bloody minute.” She ran after Mac to find him in the kitchen giving orders to the cook. “According to my sources, all five of you haven’t been in one place in...”

“Fifteen years.” Mac finished with a dry laugh. “Kerry tries to stay in touch but all five of us haven’t been in the same place since the day our parents were put in the ground so I won’t promise it’ll be a friendly reunion given Ryan’s attitude.”

“What was that thing?” she finally had to ask. “If it could break the circle, so to speak, why hasn’t it before?”

Mac paused to consider that. It had been something he’d studied and thought on a lot since he’d been 16 years old.

“Kerry’s the oldest so he’ll know more but from my point of view, it couldn’t because of something either one of or both of my parents did on the island 15 years ago when they died.” He sighed, lightly touching a photo on a shelf. “Whatever that was, belonged to what killed them and it knows it’ll take only one of us to either give in to it or die for it to win.”

Maggie didn’t care for that much but she considered. “So who does it consider the weakest?”

Surprised by how fast she was catching on, Mac shrugged. He knew by what the boy had said what would happen. “‘Two that are left with my father’s temper.’ He repeated, rolling his eyes. “Ryan and Roarke both got our Da’s temper when it’s unleashed and both have weaknesses to exploit but as to who would give in...” he only shrugged. “Who knows and I hope Kerry’s ready for company and has answers.”

Maggie Cavanaugh began to wonder if she shouldn’t have left this assignment alone while she wondered around the downstairs.

“You said your Gran had a book on us.” Mac came back down the stairs with an overnight bag slung on his shoulder. “Just clippings of a devoted fan or...”

“She always seemed interested and had all the albums your family put out until the last one.” Maggie considered that question. “When it was announced that you wouldn’t be together anymore due to a death in the family she didn’t seem surprised. In fact, she seemed to be expecting it cause she told my Ma once that it was contained for now but...”

Mac swore silently under his breath. “Kerry had to know. She had to know.” He was angry but fought to control it as he saw the young woman’s confusion. “Short of it.... A warlock tried to kill my brother 15 years ago and my parents got in the way. They died, Roarke lived and we found ourselves

yanked apart. My theory is, on that island 15 years ago my parents, before they died, cast some sort of shield to bind the evil but something that powerful can only be held so long and it looks like it's loose and God help us all if it can't be stopped again."

Monte Carlo, Monaco:

A normal night in the small country usually meant calm seas, clear skies and crowds of tourists or visitors crammed onto the beaches or the casinos.

World known for its Royal Family and also for its casinos, it's where a lot of people came when seeking to lose themselves for awhile in noise, in the luck of cards or slots or table games. Some went away with much less than they arrived with and then those very few came away from a night at the tables with much more.

Then there were the ones who broke even when luck just couldn't seem to make up her mind. That was certainly how security consultant for the rich and famous, Ryan Fitzgerald, was seeing the night.

Finishing a security upgrade job for a wealthy client in the small country, the Irish born native had decided to stick it out the weekend to see if his luck would hold up in the casinos.

Normally the 6' Irishman always seem to have the fabled Irish luck riding on his narrow shoulders when he gambled. Ryan gambled as he liked to live, hard and fast, and it usually paid off.

While playing cards or anything he won both the pot and the women since he'd never had trouble attracting attention from the opposite sex with his slender, rangy build and chiseled upper body. Women were usually flocking around but on this trip, he barely broke even and wasn't even remotely interested in the few females he noticed.

"Well this night bloody well sucked." He muttered darkly as he walked through the casino parking lot to where his car was waiting.

A naturally cocky man who seemed arrogant at most times, Ryan knew that was how others saw him and accepted that easily. In fact, he usually played into it with the cocky tone with his natural accent that came or went depending on what he wanted. He didn't care and hadn't for many years.

He was a single man who often looked out for himself, did his job well and played when he wanted to and how he wanted without having to care what others thought.

The warm breeze blew his thick long black hair into his smoky gray-blue eyes and he shoved it out with a rare show of bitter impatience.

Ryan accepted his poor showing in cards may have been due to his temper and impatience being higher than normal but the recent days had left him rawer than he'd been in years and he didn't care for it or for the blasted dreams.

Almost to his car, Ryan stopped in the lot to look around. Having been in security for awhile now and having had his time in learning the ins and out of being a thief he knew when to accept his 6th sense

was warning him and right then both his 6th and 7th senses were screaming and it was that last one that really irked him.

“Alright, we don’t really want to try this crap on me.” He spoke clearly and firmly, all the arrogance he felt coming out in the tone as his eyes shifted around him.

“You always were impatient weren’t you, luv?” the soft musically lilted tone from the edge of the dark parking lot nearly brought the strong, stubborn man to his knees. “Always knew what you wanted and went for it.”

Ryan’s breath had caught in his throat as the voice finally stepped into the mild light offered by the bright moonlight. “Annie.” He breathed, his natural accent coming back on instinct.

Facing him was a lovely girl with pale skin and nearly white blond hair that hung down to her narrow waist. Dressed in a pale blue dress with a flowered apron, she smiled serenely at Ryan.

“Can ye recall all the dreams we had, Ry?” she asked, stopping a few feet from him as her soft tone took on sadness. “All the promises you made to me about the future? How we’d wed and leave Clare behind us.”

His heart still beating wildly in his chest, Ryan’s eyes had looked away from the pale blue eyes facing him. “Aye, I do.” He whispered, fighting both the pain in his heart and the sudden pain in his head.

“You said you loved me and would love me until we died.” Anastasia Cleary spoke sadly, voice hollow. “If you meant it why did you lie to me? Why didn’t we die together?”

“Just overplayed it, mate.” Ryan’s smoky eyes started to grow darker as he lifted his head, the muscles in his strong jaw tight. “You had it right until you played that card cause Annie never doubted my love for her and knew bloody well if I could have saved her I would have. Now get the hell out of my sight!”

His temper had always been a bad thing and Ryan knew it but he wanted the image away but before he could cast the spell in his mind, an invisible fist slammed into his stomach and knocked him down hard.

“Yeah, that’s right. Can’t use a girl as a weapon go for the magic fist?” He sneered, not positive what he was facing and not caring even as he could hear other things in his head.

Another hard blow took his breath and he felt his vision blur and his nosebleed as the power sought to hurt until his temper finally got his feet under him again and his hand shot out to shoot a wave of electric energy from his fingers in a burst like the ones he hadn’t had to use in years.

“Yeah, that was productive.” He chastised himself sourly, trying to get to his feet but feeling too weak.

“You do have your father’s temper don’t you, Ryan Shawn Alaister Fitzgerald?”

Giving up trying to stand, Ryan just slumped back against a pole to see who was speaking and sneered again at the silver haired well-dressed man.

“So I’ve been told by many a person.” He replied, shifting a look and wasn’t surprised to see that the parking lot was still. “So, is this happening in real time or my mind?”

Pleased by the boy’s alertness, Sebastian smiled. “Let us say that none of the mortals wasting their lives inside will know of these events.

“Do you know who I am, Ryan?” he asked curiously.

The migraine was building so he had a bad hunch he did know but he’d never been one to show his hand that easily.

“Well, it’s too early to be the Easter Bunny.” He saw the man eyes flash in annoyance as he grinned through the growing pain. “So I’m guessing a man of your age, the silver hair, and the well-bred voice could only be Mrs. Santa Claus.”

Sebastian’s eyes flashed red but before he could react, Ryan showed he wasn’t quite as defeated as had been thought as a light shove sent the older warlock back a step.

“You may have gained Toryn’s temper but you inherited Brenna’s caustic wit, I see.” He nodded, almost pleased by the defiance. “You loved this girl once, didn’t you?”

“You picked a bad subject.” Ryan warned lowly, refusing to remember how much he had loved Annie and how much it had hurt him when someone had killed her while after him.

“You have much of your father in you, Ryan. Toryn and I were bitter rivals but I respect the way you’ve handled yourself here.” Sebastian watched the boy closely to see he had his attention. “I offered your father a choice long ago. A choice that had he accepted your family wouldn’t have been torn asunder like it has been.”

That caused Ryan to look closer and he missed the warlock’s look. “I can offer you the same choice and by accepting I can give you back your lost love.” Sebastian motioned to the now still image of Annie Cleary. “She died in your arms didn’t she? It was after some self-styled boy who fancied himself a witch attempted an attack on your life. I can return her to you, whole and like she was.”

The night sky had darkened and the calm winds had suddenly began blowing harder but Ryan was only hearing that the only woman in his life that he’d let himself love could be his again.

However as much as that appealed to him, Ryan had been a gambler since he’d been 13 years old and knew that such an appealing offer always had a catch.

“What’s the offer?” he asked casually, feeling the weight on the trinity medal he wore actually heat against his skin.

Confident of his win, Sebastian smiled easily. “Just join my cause, Ryan Fitzgerald.” He held up a smooth hand to help his would be apprentice to his feet. “Accept the offer your father so stupidly

spurned that day on the island when he could have saved your mother and his self by letting fate have its day and all that you wish can be yours.”

Looking fully at the figure of his almost fiancée for a long time, it took a couple minutes for those last words to break through and he looked up.

“So all Da would have had to do was let the brat die that day and he and Mum would have lived and...”

“And your family would still be together.” Sebastian nodded. “You were never told of the awful curse brought on your family the day your brother was born and it would have been lifted if your father would have listened to me and not the woman.”

Staring at the hand offered him, Ryan slowly accepted it but even as the ancient wizard’s fingers closed on his, his eyes went to slits and he tightened his grip.

“The only curse my family had was at times having these powers and the only one who gets to call my baby brother a curse is me.” He gritted, knowing he didn’t have the power to defeat the man responsible for his parents’ death but could sure shake him up.

“My father and mother died to save their son and maybe you thought you could reason to my own fears and weaknesses the one thing you don’t do is mock the real reason my Da gave his life.” Ryan’s eyes flashed and shoved Sebastian away in shock. “My father gave his life to protect his wife and son and he kept you at bay for 15 bleedin’ years so why don’t you go back to hell!”

Sebastian’s eyes blazed red as his anger took hold, not believing he had lost this round to this mortal witch. “Fool!” he screamed, throwing a hand out to lash out and blasted Ryan off his feet and hard to the concrete. “You could have had it all and spared yourself!

“You were born of the five. Five into one, one to become five but it only takes one weak one to fall to break the circle.” He sneered as he opened the portal to leave. “You’ve refused my offer, boy but the weakest one will fall as secrets have yet to be revealed and I know how much guilt he still harbors for the breaking of your family.”

As the wizard disappeared and things began moving in real time again, Ryan was finally able to push himself back up to his feet from that last blast that he was sure gave him a few cracked ribs.

“Damn.” He gritted, lifting his shirt to see the singe marks and bruises then sat against his car hood to consider the last words.

Not always considered the brightest of the five sons Torny Fitzgerald and his wife brought into this world, Ryan was smarter than he let on and right then he knew it didn’t take an Einstein to figure out what the ancient witch had been muttering about.

“Roarke, he means the brat.” He whispered, slamming a fist on his hood as he thought about his younger brother and knowing that it had been Roarke his parent’s had died to save that day and apparently it was time to face it again.

“That’s just bloody great.” He muttered, easing his aching body into the car and keying his cell to call one of his operators.

Hearing the blare of loud music, Ryan literally winced. “Olav, turn that bloody crap off!” he snapped, letting the bright red Lamborghini roar to life and squealed from the lot.

“What’s up, boss?” the big blond Swede asked after turning his music down. “Want the schedule?”

Considering things, Ryan sighed and made a choice that, for once in years, wasn’t based on himself. “No, family stuff’s come up. Tell Andi she’ll have to handle the upgrade to the Baron’s place and all of the coming stuff until I get back in with you.”

Surprise was clear as Olav Vanhoove, one of the security agents who worked with Ryan, took this in and knew that rarely did his boss ditch jobs. “You need help?”

“Not unless you know a bloody good demon hunter.” Ryan laughed, and then turned serious. “If I do, I’ll call and mate?” he paused to remind the man. “Tell Andi not to slap anyone this time.”

His friend was laughing as he hung up but Ryan could not get rid of the dull pain in his head, swearing under his breath. “Damn it all to hell! That brat better be worth this.”

The French Quarter, New Orleans, Louisiana:

Legends about New Orleans, Louisiana and the French Quarter have abounded since the city first came into creation. Tales of ghosts walking the streets, roaming the halls of the historic and colorful homes were also plentiful as well as other undead creatures.

Many put the stories off to legend or just colorful tales to please the flocks of tourists. One visitor wasn’t sure how true the stories were but considering some of the things he’d seen and done, a few ghosts didn’t bother him. So long as they weren’t his own.

Relaxing on a bed in one of the French Quarters more colorful town houses, Roarke Fitzgerald felt at ease. Something he hardly ever was on any given day.

At 26 years of age, he’d been many things so far in his life. The more colorful included a singer, a spy, a security engineer to his current favorite hobby, that of ghost buster.

Tall at 6’2 with a slender athletic build and long legs that carries his natural agility well, he wore his jet-black hair long as it often passed his shoulders or pulled away from eyes that were often a smoky grayish blue color.

Right then those eyes had drifted closed as he lay under an antique white lace canopy that matched the quilt he had stretched his lean frame out on top. Roarke kept his eyes closed as he let his other senses roam the room but smiled as he centered on the other occupant in the room

Roarke had come to the Big Easy to visit friends and do some casual tourist things for once. That had included earlier that day, helping a small boy just learning to play guitar for street money a few chords.

“That little boy will probably be talking about you for weeks.” The soft British accent spoke from the side of the bedroom where a mirrored vanity was located. “If not him then at least his older sister will be.”

That thinly veiled comment made his smile grow slightly since he knew what the opposite sex saw in him since he’d been told for awhile he had an elegant face with an English nose and high cheekbones. He often wished he were plainer looking.

However, right then the attention caused him to grin since he knew it made his friend more than a little jealous. “She was 16 or younger, *a stor* (‘My Dear’). She was a little too young for me.”

Without even looking, he knew the young woman sitting at the vanity was rolling her blue eyes at him. “Jealous?”

“There a reason to be, Romeo?” Jessica Hadley countered with a laugh as she continued to brush her long auburn hair but was pleased to hear Roarke’s laughter.

Her friend had been quiet for a long while and his voice had lacked its usual soothing or musical lilt that came from his Irish accent and that worried her.

“No, never any reason to worry about that.” He replied, finally opening his eyes to watch his 26-year-old friend.

A British girl with natural pale skin and soft blue eyes that tended to change with emotion, Jessica shared many of his own interests so they’d bonded quickly when they’d been kids.

She owned an international company that did quite well but unknown too many others was her work in the anti-terrorist fields. It was a job for the United States DEA agency that had brought her and her main subsidiary team to New Orleans and after it was over they’d asked Roarke to spend some time.

He had known without Cameron telling him that the main reason he’d asked him down was that Jessie was hurt and something else was wrong. That was something else they shared.

Rolling over so that he was now at the bottom of the bed, Roarke let his eyes roam the room before again settling on his friend. “You know, that’s one of the few girly-girl things I’ve ever seen you do.”

Little lights flashed behind her blue eyes but Jessie just narrowed a look at him through the mirror. “Brushing my hair is a way to relax, just because I don’t have a closet full of designer clothes or shoes don’t mean I couldn’t compete with some of the tramps you’ve dated.”

“Don’t doubt it, *a gra*.” Roarke smiled, easing his shirt off since he knew it was just the two of them. “Especially considering I really only plan on dating one woman.”

“Flattery won’t help now, Roarke.” Jessie countered, going back to brushing her hair but watching her friend’s reflection and again seeing the white scars that littered his back from years earlier and knowing where the many others were. “Roarke, are they hurting?”

Rolling off the bed to go close the balcony doors to stop the street noise, he paused next to her to meet her eyes in the mirror. “Let it go, luv.” He read her concern easily, lightly pressing a soft kiss into her hair. “I’m fine, just a slight headache.”

A mild lie he knew but Roarke knew if he told Jessie the headache had been with him for the past several days and had turned into a full-fledged migraine tonight that she’d worry and he didn’t want her to worry.

He sat back on the bed to watch Jessica finish what he knew was a nightly routine. Roarke was silently considering how to go about conning his friend into spending the night in his room, which was something they’d never talked about before when something from the mirror made him look.

The mirror on the vanity was a large oval one that was almost 150 years old and was sure to look different in varying lights but as Roarke’s eyes narrowed to study it harder he found it more difficult to see Jessica’s reflection as it began to cloud over.

“What the bloody?” he whispered, easing forward on the bed as a form began to take shape in the mirror and he found himself looking into green eyes that he remembered so well. “Mum?”

Jessica had been finishing brushing her hair, wincing as a wound on her shoulder pulled slightly she glanced back to see if Roarke had noticed when she frowned at him. “Roarke? What’s wrong?”

Her friend was sitting up in the center of the bed; his one hand flat on the bed while his other was reaching toward something.

Roarke’s skin had always been a healthy tan from his time outdoors but right then it was a near sickly white while his eyes were almost dilated as he stared at her mirror.

“Roarke, what’s wrong?” she asked, shifting on the seat to look at him fully and not liking the sudden feelings in her room. “Roarke!”

After trying to get his attention for several minutes but failing and feeling an uneasy sense of dread getting closer, Jessica keyed the in-house intercom while keeping her eyes on her now trembling friend. “Cam! I need you and Nick up here, now!”

Not able to hear the response from her friend as a sudden squealing came from the radio. Looking at the radio to check it, she felt the cold before she saw the shadow. “Shit!”

Jessica started to swing on the stool to face the growing shadow but didn’t have a chance to move or defend herself as something cold gripped her throat stilling her scream and her powers.

Very oblivious to the events threatening his friend, Roarke was staring into the bright green eyes of his mother as they formed in the ancient mirror.

“Mum?” he asked again, his usually quiet voice going even more so as the image of Brenna Kerrigan Fitzgerald formed in the mirror.

“Hello my brave little boy.” The vision of his mother spoke in her same soft accent that he recalled so vividly and at times so painfully. “It’s been so long, Roarke.”

Blinking his eyes and struggling to breathe, he finally was able to see the solid image. “Are you real?”

The same soft musical laugh he’d grown up hearing and adoring until he was 11. It was his mother’s laugh that he could recall hearing before his nightmare started 15 years earlier.

“Do you doubt your own eyes, boyo?” she asked cheerfully, stepping fully from the mirror and wearing a lovely, form fitting dress in a bright sunny yellow that seem to go perfectly with her blond hair. “Can you doubt your own senses?”

Her long fingers lightly touched his hair as it had done so many years before. “So many doubts and fears you have, little boy.”

“I saw you die so I’m pretty sure I’m dreaming, Mum.” Roarke shook his head, a buzzing beneath his skin trying to get his attention but Brenna’s smile kept his attention.

“Aye, I know you did. It was a tragic event when a child of your age had to see your father and I give our lives up to save you.” A gentle mother’s tone spoke the words but they still made him cringe as the buried guilt began creeping back up.

Among the many other things, he buried in his 26 years, the fact that he’d been told plainly that his parents had sacrificed their own lives for his weighed heavily on him to this day.

“If I could’ve stopped it I would have, Mum.” He whispered the buzzing in his brain really starting to hurt now. “I didn’t want you or Da to die.”

“Oh, I know that my dear heart,” Brenna’s green eyes had flashed something else but her ‘son’ had missed it. “You were but a child and a parent’s sole duty is to their children even if it meant also leaving your brothers to fend for them selves so was it a fair tradeoff?”

The sudden burning tears blinded him but also something else began to burn. “Jessica.” He whispered, shivering as his ‘mother’ gently touched his face.

“The girl isn’t an issue for you, my child.” She soothed with a smile. “I can take all your pain, your fears and guilt away and all the pain your brothers will face soon will also go away.

“Give me your hand come with me to join your father and all will be as it was meant to be.” She told him softly. “No more fears or shame, my little boy because how will Kerry or the lads react if they learn the truth behind all you hide?”

This caused Roarke too nearly recoil and the slight break in contact that caused his mind to hear the scream and the gunshots.

Jessica had been struggling against the cold power that gripped her throat and was slowly pulling the life and power from her even as she saw the shadow close to Roarke. Unable to use her powers that she rarely used or scream for Roarke, the panic was about to set in when the first loud shot was heard hitting the sealed bedroom door but didn't break.

The shot didn't break the door but it did interrupt the focus of whatever had entered the room since she felt its grip lessen slightly.

"Roarke!" the scream was muted and weak but seemed to have some effect when, before she started to lose consciousness, she saw his eyes flicker to pure smoke. "Fight it!"

It was the terror he felt in his mind that caused the young Irishman to shift his attention from his 'mother' to the voice and he finally saw past the gray mists and saw the shadow striking at Jessica from inside the mirror.

"Leave her alone." His tone was low and dull but as he looked toward Brenna, his temper was starting to surface.

"Join your father and...." The shadow woman broke off when the boy broke free of her grip and lunged forward. "No!"

Roarke's action was to both free him self and grab Jessica away from the grip of the shadow creature that was now pulling her toward the mirror. "Leave her alone!" he yelled, emotion more than control causing his powers to break the mirror and the girl to collapse into his arms gasping. "You're not my mother."

The shadow woman smiled cruelly as more shots came through the door. "No, but do you often wonder if she'd hate you for causing such misery to your family?"

Stepping away from them and toward the now open balcony doors, it looked back just as the bedroom door burst in. "You were born of the five. Five into one, one to become five but it only will take one to finally fall to break that accursed circle and free my master.

"You were meant to die that day, Roarke Michael Quinn Fitzgerald and without your brothers you will see that death come soon for why would they suffer the pain for one such as you?" it taunted, eyes dropping to Jessica then back to him. "The Mistress of Shadow and Light cannot protect you as you will end up destroying them all if you don't end it yourself."

A bolt of light and flame shot to the creature's heart just as it vanished with an echoing laugh as Jessica lowered her hand. "Get outta my house, demon." She managed to get out, breath still not wanting to come.

“What in the hell was that thing and why did I put two clips from my magnum in the damn door but it wouldn’t budge?” Cameron Young, the long black haired brown-eyed leader of the Mavericks, demanded as he entered the room warily with his team close behind. “Boss, what the hell’s going on?”

Jessica didn’t have the answers her friend would want or accept but what she did know was that to face what it had been they’d have to go back to the one country that Roarke had refused to go near in years.

“Later.” She waved the upset mercs off to focus on Roarke whose arms were still around her but he’d gone almost totally into himself as he did when in shock or hurt too bad. “It’s alright, luv.” She whispered, feeling his arms pull tighter as they had one time before. “It was wrong and we’ll make it better.”

Cam was sure that was a bold lie as he motioned to his medic to help him.

It took a good couple hours to get Roarke calm enough that he was able to sleep alone or at least so Cam could get Jessica away.

“Answers?” he challenged, hearing his accountant muttering about damages. “Nick said the thing was a conjured demon.”

“We need to take him back to Ireland.” She replied slowly, still feeling the grip on her throat and the evil that was in that room. “That thing knew too much so I think Kerry will be expecting it.”

Knowing what that could mean, Cam rubbed his eyes. “I hate magic crap and especially when it means facing some centuries old wizard with delusions of grandeur.”

“No choice.” Jessica heard the first shout and knew it would be hard on her friend to go home for more than one reason. “It knows how to hurt him. He still has too much guilt and Kerry needs to make things right or....”

“Or we make things right.” Cam smiled, tapping his .357 Desert Eagle Magnum on his palm.

“Call Kerry and tell him.” His employer ordered even as Roarke screamed in terror and Young knew this nightmare was of the day he witnessed his parents murdered in front of him.

“Yep, this should be fun.” The merc leader muttered.

CHAPTER TWO

The house he’d grown up in, had been born in, was unusually tense and quiet since the events at breakfast only a few days prior.

Kerry Fitzgerald knew the stalwart Mrs. O'Connor would do her best to keep things running smoothly and he, himself, made sure things were as normal as possible.

Even if he couldn't get past the dreams of dread that filled his nights and his days with apprehension.

Coming from the upstairs room that were off limits to all save him, Kerry heard the loud roar of what he knew was a speed-crazed death machine of a motorcycle.

He stopped on the second floor patio balcony to watch the neon blue bike roar up the driveway of the manor and skid to a stop with a storm of dust or stone.

The biker slowly looked around as if gauging his environment before removing the helmet that matched the bike's color.

Ian Fitzgerald slowly removed the helmet, leaning his arms on it as he looked around the grounds then at the 2-story manor where he'd been told he'd been born.

Those memories were fuzzy. However, he did have other clearer ones of running free and happy in a huge yard. Laughing as he chased after his older... a sudden buzzing in his brain made him look up too the second floor patio and locked eyes with his oldest brother.

In his 18 years, there had been infrequent visits by his brothers at different times so they weren't strangers to each other yet this time Ian could feel this was different. This visit would change all of them.

Kerry's breath had caught in his throat as he struggled to remind himself that the baby was now an 18-year-old college junior. A slight incline of the head was all he gave before stepping back inside the house.

Deirdre O'Connor had heard the bike and hurried from the kitchen to see what was happening. The look on her young Lord's face warned that it was finally happening.

Taking a deep breath to steady his suddenly unsteady nerves, Ian put his leather riding gloves in his helmet and left it sitting on the seat while he gathered his single travel bag then headed up the dozen massive stone steps to the huge front door.

Wondering if he should knock, find the doorbell or what the correct procedure was for this, the boy was about to knock when it pulled open to reveal a stout looking older woman with graying red hair.

"Um, hello, I'm..." He greeted, seeing and feeling her startled emotions.

"Blessed Saints, laddie, I know who you are." She laughed, nearly in tears as she practically pulled him into the foyer. "The picture of your Sainted Mother you are, Ian Fitzgerald."

Very unsure how to handle a crying woman, Ian was thinking quickly when a hand finally freed him from the woman's grip.

“Don’t scare him away this soon, luv.” Kerry urged, sensing his brother’s anxiety. “I figure the first time Mac has to break up a fight Ryan picks Ian will go back to where it’s sane.”

Shifting to meet eyes that were like his own, he swallowed his nerves. “I should have called.”

“This is your home. You need never call to come home, little brother.” Kerry assured him, holding out a hand then waited.

Manners that Sybil drilled into him caused him to take the offered hand politely but something in the older man’s eyes stopped him from letting go.

Unsure of how the boy grew up in Dublin, Kerry waited to see his eyes and due to the connection the five of them shared soon read his brother’s eyes easily enough; it was easy to see what he was wondering.

“Welcome home, Ian.” Kerry gave a slight pull to just ease one around his brother in a casual welcome hug and didn’t let on when it was returned fully.

Still sniffing, Deirdre reached for the bag. “I’ll take this to your room, lad while Kerry offers you something to drink after that long and dusty drive down.”

Ian blinked and started to say he’d take it but the woman was already hustling away with a brisk efficiency that made the servants he’d grown up with seem slow.

“You’ll never get a word in with her.” Kerry smiled, leading the way into the living room but didn’t go for liquor but reached under a bar for a bottle of water which he tossed at Ian’s nod. “Deirdre’s never happy unless she’s fussing.”

Nodding almost dumbly, he took a couple sips of water as his brother took a sip of the Scotch he’d had then just had to blurt it out.

“I saw a talking crow in Dublin that caught the stage on fire, burned up my classmates and talked about breaking circles and the five. I told it to go to hell and threw my claddagh medal at it then it burst into flame and went away.”

Slowly lowering his glass, Kerry eyes locked on his youngest brothers’ and did a surface scan to get a better gist of what had happened in Dublin.

“Well, I guess that takes away any further doubt.” He murmured, walking to the window in order to calm his nerves. “Sebastian’s back and he’s not wasting any time...”

“This has something to do with what happened 15 years ago, doesn’t it?” Ian asked, although he was sure it did.

Reminding him self, that while it still seems like yesterday to him, Ian had only been three years old the day their parents died and as such wouldn’t know the exact details.

“I’d rather wait for the others so this can be told once.” He rubbed the bridge of his nose where a dull pain was building.

Distracted by some photos on the mantle shelf, Ian looked over his shoulder. “You really think they’ll come?”

“Until you came and told me what you’d seen I had my doubts but considering what I saw and heard to what you saw then I’m 95% certain that he’d also send these images or minions to visit the others as well.” Kerry assured him, hearing the sounds of a car pulling to a stop. “Guess we’ll find out.”

Before either had gotten close to the foyer, they heard the front door open and slam then a voice that made the eldest brother feel odd.

“Kerry! Me, you, words now about some bloody wizard paying me a visit at a real bad time!” Mac’s voice echoed in the tone he had used to use when breaking up their bickering brothers.

“If Mac’s this mad I can’t wait until Ryan shows up.” Kerry muttered, stepping out to meet his brother but was stopped by the fiery haired pixie like woman following him outraged.

Maggie Cavanaugh had jumped from the car and hurried after Mac and couldn’t believe that he was yelling in a house he hadn’t been in for such a long time.

“Didn’t you have any manners growing up?” she chastised in a hushed tone. “You can’t just barge into your brothers’ home and start yelling.”

Patrick ‘Mac’ Fitzgerald had grown more on edge the closer he and the reporter had gotten to his birthplace and upon stepping over the threshold of the massive main door a part of him was once again 16 years old.

“I was born in this house, Miss Cavanaugh so no matter what else it’s still part mine.” Mac shot back at her, pulling up short when Kerry stepped from the living room and his eyes narrowed. “Is he back?”

Knowing whom he meant Kerry just nodded but was more curious about the woman. “Your shadow, I presume?”

Seeing that Mac was still too upset to introduce her, Maggie stepped forward to easily offer her hand to this tall handsome blond haired man but nearly gasped when she actually felt the power as her hand was gently held.

“Don’t do the scanning crap, Kerry.” Mac sighed, running a hand through his short hair before blowing out a breath. “Mary Margaret Cavanaugh my brother Kerry and...” he stopped when he looked past his brother to catch sight of Ian. “Bloody hell, he looks like her.”

“To which Deirdre has already pointed out.” Kerry’s eyes were still on the woman and things that were popping out. “This is our youngest brother, Ian.” He finished the introductions before shooting Mac a look. “She’s a reporter?”

If Maggie was startled by this guess, she didn’t let on but merely shrugged. “I was interviewing your brother when a massive wolf seemed to attack one of his horses and all hell broke after that.”

Ian let out a low whistle as the manor phone began ringing. “This thing likes to use animals?”

Not answering and leaving Ian to distract the woman, Kerry motioned Mac aside. “She saw?” this was a shock to him as very few people other than those closest to them or those related by blood should have been able to have seen the images Sebastian had sent.

Glancing over to see Maggie’s ease in any situation had taken hold and she was again talking animatedly to Ian who seemed amused.

“Yeah but more to our problem, aside from being a reporter, she’s also a hereditary witch who owns her Grandmother’s Book of Shadow which has a section on ‘the Five’.” Mac was careful when he said this and didn’t miss the flash in his brother’s eyes. “She’s also an overly hyper girl who won’t stop talking if you let her.”

Kerry could certainly agree with that but he was trying to decide how this wrinkle would affect them when Deirdre hurried out of the kitchen area. “There’s trouble.” He knew by the worry on the older woman’s face.

“That was Cameron Young on the phone.” She was speaking quickly, a sure sign to Mac that something was wrong and he thought to place the name.

“The lad who worked for Roarke’s little friend?” he eyed Kerry and caught the small grin, translating that without asking.

Figuring that was the easiest way to explain the leader of the Mavericks, Kerry focused on his housekeeper. “What did Cameron say?” he asked curiously, feeling the pain getting worse behind his eyes. “What’s wrong?”

“He said they arrived at Farranfore Airport but something happened and they’ve had to rush your brother to the hospital in Killarney.” The concern was evident in her voice as she rushed on. “The lad didn’t say much but....”

Kerry didn’t need to hear more and he silently kicked himself for not expecting this when he’d been called earlier. “He’ll lash out at Roarke the hardest since in many ways he’ll still be the weakest.”

“It’s been 15 damn years, Kerry.” Mac complained. “Surely he doesn’t still blame himself for...” scowling at the silencing look he got as he followed his brother back to Maggie to see Ian was rubbing his neck. “You give my baby brother stress already?”

As the woman wound up for a retort, Ian shook his head. “Nah, just a dull ache like someone poking my brains in with a fireplace poker and it’s like I hear screaming and laughing all at the same time.”

Maggie caught the shared look. “Something’s wrong?”

“Not sure yet but our brother’s in the hospital at Killarney and it could be a normal reason or something else.” Kerry explained, sighing. “Roarke hasn’t been back to Ireland since he was 13. Cam said he was attacked in New Orleans so it could be stress or....”

“Or Sebastian’s making a play early in the game.” Mac finished, pulling his keys out of his pocket. “This sucks if he’s willing to be this bold.”

Kerry couldn’t have agreed more and caught Ian before he could reach for the helmet. “Have these headaches before?”

“Not often.” He admitted but knew the reason for the question. If the pain got too severe, he was more prone to crash the bike.

“We’ll ride together to the hospital and Deirdre, if our lost sheep calls in, send him there.” Kerry instructed, wanting to keep Ian with them since he figured his powers along with Mac’s would buffer the boy.

Maggie didn’t understand that but saw Mac start to snicker. “Knowing Ry’s temper the last time I saw him we’ll be lucky if he shows at all or if he does it’ll just be to tell you off.”

“Well at least we’ll be at a hospital.” Kerry shot back, pulling a leather jacket from the hook near the door before opening it for Maggie. “That way if I have to put him in with Roarke the damn medics will already be there.”

Ian blinked, Maggie stared, and they both exchanged looks. “Your brothers get along at all, luv?” she asked curiously then could have kicked herself but the 18-year-old only shrugged. “Got me, I only have fleeting memories but....” He hesitated next to her on the steps. “The biggest one is of feeling safe with them.”

Mac’s hearing had always been better than most and that innocent phrase had made him pause. “Can we do this and still protect them?” he asked Kerry quietly.

“We don’t have a choice, Mac.” His brother replied grimly, looking around at the house then back to his brother. “I won’t let the bastard take anything else from us.”

As Mac’s car sped off from the house, the occupants there were left were unaware of the sad spirit peering from the attic room.

CHAPTER THREE

The local hospital in Killarney Ireland was the most sophisticated the Mavericks could manage considering the distress their friend was in after arriving in the country of his birth.

Cameron Young had been content to allow his second in command and chief diplomat to handle the head of the hospital and get them a whole floor isolated from staff and other innocents since he had a hunch this would get much worse before it got better.

Scrubbing his face in a tired motion, he recalled arriving at the local airport only hours beforehand:
Farranfore Airport, County Kerry Ireland 4 hours previously:

Having a private plane at Hadley Industries disposal always came in handy when quick trips across the ocean suddenly came up. This time was no different as Michael White, the Mavericks 2nd in command, brought the plane in for a landing.

Of course, figuring out how to get their equipment through customs was the least of Cam's problems right then. Dealing with a stubborn, hardheaded Irishman was his focal point now.

"You, of all people, should have figured out what the scene in the Big Easy meant." Cam was reminding himself to keep his temper since he knew why his friend was upset.

Roarke Fitzgerald had woken up fully while they'd been in the air traveling and hadn't been in a good mood then. His dark mood got worse when finally told where they were going.

Standing in the open doorway of the plane but not stepping on the now attached steps, the black hair young man was scowling. "I know what it bloody well meant but it didn't mean coming back here!" he snapped at Cam, eyes shifting uneasily as he tried to push down the memories.

"You know that's not true." Jessica Hadley spoke softly from behind him, lightly placing a hand on his shoulder and felt it shaking. "You're not alone and we won't leave you alone but we do need to talk to Kerry."

Knowing that meant going to the manor at Fitzgaren, Roarke began shifting until he turned to look at Jessica.

Ever since he'd woken up on the plane, the girl had been close but he'd felt the distance. Where he usually could feel her emotions and thoughts easily there was something she was keeping from him.

"Telling him I saw a vision of Mum may not be a great plan." He muttered, starting to reach to brush her face and frowned when she caught his hand to hold it. That's when he noticed the scarf. "What happened in New Orleans, luv?" he asked.

Jessica and Cameron had made the choice to keep a lot of what had actually happened while he'd been out away from Roarke since both knew he'd feel bad so she hid the bruises she'd gotten with the scarf and hoped to keep him distracted.

"Nothing, we went through that." She smiled easily but his eyes narrowed. "Later, let's just go see Kerry."

Seeing he was about to downright refuse, Cam blew out a breath and decided to pull his ace card out.

"Roarke, you don't want to make this harder cause if you don't move it or keep giving me grief on this I'm going to remind you that you still hold reserve status on the Mavericks which makes me your

damn leader. So if I say get your ass down those steps and into the car then you damn well better do it!” he snapped, using the tone only used infrequently.

Silence drew as his team stopped unloading the equipment and Roarke’s eyes stared down at him but Cam wasn’t intimidated by that look and leaned against the Chevy Blazer, waiting.

“I could turn him into a toad.” Roarke muttered under his breath, wondering just how far his friend was bluffing.

“And may it harm none.” Jessica whispered in his ear, quoting the one oath any true witch or believer lived by. “Plus, you’d be grounded within 10 minutes if you did a spell like that this close to Kerry.”

That was exactly what Roarke was worried about but finally he scowled and started down the steps. “Fine but when this back-fires it’s on your heads.” He returned, refusing to sulk but looked close when his friend just smirked at him.

“Yeah, this’ll be fun.” Jessica sighed, following him down the steps but pausing when she saw something from the corner of her eye.

On the edge of the airfield sat a row of trees that had lost their leaves for winter but in the center tree was a large black bird that sent shivers down her spine.

The bird seemed to be watching them intently as the Mavericks finished loading the truck and Cam and Roarke continued to bicker as came to bottom of the steps.

Jessica’s eyes narrowed as the bird’s eyes shifted to red and its wings began to flap. “Roarke?” she spoke quietly but heard the wind pick up but the voice it carried worried her.

“They seek to protect the chosen one but it took two sacrifices to keep it at bay this long.” It seemed to howl as the bird began to fly at them. “Refusal will cause the ultimate price but the boy will die alone before he sets foot on that sacred land.”

She saw the bird’s eyes and realized what it was. “Roarke!” she screamed, starting down the steps faster but it was too late.

Hearing the girl’s panic, he had begun to turn when he felt the wave of energy strike his chest then there was nothing but white- hot pain and blinding images as he went down and his helpless friends could do nothing.

Killarney Hospital, now:

“Sit-rep, Peter?” Cameron Young brought himself back to the present by the approach of his main medic.

An odd type to be on a mercenary team, Peter Daniels was a thin, slender young man who had born in Alabama but raised in Germany his light eyes were usually hidden behind wire-rimmed glasses and his black hair kept short.

Right then he was pushing even his skills since there was just so much one could do when he couldn't define a condition.

"I've had to restrain him because he's still convulsing too much." The medic spoke in his quiet oddly accented voice, eyeing his leader grimly. "Physically there's nothing wrong with Roarke except for his old scars and some of the newer wounds he'd gained. His MRIs' cat scans, X-rays, blood work have all come back normal."

Pushing his glasses up with a finger, Peter frowned. "I've tried giving him sedatives, a pain killer to dull whatever's making him scream like that but nothing is doing any good."

Scowling at this, Young knew his medic well enough to read between the lines. "Alright, now hit me with the rest of it."

"Roarke has had a link with Jessica since they were younger you said." Peter closed the chart to face his leader fully. "Whatever this is, is affecting her because she's getting paler and more upset that she can't make him better. Plus, she keeps saying that something's taking his soul."

"Do I need to scare up a priest or an exorcist for this?" Cam asked, hearing the elevator ding and was pulling his ever present Magnum when a hunch told him not to. "Oh, never mind I can ask you to tell me what the hell is happening since I didn't sign on for soul eaters."

Kerry Fitzgerald had gotten the basic story from those mercs holding the lower floors when he, his brothers and Mary Margaret Cavanaugh had arrived at the hospital.

This statement, however, took him totally off guard. "Ian, stay here with the young lady." He spoke softly but firmly to the youngest Fitzgerald but motioned to Mac. "Mac, come with me."

"Yes, he was this intense even when we were lads." Mac cut off Maggie's unspoken question even as he was tossing his jacket over a chair but caught her eye. "Keep him here."

The red-haired pixie like woman could read the younger boy's dislike of these orders but also understood them. She was the youngest child so she immediately caught onto to the overprotective element happening here.

"Big brothers are a pain at times, boyo." She laughed lightly, sitting down and hoping the edge of tension and power she was picking up wasn't what was going on further up the hall.

Ian slumped in the chair, very close to sulking. "I know they're protecting me but they won't be able to cause I can see what they can't."

Maggie's eyes shot up at this, knowing that at certain times some magic was stronger in certain users but even she hadn't been expecting this baby-faced boy to be a seer and she doubted his brothers did either.

"How bad is he?" Kerry was demanding as they followed the mercenary leader up the hall.

The eldest had tried a minor surface scan but only got shoved back by something he had never felt before.

Cam shifted a look over his shoulder then opened a door. "You tell me."

Expecting the worst by the call and from the surface power that they were picking up, neither Kerry nor Mac had prepared them selves for what they walked into.

Both men knew this would be hard as, unlike the rest of them who had had casual contact over the past 15 years, Roarke had avoided contact with his brothers unless totally necessary.

In fact, Ryan seemed to be the only brother he had contact with and that was only when businesses meshed.

"Sweet Mary, this is bloody well not good." Mac whispered, stepping in and instantly being bombarded by the feelings of fear, despair, anger and death. "Kerry."

His brother was looking and not liking what he was seeing or feeling in the room.

Their brother as both recalled had been an energetic boy that was always climbing, jumping, singing or being a typical 11 year old with bright eyes and his black hair always too long.

The young man lying on this bed, strapped down to prevent him from hurting either himself or someone else, was a sickly pale color now and trembling. His voice that had charmed royalty while singing and fought bitterly in childish fights with his brothers had turned hoarse from screaming in his native tongue.

Sitting beside the bed and holding onto one clenched fist, Jessica Hadley looked up as they entered and the strain was clear in her blue eyes.

"I...I can't block it out, Cam." Her British accent tight and her fear were clear. "He was too weak to start with."

Getting a look from his brother, Mac slowly approached the bed. What he hadn't admitted to Maggie that while he did have a legal license to practice medicine he was more attuned to practicing the healing arts another way.

Early on, all of them knew each had stronger abilities in some areas and Mac had found out that his deepest affinity was in healing.

It was on this power he began calling now as he approached the bed but was careful to assure the girl of his intentions first.

All of them had known Jessica Hadley and her company since they'd been kids and through the years had stayed in touch even though Mac knew the young British woman's strongest loyalties remained with Roarke.

"Easy does it, luv. I just want to see him." He assured her, voice going to the low, deep and soothing tone he always used playing medic but as he got closer he also sensed something else. "How about we see how bad these are first."

Cameron Young nearly winced at this but just rolled his eyes. "She may fry him for that." He sighed seeing the lanky Irishman slowly reach for the scarf.

"What happened?" Kerry asked, knowing the girl's injuries wouldn't have come from his brother.

"What attacked in New Orleans tried to take my employer out of the equation early." Cam replied grimly, shrugging. "Clearly it doesn't like her."

Kerry knew this wouldn't quite be the case but let that go for now as he approached to see Jessica was trying to redirect Mac's attention back to his brother.

"They're just bruises. He needs help now." She argued, not even aware when some of the pains went away. "Mac, it's killing him."

"Who's killing him, darling?" Kerry asked gently, trying to probe but only getting static and pain.

Jessica's eyes shot to his and she explained about seeing the bird, hearing the wind and what she's felt since then. "It's destroying him, Kerry and I can't block this out. It's not like the shadow creature in New Orleans that made him see your mother."

That caused both Fitzgerald brothers to exchange looks. "That's low." Mac muttered but did turn to place a hand on Roarke's trembling wrist and was shocked when something physically shoved his hand away. "Roarke?"

"Luv? It's alright." Jessica had looked when something, a twinge in her head, made her look up to see her friend's eyelashes beginning to flicker. "Is he waking up?"

Kerry wasn't sure since something was still blocking him but it wasn't until his younger brother's eyes did open that he knew for sure. "Mac!" he snapped, whirling to shove Cameron Young back from the bed.

"Oh, well isn't this just perfect." Mac swore, grabbing Jessica and pulling her back just as she was going closer to help her friend when Roarke's normally smoky gray-blue eyes opened to reveal pure black and he sat straight up in the bed restraints going away in a simple burst of flame.

"This is bad, isn't it?" Maggie Cavanaugh was asking Michael White who had come at her shout when Ian Fitzgerald had literally screamed as pain bombarded his head and fell to the floor.

The California born native wasn't sure but had to figure given what they were involved with then it couldn't be a good thing.

“Ian! What happened?” he was asking, getting word from his radio of varying things. “Shit! Roy, keep the staff outta this! Adam, yell for Nick if the power readings get worse and Bry, tell him to get up here!”

Ian was still trying to regain his balance but finally gave up and slumped to the floor, his head down; images still vivid. “He’s here but he’s inside him.” He was whispering. “He’s screaming!”

“Who’s screaming, luv? What do you hear?” Maggie asked gently, trying to get the young man up to his feet but couldn’t budge him until a hand reached over her and gave a quick pull that brought Ian to his feet and into a chair.

“Look at me, boyo.” The stern voice got through his haze better than Maggie’s soft tones did.

The boy and Maggie both looked at the new arrival to see a well tanned man with wind swept almost unruly long black hair but his eyes were a sparking smoke right then as he stared hard at this boy.

It didn’t take Kerry’s more natural gift of sight or scanning for Ryan to see what his youngest brother did. That and the power he felt from down the hall told him what he needed.

“This hurts.” Ian whispered, rubbing his head but nearly recoiled as strong fingers gripped muscles in his neck and squeezed. “That’s worse!”

While the pain hurt, the deep laughter he heard over it was more relaxing to him for some reason that he couldn’t place.

“A little pain or no gain as the saying goes, baby brother.” Ryan replied, letting his hand rub lightly and felt some of the boy’s pain ease away then he shot the woman a look, an instant read on her. “Stay with him, little witch and keep him away from that room.”

Maggie never got a word in edge wise with this one but didn’t try as he shot White a look before heading down the hall just as the whole building seemed to shake.

“Mike! Get the woman and Ian outta here!” Ryan snapped, knowing this had gone way beyond Kerry’s point of control just hoped they could bring it back because he knew he didn’t want to kill his brother this soon.

“No, I can help.” Ian started to argue but Maggie had grabbed his arm but instead of pulling it to leave, as he feared she shoved weathered old leather bound book at him. “What’s this?”

“How we’re going to help.” She replied, sitting down to begin sorting through pages to find one she’d seen often as a child. One her Gran always had marked.

A sudden wind seemed to come in and blow the pages until it stopped on one with a rough drawing of a medal and a spell.

“That works.” Maggie sighed with a shaky laugh seeing the boy’s eyes had landed on the picture. “We don’t have one of....”

His hand moved his shirt aside to show her the Claddagh medal he'd had since childhood. "What's the spell?"

"Roarke! Stop this!" Kerry snapped, raising his voice and hoping it would get through to this younger brother.

Roarke Fitzgerald was sitting up in the bed but his restraints were gone and his normally gentle eyes were a blank black, sparking with a power that wasn't his.

"Should I scream for my mystic now?" Cam asked where he was kneeling, knowing he couldn't pull a gun but not sure what else to do.

Jessica still wasn't sure what was happening but could feel the change in her friend. "Roarke?" she called softly, seeing his head turn but what happened next surprised them all.

When her friend's eyes shifted to look at her, his pupils were black and a low flame was now beginning to sheen around him. His normally easy going, flawless face that at times of having his powers on could and did look almost ethereal now looked haunted or evil.

This, she knew in a heartbeat too late, was not her friend in control but could not stop the wave of energy that caught her off-guard and slammed her against the wall sharply.

"Roarke! No!" Mac shouted, quickly seeing this had gone badly even as the girl screamed as the power didn't diminish. "Kerry, we need to bring him around before this kills her!"

Kerry knew this but he just wasn't sure how to do that without knowing exactly what possessed their brother. "Roarke, can you hear us?" he spoke firmly and loudly but his lips thinned as those now black eyes turned toward him and he felt the power shoot toward him.

Tilting his head slightly, Roarke Fitzgerald didn't seem to see his oldest brother yet something inside him did.

"What is it with you boys and your whores?" the voice that spoke wasn't Roarke's and that was quickly clear to all of them as the body waved a hand back to where the power was still holding Jessica. "My Master often asked your father the same question about your mother but never did get a solid answer."

Assured that Kerry had the thing focused on him for the moment, Mac raised a hand to try a spell that may break the thing's hold but found him self knocked off his feet and across the room.

"For shame on you, Patrick, I would have expected better" The thing in his brother seemed to cackle then clucked his tongue in mock shame as he used Mac's given name. "Didn't your sainted mother teach her sons any manners before my master slaughtered her and your worthless father?"

"Release him, demon." Kerry's temper was raising but he knew to keep it in check. "Sebastian will not break the circle this way."

Roarke seemed to stare at him and his brother could feel the internal struggle but was having a hard time breaking through the possessing things energy.

“It only takes one of you to die or give in to break the circle, Kerrigan Fitzgerald.” The thing in his younger brother gloated with a sneer, again throwing a hand out toward Mac but this time the lanky Irishman was quick enough to duck the attack and use a spell of his own but the thing only increased his grip on the president of Hadley Industries. “Attack me and I will kill your brother’s whore and the only way to save her is to kill him.”

The wind was now increasing in the room and Jessica’s screams increased but without being able to get close to the bed breaking Sebastian’s lackey’s hold on Roarke was proving hard as both Mac and Kerry were taken off guard by their brother’s intense power.

“We need to stop him before this kills them both!” Cameron Young shouted over the noise, finally pulling his Magnum. “If I graze him, what would happen?”

“You could fire and it could redirect the bullet.” Kerry replied, trying to shield what he could but hissed as something like a knife sliced into his shoulder yet there was no visible wound.

Cam decided he had to take the chance but before he could, the slamming of the closed hospital door surged with a countering power and a great wave of energy exploded into the room and shook it while actually knocking Roarke back down on the bed.

The sudden break in power caused the evil energy to release Jessica who started to collapse limply to the floor.

“Catch her!” Ryan snapped as he entered the room, shooting this toward Mac who had already been doing that even as Kerry was heading for the bed. “That won’t keep it down for long but maybe long enough to bring his control back to the surface.”

Kerry was silently surprised to see his final brother since even he hadn’t been sure if Ryan would come back but he still caught the underlying edge of anger.

“Did Deirdre tell you to...” he began to ask when he saw the other’s eyes and read the emotion that Ryan had always tried to shield.

“Don’t scan me, Kerry.” Ryan snapped lowly, jerking his jacket off even as he was sitting on the bed and gripping his brother’s white, clammy sweat-soaked face in both hands. “Roarke, listen to me. It’s time to wake up, get moving and kick this thing where it hurts.”

Mac had allowed Kerry to handle this, figuring he’d be the one best able to keep Ryan’s temper in check as he looked after Jessica who was semi-conscious but only barely.

Using a marginal spell to ease the girl’s fears and pain, Mac could feel the pain he took from her but knowing he needed to deal with it later, pushed it down.

“Kerry, that thing is still in him.” He warned lowly.

“Of course it is.” Ryan snorted, rolling his eyes as he focused his power. “That just distracted it enough that it backed off but the brat’s still in too deep.” He looked at Kerry fully. “You know how to end it.”

“We will not take his life.” Kerry’s eyes went to pure smoke but they locked with Ryan’s and read his feelings. “Ryan, it wasn’t his fault.”

Cameron Young’s head snapped up after figuring what this meant. “Oh, this won’t be pretty.”

Ryan Fitzgerald’s eyes seemed to hesitate before lifting to look at Kerry’s. “Do we know what happened on that island, Kerry?” he countered then waved it away, hating to have his own emotions played on even as Roarke jerked under his hands. “We only have his word on what happened and of course, what you say you saw in the visions.”

“Ryan!” Mac snapped, tone going from the one he used when playing healer to the firmer, harder one he used to use when mediating between bickering brothers.

“Are you here to help or hurt boyo?” Kerry’s voice was ice and the power he summoned was clear but his black haired, rash brother just smirked.

“If I wasn’t I could have taken Sebastian up on his offer in Monaco.” He returned, feeling the power building and shot his own back at it. “Get the hell outta the brat, demon! Nobody touches him but me.”

Roarke’s eyes snapped open but while the black was, still there it was obvious a struggle was going on because his one hand had turned over on the bed and gripped his oldest brothers.

“You know so little about this one whom you fight so hard to save.” The voice coming from inside their brother sounded strained. “You wouldn’t if you knew the secrets he hid, the shames. Ask... ask the female about them.” He gritted as if something was trying to stop the words. “Ask about the scars he hides.”

“Leave him alone.” Jessica hissed, barely staying conscious but needing to protect her friend. “Roarke, fight this!”

Ryan’s fingers gripped tighter as he made his brother look directly at him. “Brat, look at me.” He commanded, using the tone he knew annoyed his younger brother.

Only having two years between them the rivalry between Ryan and Roarke had always been the strongest and even now when they met on jobs it was clear that Ryan could still annoy his brother easily.

“C’mon, brat, you never let me push you around so quit letting this son of a bitch.” He snapped angrily, seeing those coal black eyes beginning to shift. “Mac, remember when the brat was seven and Mum grounded him for playing in her roses?” he spoke over his shoulder without looking, knowing he needed to maintain eye contact.

Mac rolled his eyes, having helped Jessica up into a chair then he shifted to watch the drama unfold. “Yeah but are you forgettin’ that you’re the one who told Roarke there was buried treasure in the roses?”

“Sure but Ma didn’t know that.” Ryan smiled, keeping one hand on his brother’s face while gripping his other hand. “Fight him, brat or are ya the coward everyone always said.”

Kerry’s eyes blazed and Mac shot to his feet but before either could move or speak a claddagh medal was tossed onto the bed next to Roarke.

“Get outta my brother.” Ian spoke from the doorway, eyes gone to smoke and focused on the bed.

“Oh, bloody hell.” Ryan groaned, starting to move when Kerry shook his head and then Roarke’s fingers were gripping his hand in a nearly bone-breaking hold.

If Maggie Cavanaugh had any doubts, the lineage the Fitzgerald brothers shared one look at the youngest would have taken them away.

After reading the spell in her Grandmother’s Book of Shadows several times, it dawned on Ian what needed to be done.

Opening up a small portion of powers he rarely used, Ian stood in the hospital room door with his hand outstretched and energy flowing; he recalled the spell.

“Born of the Five, I am of the Five, I call on the bearers of the five elements to shield and protect the innocents from harm as the circle of five will be formed.” The chant was ancient and instinctive to him even though he’d never heard it before. “I order you to leave the form you hold and return to the depths of hell from which you came.”

The boy’s eyes and voice changed as the spell was repeated twice and as it neared the end of the third time, Ian’s eyes flashed and the medal he’d tossed glowed white. “And tell your master to stay the hell away from my family!” he snapped, giving the spell one final push and hoped for the best.

The demon possessing Roarke had believed this boy-witch could be defeated or ignored but it couldn’t keep the hold because as soon as the spell began to work, Ryan and Kerry exchanged looks and for the first time in years four Fitzgerald brothers worked a combined spell that was powerful enough to pull the demon out.

Roarke screamed in agony when the spell forced the demon out and as his body convulsed while the demon tried to hang on, Jessica reached out with what strength she had left to touch the link she and Roarke shared and felt him fighting.

His final scream had him sitting up and the backlash of power had things moving in all directions as a black mass came out of the young man and hovered a second before dispersing.

“Roarke?” Jessica, despite being hurt and weak, shoved herself to the bed next to her friend where he’d fallen back.

The backlash had knocked Ian out the door and into the hallway while Kerry and Ryan, who had been the closest, had tried to shield the others as best they could.

“Shit, Cam check on them while I see to Ian.” Mac had picked himself up from the floor and hurried out the door.

After a couple minutes of silence, Ryan finally shook his head and ran his fingers through his unruly black hair. “So, the kid come up with that one off the top of his head or do we have a bloody ringer in the mix?” he asked casually, watching as Jessica hovered next to his brother. “By the way, who’s the redheaded witch who was with Ian?”

“A reporter from Mayo Mac brought in.” Kerry didn’t bother asking how his brother knew the woman was a witch just like he didn’t ask him how he’d recognized their youngest brother.

Ryan had always been able to pick up things more easily than others had at times. That hadn’t changed.

“What part of ‘keep him out of this’ didn’t you get?” Mac asked crossly when he got into the hall to see Ian leaning against the wall holding tissues to his now bleeding nose.

“The spell was in the Book and so was his medal.” Maggie countered, not backing down from his tone since she also saw the fear in his eyes. “Is he the only one with one of those?”

Kneeling down to look at Ian, Mac was relieved to see his eyes were clearing just tired. Placing a hand on his shoulder to sense more deeply, he shifted some attention to the question.

“We all had Trinity medals but only Ian had the Claddagh medal.” He sighed, wincing as he picked up the tension and slight pain from where his brother’s head had hit the wall. “Our maternal grandmother gave it to him when he was christened.”

Recalling some of her earlier investigations into his family, Maggie knew that meant it had come from Fiona Kerrigan; a powerful wise-woman from up further in Clare and she wondered if any of them also knew the legends associated with it.

“What about your other brother?” she asked quietly. “Is he alright?”

Mac was feeling and not liking everything he was picking up. “Doubt it, luv.” He muttered.

“It’s alright, Roarke.” Jessica was whispering, leaning up and lightly brushing the hair from his now peaceful face. “You’ll be safe.” She promised, shifting a look up at his worried brothers. “Won’t he?”

Ryan wasn’t about to touch that one since even he had doubts on how all this would turn out so he made a show of looking out into the hall while Mac suddenly found Ian very interesting which left Kerry the unhappy choice of answering her.

“We’ll take Roarke home and he’ll be as safe as I can possibly make him.” He assured the girl, kicking Ryan before he could finish the remark forming in his head. “You stay with him, darling. Ry and I need to check on Ian.”

Jessica nodded but her exhaustion was clear as she sat talking blindly to her friend and Cam just shrugged that he’d stay in the room.

Barely waiting until the door closed and ignoring Maggie, Ryan whirled on his oldest brother.

“How the bloody hell could you promise that?!” he demanded in a low voice, anger clear. “You don’t know if we can protect him. Hell, you don’t even know if we can defeat Sebastian.”

“Telling her that right now would just upset her.” Kerry explained calmly, looking at Ian and was pleased he was standing on his own as he held out the medal. “Sebastian’s counting on us not being able to co-exist enough to defeat him. He’s also counting on our weaknesses causing us to fail.”

Ian seemed to consider this. “You have weaknesses?” this was a surprise to him.

“Everyone has weaknesses, lad.” Mac replied, reaching back to rub his neck. “We’re no exceptions but Sebastian knows the biggest will come from Roarke since he has always blamed himself for what happened and I’m thinking there are other issues.”

“If we can’t unite for this then he’ll win.” Kerry aimed this at Ryan and his brother knew it because he scowled and stalked a little ways down the hall. “Ryan, all of us are different than we were that day but we need to remember who we are and what we are. Mum and Da gave their lives to stop Sebastian then and now it’s up to us.”

Maggie decided this was something she shouldn’t hear so she started to quietly slip away when she caught the way Mac was still rubbing his neck.

“You all right, Fitzgerald?” she asked, coming up next to him.

“Too much bickering.” He waved her off but avoided looking at her eyes, surprised when she took his hands. “Read palms?”

She hushed him with a look then looked over for Kerry. “Hey, how exactly does Mac do his healing thing?” she asked curiously, getting an answer when she saw his sharp look turn warning.

Still arguing with Ryan while Ian leaned against the wall to watch, Kerry looked to answer when the question hit him and he swore.

“Damn it, you’ve taken too much in at once.” He muttered, ignoring his brother’s attempt to wave it off. “Mac, you know the risks of taking too much pain or injury in at one time.”

“I also know it goes against my own personal oaths to leave someone I care about in pain.” Mac shot back.

Ian watched this altercation interestingly. “If the villain wants to break the circle, which I’m guessing is the five of us, wouldn’t making us fight amongst ourselves be a good way to do it?” he asked quietly.

“Ah, there was a reason he could talk before he was one.” Ryan coughed, coming back up the hall to nudge Mac’s shoulder. “Baby brother is the only one who can see past the obstacles and remain clear.”

“He was three and still untouched when he went to Dublin.” Kerry reasoned but understood what Ryan was saying. “Can we do this and not kill each other?”

The brothers exchanged looks and Mac merely shrugged as Ryan snorted, grinning. “I figure Deirdre will remember right quick what it’s like having all five of us in the same house cause we’ll be scrapping a lot but...” He paused to take a breath and held out a hand. “I’d rather send the old devil packing than spend too much time fighting with you lot.”

“Just don’t tease Roarke too much or Jessica will likely fry you.” Mac warned easily, taking the hand his brother offered then narrowed his eyes when he felt the tension ease. “Ry.”

The third born son just grinned but didn’t say anything about easing his brother’s stress. “Bugging the brat is what I live for.”

“Just watch what you say until we see what he’s hiding.” Kerry warned, surprised by the sudden ringing they all heard when he and Ian joined the combined hands of the others.

“Well, that should be interesting if all 5 of you do that.” Maggie laughed, wondering if the brothers were aware of the shower of lights that went off right then. ‘I doubt it.’ She thought to herself, wondering what else would happen.

CHAPTER FOUR

Fitzgerald Manor, Fitzgaren, Ireland:

It took several more hours to convince Peter Daniels that taking his patient out of the hospital was what was best for him but finally when his leader pulled rank, the Detroit-born medic conceded.

After Kerry had made a call, Deirdre O’Connor had been waiting of them at the front door of the manor house.

Ryan Fitzgerald had followed in his own car, pulling to the side to allow the Mavericks own van to pull closer to the house since Peter had insisted his brother stay on a stretcher until they got him settled in the house.

Stepping from the car, he could see the house lit up with lights from the inside and the many spotlights on the outside and his mind went back to earlier days. Happier days when they would return from a trip or a show to have this very same woman meet them by the door.

Now, except for some graying hair, all seemed the same to him as Deirdre hurried down the steps.

“I’ve prepared the rooms as you suggested and told Mick to clear the garage for those death-machines the lads use.” She spoke to Kerry briskly but her eyes were looking around, frowning as the

Mavericks carefully unloaded the stretcher. “He should still be in a hospital, boyo.” She admonished sternly.

“That’s what I said.” Peter muttered wincing as a hand smacked his head.

Ryan rolled his eyes at the medic. “You really wanted to explain to those doctors why their patient was glowing or levitating?” he challenged, turning to give his best smile to the older woman. “Hey, luv, I was in the area and decided to drop by.”

Already emotional, Deirdre’s eyes welled up at the sight of him. “Ryan! You lovely boy, let me look at you.” She gripped his arms but had to stand back to look him in the eye. “Saints alive but you are the image of your Da.”

If that comment bothered him, Ryan didn’t let it show as he smiled at the woman who had taken a hand to him as often as his mother then decided to turn her attention to his older brother.

“Mac’s being a wimp because he absorbed too much pain tonight and won’t let it show.” He whispered in her ear, almost smiling when she turned to pin the dark blond Fitzgerald with a knowing look.

“Patrick MacKinley Fitzgerald!” she snapped in a tone perfected of being the only help that Brenna Kerrigan Fitzgerald would allow to assist her in managing her five sons. “Take yourself in that house right this minute and be where I can find you in five minutes!”

Mac scowled at his smirking brother and started to go toward him when Maggie caught his arm and steered him up the steps.

“Let’s go hero.” She grinned, patting his arm. “I don’t think that’s a lady you want to mess with.”

“It wasn’t her I was going to mess with.” Mac muttered, but gave up on the idea of getting around Maggie who was stronger than she looked. “My big mouth little brother needs a quick reminder on why he’s younger though.”

While Deirdre got the others settled, Ian had become fascinated with the high-tech motorcycles that the Mavericks drove and Ryan decided to follow Mac since he was the one who got the housekeeper aimed his way, it also allowed Kerry a chance to check in with the Mavericks medic and leader.

Having been told where to settle Roarke by the ever-helpful housekeeper, Peter had made sure his friend was still stable and that the ride hadn’t hurt him any.

He was in between hovering over him and trying to get Jessica Hadley to lie down and rest when Kerry walked in.

“He won’t like being here and he can’t be alone so go away, Peter.” Jessica’s tone was one of pure refusal even though the eldest Fitzgerald brother could sense the girl’s exhaustion.

“You know Roarke’s safe in this house, Jessie.” Kerry spoke quietly and didn’t try to approach the bed when he saw her tense at his voice. “What’s he scared of?”

Jessica lifted her tired eyes and nearly smiled at that. “You mean, besides the events of recent days? Too much that you really aren’t ready to deal with.”

Kerry knew he could have scanned but also knew the girl had a natural defense against mental intrusions and also knew he wouldn’t invade her personal privacy like that. The same reason he wasn’t scanning his brother.

In the silence, Roarke began twisting in his sleep, whimpering. “No. Don’t...hit...Don’t...touch”

“Sshh, luv. It’s alright” Jessica whispered, sitting next to him to try to use their link to ease the fears before any of his brothers could begin getting the images but she was too weak and wasn’t expecting her friend to be this far under too soon. “It’s alright.”

Roarke moved as soon as he felt her next to him, rolling and curling against her; his arms tightening around her waist. “Why?”

At first, Kerry thought his brother was awake but soon realized he was still asleep, his eyes were open but not clear as they saw the past and his voice was that of a child not the adult he’d grown into.

“Why what, Roarke?” he asked, seeing Jessica had tensed but concentrated on the boy in front of him and beginning to feel waves of emotions from him.

“Why’d ya let it happen? Why didn’t you... come for me?” the tone changed to a fearful bitterness but he was curling tighter. “Why did you let her let them hurt...”

Jessica’s fingers ran through his long black hair and slowly he fall back to sleep but this took a toll on the girl and finally Kerry reached for her.

“Just stay with him and rest.” He urged, frowning. “What did he mean, Jess?” he asked, knowing this was something bad for them. “Why did I let what happened? Who hurt him?”

The girl sighed; weighing her loyalty to Roarke to what she knew was best for her him in the long run. His pain, both new and old, was still cutting into her emotions.

“He’s asking why you didn’t go get him when he wrote to you after he was sent away.” She finally sighed, laying her head against the headboard and hoped she wasn’t making this worse.

This subject was the one that always bothered Kerry since he had fought bitterly with his father’s mother on her decision to send his younger brothers away to other relatives scattered throughout the country.

Ian had gone to Dublin with Sybil and Brandon Sullivan; Ryan to Clare to Maureen and Eamon O’Brien, Mac had gone to County Cork with Bridgett and Padric Odell and Roarke had gone to Ida and Felan Walsh in Mayo.

Kerry had been 19 at the time and had of course been able to stay on his own and inherit his family estate. He had tried to keep his brothers but Kathleen Murphy Fitzgerald had been firm on sending them away.

She had said it was for their own safety, since what had killed their parents would try to strike at them and the boys would be safer away from the life and to be raised normally but he'd always had doubts, especially when she had insisted they stay apart, even though Mac's foster family had plenty of room.

"She insisted it was for the best." He repeated the weak line and saw the mild anger in the girl's eyes.

"He wrote you letters, Kerry." Jessica replied, tiredly. "He wrote you what was happening and begged you to come bring him home. He believed that since you were the oldest and promised him that you'd make it right that you'd do that."

Those words made him frown. "I never saw any letters from Roarke, luv." He argued, looking at her. "The only thing I ever heard from the Walsh's was when Gran showed up yelling that you and Cam had come and kidnapped him one day." He replied, seeing her smirk as he lightly brushed his brother's hair out of his face as he'd done once and down his back and felt the boy jerk under his hand and his already weak powers tried to deflect the light touch.

His eyes shot to Jessica's and saw her lips thin but remain silent as he carefully moved to lift his brother's t-shirt up and a streak of lightning ran across the clear night sky.

"What in Finn's name happened to him?" his voice had gone flat and cold upon lifting the shirt and seeing the many old scars that littered the younger man's back as far as he could see.

Some looked to have come from a hand or belt while others he didn't want to define yet what had caused them.

"Your grandmother's good friends, the Walsh's, used Roarke as slave labor for the two years he was there." Her tone, while still exhausted, was also cool as she spoke distinctly to make sure he understood every word. "Their four ugly little demon brats didn't have to lift a finger but Roarke did chores from 5AM until well past 10PM, he often ate little to nothing if they thought to feed him at all and was punished for the smallest mistake."

This time, Kerry began scanning his brother even though he had to work through the fear and tension of his whole life. As he did this, he also looked at the other scars and saw what his brother was hiding.

"Cam and I were in Ireland one day checking on the local companies and decided to drop in unannounced to see Roarke since getting him by phone was a huge effort." Jessica went on softly, her pain evident as she remembered that day. "He was 13, had been sending you secret letters or notes the whole time begging you to make the horrors stop, to come get him but you never answered him.

"That day, when we got to the Walsh farm things felt odd. Their oddest son was doing his usual swaggering until Cam put a gun in his face but wouldn't say where Roarke was. I found Roarke laying

in the barn where they had tied him and he'd been beaten into a raw bloody pulp. His back, legs, chest, anything exposed was just raw and bloody and that's when I learned they'd also been selling him."

Her fingers stilled in his hair as another streak of lightning flashed and Kerry's eyes started to smoke. "They..."

"The Walsh's, their kids, used him as a toy, a slave and they raped him from 11 to 13 and Cam and I took him from there with the threat that if they even tried to touch him again Cam would cause so much trouble." She slowly met his eyes and debated on telling him this next part. "I told them we'd tell you but the old woman just laughed and said it wouldn't matter since your grandmother already knew what they were doing. In fact, she had told them to make him suffer. That she wanted him to pay for what he'd caused to happen"

This time, the whole clear night sky just lit up as his temper lit but his brother's soft whimper brought him back slowly to some calmness. Several deep breaths and finally Kerry could find his voice. "Kathleen knew they were doing this to him?"

The pain in his chest was bad enough but this was making his stomach turn as he laid a gentle hand on the boy's face and looked, wishing he hadn't as the images flew to meet him until finally he jerked back but was careful to stop them from going any further.

"Sleep, Roarke." He whispered, fingers brushing across a scar on his neck but didn't want to focus on those he couldn't see yet. "Sleep, little boy, as your dreams won't be touched tonight and neither will you."

Kerry's promise went unheard as his brother's body seemed to relax and he looked up to see that this had taken what strength Jessica had. "Sleep, darling. You don't need to protect him tonight. You both sleep."

Jessica started to object but the older man shook his head, reaching for the hand made quilt from the bottom of the bottom to lay over them.

As he waited to be certain the spell would hold; he crossed to the window in the room and lit the candle on the sill, silently whispering the protection spell he'd heard his mother use before.

"Moonlight, starlight, I ask thee to protect these I seek to shield this night." The candle sparked blue flame and he left a low light on before easing from the room to see Cameron Young in the hall.

"She swore to him we wouldn't tell you and considering your grandmother's involvement, I wasn't sure he'd be safe in Ireland." The merc leader could read the silent fury. "The only way we could save him was to get him outta here and help him to forget."

Kerry knew that was true but he was still feeling his brother's pain, the shame and above all the absolute abandonment. "Stay close to them and if either of them wakes up, call me or Mac."

“Are you going to tell the others?” Cam wasn’t sure that would be good, especially if one considered how Roarke and Ryan got along.

“I don’t know.” The eldest brother admitted as he headed downstairs, his temper beginning to spark as he again thought of what he’d been told, what he’d seen, what he’d felt and above all what all he hadn’t been told these past 15 years.

In the kitchen of the Fitzgerald manor, Deirdre O’Connor served strong Irish coffee, tea and bottled water with her famous cookies and cakes as she hovered over Mac.

“Even as a lad you were always taking on too much.” She admonished, pleased with the way Maggie had taken to rubbing the spots on Mac’s neck the way she’d showed her.

“Saint Mac.” Ryan threw out a phrase he’d used when they’d been boys and was pleased when his brother lifted his head from the table enough to shoot him a hard look.

Maggie just gently pushed his head back down, clucking her tongue. “I see we have typical brothers.” She chided.

Got many of those do ye, Miss?” Deirdre asked while placing dishes away as sudden noise came from outside.

“I have nine of them to be exact.” Maggie returned, hearing Ian choke and Mac tried to twist his head. “What? A girl can’t have brothers?”

“Are they older or younger?” Ryan asked, reaching for the whiskey bottle in the cabinet.

“All older, I fear.” The red-haired reporter replied, surprised to see lightning flash. “I’m the youngest of 10.”

A smack to the hand had Ryan jerking away from the bottle. “Damn it, Deirdre.” He complained wincing as another slap came to his head.

“You’ll watch your mouth in your mother’s house Ryan Fitzgerald and you don’t need whiskey at this hour.” The housekeeper returned firmly, turning as the sky outside lit up with lightning and Mac raised his head.

“Kerry’s ticked about something.” He sighed, reaching for a cookie and meeting Ryan’s gaze. “It takes a lot to cause his temper to make lightning.”

Ryan knew this and remembered the times when breaking up fights between them had caused that reaction though the final time he’d felt that reaction had been the day of the funeral when his brother and grandmother exchanged words.

Maggie had sat down to sip her tea, tapping a cookie on the rim of the china cup. “Your brother causes lightning?”

“Aye, when his temper is up he certainly can.” Deirdre again slapped Ryan’s hand away from the bottle. “Lad, you were an obstinate child but you don’t need whiskey at this hour and not in my kitchen.”

“What’s the use of having Irish coffee without the whiskey to put in it?” Ryan grumbled, seeing Mac grin. “Shut it.” He warned, knowing what he was thinking.

Mac smiled innocently, taking another cookie then handing the tin to Ian who seemed to be having mixed feelings on taking another one. “You can’t handle whiskey, Ry.” He reminded him gravely. “Hell, you couldn’t even handle Da’s Rum the day you got into it and were sick for the next two days.”

“I was eight years old that time and have learned to handle my liquor a little better.” His brother countered, giving up on the whiskey so he laced the coffee with sugar.

Ian was frowning. “The house is tense.” He spoke quietly but both his brothers seemed to feel it.

Maggie was still having trouble believing she was sitting in the same room with three of the famous singing Fitzgerald brothers and mentioned it, narrowing her eyes in annoyance as Mac nearly choked and Ryan lifted dark eyebrows.

“Been awhile since anyone remembered us that way.” He lifted his cup to her in mild salute and smiled at her; also not missing the look Mac gave him at this and caught the underlying meaning to this. ‘Well, well, this is new.’ He thought.

“My Gran was a huge fan.” The reporter replied looking out the kitchen window as the whole sky lit up. “Had a book of clippings, all your albums, everything.”

Mac’s eyes narrowed at the lightning but caught Ian’s look. “What’s up, lad?”

The boy had been wondering this for a long time but never had anyone to ask. “I always asked Sybil if it had been so easy for us to quit being a group, to quit singing.” He frowned, looking up as he sought to explain. “I mean, I like to act in school and I can sing pretty well but...”

Deirdre put a loving arm around his shoulders. “Lad, for three years old when you last sang with your brothers you sang like an Angel.” She told him.

“Kerry was the main singer in the family.” Mac explained, thinking back. “When it became clear that all of us could sing it made sense to Mum and Da to keep the family together by making a group. To this day, people still try to get Kerry to sing at local festivals or the like but.... As for what happened to us singing together....” He could only shrug.

“Your Da’s Mum thought it best to stop the singing to protect you lads.” Deirdre explained looking up suddenly as the feel of the whole house seemed to change.

Maggie had been about to ask something when she saw Kerry enter the kitchen and figured it better to stay silent.

The oldest of the Fitzgerald brothers had always seemed like he could look colder and serious to Maggie but as he walked in this time there was no mistaking the anger radiating off him.

“What else did our Grandmother think, Deirdre?” he asked; voice cold steel as he reached in the cabinet for the whiskey and a glass.

“Deirdre says it’s too late for that, bro.” Ryan grinned but quieted as his brother poured the amber liquid in a shot glass and drank it in one hiss. “O-kay, your house so your rules I suppose.”

Mac looked up and frowned. “Kerry, what’s wrong?” he asked, starting to stand but a single look from his brother had him sitting back down.

“What’s wrong with him?” Maggie’s question was a soft whisper but Mac could only shrug as his brother sat the glass down on the table with a thump as he pinned the housekeeper with his eyes.

“I don’t know what you mean, Kerry.” Deirdre replied, wiping her hands on an apron and reaching for another mug to pour more coffee.

Usually very careful about his powers, this night Kerry’s eyes flashed and the mug turned to ash.

“Whoa.” Ian breathed, not expecting this and clearly by the way both Ryan and Mac looked neither were they.

“Kerry!” Mac was on his feet even as the dust was hitting the floor. “What the bloody hell’s wrong?”

His brother didn’t shift his gaze from the older woman. “For so long as I was old enough to remember, aside from my parents, you’ve had the pulse of this house, Deirdre, you could always tell what was where before Mum asked you for it.” He spoke quietly now but his accent was almost totally gone which was a sign of his temper.

“You know everything that goes on in this house, with this house and the people in this house so I’m pretty damn sure you know what I’m going to ask you.” Kerry seen her lower her eyes slightly but she gave no inclination. “What else did Kathleen say or do those days and weeks after we buried our folks?”

At his use of the former matriarch of the family’s first name Deirdre looked up quickly and pursed her lips. “You shouldn’t be so disrespectful of your grandmother, lad.”

“That’s not disrespect.” Kerry corrected evenly. “That’ll come when she shows up and I tell her to get the hell off my property. Now, did she tell you to do it or did you just not give them to me?”

Again, the brothers were exchanging wary looks as Kerry faced off with the housekeeper.

“I think you better tell your new girlfriend to split for awhile.” Ryan told Mac softly, watching this scene with interest but had also positioned himself that he could move quickly if he had to.

Mac hadn’t taken his seat again but did slide a look at his brother blandly. “She’s not my girlfriend.”

As Ryan was rolling his eyes at that, Maggie was watching the kitchen got tenser as Kerry took two more steps but halted when Mac just coughed.

“What happened to the letters Roarke sent to me the two years he was in that hellhole in Mayo where she put him?” he demanded, slamming a hand on the butcher block table in a rare form of anger. “Damn it, Deirdre! Did you know what she did?” Kerry demanded. “Did you know that our grandmother told those bloody bastards to torture and rape her 11 year old grandson and ignore the letters he sent?”

Silence hit the kitchen with this explosive comment and Maggie decided it was time she slipped out, doubting if anyone would even notice, her leaving except Mac’s fingers had grasped her hand under the table and only she heard the silent ‘Stay’ request.

Ryan looked between the older woman and his brother, needing to be sure he’d heard right but he could tell the way her face had fallen that it was true.

“Kerry, ye have to believe that I certainly didn’t know that.” Deirdre grabbed his wrist but let go with one smoking look and with a sigh, she went to a small cabinet in the small room off the kitchen unlocked a drawer and removed a carefully wrapped bundle of yellowed letters and postcards.

“Mrs. Fitzgerald ordered me and all the house staff to destroy anything that came to you from any of the lads but especially from Roarke.” She pulled a stool to the table and sat, suddenly very tired after keeping this secret for so long. “The day of the funeral, after you and she had spat so violently, she ordered Mick and some of the others to destroy all your parents’ things and the boys stuff and told me to destroy all letters.”

Ryan pushed the coffee away, suddenly not wanting it. “Why? Why would she do that?” he demanded.

“She never said boyo.” Deirdre sighed, seeing the pain in their eyes but avoiding looking at Kerry. “Just that so long as she was mistress of this house her will was to be obeyed and many of the folk here feared your Grans’ power.”

“I told her the last day she spent in this house that she wasn’t its Mistress any longer and hadn’t been in years.” Kerry scowled his temper still high as he eyed the bundle. “Are these all from him?”

Deirdre O’Connor nodded silently. “The maid who got the mail would have burned them but I took them and hid them away. Just as I had the staff put aside much of your Mum and Da’s stuff that I knew would be important to you lads one day, including the Family Book of Shadows.”

“Did you know?” he asked her one more time, taking the bundle of letters in his hands and instantly feeling the emotions from them.

“Saints, no, I didn’t know that.” Deirdre breathed, startled. “Kerry, I worked for your Da’s folks since I was a girl but my loyalty was to Toryn and Brenna. I loved your parents and you lads like you were my own. Had I known anything like that was going on I would have risked her ire and told you.”

Kerry stared at the letters in his hand to back at his housekeeper. “I hope so, Deirdre. Mac, show Miss Cavanaugh where her room is. I’ll be in the office.”

He walked out without another word and all Maggie could do was try to comfort.

“Can I get you some tea?” she asked the distraught woman, whirling as glass broke and Ryan stormed out. “Mac?”

Mac scrubbed his face, really too tired to handle this right then. “Ian, stay with Maggie and get Deirdre settled.” He spoke to his youngest brother since he knew he was the most upset right then.

“Is what he said true?” the boy asked, not understanding how any of this could have happened. “Why would someone related to us want to hurt him so much? I mean, I grew up in a wonderful place so why would...?”

“Don’t know, Ian.” Mac sighed, hearing the thunder build. “Stay with Maggie.” He just looked at her and got an understanding nod before he left the kitchen.

Ryan was about to the front door when Mac caught up to him. “Are you looking for fresh air or you running?”

“You’re the bloody empath so you picked up more from Kerry in there but it was practically screaming at me and it still is from him, from upstairs.” His dark haired brother kept a hand on the door handle. “Dealing with an ancient wizard looking to kill us is one thing; coping with the past is something else but this.... No, I won’t deal with this.”

“Why? You blame Roarke from Mum and Da dying since they were on the island with him and we weren’t so why should learning some of what happened afterwards bother you?” Mac asked casually, seeing the flash in the opposite set of eyes.

Again, thunder blasted but this time it shook the house and Mac groaned, this time having no trouble picking up his older brother’s anger. “Go, Ry.” He sighed. “We’ll manage it fine.”

Leaving his brother at the door, he headed toward the office with some hesitance. The room had once been their father’s private retreat and the one place the boys had rarely bothered him. Mac wondered if it still felt the same.

Having left the kitchen and his clearly disturbed brothers, Kerry had closed himself off in his office and carefully laid the letters and little cards out on the hand-carved desk before finally picking one to read.

He had very little trouble recognizing his younger brother's shaky handwriting since Roarke had been the one who had the hardest trouble learning to write English well since he'd been diagnosed early on with a mild form of dyslexia.

Kerry found the first letter which had very little to say of the trouble to come for his dark haired little brother except that he missed home and promised not to fight to Ryan so much if Kerry could only come get him.

"Oh, bloody hell, Roarke." He whispered, continuing to read as the letters become more urgent and his writing harder to read as they were wrote in what he guessed was hurried sessions of fear to finally the later ones where he wrote to beg his brother to come to Mayo for him.

The one letter that Kerry stared at the longest was the one stained with faded red blotches. This one had some of what was happening but Kerry knew that his brother would never ever have written of his full ordeal.

Lightning flashed outside the bay window as he could picture his younger brother and the events that he endured.

"Locals are gonna start wondering about all this lightning." Mac spoke from the door, closing it as he came to sit on the edge of the desk and picked up a faded letter. "'So, how bad is it?"

"His back is nothing but scars and from what Jessica says his chest and the rest of him probably isn't much better." Kerry replied after a long while, leaning back in the leather chair that had once been their fathers. "I honestly don't think he remembers everything because I had to push to see some of it."

Mac considered that, knowing that he could probably ease some of the pain but that would have to be after their brother learned to trust them again. "He had retrograde amnesia after the island so it stands to reason that he'd push the worst of this back too."

"He believes I abandoned him, Mac." Kerry muttered, throwing a postcard on the desk. "Upstairs, in his sleep, he asked why I didn't come for him. How the bloody hell do I tell him and expect him to believe that we didn't know it was happening when we've always been linked."

That was something else that Mac had been considering. "Our link hasn't been as strong since the funeral, since she broke us up so odds are good that either being apart dimmed that link or..." he stopped as his brother's eyes flashed.

"Or she did something to block us from feeling." Kerry finished for him having gotten the hidden meaning.

"Bridgett and Padric both asked her to let Roarke come live with me since they had plenty of room but she refused." Mac thought on this and mentally kicked himself. "She told them it was better if we were apart and that the Walsh's were the perfect place for him."

The office was silent as Kerry began to pace, finally turning to face his brother. “Why, Mac?” he had to ask. “You and I were older and caught the strain between Da and his mother in those last few months but why the bloody hell would she do this to Roarke? He was 11 years old and still traumatized as it were.”

Hating to admit it, Mac had to be honest. “Could be she felt like Ry did and blames Roarke for them dying. A lot of people did and may still do.”

“We were all supposed to go with Mum that day but Ian had a cold and you, Ryan and I all made excuses to go later.” His brother shot back, a small part still feeling the guilt of that since if he had been on time things may have been different.

Recalling that it had been his younger brother’s wish for months to go Skelling Michael to see the island and the sights, Brenna Fitzgerald had finally agreed to take her fourth born son and after the other boys all made proper noise to come over later their father had suddenly decided to go too. Something that he hadn’t been supposed to do.

“Da wasn’t supposed to be there, Mac.” Kerry murmured, an uneasy feeling going through him as something bothered him about that. “Remember, Kathleen was coming that day so Da was supposed to stay home.”

“He said Grandmother could wait because he wanted a few hours with his family in peace.” Mac did remember that, fingers twirling the pen on the desk. “She made you late from catching the boat over to meet them.”

Both brothers exchanged looks. “Oh, God, Kerry.” Mac muttered, horror dawning on him. “Tell me you aren’t thinking that...”

“Guess I’ll be asking her that when she shows up.” Kerry’s voice was cold but even he couldn’t deny how much sicker this was making him when another thought hit him. “Damn! I thought he’d stay asleep.”

Knowing what that meant, Mac figured it would be a long while before he got sleep this night and wondered if he shouldn’t have told Kerry that odds were high that Ryan had left.

It was the silence and peace of the room that caused Roarke Fitzgerald to wake up.

Usually, even when things were calm, he woke up agitated until he got his bearings but this time he woke slowly but not anxious like normal.

Lying still, he thought of the last things he could recall and remembered the airport then fleeting images of pain, fear and hearing voices filtered in.

Cautiously he opened his eyes to see where he was since his instincts said this wasn’t a hospital room and blinked several times.

The room was large with a fireplace that had a low flame going in it, decorated in a casual way with semi-modern furniture but the quilt that he ran his fingers over that gave him the first inkling, then the blue-flamed candle going on the windowsill.

Roarke slowly moved his arms and looked next to him to see he had been holding onto Jessica as he had.... He quickly sought to blank that out as he eased away but gently laid his friend down on the pillows and under the quilt.

Stroking a finger down her face, he saw how pale she was and felt the weakness. "Sleep now, *muirnin*. (sweetheart)" he whispered, still partially asleep himself he wandered out of the room to see where he was and went on feeling, knowing where he was on instinct.

The house was quiet but had an uneasy feeling to it even in his current half-sleep state as he entered the living room, looking around to see it had only slightly changed.

It still held the elegance but the furniture was more modern, not as cold or sterile as it had once been as he ran a hand over the soft suede of the couch and memories took him back to laying on it to study or falling on it when he and his brothers would have play fights in this room.

Instinct had him looking on the mantle shelf for the vase his mother had kept there that had been broken during one of those fights. He recalled vividly as he did the bad things in his life how that vase had come crashing down to shatter when he'd been playing with Ryan and Mac and knowing his normally gentle mother's punishment would be swift.

"One of the very few times I took the blame for something you did." Ryan spoke from the corner of the room.

Having debated with himself on leaving or not, Ryan Fitzgerald had decided he wasn't coward enough to run from this fight so he'd retreated to the privacy of the living room to find a drink of some kind.

He'd been nursing the same Scotch and water for well over an hour when he felt his younger brother waking up and had stayed still to see if normal routine would have him coming to the living room.

Ryan sat and waited, watching as his younger brother looked around the room and remembered that day the vase had broken. "I couldn't sit down right for nearly three days because of that." He finished, seeing the boy was still half-asleep when he whirled at the voice. "Hey there, Brat. Long time no see."

The voice made Roarke blink as it slowly registered whom it was. "Ryan."

"Well, nice to see you remember me." Ryan countered, still using the cocky tone he always did when dealing with this brother. "In the hospital I wasn't sure you knew any of us or do you even remember trying to kill us and your girlfriend?"

The words sank in but he only focused on one. "I don't have a girlfriend."

“What is with you and Mac?” Ryan felt like smacking someone but settled for slapping his own forehead as he motioned with his glass. “The little red-haired reporter, wait until you get a load of her, is all gooey eyed when she looks at him and he gives me the back off look when I flirted tonight and little Jessica,” he paused to smile, deciding to test the waters on this one. “She really did grow up nice so if you aren’t interested, despite the fact she hovers over you, let me know, huh?”

Roarke’s eyes were hazy but still sparked slightly. “Back off, Ry. I’ve told you before.” He warned evenly, body aching from the airport attack and everything else that he couldn’t recall. “What happened at the hospital?”

“You got your butt possessed and used Mac, Kerry and the lass for target practice until I got there.” Ryan replied easily, drinking the rest of his Scotch down before standing slowly.

A professional gambler he could read the body language of others like a book and he could read his baby brother as easily as before except his brother’s way of protecting himself now were the ‘back off’ signals he was reading. “That was sloppy work on that one, brat, getting possessed in the first five seconds of the job.” He jabbed, knowing that to get what he wanted he needed to do this fast.

“Sorry, you try arguing with Cam and getting hit with a cheap shot magical bird then we’ll talk.” Roarke threw back, easing down to the couch and wincing as wounds pulled but he hid that. “Is Jess alright, Ryan?”

He heard the concern and this time didn’t play as he answered. “Mac and her medic said she’s weak but should be fine.” He watched as his brother eased forward to rest his head in his hands. “What about you, brat, how are you?”

“Fine, I’m just bloody great.” However, Roarke’s tone was clipped and low as he looked at his hands. “Why didn’t he stay gone?”

“Spells are only good for so long at times.” Ryan shrugged, sitting on the back of the sofa to eye his brother and looked for himself. “Sebastian’s too strong for whatever they did to have worked forever.”

“No. Not forever, I never wanted forever. I would have preferred until I was dead and buried.” Roarke muttered, wincing as he felt the buzz. “Back off, Ryan, I don’t need you...” He snapped, trying to close his mind but knew he wasn’t quick enough when he heard the breath his brother released blow out hard. “Damn it, Ryan!”

He started to move, not wanting to face this yet but his brother was still quicker and Ryan moved like a snake, rolling over the back of the couch and grabbing him by the back of the neck.

“Stop it, brat.” Ryan ordered lowly, knowing his brother was still too weak when his feeble attempts to break free didn’t even budge him as he held him still. “Roarke let me look.”

The more careful tone caused the younger man to settle down but his mind wasn't clear yet and being grabbed and restrained, even slightly was causing his emotions to spike and his mind to cloud more.

Keeping his fingers firm on his neck, Ryan used his other hand to lift the T-shirt up to see what had set Kerry off and felt his mouth go dry.

He'd been expecting some casual scarring but hadn't been expecting to see the massive amount of scars on his younger brother's tanned skin. He counted well over thirty just on his upper back before he felt Roarke jerk under his hand.

"Why'd they do this, brat?" he asked lowly, letting go and expecting the boy to bolt but all he did was turn to draw his legs up on the couch.

"I was bad." The tone caught Ryan off guard since it wasn't his brother's voice. This tone was dull, flat and emotionless, almost a monotone. "Always doing something stupid or wrong, just like you always said I did. I brought it on myself or else Kerry wouldn't have left me."

Ryan felt his anger burn but got a swift kick in the leg along with a short snap mentally before he could reply to that as Kerry's eyes burned into his own in warning.

"You shouldn't have done this tonight." He spoke lowly but they both knew their brother was deep into his memories again as he laid his head on the couch arm. "Roarke let Mac take you upstairs. Stay with Jessica."

He had to push this suggestion more than he liked but knew none of them were stable enough that night to deal with this any further.

"I killed them so maybe it is right if I die." Roarke yawned, rubbing his eyes as he had once but Mac had him then and was gently easing him back upstairs. He paused on the steps going up the curving staircase. "She was right. I was born evil or else I wouldn't lose everyone I love, that's why I'll never tell Jessie."

"C'mon, boyo, lets get you back to bed before Jess wakes up and decides to fry us." Mac urged softly, using the last of his energy to ease the younger man's emotions so he could sleep again.

Ryan waved Kerry off, expecting his anger. "I know, I know. We need to handle this carefully and I rushed into it." He sighed, flexing his fingers and wishing it was someone's face. "I just wanted to see for myself."

"I know but there are other issues we need to deal with and I hope he sleeps through them." Kerry muttered, while now knowing who the first target of the wizard would be and just hoped they could stay together long enough to deal with him.

Struggling to keep his own emotions level and his powers on to help his younger brother but it was getting harder.

The events of the day had left him tired so much that Mac nearly tripped on the last step going up and would have lost his grip if Maggie Cavanaugh hadn't suddenly been there.

"There's a lad." She eased to Roarke's other side and with a softer tone began murmuring lowly to him while shifting a look to Mac that easily could be read as 'Back it off some'.

Cameron Young was pacing in the bedroom and muttering about losing people already when Maggie got Roarke back in and with one look knew what he'd be facing.

"Some nice relaxing sleep is all you need to take it away." She kept talking even as Cam saw his friend's eyes were normal but cloudy which usually meant he was near regression. "Perfectly safe here."

Roarke was still under, still seeing the past he'd rather forget but Maggie's gentle touch and musical voice was keeping him calm but he shook his head.

"Won't be safe anywhere." He replied softly, lying down but he curled into an almost fetal position and only having Jessica move closer in her sleep kept him from going into a total withdrawal. 'Can't sleep cause it's not safe. One day, one day she said I'll die like I should've.' He yawned, burying his head into a pillow.

"Who said that, Roarke?" Mac asked from the bottom of the bed, taking a slow breath before preparing to cast one final spell that night.

His brother shifted slightly, unknowingly reaching for his sleeping friend but did finally answer Mac. "Gran."

Cam nearly groaned but Mac just nodded, kneeling at the side of the bed to place a hand on his brother's back but didn't make contact; knowing he wasn't ready for that.

"Be careful." Maggie urged softly but saw the hand start to shimmer in a way she had never seen before.

"Go to sleep, baby brother." He spoke softly, closing his eyes to focus. "You feel no fear, no pain. You hear only the fairies singing to you from the hill outside where we would play. Sleep now and take what you need."

Maggie's eyes jerked at this and started to grab his hand but Ian was there and she saw his eyes were a darker gray-blue right then.

"He knows what to do." He spoke but the voice seemed stronger then he blinked at her as if in surprise. "That was weird."

Before she could ask, she was moving to catch Mac before he fell back and Cam and Ian were there.

"You are pushing way too far now." The mercenary leader told him firmly, looking back to see his friend was still and seemed to be at peace. "Let him rest and you better get some too."

Mac was about to object when Ian crossed his arms, leaning on the bedroom door.

“Push too hard, push too fast and you won’t be any good to them.” He chided lightly causing Maggie to frown and Cam to roll his eyes.

“I also know that Kerry’s in no mood for me to tell him this.” Mac muttered, lightly smacking his youngest brother on the forehead. “Snap back!”

Ian blinked and rubbed his head. “What? I was just going to say I’ll hang out until we’re sure he’s alright.”

“That’s a fine plan, lad.” Maggie shot him a bright smile, pulling Mac out of the room before he could argue. “You stay for an hour or so then turn it to Mr. Young’s lot.”

Cam watched as the red-haired reporter plunged ahead and scratched his head. “Yeah, when he gets some sleep Mac will love the idea he got railroaded by her. Considering Ryan’s around to rub it in his face at every chance.”

“I don’t need a bloody nursemaid.” Mac was tired and cranky but didn’t feel like putting the strength in arguing with the woman.

“No, you need your bloody head examined for pushing too much.” Maggie shot back as they stopped by what she guessed was his room. “You’ve had your powers for how long? Since childhood I’m guessing so you should know not to leave yourself this weak or you open yourself up to too much.”

Scowling at the mild lecture, Mac turned to open the door to the guest room since Deirdre had known it would be too hard on them to use the rooms they’d had as children.

“Because I do know that I’ll apologize for snapping just now.” He replied, leaning against the door to rest his eyes a second. “It’s never been easy to see one of them hurting and especially Roarke.”

Mac paused as he looked into the intense green eyes that were looking up at him. “If you stay, you’ll see more than you’ll like.” He warned, hoping she’d leave since he didn’t want to see anyone else hurt. “Aside from us fighting, there’s clearly more going on than we know and then there are things Kerry needs to come clean about.”

“I’ll cope, Doc.” Maggie teased, wanting to relieve some of his tension and was pleased to see his small smile as she stood on her tiptoes too lightly kiss his cheek. “You know how to show a lass a good time.”

“Hang around long enough and you’ll probably see a hellava lot more.” He countered, blaming his tiredness for what he did next since Mac was never one to do spur of the moment but as she leaned up to give his cheek a light peck he placed his hands on her waist before moving to lightly kiss her lips.

Both knew it should have been a casual, light gesture brought on from stress and the events of the past days but was expecting neither the friction nor desire that hit and neither saw the lights that started to flicker.

Mac broke the kiss, easing back slowly but keeping a hand on the young woman's shoulder as he fought to regain a sort of balance. "I don't normally do that type of thing, Maggie." He sought to assure her then added. "But I don't think I'm going to apologize for it either."

"No, I don't think you should either." She replied, stepping back but not immediately breaking eye contact. "G'night, Mac."

Mac stayed by his door until she had walked away fully and he heard a door click on the other side of the house. "Not what I need." He muttered but didn't try to get the kiss or the woman out of his head as he just flopped on the bed and drifted off.

On the outside the manor, on the edge of the grounds a massive black wolf stalked back and forth in an agitated state. Once it stepped forward and then let out a painful howl as a black smoke hissed from its paw and it jumped back then ran away.

Note from the author:

Well, that's it for the brief excerpt. If you want to see how this first tale ends, then look up my storefront here on Lulu for the book, or on Amazon or check out my website at: <http://sierra-rose-books.webs.com/>